

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION  
NEW YORK SCHOOL

INSTRUCTIONS FROM AUTHOR TO LIBRARY FOR THESES

AUTHOR Barbara AB Symons  
TITLE The Negative Tonality of Interpersonal  
Touch in the Hebrew Bible

TYPE OF THESIS: D.H.L. ( ) Rabbinic (X)  
Master's ( ) D. Min ( )

1. May Circulate (✓)  
2. Is restricted ( ) for \_\_\_\_ years.

Note: The Library shall respect restrictions placed on theses for a period of no more than ten years.

I understand that the Library may make a photocopy of my thesis for security purposes.

3. The Library may sell photocopies of my thesis. ✓       
yes no

March 14, 1994  
Date

Barbara AB Symons  
Signature of Author

Library  
Record

Microfilmed

March 1, 1995  
Date

W. Lange  
Signature of Library Staff Member

**THE NEGATIVE TONALITY OF INTERPERSONAL TOUCH  
IN THE HEBREW BIBLE**

**BARBARA AB SYMONS**

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion  
Graduate Rabbinic Program  
New York, New York

1994 / 5754

Advisor: Dr. Sharon Keller

*Many thanks to Dr. Sharon Keller for her accessibility, insightful comments and scholarly emendations. She has the unique ability to correct a misplaced comma – which she needed to do all too often – as well as to know when a Greek passage is misquoted. I am truly honored to be the first student to have her as a thesis advisor.*

*My husband, Ronald B.B. Symons, has given me a tremendous amount of encouragement, assistance and love... as usual. The greatest gift he has given me both for this thesis and for the rabbinate, however, is his contagious love of learning. Many times over the course of the past few months, I have heard the phrase, "I found a great midrash..." only to look up to see him eagerly waiting to share a new theory with me. I am very lucky in that I have a permanent scholar in residence.*

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	page 1
Chapter I: Sexual Touch.....	page 6
Chapter II: Affectionate Touch.....	page 47
Chapter III: Aggressive Touch.....	page 83
Chapter IV: Deliberate Touch.....	page 116
Conclusion.....	page 148
Bibliography.....	page 152

## Introduction

While exceptions can always be made to generalizations, it is entirely likely that every liberal rabbi breathes a sigh of relief when hearing that the portion of the week is from a narrative section of the Torah. Why? Because rather than struggling with how to discuss leprosy and animal sacrifices to modern American congregants, he or she can develop a sermon about the first time that Jacob and Rachel kissed. In fact, the birth of this thesis came during a sermon describing how Jacob touched his grandsons as he blessed them. It was a topic that was easy to embrace, so to speak.

Based on an informal survey of students and professors at Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, when asked to think of an example of touch in the Hebrew Bible, there is a hesitation. Finally, one of the famous examples comes to mind: Jacob blessing his grandchildren, the oath by the thigh or ordination. In reality, there are at least three hundred examples of touch in the Hebrew Bible.

What exactly constitutes "touch"? The first qualification that must be stated is that the examples of touch studied here involve two people directly touching each other. Therefore the examples of a person touching an animal to expiate his guilt or someone grabbing the clothing of another will not be investigated. When God or a divine being touches a person, that too will be eliminated from

this study.

The definition of person-to-person touch can be further broken down into actual and metaphoric touch. While actual touch is portrayed as having truly taken place, metaphoric touch uses phrases for touch for events in which touch does not (or can not) occur.<sup>1</sup> Many of the same terms are used, as might be expected, for both. While it is undoubtedly the case that the terms used for metaphoric touch affect the overall nuance of a word, this study will be limited to actual touch, again with some qualifications, in order to determine whether touch has a positive or negative tone in the Hebrew Bible.

Within the category of actual touch, the following forms of touch will be excluded: possible touch, incidental touch and touch involving a corpse. As may be imagined, there are many verses which are henceforth excluded from this study.

Examples of "possible touch" include Exodus 15:20 ("Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her in dance with timbrels.") and Joshua 8:23 ("The king of Ai was taken alive and brought to Joshua."). While contemporary dance would commonly include touching, it is difficult to infer

---

<sup>1</sup>For example, Exodus 23:1 "You must not carry false rumors; you shall not join hands with the guilty to act as a malicious witness." This verse does not have to do with physical touch, but rather with collusion in judicial proceedings.

that that was the case in ancient Israel. Further, capturing a king could be done with swords, or grabbing onto his garment, thus whether or not the king was ever touched remains unclear. The verses that fall into this category are those in which it is not necessarily the case that two people touched.

Examples of "incidental touch" include Genesis 37:28 ("When Midianite traders passed by, they pulled Joseph up out of the pit. They sold Joseph for twenty pieces of silver to the Ismaelites, who brought Joseph to Egypt.") and Exodus 17:12 ("But Moses' hands grew heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur, one on each side, supported his hands; thus his hands remained steady until the sun set."). When they pulled Joseph up out of the pit, it was not in order to touch him, but rather touching was a by-product, a necessary occurrence. So too with Aaron, Hur and Moses -- they did not intend to touch him, they intended to do whatever possible to keep his hands aloft. Thus if touching is not the goal of the encounter, it will not be examined here.

Finally, examples of touch involving a corpse include Numbers 19:16 ("And in the open, anyone who touches a person who was slain by the sword or who died naturally, or human bone, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days.") and Haggai 2:13 ("Haggai went on, 'If someone defiled by a corpse touches any of these, will it be defiled?' And the priests

responded, 'Yes.'). It is unclear whether the remains of a person constitute a person (and thus part of the equation of person-to-person touch). Further, because a person is more likely to touch a corpse's clothing than the body, this category will be left for another study.

The remaining forms of actual touch between two people occur under varying circumstances. This being the case, the sub-divisions created for the sake of this study will be: Sexual Touch, Affectionate Touch, Aggressive Touch and Deliberate Touch. Sexual touch includes all those instances in which two people touch each other during sexual intercourse. This could be normative as in a marriage or illicit as in adultery, harlotry or forced sexual relations. Affectionate touch includes those instances in which two people touch in a non-sexual way. This would include greetings and farewells, parents fondling or blessing their children and people falling in love. Aggressive touch covers any instance of touch in war or struggle. Finally, deliberate touch includes those times when people touch in ceremonial or planned ways as in taking an oath by touching the thigh or, possibly, adopting a child. This final category in particular has many parallels in ancient Near Eastern literary sources.

The way in which the research was conducted was through the use of traditional and modern biblical commentaries as well as extra-biblical sources such as Hammurabi's code and

Nuzi texts. Within the biblical text, verses which employ the same verb as the one under discussion were often taken into account, as were parallels employing different phrasing but similar outcomes. When at all possible, every verse using a particular phrase was discussed. All English translations, unless otherwise noted, are from The New Jewish Publication Society's *Tanakh - The Holy Scriptures*. When the literal meaning (which was footnoted) was different from what was written in the body of the translation, the former was inserted. The traditional commentaries for Genesis through Deuteronomy are from *Torat Hayyim* and the remainder of the Tanakh are from *Mikraot Gedolot*. When Hebrew is written within the text, unless otherwise specified, it is written in the male third-person singular form. In terms of the extra-biblical sources, these were studied in their English translations, though cognates to other languages were referred to whenever possible.

The category of touch sweeps through the entire Hebrew Bible. If, as proposed, touch is proven to carry a negative nuance, the implications for Jewish custom and law could be enormous.

## Chapter I

### Sexual Touch

According to Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra, "there is a threefold purpose to sexual intercourse: one is to beget children, a second is to relieve the body of its fluids, and the third is for passion, which is likened to that of the animals."<sup>1</sup> In terms of his apparent discomfort in discussing sexual matters, Ibn Ezra is not alone. Not only are the other commentators also uncomfortable to the point of often remaining silent, but the text itself is less than descriptive when mentioning anything of a sexual nature. It is surprising, therefore, that a document which is often described as "modest" uses a minimum of sixteen words for sexual intercourse. The challenge at hand is to determine which of those terms carry negative nuances and which carry positive nuances. Only then will it be possible to analyze the overall tone of sexual words in the Hebrew Bible.

This study will be divided into five categories: (1)"everyday" words which in certain circumstances imply sexual touch, (2)terms which are used primarily, if not solely, to refer to sexual relations (3)terms that are euphemisms for touch in the form of metaphor (4)terms that directly translate as "touch" and lastly, (5)those that are used for illicit sexual relations. The "everyday" words

---

<sup>1</sup>As quoted by Ramban on Leviticus 18:20. Chavel, 257.

will provide a beginning.

"Everyday" words are those that are used for daily functions such as "knowing," "going," "taking" and so forth, but can also, in certain circumstances, refer to sexual relations. The word  $\text{YT}^3$ , for example, which is commonly translated as "know" is far more frequently used in a non-sexual sense, yet has become famous as the basis for the English colloquialism "to know in the biblical sense." Without further study however, it is not clear whether this verb, when used to mean sexual relations, is shaded in a positive or negative light.

It seems proper to begin, as is so often the case, with Adam and Eve. In Genesis 4:1, "the man [Adam] knew his wife Eve, and she conceived..." Because she conceived, it is clear that  $\text{YT}^3$  was the term used for sexual relations. However, the question then arises: does this then imply that using the verb "to know" for a sexual experience is only in reference to the first experience? The answer is "no." As shown by I Samuel 1:19, "Elkanah knew his wife Hannah," the verb "to know" does not need to imply the first sexual experience. Elkanah and Hannah were already married and, as verse 5 implies ("...the Lord had closed her womb"), had already been trying to have children and therefore were sexually active!<sup>2</sup>

While this verb is often applied to normal marital

---

<sup>2</sup>Sarna, *Genesis*, 31-32.

situations (as in Genesis 4:17 "Cain knew his wife" and Genesis 4:25 "Adam knew his wife again"), it also carries other nuances. In clandestine conduct, as in the story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38:26 "he knew her again no more" and in the story of the men of Sodom who approach Lot's guests in Genesis 19:5 in what appears to be a potential homosexual encounter, "...Bring them out to us, that we may know them," the translation "to know" appears inept.<sup>3</sup> Because this verb does apply to many types of situations, a more thorough understanding of its meaning must be sought.

The parallel usage of the Akkadian verb "lamadum" - "to learn, experience" in the Code of Hammurabi<sup>4</sup> is a cognate to the Hebrew לָמַד and is used to mean "experience sexually." In fact, even the Hebrew יָדָע has a broader range of usage than the English translation suggests and shares with לָמַד the connotation "to experience" as made clear to Adam and Eve "...your eyes will be opened and you will be like God who knows good and bad (יָדָע טוֹב וָרָע)" in Genesis 3:5. It is for that reason that the *Anchor Bible* translates יָדָע as "had experience of" -- as in "Adam had experience of his wife" -- which, it points out, is correct semantically, if not stylistically.<sup>5</sup> The difficulty with this argument is that לָמַד and יָדָע are different words in Hebrew and it is

---

<sup>3</sup> Speiser, *Genesis*, 31.

<sup>4</sup> Pritchard, 172, numbers 154 and 155.

<sup>5</sup> Speiser, 32.

never the case that  $\text{וְיָדָע}$  is used to mean sexual relations.

It is not only possible, but preferable, to think of  $\text{וְיָדָע}$  as "experiential, emotional and relational" where it is used between people or between man and God (as in Genesis 18:19<sup>6</sup>).<sup>7</sup> In Hebrew it is never used to describe animal copulation,<sup>8</sup> whereas the Akkadian term extends to dogs!<sup>9</sup> Thus  $\text{וְיָדָע}$  as a sexual euphemism relates only to interpersonal sexual touch and sets that touch apart from animal copulation.

Rabbi Saadia Gaon of the tenth century simply explains that  $\text{וְיָדָע}$  is equivalent to  $\text{לִדְבֹר}$ . In fact, as Metzudat David comments on Judges 21:11<sup>10</sup>, this is an expression for  $\text{לְעֵלָו}$  and, in addition, clarifies it with  $\text{לְדַבֵּר}$ . Unlike the previous modern definition which speaks of emotions, these earlier commentators do not allow for a description other than the act itself; love has nothing to do with it.

Of the eleven instances when  $\text{וְיָדָע}$ <sup>11</sup> is used as a

---

<sup>6</sup>Genesis 18:19 "For I have singled him out ( $\text{וְיָדָע}$ ), that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is just and right, in order that the Lord may bring about for Abraham what He has promised him."

<sup>7</sup>Sarna, *Genesis*, 31.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Speiser, 31.

<sup>10</sup>Judges 21:11 is commonly translated: "This is what you are to do: Proscribe every man, and every woman who has known a man carnally."

<sup>11</sup>Judges 19:22, 25; 11:39; 21:12; Genesis 4:1, 17, 25; 24:16; 38:26; I Samuel 1:19; I Kings 1:4.

euphemism for sexual intimacy, only in Judges 19 does it have a negative nuance. In verse 22, after the men surround the old man's house, they say "Bring out the man who has come into your house, so that we can be intimate with him" then in verse 25, they "raped and abused her" (referring to the concubine who replaced the man). Here, the root  $\text{וּטַ$ , because of its later association with  $\text{הַחֲעֵלֶל}$ , takes on a negative nuance -- even in the translation.

In any case, it is clear that  $\text{וּטַ$  as used in the Hebrew Bible is a euphemism for sexual intercourse and, for the most part, carries a positive, or, minimally neutral, connotation.

Another common word,  $\text{לָקַח}$  can also be used to intimate sexual relations. Ramban translates it as generally meaning "to take as a wife".<sup>12</sup> He points out, however, that with regard to Leviticus 20:17<sup>13</sup>, this does not make sense since the act described there, namely betrothal to a sister, is not a valid marriage. He explains, rather, that since they sleep in the same house, he takes her and overpowers her. He then differentiates between forced sexual relations and the way in which one might (voluntarily) approach a harlot. It is interesting to note, then, that since  $\text{לָקַח}$  is the only

---

<sup>12</sup>Commenting on Leviticus 20:17.

<sup>13</sup>Leviticus 20:17: "If a man marries ( $\text{לָקַח}$ ) his sister, the daughter of either his father or his mother, so that he sees her nakedness and she sees his nakedness, it is a disgrace; they shall be cut off in the sight of their kinsfolk."

verb used, to Ramban, it implies forced sex.

In fact rather than meaning "marriage," all of the laws using  $\Pi\eta$  imply sexual relations (though not necessarily forced sex). This is because it is impossible that "a man marries his sister" as in Leviticus 20:17 or "marries the wife of his brother" as in Leviticus 20:21. The more accurate translation, then, would be "has intercourse with."

Regarding Ruth 4:13 ("So Boaz married  $\Pi\eta$  Ruth, she became his wife, and he cohabited with her. The Lord let her conceive, and she bore a son."), one version of the Septuagint omits the clauses which say she became his wife and had intercourse<sup>14</sup> meaning that it is enough to read that he "took" her to understand the chain of events.

This is similar to the situation of the man who is betrothed and did not yet "take" his wife in Deuteronomy 20:7.<sup>15</sup> He, like "anyone who had anything to inaugurate," whether it be a vineyard, a new house or a wife, would leave the war in order to do so. According to ancient beliefs, these people felt threatened by demons and therefore eliminated this threat in the interests of magical and ritual purity as well as for protection of the levy and its

---

<sup>14</sup>Campbell, *Ruth*, 162.

<sup>15</sup>Deuteronomy 20:7: "Is there anyone who has paid the bride-price for a wife, but who has not yet married her? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another marry her." The New Jewish Publication Society translation notes regarding "paid the bride-price" - "thereby making her his wife legally, even though the marriage has not yet taken place." *Tanakh*, 305.

effectiveness.<sup>16</sup>

In the vast majority of its sixty citations used with regard to relationships (out of nearly 1,000 overall), נקל is used in the context of taking a wife and not in terms of sexual relations.<sup>17</sup> As has been stated, however, when discussing prohibited unions נקל would have to mean sexual relations. Though the verses which describe these illicit unions are few in number compared to more neutral usages of נקל, the former are the only ones of concern here as they are the only ones involving touch. Therefore, נקל in terms of sexual relations is tonally negative.

In the Tanach, there are over 2500 citations of the various noun and verb forms of נקל. Of those, only eleven are combined with the preposition אל which, together with a male subject and female object or the reverse, imply sexual relations.<sup>18</sup>

I Chronicles 7:23 states "He cohabited with (אל נקל) his wife, who conceived and bore a son..." Similar to נקל, there is no other verb needed to describe the action that took place. Similarly, when used in Ruth 4:13 ("So Boaz married (נקל) Ruth; she became his wife, and he cohabited (נקל) with her. The Lord let her conceive, and she bore a

---

<sup>16</sup>Von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, 132.

<sup>17</sup>See: Genesis 28:6; Deuteronomy 22:14; Leviticus 21:7; Nehemiah 10:31, etc.

<sup>18</sup>Genesis 16:2,4; 28:9; 29:21; 30:3,16; 38:9; Deuteronomy 21:13; 22:13; II Samuel 3:7; Ezekiel 23:44.

son."), Kll could be interpreted as a double entendre: Boaz entered Ruth's chamber and had sexual intercourse with her by entering her.<sup>19</sup>

Genesis 16 bears many similarities to Ruth 4. Sarai's directions to Abraham regarding Hagar in Genesis 16:2 are: "And Sarai said to Abram, 'Look, the Lord has kept me from bearing. Consort (Kll) with my maid; perhaps I shall have a son through her.' And Abram heeded Sarai's request.")<sup>20</sup> The following verse in Genesis, in a parallel formation, provides a definition: "So Sarai... took Hagar... and gave her to her husband Abram as concubine." And verse 4 continues: "He cohabited (Kll) with Hagar and she conceived..." She then told Abram (verse 5) that "I myself put my maid in your bosom; now that she sees that she is pregnant, I am lowered in her esteem!..." (This latter phrase, "put my maid in your bosom" is recognized legal phraseology and is used identically in the Sumerian-Akkadian dictionary of legal expressions.<sup>21</sup>) There is no question, then, that Kll means "sexual relations" and even seems to successfully produce children!

It was not uncommon in the ancient Near East, after all, for a barren wife to give her maid to her husband in order to provide offspring. Apparently, a legitimate way to

---

<sup>19</sup>Campbell, 163.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Sarna, *Genesis*, 118.

avoid childlessness was for the wife to give to her husband the wife's own maid who was not otherwise available to the husband as a concubine in the same way that his female slaves were. The child then would be considered the wife's child.<sup>22</sup> Similar instances of an infertile wife providing her husband with a concubine in order to bear children are found in the laws of Lipit-Ishtar (early 19th century B.C.E.) and an Old Assyrian marriage contract (19th century B.C.E.) which stipulates that if a wife does not provide offspring within two years, she must produce a slave woman for that purpose.<sup>23</sup> Very similarly, in the Nuzi documents<sup>24</sup> the provisions of a marriage are: if the wife bears children, the husband may not take another wife. However, if she does not, the wife will get another woman as a concubine. In Hammurabi's Code, a priestess who was free to marry but not bear children gives her husband a slave girl to get a son for him.<sup>25</sup>

The laws of levirate marriage provide another route to obtaining children (and a husband). When Judah comes across a woman whom he thinks to be a harlot (Genesis 38:15), he asks literally (verse 16) "to come in to her (X11)." This is

---

<sup>22</sup>Von Rad, 186.

<sup>23</sup>As cited by Sarna, *Genesis*, 119.

<sup>24</sup>Nuzi documents printed in Harvard Semitic Studies V, no.67 (1929) and translated in the Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research 10 (1930), 31ff.

<sup>25</sup>Pritchard, 172 number 146.

translated in the *New Jewish Publication Society Tanach* as "Let me sleep with you..."<sup>26</sup>. It is interesting to point out that the graphic detail of "let me come in to you" -- in both Hebrew and English -- seems to fit the sordid situation of a man approaching a harlot better than does "Let me sleep with you."<sup>27</sup> But once again, children are produced from this union described by *XXI* and, for her part, "in resolutely following the intent of the law by unorthodox and hazardous means, Tamar takes her place alongside Rachel (Genesis 31:19)".<sup>28</sup>

It should be remembered that the object of levirate marriage was to maintain family life in a society that valued blood ties and had little use for adoption.<sup>29</sup> (For a more complete discussion on adoption, see the chapter entitled "Deliberate Touch.") Biblical law, for its part, upholds this obligation; it seems that it is an institution which long preceded the pentateuchal legislation.<sup>30</sup> The Bible also explicitly frowns on any attempt to circumvent it

---

<sup>26</sup>*Tanakh*, 61.

<sup>27</sup>While this is similar to Ruth 4:13, there, he married (נָשָׂא) her first. Here, the nature of the relationship was purely sexual.

<sup>28</sup>Speiser, 300.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup>Sarna, *Genesis*, 266.

as in Deuteronomy 25:5ff<sup>31</sup> and Ruth 3ff.<sup>32</sup>

Another example of *Kll* used by itself is when Absalom lays with his father's concubines in II Samuel 16:22. The verse reads, "So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof, and Absalom lay (*Kll*) with his father's concubines before the eyes of all Israel." More than an affront, apparently, Ahitophel's advice was based on an ancient custom whereby the son and heir inherited all of his father's wives and concubines except his own mother. This was part of the act of succession and is attested to in Semitic and classical sources.<sup>33</sup> In the lost *Telegonia* (the continuation of the *Odyssey*) Telegonus is Odysseus' son by Circe. He kills his father and marries Penelope. Telemachus, (Odysseus' only son according to the *Odyssey*) marries Circe, which, indirectly, is a form of inheriting his step-mother.

In I Kings 2:13-25, similarly, it must be remembered that Adonijah was put to death for merely asking for Solomon's father's concubine. Thus here the violation of the royal harem is tantamount to a public declaration of

---

<sup>31</sup>Deuteronomy 25:5 "When brothers dwell together and one of them dies and leaves no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married to a stranger, out side the family. Her husband's brother shall united with her: take her as his wife and perform the levir's duty."

<sup>32</sup>Ruth 3:1 "Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her, 'Daughter, I must seek a home for you where you may be happy. (2) Now there is our kinsman Boaz...'"

<sup>33</sup>Gaster, 480.

pretension to the throne.<sup>34</sup>

Similarly, in II Samuel 3:7<sup>35</sup>, Ish Bosheth accused Abner of consorting with (לך לל) Saul's concubine and of conniving to secure succession for himself (verse 10)<sup>36</sup>. It is interesting that the Lucianic manuscript felt it necessary to add to verse 7: "and Abner took her" while another Greek Manuscript translates "and Abner went in to her."<sup>37</sup> Some critics regard the addition as a necessary preparation for Ish Bosheth's accusation of Abner, but the textual evidence suggests that the writer purposefully left it ambiguous.<sup>38</sup> It is clear, then, that in these cases, לל not only refers to sexual relations, but the sexual relations themselves constitute a symbol of pretension to the throne!

Unlike the previous situations, there are times when the act is spelled out by using other verbs in conjunction with לל. In II Samuel 11:4 "David sent messengers to fetch her [Bathsheba] and he took (לקח) her; she came (לל) to him

---

<sup>34</sup>McCarter, *II Samuel*, 112.

<sup>35</sup>II Samuel 3:7 "Now Saul had a concubine named Rizpah, daughter of Aiah; and [Ish-bosheth] said to Abner, "Why have you lain with my father's concubine?"

<sup>36</sup>II Samuel 3:9 "May God do thus and more to Abner if I do not do for David as the Lord swore to him (10) -- to transfer the kingship from the House of Saul, and to establish the throne of David over Israel and Judah from Dan to Beer-sheba."

<sup>37</sup>McCarter, *II Samuel*, 105.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*

and he lay (לָו) with her..." then David "went to her and lay with her" (II Samuel 12:24). It is interesting to note that in translating II Samuel 11:4, the Septuagint has "and he went in to her" in place of the less common "she came to him."<sup>39</sup> It is possible to explain this by the fact that the instigator of the other verbs is David: he took her, he lay with her -- so the Septuagint retained this sequence and read he went in to her. In fact, only once does a woman proposition a man: In Genesis 30:16, Leah meets Jacob in the field and says "You are to sleep with me (אֵלַי תִּלְוּ) for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes" and the text records later in the verse "And he lay (לָו) with her that night." There is no ambiguity.

Thus it appears that there is no one trend regarding the usage of לָו in a sexual context -- it could be to produce children for a barren woman (Sarai, Rachel) to lay a claim on the throne (Abner, Absalom, Adonijah), to be with a spouse (Leah with Jacob and Jacob with Rachel) to be with a harlot (Tamar). It should be noted, however, that לָו is never used alone or in combination with other sexual terms to describe a sexual attack thus lending it a neutral, if not a positive, tone.

Yet another common-place word used to refer to sexual intercourse is לָקַד -- often translated as "approach." Out of the close to 300 verses using one form of this root or

---

<sup>39</sup>McCarter, *II Samuel*, 279.

another, only six pertain to sexual touch. Of these six, it is used both in isolation and in conjunction with another word or phrase connected with sexual relations.

As an example of the former, Isaiah 8:3 says "I was intimate (לָקַח) with the prophetess and she conceived and bore a son..." Again, what else could lead to conception?! It seems, then, that in Isaiah 8:3 when לָקַח is used alone, it refers to acceptable relations if it is granted that, as Radak, Metzudat David and Metzudat Tzion all say, "the prophetess" is his wife.

Further, it says in Ezekiel 18:6 (which begins a list of specific laws through which a righteous man's obedience is shown through practical situations and which is set in an order that recalls the Decalogue<sup>40</sup>) "if he has not... approached (לָקַח) a menstruous woman..." such a man (verse 9) "...is righteous... he shall live." Commenting on the verse from Ezekiel, Metzudat David seals the definition by equating לָקַח with נָשָׂא.

Leviticus 18:19 not only serves as a proof text, but illustrates the second type of usage, namely, in conjunction with another word. Leviticus 18:19 reads "Do not come near (לָקַח) a woman during her period of uncleanness to uncover her nakedness גִּלְהָ עֲרוּתָהּ." (Similarly, in Leviticus 18:6,<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup>Ezekiel, 379.

<sup>41</sup>Leviticus 18:6: "None of you shall come near anyone of his own flesh to uncover nakedness: I am the Lord."

14<sup>42</sup>,  $\text{לָקַח}$  is used in negative situations -- with "uncovering nakedness.") It equates  $\text{לָקַח}$  with "uncovering nakedness" (a term yet to be discussed) which is also a euphemism for sexuality. It is related to the verb ( $\text{לָקַח}$ ) for uncover and is a cognate with the Akkadian verb "eru(m)" which means "empty, bereft, naked"<sup>43</sup> as in Habakkuk 3:13.<sup>44</sup>

In Deuteronomy 22:14<sup>45</sup>  $\text{לָקַח}$  is used together with  $\text{לָקַח}$  regarding a man who sleeps with a woman then accuses her of not being a virgin. Though the situation is unpleasant, the sexual act is portrayed in a neutral way.

The sixth, and final, verse which uses  $\text{לָקַח}$  in a sexual way is ambiguous. Genesis 20:4 reads "Now Abimelech had not approached ( $\text{לָקַח}$ ) her [Sarah]. He said, "O Lord, will You slay people even though innocent?" In this verse, it is impossible to tell whether  $\text{לָקַח}$  refers to Avimelech's merely "approaching" or "engaging in sexual relations with" Sarah.

Thus it seems that when  $\text{לָקַח}$  is used in sexual

---

<sup>42</sup>Leviticus 18:14: "Do not uncover the nakedness of your father's brother: do not approach his wife; she is your aunt.

<sup>43</sup>Levine, 119.

<sup>44</sup>Habakkuk 3:13 "You have come forth to deliver Your people, to deliver Your anointed. You will smash the roof of the villain's house, Raze  $\text{לָקַח}$  it from foundation to top.

<sup>45</sup>Deuteronomy 22:13: "A man marries a woman and cohabits with her. Then he takes an aversion to her (14) and makes up charges against her and defames her, saying, "I married this woman; but when I approached her, I found that she was not a virgin."

situations, it is used in positive, negative and neutral situations and thus its nuance is fully dependent on the particular situation. Given its sparse usage in sexual contexts, it does not influence the overall picture one way or the other.

הלך is another common verb that can be used to refer to sexual relations. Amos 2:7 states that "... father and son go (הלך) to the same girl, and thereby profane My holy name." While the meaning of הלך is unclear, this "girl" could assist in discovering its definition. She could be a cultic prostitute (discussed later in this chapter) who plays an important part in the Canaanite fertility cult -- an institution prohibited in Israel (Deuteronomy 23:18) though also referred to in Hosea 4:14.<sup>46</sup> While the idea of cult prostitution does agree with הלך since it suggests religious pilgrimage,<sup>47</sup> this verse in Amos could refer to the violation of the rights of a female bond-servant by making her into a concubine, as prohibited in Exodus 21:8.<sup>48</sup>

On the other hand, it is also possible that this verse

---

<sup>46</sup>Mays, *Amos*, 46.

<sup>47</sup>Andersen, *Amos*, 318.

<sup>48</sup>Exodus 21:7 "When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not be freed as male slaves are. (8) If she proves to be displeasing to her master, who designated her for himself, he must let her be redeemed; he shall not have the right to sell her to outsiders, since he broke faith with her."

has nothing whatsoever to do with cultic practices. Because there is no law forbidding father and son from having sexual relations with the same young woman,<sup>49</sup> "Amos appears to be actually proscribing a deed that went beyond the existing law."<sup>50</sup> Who is the "man and his father"? According to this commentary, this does not refer to father and son, but rather implies the continuity of the act and the lack of shame.<sup>51</sup> ׀לן, then, most likely agrees with its Akkadian interdialectal semantic and cognate of "to have sexual intercourse."<sup>52</sup> As there is only one reference, however, the impact on the overall category of sexual touch is negligible.

׀לן, also commonly translated as "approach," is used only once with sexual implications.<sup>53</sup> In Exodus 19:14-15, prior to receiving the Ten Commandments, it says, "Moses came down from the mountain to the people and warned the

---

<sup>49</sup>In the Hittite laws, the allowance is explicit: "If father and son sleep with (the same) slave girl or harlot, there shall be no punishment." As quoted in Paul, 82.

<sup>50</sup>Paul, 81.

<sup>51</sup>Paul, 82.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>It should be noted that while in Genesis 27:26-27 Isaac asks Esau, or so he thought, to come near and kiss him and in Genesis 48:10 Joseph brought his sons close to Jacob and he kissed and embraced them, these instances are not sexual touch and will therefore be discussed in the chapters entitled "Affectionate Touch" and "Deliberate Touch." In fact, the only touch occurring in these verses from Genesis is that described by words other than ׀לן.

people to stay pure, and they washed their clothes. And he said to the people, 'Be ready for the third day: do not go near (לֹא תִגְשׁוּ) a woman.'" In Exodus 19:15, it is thought that the request for restraint is done in a "remarkably lame way which perhaps suggests an addition."<sup>5</sup>

Again, while נָגַח deserves a place on the list of verbs which describe sexual touch, the fact that it appears only once in this capacity minimizes its influence on the body of words.

Perhaps it is the very ordinariness of the words in this first category that give them, overwhelmingly, their neutrality. While modern-day sensitivities may take exception to the fact that it is a man initiating a sexual encounter the majority of the time, that was presumably the norm given contemporary societal rules. It seems acceptable, therefore, to make the statement that when used in the context of sexual relations, this category on the whole can be classified as neutral.

The next category of sexual touch is that of terms used primarily, if not solely, to refer to sexual relations such as נָשַׁךְ and גִּלּוֹי עֲרוּהָ. While for all intents and purposes, they seem to be neutral terms, only through an in-depth look at the verses within which they fall will their nuances be revealed.

While "uncovering nakedness" (גִּלּוֹי עֲרוּהָ) is one term

---

<sup>5</sup>Noth, *Exodus*, 158.

that primarily refers to sexual acts, its nuance is as yet unclear. Does "uncovering nakedness" mean getting undressed or does it mean sexual activity? Since the Bible records that it is possible to expose one's own nakedness, this question is not redundant. In Ezekiel 23:18, for example, Oholibah (Jerusalem personified) "flaunted her harlotries and exposed her nakedness..." thereby not implicating anyone else (though "harlotries" does presuppose the assumption that others were involved). Though this would seem to be relatively less damaging than involving another's reputation, it is clearly not a socially acceptable act.

In every verse from Leviticus 18:7-19 (and many times within the list in Leviticus 20), some form of the term "do not uncover nakedness (גלה ערוה)" appears. It can involve a mother, sister, granddaughter, aunt, daughter-in-law, woman and her daughter, sister-in-law, or woman during menstrual flow. In many cases, as there is no strict blood-relationship, it looks as though these prohibitions were originally demarcated with regard to the circle of a large family in tents or houses.<sup>55</sup> Whether because of that or in spite of that these are viewed as immoral acts that were forbidden.

Ramban, in his comments on Leviticus 18:7, says that each verse in this section of forbidden relationships is composed of two parts: a negative commandment and an

---

<sup>55</sup>Noth, *Leviticus*, 135.

admonition. For, he says, in having intercourse with one's own mother, the son uncovers the nakedness of both his father and his mother as shown through the concluding phrase "she is your mother." That is why it does not say "and" -- it is one act. One illicit act.

Rashi's approach is slightly different. Leviticus 18:14 states "Do not uncover the nakedness of your father's brother: do not approach his wife; she is your aunt." Rashi interprets this as follows: "Do not uncover the nakedness of your uncle." And what is that? "His wife do not uncover." The nakedness of a woman was considered to belong to her husband (verses 7,8,14,16) or father if she was unmarried (verses 9,11,12).

Further, Leviticus 18:29 states that the punishment for committing any of these offenses is "to be cut off from their people." In Leviticus 20:11: "If a man lies with his father's wife, it is the nakedness of his father that he has uncovered; the two shall be put to death -- their blood-guilt is upon them." In Leviticus 20:20, "If a man lies with his uncle's wife, it is his uncle's nakedness that he has uncovered. They shall bear their guilt: they shall die childless." In fact while the punishments differ according to the crime, there is no doubt that uncovering nakedness is, indeed, a crime.

The word לד appears in its various forms over two hundred times in the Tanach. It can mean death (I Kings

2:10<sup>56</sup>), to sleep (I Samuel 3:15<sup>57</sup>) or even to lodge (Leviticus 14:47<sup>58</sup>). Of interest here, of course, is its use regarding sexual relations.

Often it is used in isolation, as in Genesis 34:7 "... he [Shechem] had committed an outrage in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter..." -- an act described earlier in 34:2 as "[Shechem] took her and lay with her by force..." Clearly, in the narrative retelling of the story in verse 7, as opposed to the action-filled actual events in verse 2, the words are toned down. Both verses describe the same horrendous act.

In II Samuel 11:8 after David has engaged in sexual relations with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, "Then David said to Uriah, 'Go down to your house and bathe your feet...'" -- yet another euphemism (to be discussed later). Uriah, however, did not go home that night. When asked why not, he responded in II Samuel 11:11 "...how can I go home and eat and drink and sleep (לִישָׁן) with my wife?" While this was one of the few seemingly neutral verses containing only לִישָׁן as the sexual verb, it should be pointed out that Uriah, a

---

<sup>56</sup>I Kings 2:10 "So David slept with his fathers, and he was buried in the City of David."

<sup>57</sup>I Samuel 3:15 "Samuel lay there until morning; and then he opened the doors of the House of the Lord. Samuel was afraid to report the vision to Eli."

<sup>58</sup>Leviticus 14:47 "Whoever sleeps (lodges) in the house must wash his clothes, and whoever eats in the house must wash his clothes."

warrior, uses words for sex more openly than does David, a warrior but also a statesman; David had couched his terms in metaphor and Uriah did not. It was the genteel speaking with the peasant; latter spoke on a baser level.

This story, incidentally, is apparently a Hebrew version of a widespread folktale. In the Greek story of Bellerophon, Proetus' wife, Stheneboea, becomes infatuated with Bellerophon and tries to seduce him. When he rejects her (like Photiphar's wife) she directs a false accusation against him. Proetus then sends him with a letter to Proetus' father-in-law Iobates requesting that the latter have him killed. Iobates sends him to fight Chimaera but Bellerophon mounts Pegasus and shoots the monster from the air. When he is later sent on other potentially fatal missions, he also emerges unscathed. Iobates then relents, marries Bellerophon to his daughter and eventually bequeaths to him his kingdom. There are two main differences between this story and the story from II Samuel: in the latter, it was not the woman who was infatuated and, of course, Uriah died. Nonetheless, the parallel is quite clear.

לך is all the more negative when used in conjunction with negative words such as ופן (Deuteronomy 22:28<sup>59</sup>), הן

---

<sup>59</sup>Deuteronomy 22:28 "If a man comes upon a virgin who is not engaged and he seizes her and lies with her, and they are discovered (29) the man who lay with her shall pay the girl's father fifty [shekels of] silver, and she shall be his wife. Because he has violated her, he can never have the right to divorce her." 118a. "Mishna. 434

גלה (Leviticus 20:18<sup>60</sup>) or אָדוּ (Leviticus 15:24<sup>61</sup> or 18:20). The text of Leviticus 18:20 reads "Do not have carnal relations (שָׁכַב לְזָרָה) with your neighbor's wife and defile (אָדוּ) yourself with her." The word לְזָרָה was also added here. As Ramban writes, "...Scripture had to say here לְזָרָה. For had it said only: "and thou shalt not lie with thy neighbor's wife," it would have appeared that it forbids [by punishment of excision] even lying with her just for embracing and kissing since here [in this section] it speaks only of those forbidden relations that are punishable with excision. Therefore it was necessary to mention that the intimacy was זָרָה, in order to explain that He is prohibiting here sexual intercourse." First a brief note on Ramban's comment: it is rather surprising given the usual dearth of description related to the words being discussed, that he not only clearly describes what is happening, but allows for a neighbor lying with one's wife and embracing and kissing her!

Ultimately, however, it is clear that punishment was

---

<sup>60</sup>Leviticus 20:18 "If a man lies with a woman in her infirmity and uncovers her nakedness, he has laid bare her flow and she has exposed her blood flow; both of them shall be cut off from among their people."

<sup>61</sup>Leviticus 15:24 "And if a man lies with her, her impurity is communicated to him; he shall be unclean seven days, and any bedding on which he lies shall become unclean." Why? According to Wenham, the loss of "life liquids" (from Leviticus 17:11: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood..." (regarding sacrifices)) causes the discharging woman to be "regarded as unclean in that she evidently does not enjoy perfect life." Wenham, 434.

imminent. Secondly, though already proven that *לָו* can be used alone to mean sexual relations, this case is more descriptive such that there is no doubt as to what is going on here... and that it was wrong.

Another example can be found in chapter 27 of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy 27:16-26, also known as the Dodecalogue of Shechem, is the most ancient series of prohibitions preserved in the Old Testament and therefore offers a viewing of the spirit and liturgical form of early faith of Yahweh.<sup>62</sup> (The same prohibitions also occur in the Holiness Code in Leviticus 18:7-17.<sup>63</sup>) Falling among this list of offenses the text of Deuteronomy 27:29 reads "Cursed be he who lies with his father's wife, for he has removed his father's garment..."<sup>64</sup> According to Hezekuni, all of the actions in verses 15-25 are done regularly in private. It may be fair from the use of "cursed" to surmise that this was the case because the actions were considered not only illegal but immoral.

Therefore, the most common words connoting sexual relations which, to all appearances seem neutral, are, in fact, vulgar words. Whether by context or association with other verbs, *לָו* carries a negative nuance when referring to sexual relations as does *לָוָה*. This category of words

---

<sup>62</sup>Von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, 167.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Some say that "cursed" means "cursed by God." Ibid.

that refer primarily to sexual activity, then, is negative in character.

Up to this point, it has been clear that the terms used in the Hebrew Bible for sexual encounters are, for the most part, euphemistic. Even beyond that, is a small category of terms which are actually metaphoric. The following phrases do not use words which describe sexual touch but do symbolize it. "Bathing feet," "uncovering his father's skirt," "uncovering feet" and "spreading a robe" are the four terms to be discussed here.

When, as discussed earlier, David tells Uriah "Go down to your house and bathe your feet" (II Samuel 11:8) it is in order to make Uriah think that he himself impregnated his wife (with whom David has had sexual relations). In other words, David is commanding him to have sexual relations with his wife. After all, it is accepted by scholars that "feet" can symbolize genitals.<sup>65</sup> Abarbanel and Metzudat David agree with this interpretation. Out of twelve verses that use the phrase רגל רחץ however, only here does it clearly refer to sexual intercourse. "Washing feet" is a gentle way of referring to sexual intercourse and, despite David's deviousness, his appeared to be a nice, if surprising, command.

"Uncovering his father's skirt" (גלה כנף אביו) is a

---

<sup>65</sup>McCarter, II Samuel, 286. For other instances in which רגל refers to genitals, see: Judges 3:24; Isaiah 7:20.

phrase used in Deuteronomy 23:1<sup>66</sup> and 27:20<sup>67</sup> in conjunction with לל as yet another metaphor for sexual activity (as discussed above). Both verses refer to a man sleeping with his father's wife and thus uncovering his father's garment. As Ramban points out<sup>68</sup>, he should not approach her because it is not proper to uncover her skirt - which he would spread over her by means of a canopy similar to that in Ruth 3:9<sup>69</sup> and Ezekiel 16:8<sup>70</sup> (the only two citations with the phrase לל וכל). The two verses in Deuteronomy obviously refer to illicit sex with the wife of one's father. (The verse from Ruth will be given further attention below.) Thus uncovering a father's skirt is an indignity which involves a third party.

Perhaps a combination of "washing feet" and "uncovering his father's skirt" is the phrase "uncovering feet." In Ruth 3:4 (and in the retelling in verse 7) Naomi directs Ruth: "When he [Boaz] lies down, note the place where he

---

<sup>66</sup>Deuteronomy 23:1 "No man shall marry his father's former wife, so as to remove his father's garment."

<sup>67</sup>Deuteronomy 27:20 "Cursed be he who lies with his father's wife, for he has removed his father's garment. -- And all the people shall say, Amen."

<sup>68</sup>Commenting on Deuteronomy 27:20.

<sup>69</sup>Ruth 3:9 "'Who are you?' he asked. And she replied, 'I am your handmaid Ruth. Spread your robe over your handmaid, for you are a redeeming kinsman.'"

<sup>70</sup>Ezekiel 16:15 "...you played the harlot... (18) You took your embroidered cloths to cover them; and you set My oil and My incense before them."

lies down, and go over and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what you are to do." While it is unclear what this means, the fact that **לל** can mean genitals, as shown above, troubles many people who, in response, seem to become editors. In the Septuagint, for example, this phrase is translated "reveal the (place) at his feet" whereas the Vulgate reads "remove the coverlet which hides the place at his feet."<sup>71</sup> On the other hand, in verse 8<sup>72</sup> and particularly in verse 14<sup>73</sup>, **לל** means nothing more than the place where Boaz sleeps. It is entirely likely, as Campbell suggests, that the storyteller intended to be ambiguous and therefore provocative.<sup>74</sup>

In Ruth 3:9 Boaz discovered Ruth lying at his feet "'Who are you?' he asked. And she replied, 'I am your handmaid Ruth. Spread your robe over your handmaid, for you are a redeeming kinsman.'" Because **לל** and **לל** are used so frequently throughout this story a certain provocative tension already exists.<sup>75</sup> Thus it is not surprising that The New Jewish Publication Society's translation of the

---

<sup>71</sup>Campbell, 121.

<sup>72</sup>Ruth 3:8 "In the middle of the night, the man gave a start and pulled back -- there was a woman lying at his feet!"

<sup>73</sup>Ruth 3:14 "So she lay at his feet until dawn. She rose before one person could distinguish another, for he thought, 'Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.'"

<sup>74</sup>Campbell, 121.

<sup>75</sup>Campbell, 130.

Tanakh deems it necessary to add the note "A formal act of espousal"<sup>76</sup> -- perhaps in order to tone it down. It also points to the only other verse using וְנָתַתְּ which contains some sort of relationship, is Ezekiel 16:8<sup>77</sup>. (The other verses employing this phrase speak of "spreading wings" as in Jeremiah 18:22.<sup>78</sup>) Other commentators, agreeing with the Jewish Publication Society's rendering, recall an ancient (and still existing) Arabic custom by which placing a garment over a woman is a symbolic claim to marriage.<sup>79</sup> Ibn Ezra agrees that this is the meaning.

In taking the initiative, is Ruth really this forward? It could be that in making the connection regarding the levirate marriage and the redeemer, she is saying something to the effect of "Your redeemer responsibility calls for you to marry me."<sup>80</sup> Since Israelite law does not combine the duties of the levir and redemption, some think that the storyteller wrote after the codification of Deuteronomy (in

---

<sup>76</sup>Tanakh, 1422.

<sup>77</sup>The end of Ezekiel 16:7 begins with this scene: "You were still naked and bare (8)when I passed by you [again] and saw that your time for love had arrived. So I spread My robe over you and covered your nakedness, and I entered into a covenant with you by oath -- declares the Lord God; thus you became Mine."

<sup>78</sup>Jeremiah 18:22 "See, like an eagle he flies up, he soars and spreads his wings against Bozrah; and the heart of Edom's warriors in that day shall be like the heart of a woman in travail."

<sup>79</sup>Campbell, 123.

<sup>80</sup>Campbell, 132.

which levirate marriage is discussed in chapter 25:5-10).<sup>81</sup> The idea of redemption is discussed in Leviticus 25:25 and 27:9-33.

Covering with a garment is also a recognized method of simply taking a person under one's protection.<sup>82</sup> This was stated in reference to God's protection earlier in the book<sup>83</sup> and is also attested in one of the pseudepigraphic Odes of Solomon dating probably from the first century C.E.<sup>84</sup>.

Whether Ruth's words or actions were presumptuous, she achieved the results she wanted. While it seems unlikely that she and Boaz engaged in sexual relations on the threshing floor, the author does leave it ambiguous. Furthermore, "spreading a garment" does lend a positive, protective tone to whatever did transpire on the threshing floor.

Thus overall, this modest (in both senses of the word) category of sexual touch described in metaphoric, non-

---

<sup>81</sup>Still others say that Ruth (and Genesis 38) came prior to the Deuteronomic Code which limits the redeemer to brothers who live together. Campbell, 133ff.

<sup>82</sup>Gaster, 448.

<sup>83</sup>Ruth 2:12 "May the Lord reward your deeds. May you have a full recompense from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have sought refuge!"

<sup>84</sup>"In the pseudepigraphic Odes of Solomon, it says, "I have been prepared against the coming perdition, in that I have been placed under God's garment of non-destruction, and in that he has enfolded me in life immortal and embraced (kissed) me." Gaster, 448. *op. cit.*, 937.

tactile terms, is positive. The terms are couched in metaphor not to hide their negativity (except for uncovering a father's garment), but to be refined.

The next category is that of explicit touch, but whether that is sexual touch, is to some degree unclear. Of the 150 times that *ṽlḵ* is used in a verbal form, in only a few instances does this form of touching occur between a man and a woman.

In Leviticus 15:19 it says "When a woman has a discharge, her discharge being blood from her body, she shall remain in her impurity seven days; whoever touches (*ṽlḵ*) her shall be unclean until evening." It should be pointed out that touching her implies contact with her body, not with her clothes, as in the case of a man with an issue.<sup>85</sup> This is a one-way road however, in that there is no biblical prohibition barring the menstruant from touching anyone else which presumably means that her hands do not transmit the impurity.<sup>86</sup> This would, retroactively, imply that this form of touch does not have to be sexual. The punishment for touching her is to remain unclean until evening -- a punishment far less severe than for touching a menstruant woman in Mesopotamia (where one remains unclean for six days).<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 935.

<sup>86</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 936.

<sup>87</sup>Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 937.

Similarly, a punishment is attached to touching someone in a sexual way in Genesis 29:6. There, God tells Abimelech (who has taken Sarah as his wife) in a dream "...I knew that you did this with a blameless heart, and so I kept you from sinning against Me. That was why I did not let you touch her." The punishment, according to verse 7, is that if he failed to restore her to Abraham, he and all that were his would die. In the Genesis Apocryphon, God sent the Egyptian king (also called "Pharaoh") "an evil spirit to all his household; and it scourged him and all his household."<sup>88</sup> In that telling, he suffered immediately!

Finally, in Ruth 2:9, Boaz told Ruth to glean from the fields and assured her "I have ordered the men not to molest you." It is interesting that while Boaz uses the word  $\text{V}\text{L}\text{J}$ , in a parallel statement in Ruth 2:22, Naomi uses the verb  $\text{V}\text{L}\text{D}$  which is a "stronger, more violent word, at least as attested in the prose of Deuteronomic histories."<sup>89</sup> It is possible that Naomi's instructions had a stronger emphasis on Ruth's personal safety though no other use of the word in the Tanach suggests sexual assault.<sup>90</sup> Also, given the

---

<sup>88</sup>Vermes, 255.

<sup>89</sup>Campbell, 107-8. See also I Samuel 22:17-18 and I Kings 2:25-46.

<sup>90</sup>Campbell, 108. 12, 126.

usage of  $\text{V}\text{L}\text{J}$  in Ruth 1:16,<sup>91</sup> the assonance of  $\text{V}\text{L}\text{J}$  could be intentional. Overall, it can be concluded that the usages of  $\text{V}\text{L}\text{J}$  which imply sexual touch are negative.

The final category of words is comprised of those that are clearly negative in tone such as  $\text{H}\text{J}\text{V}$ ,  $\text{H}\text{V}\text{J}$  and  $\text{H}\text{J}\text{I}$ . It is not a difficult task to show that all three of these words portray negative and harmful acts; merely surveying the punishments corresponding to these acts is proof enough.

While adultery and harlotry are illicit and immoral acts, they are done by choice.  $\text{H}\text{J}\text{V}$ , as will be shown, is forcible rape in a sexual context, or humiliation in a non-sexual context -- and because in both cases consent is missing, the word has negative connotations. Ibn Ezra, in commenting on this same word in Lamentations 5:11<sup>92</sup>, for example, translates it as  $\text{V}\text{J}\text{V}\text{I}$   $\text{J}\text{V}$ . Being raped was considered to be "the moral and social degrading and debasing by which a girl loses the expectancy of a fully valid marriage."<sup>93</sup>

Looking at the episode with Amnon and his sister Tamar in II Samuel 13, phrases such as "...Amnon pretended to be sick..." (verse 6) foreshadow the ominous events yet to

---

<sup>91</sup>Ruth 1:16 "But Ruth replied, 'Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.'"

<sup>92</sup>Lamentations 5:11 "They have ravished women in Zion, maidens in the towns of Judah." us? What wrong have I done that you should bring so great a guilt upon me and my kingdom?

<sup>93</sup>Von Rad, Genesis, 326. that ought not to be done."

come. When Amnon caught hold of his sister and said, "Come lie (לִי) with me, sister" (verse 11), she responded (verse 12-13): "Don't, brother. Don't force (לִי) me. Such things are not done in Israel! Don't do such a vile thing! Where will I carry my shame? And you, you will be like any of the scoundrels in Israel!..."

Similar to Tamar's phrase "Such things are not done in Israel!" is a phrase found in the story of the rape of Dinah: "...he had committed an outrage in Israel by lying (לִי) with Jacob's daughter -- a thing not to be done" (Genesis 34:7). (See also Genesis 20:9<sup>34</sup> and the conversation between Abimelech and Abraham.) Why was this not to be done? Because it threatened the fabric of society by being a serious violation of custom. When, in II Samuel 13:14, Amnon then "overpowered her and lay with her by force" -- the following events happened: he loathed her and threw her out (verse 15), Tamar remained forlorn (verse 10), Absalom hated him (verse 22) and finally, Absalom had him killed (verse 28-29). The ending was not a happy one.

Similarly, the result of the rape of Dinah "he took her (לָקַח), he lay (לִי) with her, he forced her (לִי)" in Genesis 34:2 -- a sequence of increasing severity which

---

<sup>34</sup>Genesis 20:9 "Then Abimelech summoned Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? What wrong have I done that you should bring so great a guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done to me things that ought not to be done."

underscores the brutality of his assault<sup>95</sup> -- was that all of the males in Shechem were slaughtered by Simon and Levi.

It is a hendiadys to use "lay with her" and "violated her."<sup>96</sup> As already proven, while לָו can be accused of guilt by association in sexual settings, הָו in and of itself is the greater negative of the two in this verbal clause.

In fact, it is not only in terms of sexual activity that הָו is used. In Exodus 1:11-13<sup>97</sup>, the taskmasters "oppressed" (הָו) them and in Exodus 22:21-23 the text reads "You shall not ill-treat (הָו) any widow..." or "My anger shall blaze forth..." This הָו denotes maltreatment and humiliation.<sup>98</sup> In fact, Ramban commenting on Genesis 34:2<sup>99</sup> in which he quotes Rashi, says that לָו is used in cases of natural gratification and הָו is used in cases of unnatural gratification(!). Thus whatever the context, הָו remains negative.

Adultery (הָוָה) is another term that never carries

---

<sup>95</sup>Sarna, *Genesis*, 234.

<sup>96</sup>Sarna, *Genesis*, 264.

<sup>97</sup>Exodus 1:11 "So they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor; and they built garrison cities for Pharaoh: Pithom and Raamses. (12) But the more they were oppressed, the more they increased and spread out, so that the [Egyptians] came to dread the Israelites. (13) The Egyptians ruthlessly imposed upon the Israelites..."

<sup>98</sup>Sarna, *Genesis*, p.367. Jeremiah 29:23, Ezekiel 16:32, Proverbs 11:4:14, Proverbs 6:32, and others.

<sup>99</sup>Genesis 34:2 "Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, chief of the country, saw her, and took her and lay with her by force."

positive associations in all of its thirty-two various forms in the Tanach. The context of the prohibition was as follows: it was originally based on a conception of marriage which was not monogamous -- but also not simply polygamous. A man could engage in sexual relations with the female slaves within his household, but this was regulated by strict legal concepts. If they were disregarded, it became adultery.<sup>100</sup> It was likely, then, that since sexual relations outside of marriage were permissible with certain restrictions, when the societal rules were broken, the punishments were severe.

The word [V] refers to relations with married or engaged women<sup>101</sup> and because (1) the marriage bond has sacral dimensions (Malachi 2:14 "...the Lord is a witness between you and the wife of your youth..."), (2) adultery is prohibited by God, (3) its penalty is severe (see Leviticus 20:10, Deuteronomy 22:22, Jeremiah 29:21-23, Ezekiel 16:18), and (4) its placement within the Decalogue is between theft and murder, the strength and gravity of the prohibition is clear.<sup>102</sup>

In both versions of the Ten Commandments, Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17, it says "You shall not commit

<sup>100</sup>Von Rad, Deuteronomy, 59.

<sup>101</sup>See Leviticus 20:10, Jeremiah 29:23, Ezekiel 16:32, Hosea 3:1, 4:14, Proverbs 6:32, and others.

<sup>102</sup>Sarna, Exodus, 114.

adultery." A two-word prohibition should be accompanied by many questions of clarification: What constitutes adultery...? Who gets punished...? What if it is rape..? As is pointed out, however, this is in absolute form (as are the prohibitions against murder and theft between which it falls in the Decalogue) without an object, component, definition or qualification.<sup>103</sup> In other words, the Decalogue is written in short, easy memorable clauses of apodeictic law (law in the form of "You shall (not)") which are unconditional.<sup>104</sup> Similar in form are the lists in Exodus 34:14-26 and Deuteronomy 27:15-26.

Ramban, commenting on Exodus 20:13 says that adultery will destroy the principle of honoring parents since they will not know their fathers and will give honor to another, just as idol-worshippers do as in Jeremiah 2:27<sup>105</sup>. Thus he sees a snowball effect, with adultery, not honoring parents (as in Exodus 21:17<sup>106</sup>) and idolatry all punishable by death!

Similar to the prohibitions in the Decalogue, in Ezekiel 18:6 "If he has not eaten on the mountains or raised

---

<sup>103</sup>Cassuto, 246.

<sup>104</sup>Noth, Exodus, 160.

<sup>105</sup>Jeremiah 2:27 "They said to wood, 'You are my father,' To stone, 'You gave birth to me,' while to Me they turned their backs and not their faces. But in their hour of calamity they cry, 'Arise and save us!'"

<sup>106</sup>Exodus 21:17 "He who insults his father or his mother shall be put to death." 335-336.

his eyes to the fetishes of the House of Israel; if he has not defiled another man's wife or approached a menstruous woman..." (verse 9) "...he is righteous". In the list in Ezekiel 22:6-12 (which has even more similarities to the Decalogue than Ezekiel 18) verse 11 says base men... "have committed abhorrent acts with other men's wives."<sup>107</sup> Adultery, then, is not the socially acceptable way to engage in sexual relations.

In some cases "harlotry" and "adultery" are mentioned in the same verse, as in Jeremiah 5:7<sup>108</sup> The act of harlotry (זנות) is very common in the Tanach but also never seen in a positive light. In defining the term זנות in Leviticus 21:7, Rashi explains it to be: sex with an Israelite who is forbidden to her as a husband.

Again, one way that it is possible to judge an act is by its repercussions and punishments. In Leviticus 21:9 "When a daughter of a priest defiles herself through harlotry, it is her father whom she defiles; she shall be put to the fire." (Death by burning was in an extreme case whereas death by stoning was more common (as in Deuteronomy 22:23ff)).<sup>109</sup> Thus, as with any public figure past or

---

<sup>107</sup> Other similarities can be found in Leviticus 18:20, 20:10, Deuteronomy 22:22, Numbers 5:11-30.

<sup>108</sup> Jeremiah 5:7 "Why should I forgive you? Your children have forsaken Me and sworn by no-gods. When I fed them their fill, they committed adultery and went trooping to the harlot's house." *ibid.*, 156.

<sup>109</sup> *Noth, Leviticus*, 2355-356.

present, a priest's daughter's actions reflect on her father's sacral office<sup>110</sup> and harlotry does not do him well. Also, according to Leviticus 21:7 a priest may not marry "a woman defiled by harlotry" nor "one divorced from her husband" -- both of which are restrictions that did not apply to lay Israelites.<sup>111</sup>

It is interesting that at the end of the episode with Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38 when Judah has Hirah seeking to redeem the pledge, Hirah asks for the local זנות or cult prostitute. זנות is yet another biblical term directly implying sexual relations. This person -- male or female -- practiced prostitution in the service of a deity, probably in connection with a fertility cult. This office is also known from tablets listing Mesopotamian temple personnel and from Babylonian and Assyrian laws, but the nature of her religious function remains unclear.<sup>112</sup> Such an institution is clearly known but outlawed in Deuteronomy 23:18: "No Israelite women shall be a cult prostitute, nor shall any Israelite man be a cult prostitute."

The difficulty with envisioning Tamar as a cult prostitute is due to the fact that she knew Judah and that this practice was strictly forbidden by law though.

<sup>110</sup>Levine, 144.

<sup>111</sup>Noth, Leviticus, 156.

<sup>112</sup>Sarna, Genesis, 268.

admittedly, at times fashionable<sup>113</sup>. As Karel van der Toorn points out, it is more likely that "cult prostitution" occurred when women were unable to pay back vows they had made and had no where else to turn to find the money or goods promised. While the money was used within the Temple, it was unrelated to any type of fertility cult.<sup>114</sup> It is easier to envision Tamar as owing payment of a vow than of being a cult prostitute.

It is possible, then, that Tamar was not pretending to be a harlot but rather a נִוְטָר indulging in a practice of the ancient Orient -- namely for married women to give themselves to strangers because of an oath. This occurred in the service of the goddess of love, Astarte and was different from prostitution.<sup>115</sup>

Returning to Genesis, why did Hirah ask for the "cult prostitute" rather than the harlot? Even though it was a

---

<sup>113</sup>Von Rad, *Genesis*, 354. For references, see Hosea 4:13ff, Proverbs 7:1ff.

<sup>114</sup>One proof used (p.199) is from Proverbs 7. Verse 14 reads "I had to make a sacrifice of well-being; Today I fulfilled my vows." Van der toorn thinks that this should be written: "I am to fulfill presently" such that the erotic adventure detailed in this chapter is related to this vow. Further, the woman of the text explains that (19) "For the man of the house is away; He is off on a distant journey. (20) He took his bag of money with him and will return only at mid-month." Rather than allaying her companion's fears that her husband will come home early, this woman is telling him that she does not have access to the money that she needs in order to pay her religious obligations so she must resort to prostitution. Van der Toorn, 193-205.

<sup>115</sup>Deuteronomy 23:18 "No Israelite woman shall be a cult prostitute." Von Rad, *Genesis*, 354.

common harlot that Judah supposed Tamar to be, Hirah used the term *הוֹטֵטָה*. This turn of phrase could be for one of three reasons: to place the affair on a higher social level<sup>116</sup> because Hirah could be expressing Canaanite notions<sup>117</sup> or by Judah's use of the word "harlot" he could be expressing the Israelite view that cult prostitutes are a perversion of religion,<sup>118</sup> as in Hosea 4:4.<sup>119</sup>

Based on the commentaries, the answer is unclear: Saadia Gaon equates a *הוֹטֵטָה* to a "harlot," Rashi describes her as one who is ever ready for illicit intercourse and Rashbam points the reader to I Kings 14:23<sup>120</sup> and Deuteronomy 23:18.<sup>121</sup> Ultimately, then, while there are differences between harlots and cult prostitutes, both engage in illicit sex.

In Maimonides' The Guide to the Perplexed the prohibitions of sex with near of kin are given in order to

---

<sup>116</sup>Von Rad, *Genesis*, 354.

<sup>117</sup>Sarna, *Genesis*, 268.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid.

<sup>119</sup>Hosea 4:4 "'Let no man rebuke, let no man protest!' For this your people has a grievance against [you], O priest!" The grievance seems to be that the priests failed to reprove for the dishonesty, murder, adultery, etc. mentioned in verse 2. *Tanakh*, 985.

<sup>120</sup>I Kings 14:23 "They too built for themselves shrines, pillars, and sacred posts on every high hill and under every leafy tree."

<sup>121</sup>Deuteronomy 23:18 "No Israelite woman shall be a cult prostitute, nor shall any Israelite man be a cult prostitute."

inculcate the lesson that people should limit sexual intercourse, hold it in contempt and perform it rarely.<sup>122</sup> Despite the large number of words used to describe sexual activity in the Hebrew Bible, evidences from the text would seem to support Maimonides' idea. Sexual activity in the Tanach is not portrayed lovingly.

---

<sup>122</sup>Maimonides, Guide to the Perplexed, III:49, Pines, 601ff. as quoted in Gruber, 320-21.

## Chapter II

### Affectionate Touch

The chapter entitled "Sexual Touch" did not include kisses or loving caresses. Dandling a child upon one's knees or holding a child's hand were as invisible as were greetings and farewells. While all of these demonstrations of affection were present, of course, in the lives of the biblical characters, references to them in the Hebrew Bible are few and far between. This being the case, it is possible to discuss every example of affectionate touch in the Hebrew Bible within the confines of this chapter. It should be kept in mind, however, that because of the relative paucity of terms, the influence of affectionate touch -- which by definition is positive -- on the overall category of touch is limited.

Christopher Nyrop defined "kissing" in his book The Kiss and Its History. There he writes:

"...from a purely phonetic point of view a kiss may be defined as an inspiratory bilabial sound, which English phoneticians call the lip-click, i.e. the sound made by smacking the lip. This movement of the muscles, however, is not of itself sufficient to produce a kiss, it being, as you know, employed by coachmen when they want to start their horses; but it becomes a kiss only when it is used as an expression of a certain feeling, and when the lips are pressed against, or simply come into contact with, a living creature or object."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nyrop's questions:

"How old are you?" (verse 18)

"How did you succeed so quickly [in bringing the meal], my

<sup>1</sup>As quoted in Gruber, 320-1 (verse 24)

Of the thirty-two verses in which "kiss" (קָשַׁק) is found, the vast majority are not romantic kisses. Rather, after expelling the seven verses which do not involve interpersonal touch at all, the remainder are overwhelmingly kisses between family members -- especially between parents and children. It should be noted how often a scene with kissing also involves tears<sup>2</sup> and/or an embrace.<sup>3</sup>

Jacob is the person with whom to begin as he and his family are physically affectionate. When Jacob appeared before his father in order to try and convince him that he was Esau, Genesis 27:26 reads, "Then his father Isaac said to him, 'Come close and kiss me, my son,' (27) and he went up and kissed him." For Jacob, it was the beginning of his new status; in terms of literary structure, the kiss signals not only a conclusion, but a transition to the blessing.<sup>4</sup>

Where did he kiss him? According to Ibn Ezra, it was on the hand, the shoulder or the neck since the preposition was a "בְּ" whereas, he says, if a "ל" is absent, the kiss is on the mouth. Others say, however, that Isaac's questions show his uncertainty given his poor eyesight.<sup>5</sup> When they

---

<sup>2</sup>Genesis 29:11; 33:4; 45:15; 50:1; Ruth 1:9,14.

<sup>3</sup>Genesis 29:13; 33:4; 48:10.

<sup>4</sup>Von Rad, *Genesis*, 273.

<sup>5</sup>Isaac's questions:

"Which of my sons are you?" (verse 18) there, David rose up  
 "How did you succeed so quickly [in bringing the meal], my son?" (verse 20) low three times. They kissed each other and  
 "Are you really my son Esau?" (verse 24)

then kissed mouth to mouth, he was certain that he was dealing with Esau.<sup>6</sup> Isaac's conclusion is surprising, however, given the deception that the reader knows to be taking place!

Other than to determine who stood before him, why did Isaac initiate the kiss? After all it was Isaac who asked Esau (or so he thought) for the kiss. It could, of course, simply be a father wanting to receive his child's kiss before blessing him. In his comments on this verse, Radak is more concrete. He suggests that the kiss always travels from a stronger person to a weaker person. (If they are equal as in I Samuel 20:41<sup>7</sup>, a verse to be discussed further on, the kiss is passed from one friend to another.) Therefore, because Isaac could not see Jacob, Isaac said to him that Jacob should kiss him. Regardless of who initiated the kiss this episode is only a beginning. Jacob and his own family prove to be very affectionate as well.

Whether Jacob left home to avoid his brother's wrath or to find a wife, it seems only proper that Jacob married into Laban's family. His too was an affectionate family. In three instances Laban, unlike other biblical characters, greeted or bid farewell to members of his family by kissing

---

<sup>6</sup>Von Rad, *Genesis*, 272. <sup>7</sup>I Samuel 20:41 "When the boy got there, David rose up from beside the Negeb. He flung himself face down on the ground and bowed low three times. They kissed each other and wept together; David wept the longer."

them. Unlike others, however, he never cried. In Genesis 29:13 when Laban first met Jacob "On hearing the news of his sister's son Jacob, Laban ran to greet him; he embraced him and kissed him, and took him into his house. He told Laban all that had happened."

Was there more to his greeting than meets the eye? That the kiss is a normative greeting among friends in ancient Babylonia is demonstrated in The Epic of Gilgamesh: "He [Enkidu] came forth. They [Enkidu and Gilgamesh] embraced, and they kissed each other. They took counsel with each other, [and] they sighed to each other."<sup>8</sup> How much the more so, it is hoped, between relatives...

In Genesis, Laban, like Jacob and Rachel, may have wanted to put his best foot forward at their first meeting.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, as future developments show, his effusive greeting may have been self-serving<sup>10</sup> -- he subsequently fenagled fourteen years of work out of his son-in-law! If, in fact, the greeting was self-serving, then it is interesting that a kiss (and/or embrace) brings the deceiver and the deceived back into contact (though on opposite sides). As will be seen in the second of the three instances involving Laban, Jacob denies Laban a farewell

---

<sup>8</sup>Gruber, 336 as quoted from R. Campbell Thompson, The Epic of Gilgamesh: Text, Transliteration, and Notes XII, 84-86. "There must always be present: a relation of consanguinity, a relation of affinity, and a relation of descent; and these three are most economically by the total relationships involved in the maternal uncle-nephew relationship." <sup>9</sup>Von Rad, Genesis, 284. <sup>10</sup>Sarna, Genesis, 2203.

kiss by secretly fleeing with Rachel and Leah.

In Genesis 31, Jacob together with his wives, children and possessions left without telling Laban he was fleeing (verse 20). When Laban caught up with him, he said (verse 28) "You did not even let me kiss my sons and daughters good-bye! It was a foolish thing for you to do." Perhaps Laban considered Jacob a member of his clan and therefore one who deserved punishment for violating its rules and mores.<sup>11</sup> (This retribution was never exacted due to the divine admonition, however.<sup>12</sup>) The "avunculate" relationship (which is borne of marriage between the offspring of opposite-sex siblings<sup>13</sup>) is seen to be significant.<sup>14</sup> However, it also has tension with the patrilocal residence. Therefore, "while Laban regards Jacob's departure as a flight from Jacob's and Jacob's family's proper home, Jacob regards the time spent with Laban as time away from his proper home in the land of his

---

<sup>11</sup>Sarna, *Genesis*, 218.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup>Oden, 201.

<sup>14</sup>According to Oden, "The avunculate relationship is a key to a more comprehensive 'atom' of kinship, because 'in order for a kinship structure to exist, three types of family relations must always be present: a relation of consanguinity, a relation of affinity, and a relation of descent;' and these three needs are met most economically by the total relationships involved in the maternal uncle-nephew relationship." Oden, 202.

own father."<sup>15</sup>

Whatever the cause of Jacob's flight and Laban's reaction, in Genesis 32:1, he did want the chance to say goodbye. So "Early in the morning, Laban kissed his sons and daughters and bade them good-by; then Laban left on his journey homeward." The families went their separate ways.

Later, when Jacob and Esau were reunited (Genesis 33:4), they came together with multiple signs of affection. It should be pointed out that just as the brothers' breach was characterized by an unparalleled succession of five Hebrew verbs in Genesis 25:34<sup>16</sup>, so too the final reconciliation is described by five verbs.<sup>17</sup> The verse reads "Esau ran to greet him. He embraced him and, falling on his neck, he kissed him; and they wept." Paralleling the above example with Laban, this seems to be a closure to his earlier (deceptive) kiss when he played the role of Esau (Genesis 27:26).

There is some confusion, however, in that the Masoretic Text, reads לָהּ וַיִּשָּׁק while the Septuagint's version presupposes an original לָהּ וַיִּשָּׁק.<sup>18</sup> Comparisons of similar passages cast doubt on the primacy of the Masoretic Text's

<sup>15</sup>Oden, 201. <sup>16</sup>See, for example, the use of the same device, also

by Alexandrian scholars for Greek texts, to draw attention to the birthright. <sup>17</sup>Genesis 25:34: "Jacob then gave Esau bread and lentil stew; he ate and drank, and he rose and went away. Thus did Esau spurn the birthright." A similar ceremony is contained in the Amarna letters of the fourteenth century.

<sup>18</sup>Sarna, Genesis, 229.

<sup>19</sup>See, for example: Leviticus 19:32; I Kings 2:19; Isaiah 55:7; <sup>20</sup>Gruber, 305.

reading.<sup>19</sup> As a reference to Exodus 18:7 (quoted below) shows, it seems that the disparity between the two arose from two separate traditions stemming from the joint use of קָשַׁק and נָשַׁק.<sup>20</sup>

Apparently, the entire scene is duplicated, and thus indirectly confirmed, by the Enuma Elish<sup>21</sup> which states "he encircled his neck... and kissed him." Therefore the Hebrew text would seem to be correct even though the Masora indicates some doubt by placing dots over the second verb.<sup>22</sup> It could be that the sincerity of Esau's actions were being questioned.

In fact, both of the brothers' actions can be questioned. The picture of the reunion is drawn in contrasts: Esau is overjoyed whereas Jacob takes deliberate actions. For example, in verse 3 Jacob bows seven times. This seven-fold bowing is known to be part of a ceremony of minor city princes<sup>23</sup> and is a common greeting for persons of high status in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>24</sup> (Bowing is also

---

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Gruber, 305-308.

<sup>21</sup>Enuma Elish I, 11.53f as cited by Speiser, 259.

<sup>22</sup>Sarna, *Genesis*, 229. The dots are a scribal device, also used by Alexandrian scholars for Greek texts, to draw attention to something unusual. the news of his sister's son

<sup>23</sup>Von Rad, *Genesis*, 322. A similar ceremony is contained in the Amarna letters of the fourteenth century.

<sup>24</sup>See, for example: Leviticus 19:32; I Kings 2:19; Isaiah 49:7; Job 29:8. his neck, he kissed him; and they wept."

attested to in Ugaritic and Akkadian texts where the one greeted is superior in status to the one bringing greetings.<sup>25</sup>)

Many years later when Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, he followed his grandfather's example and kissed them. Genesis 45:15 reads "He kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; only then were his brothers able to talk to him." A pattern re-emerges: after deceit, Jacob and the sons of Jacob make up with a kiss.

At the end of Jacob's life, he embraced and kissed his grandsons. In Genesis 48:10 "Now Israel's eyes were dim with age; he could not see. So [Joseph] brought them close to him, and he kissed them and embraced them." Only here and in verses 29:13<sup>26</sup> and 33:4<sup>27</sup> do "embrace" and "kiss" appear together. However, the action here proceeds from kissing to embracing whereas in the other two verses the action proceeds from embracing to kissing. This may express

---

<sup>25</sup>The Ugaritic bowing formula is translated "lie down and fall at the feet of Deity Name; bend over and honor him." This formula occurs only in connection to meetings between deities and thus is not a worship formula. It is similar to the Akkadian "he prostrated...he straightened up to stand" which is a greeting formula describing the exaltation of the one greeted vis-a-vis the one who greets without the latter's disparagement. Gruber, 293-301.

<sup>26</sup>Genesis 29:13 "On hearing the news of his sister's son Jacob, Laban ran to greet him; he embraced him and kissed him, and took him into his house. He told Laban all that had happened." ... saying, "Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of the fields that the Lord has blessed."

<sup>27</sup>Genesis 33:4 "Esau ran to greet him. He embraced him and, falling on his neck, he kissed him; and they wept."

not simply affection, but "a reinforcement of oral declarations through symbolic physical gestures that have significance in the adoptive process."<sup>28</sup> This adoptive process will be discussed below in the chapter entitled "Deliberate Touch."

The only example of an unmarried man and woman kissing also involves Jacob.<sup>29</sup> In Genesis 29:11 after meeting Rachel by the well, "Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and broke into tears." Only in the next verse did he tell her that he was his father's kinsman; Rebecca's son. The two verbs used here (נָשָׁק and נָשַׁק) are identical with those from Genesis 27:26-27<sup>30</sup> (the scene which precipitated Jacob's flight). In other words, one phase of his life ends and another, which intimates retributive justice for his offence in the previous one, begins. (Laban, as was seen, greeted him with a kiss.<sup>31</sup>) So the tricker was himself tricked.

As Jacob already knows that Rebecca is his cousin, even though he has not yet disclosed his identity to her, his

---

<sup>28</sup>Sarna, *Genesis*, 327.

<sup>29</sup>The examples given below from Song of Songs 1:2 and 8:1 and Proverbs 7:13 are either wishes for kisses or illicit kisses from a harlot.

<sup>30</sup>Genesis 27:26-27 (26) "Then his father Isaac said to him, 'Come close and kiss me, my son'; (27) and he went up (נָשָׁק) and kissed (נָשַׁק) him. And he smelled his clothes and he blessed him, saying, 'Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of the fields that the Lord has blessed.'"

<sup>31</sup>Sarna, *Genesis*, 202. *Genesis* 29:11.

kiss can be seen as natural and innocent.<sup>32</sup> According to Calvin, on the other hand, the fact that Jacob kissed a girl without having introduced himself first, is a mistake in Moses' redaction!<sup>33</sup> However, this need not have been out of line with the mores of the times.<sup>34</sup>

It is known from Nuzi records, which often mirror conditions in the Haran area and therefore within the patriarchal circle, that women were subject to fewer formal restraints than was to be the norm later in the Near East.<sup>35</sup> Further, it may not be Jacob who was to be labeled promiscuous at all! Radak looks at the scene from Rachel's perspective. Seeing that Jacob removed the stone from the mouth of the well for her (verse 10), she received the kiss from him -- not knowing that she was a kinsman.<sup>36</sup> In this case, Jacob's kiss is innocent and Rachel's is bold.

It is unclear, then, as to whether Jacob stepped over the boundary of ancient Near Eastern etiquette. What can be stated, however, is that without a doubt, when Jacob kisses Rachel, there is no question as to the authenticity of emotion behind it... unlike the kisses of his future father-in-law.

---

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Von Rad, *Genesis*, 284.

<sup>34</sup>Speiser, 223.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Radak commenting on *Genesis* 29:11.

While touch involving the dead does not fall within the bounds of this study, the following verse is mentioned in order to mark the loss of the patriarch of this openly affectionate family. When Jacob died (Genesis 50:1), "Joseph flung himself upon his father's face and wept over him and kissed him." (As will be discussed below, "falling on the neck" is more common than "flinging upon the face" possibly because the latter would be appropriate only when the parties involved are standing.<sup>37</sup>) Once again Jacob and his family set a unique standard: this is the only occurrence of a farewell kiss to the deceased in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>38</sup>

Unlike the incidents of touch involving Jacob's family each one involving Ruth and her daughters-in-law were sincere. In Ruth 1:8, after Naomi's husband and sons had died, she begged her daughters-in-law to return to their mothers' homes: "'Turn back, each of you to her mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me!' Verse 9 continues: 'May the Lord grant that each of you find security in the house of a husband!' And she kissed them farewell. They broke into weeping." After telling them that she had no more sons to give them (verses 12-13), in verse 14 "They broke into weeping." 12 continued 'Jonathan said to David, 'Go in peace! For we will give them (verses 12-13), in verse 14 "They broke into weeping." May the Lord be [witness] between you and me, and between your fathers and mine, forever!'" 2 Samuel 21:1 "David then went down to the town."

<sup>37</sup>Sarna, Genesis, 347.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid. It should also be noted that in the Book of Jubilees 23:5, Isaac kisses his dead father. Thus it could be that this practice was widespread though unrecorded.

weeping again, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law farewell. But Ruth clung to her."

This section, from verse 9 to 14 is an *inclusio* which "artistically brackets the episode of persuasion": in verse 9, the order is kissing and lamenting whereas in verse 14, it is the reverse.<sup>39</sup> More specifically, in verse 9, Ruth kisses both Orpah and Naomi whereas in verse 14, Orpah kisses Naomi. This is a signal which says that the relationship between Orpah and Naomi is here terminated and there is no need for more words (though some versions of the text supply them).<sup>40</sup> Being decisive could have led Orpah to take over the role of the stronger one and therefore the initiator of the kiss.

A one-way farewell kiss appears in other stories which portray the conclusion of intimate relationships. Examples can be found in Genesis 32:1 (as quoted above), I Samuel 20:41,<sup>41</sup> II Samuel 19:40<sup>42</sup> and I Kings 19:20.<sup>43</sup> This

---

<sup>39</sup>Campbell, 71.

<sup>40</sup>Campbell, 72.

<sup>41</sup>I Samuel 20:41 "When the boy [Jonathan's boy] got there, David rose up from beside the Negeb. He flung himself face down on the ground and bowed low three times. They kissed each other and wept together; David wept the longer." Verse 42 continues "Jonathan said to David, 'Go in peace! For we two have sworn to each other in the name of the Lord: "May the Lord be [witness] between you and me, and between your offspring and mine, forever!"' I Samuel 21:1 "David then went his way, and Jonathan returned to the town."

<sup>42</sup>II Samuel 19:40 "All the troops crossed the Jordan; and when the king was ready to cross, the king kissed Barzillai and bade him farewell; and [Barzillai] returned to his home."

sub-group of kissing farewell forms yet another type of affectionate kiss. One verse will be discussed here as the others will be or were discussed elsewhere in this chapter.

In I Kings 19:20 Elijah recruits Elisha son of Shaphat. "He left the oxen and ran after Elijah, saying: 'Let me kiss my father and mother good-by, and I will follow you.' And he answered him, 'Go back. What have I done to you?'" Metzudat David sees this contact with his parents as a way of requesting permission. While this comment is interesting, this kiss may simply be the sign of farewell between a child and his parents.

A kiss can also be a sign of greeting as already seen above involving Jacob. In Exodus 4:27, after the mysterious incident in which Zipporah circumcised her son, "The Lord said to Aaron, 'Go meet Moses in the wilderness.' He went and met him at the mountain of God, and he kissed him." This was a sign of "joy and affection"<sup>44</sup> and the "standard biblical greeting between close relatives."<sup>45</sup> Ramban, incidentally, thinks that Aaron kissed Moses. To some extent, it does not matter who initiated the kiss. More important is the fact that Moses' family, as will be seen,

---

<sup>44</sup>I Kings 19:20 "He [Elisha son of Shaphat] left the oxen and ran after Elijah, saying: 'Let me kiss my father and mother good-by, and I will follow you.' And he answered him, 'Go back. What have I done to you?'"

<sup>45</sup>Cassuto, 62.

<sup>46</sup>Sarna, Exodus, 26.

joins the families of Ruth and Jacob in becoming one of the more openly affectionate personalities in the Bible.

Later, in Exodus 18:7 when Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought Zipporah and her two sons to be reunited with Moses, "Moses went out to meet his father-in-law; he bowed low and kissed him; each asked after the other's welfare, and they went into the tent." Moses clearly greets his father-in-law, a priest of Midian, differently than he greets his brother. Here, as in I Kings 2:19<sup>46</sup>, there is a high status person greeting a parental figure of high status but only in Exodus do both bowing and kissing occur. (This verse is also a reminder that the usage of bowing and/or kissing arose from two separate traditions stemming from the joint use of  $\text{קָרַב}$  and  $\text{נָשָׁק}$ .<sup>47</sup>) This episode in fact, sparks the memory of Jacob's formality of bowing during his reunion with Esau and therefore might reflect the formal civilities customary in the East.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, Moses' act could simply be that of greeting his father-in-law with all possible courtesy.<sup>49</sup>

Aside from greetings and farewells, there are instances

---

<sup>46</sup>I Kings 2:19 "So Bathsheba went to King Solomon to speak to him about Adonijah. The king rose to greet her and bowed down to her. He sat on his throne; and he had a throne placed for the queen mother, and she sat on his right."

<sup>47</sup>Gruber, 305-308. And if a man approached to bow at him,

<sup>48</sup>Sarna, Exodus, 99. "Shouldn't this be every Israelite

<sup>49</sup>Noth, Exodus, 149. "Thus Abigail won away the

of kisses which have other meanings. In II Samuel 14 after the incident with Tamar (discussed in "Sexual Touch"), Absalom had not appeared before his father the king in seven years. Absalom was unsuccessful in summoning Joab, the king's general, to come before him (in order to initiate contact with his father). What was his solution? He set Joab's field on fire thus forcing him to be in contact. Absalom then told Joab that he wanted him to speak to the king on his behalf. In verse 33 "Joab went to the king and reported to him; whereupon he summoned Absalom. He came to the king and flung himself face down to the ground before the king. And the king kissed Absalom." This kiss is emotional, like the encounter between Jacob and Esau. Here, it indicates reconciliation and restoration of the royal favor.<sup>50</sup> (It is not, however, a gesture of affirmation of Absalom's right to succeed David as in Samuel's anointing of Saul in I Samuel 10:1 which will be discussed below.<sup>51</sup>)

Similarly, in II Samuel 15:5<sup>52</sup>, Absalom's own kiss intimates royal favor. Here, however, Absalom's kiss is deceptive -- he was trying to usurp the throne through greater intimacy with his subjects (as will be discussed in

---

<sup>50</sup>McCarter, *II Samuel*, 350.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup>II Samuel 15:5 "And if a man approached to bow to him, [Absalom] would extend his hand and take hold of him and kiss him." Verse 6 continues "Absalom did this to every Israelite who came to the king for judgement. Thus Absalom won away the hearts of the men of Israel."

"Aggressive Touch"). It clearly lacked the emotion that the reunions sparked.

Still other examples of kissing which are unique in context are: in I Samuel 10:1 "Samuel took a flask of oil and poured some on his [Saul's] head and kissed him, and said, 'The Lord herewith anoints you ruler over His own people.'" Because an ordination is never followed by a kiss other than here, Samuel's and Saul's relationship proves to be close.

In Proverbs 24:26 the following aphorism appears: "Giving a straight forward reply is like giving a kiss." This translation, however, leaves out the fact that this is the only verse involving a kiss in the entire Hebrew Bible which also includes שׁפּהּ -- lips! This verse discusses socially constructive behavior -- in particular, the idea of speaking the truth in love.<sup>53</sup> It could also be an aphorism defining true friendship which leads to the inference that because friends kiss on the lips, so do lovers (as in Song of Songs 1:2).<sup>54</sup> This true friendship involves a man who gives straight answers to his friend's questions and is a model of candor and frankness. He is a friend indeed whose kiss is not counterfeit -- an idea that is upheld with the insertion of "he who kisses the lips as a

---

<sup>53</sup>McKane, 575.

<sup>54</sup>Gruber, 328.

friend" as proposed by Toy and Gemser.<sup>55</sup> In ancient Babylonia, greeting friends with a kiss is demonstrated by Gilgamesh as quoted above.<sup>56</sup> It could also be that a kiss and being candid are "aesthetically comparable" for to receive an honest reply gives pleasure comparable to that bestowed by a kiss.<sup>57</sup>

The following three examples, two from Song of Songs and one from Proverbs, are the only ones in the Hebrew Bible which suggest erotic kissing.<sup>58</sup> This is in direct contrast to the Ugaritic literature which employs the kiss principally as an element of sexual foreplay.<sup>59</sup> It should be known that the Akkadian literature also employs erotic kisses and embraces more freely than does Hebrew.<sup>60</sup>

In Song of Songs 1:2, "Oh, Let him give me of the kisses of his mouth! For your love is more delightful than wine." It is interesting that while it is clear that mouth-

---

<sup>55</sup>McKane, 575.

<sup>56</sup>page 50, note 8.

<sup>57</sup>McKane, 575.

<sup>58</sup>Gruber, 334.

<sup>59</sup>In El's blessing Daniel in II Daniel i, 39f "Let him [Daniel] go up to his bed, [and let him lie down]. By kissing his wife she will conceive, by embracing she will become pregnant..." As quoted by Gruber, 322-3.

<sup>60</sup>See, for example, "My beauty spots give me sensations. My upper lip becomes moist while my lower one trembles. I shall embrace him; I shall kiss him. I shall look upon him." As quoted from J.A. Knudtzon, Die El-Amarna-Tafeln; siglum for Amarna texts in Knudtzon and in Anson F. Rainey, El Amarna Tablets 359-379, col. 2, 1.20 by Gruber, 342.

kissing is meant, nose-kissing is also known from Egyptian sources.<sup>61</sup> In Ugaritic literature, meanwhile, both the erotic and motherly kiss are given on the lips.<sup>62</sup>

According to Rashi, there are also places in which people kiss on the shoulder and back of hand, which goes with the custom surrounding, for example, bride and groom. Again, Ibn Ezra points out that every time  $\text{PVL}$  is used without a "ל" it is on the mouth. When it is accompanied by a "ל" it is on the hand or the shoulder or the cheek according to local custom.

In Song of Songs 8:1 "If only it could be as with a brother, as if you had nursed at my mother's breast: then I could kiss you when I met you in the street." This girl could not really mean that she wishes him to be like her brother, for then her problem would not be solved; she still would not be able to kiss her lover unabashedly in public.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, if her lover were like a brother, she could kiss him non-romantically in public without meeting the disapproval of others. As Rudolf noted, "the charming lack of logic" lies in the desire that he might be her brother in order that she can act like more than a sister.<sup>64</sup> Here in Song of Songs, the girl yearns

---

<sup>61</sup>Gordis, 126.

<sup>62</sup>Gruber, 328.

<sup>63</sup>Gordis, 98.

<sup>64</sup>Murphy, 188.

for intimacy and privacy<sup>65</sup> and she was not concerned with public opinion.<sup>66</sup>

The question is then raised: what was appropriate? The difficulty in determining what was appropriate is that in Genesis 26:8 (Isaac and Rebecca) and 29:11 (Jacob and Rachel) affection is displayed publicly and therefore it is hard to know what is and what is not socially acceptable. Since events in the Bible occurred (or were written) over a span of time it is expected that mores vary to some extent. Clearly, however, the two previous examples as well as the next example would appall Jacob!

The final encounter involving kissing is the most negative. In Proverbs 7:13, "She [a woman dressed like a harlot] lays hold of him [a lad devoid of sense] and kisses him..." The lad seems to have had no choice in the matter and unlike the only other recorded kiss between a man and woman which took place between Jacob and Rachel, this one was devoid of emotion.<sup>67</sup>

The word [קָוַ] clearly denotes personal touch in all of the above examples. While it may be used alone or with other verbs, it is rarely used in a negative way. In terms of literary style, it is often used to bracket encounters.

---

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>See Song of Songs 3:1-4; 5:6-8; 7:12-13.

<sup>67</sup>As previously pointed out, the kisses in Song of Songs 1:2 and 8:1 were wished for, not actualized.

Between relatives, kissing is done on the occasions of (grand) parental blessing, father's deathbed, departure, greeting, reunion and reconciliation. Its other uses are more sporadic. Further, though kissing the loved wife and son was the norm in Akkadian literature<sup>68</sup>, in the Hebrew Bible it is all but absent. Clearly, then, kissing was a form of affection that was acceptable in certain public circumstances and not in others. While Jacob and his family, Moses and his and Ruth and hers display their affection publicly, it is peculiar to those three families. Life provided many more instances of affectionate touch than the Bible portrays; evidently it does not kiss and tell.

There are over thirty listings of *ḥlt*, commonly translated as "cling to" or "hug." Only three involve interpersonal touch. Briefly tracing the way in which this verb is used in the other situations will assist in determining whether or not they influence the way it is used in personal relationships.

While it is true that sickness can cling, as in Deuteronomy 28:60<sup>69</sup> and a tongue can cleave as in Ezekiel

---

<sup>68</sup>As in Gilgamesh's instructions to Enkidu before the latter's trip to the netherworld preceding which he was to avoid the mores of this world. "Do not kiss your wife whom you love... Do not kiss your son whom you love." As quoted in Gruber, 338.

<sup>69</sup>Deuteronomy 28:60 "He will bring back upon you all the sicknesses of Egypt that you dreaded so, and they shall cling to you."

3:26<sup>70</sup> most pertinent to this discussion is the idea of clinging to God and God's commandments. Some of the verses which employ  $\text{p}^{\text{L}}\text{T}$  in this way are: Joshua 22:5 and II Kings 18:6. In Joshua it says, "But be very careful to fulfill the Instruction and the Teaching that Moses the servant of the Lord enjoined upon you, to love the Lord your God and to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments and hold fast ( $\text{p}^{\text{L}}\text{T}$ ) to Him, and to serve Him with all your heart and soul." II Kings 18:6 reads "He [Hezekiah] clung ( $\text{p}^{\text{L}}\text{T}$ ) to the Lord; he did not turn away from following Him, but kept the commandments that the Lord had given to Moses." As will be shown, this phraseology has an impact on other uses of  $\text{p}^{\text{L}}\text{T}$  -- for example in the Book of Ruth.

In chapter 1 of Ruth, a scene already noted for its kisses, Naomi's daughters-in-law are deciding whether or not to return to their mothers' homes after their husbands had died. In verse 14, it says "They broke into weeping again, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law farewell. But Ruth clung ( $\text{p}^{\text{L}}\text{T}$ ) to her." Where the Hebrew Bible uses "clung," the Septuagint uses "ekolouthesen" - "she followed after" rather than "ekollethe" (from "kallos") meaning "to adhere" even though forms and derivatives of  $\text{p}^{\text{L}}\text{T}$  are used in verses 2:8,21,23.<sup>71</sup> (Most likely, the similarity of the sound of

---

<sup>70</sup>Ezekiel 3:26 "And I will make your tongue cleave to your palate, and you shall be dumb; you shall not be a reprover to them, for they are a rebellious breed."

<sup>71</sup>Campbell, 72.

the two Greek words led to a scribal error.<sup>72</sup>) It has been pointed out<sup>73</sup> that this theme of adherence is also found in Ruth 1:16<sup>74</sup> and 2:20.<sup>75</sup>

The Septuagint's use of "followed after" does not adequately portray the emotional bond between the women. Moreover, there is a correlation between divine and human activity as shown through the use of covenant terminology (פֶּלֶא) as seen above.<sup>76</sup> Thus an already emotional relationship is raised to an even loftier level.

Unlike the previous example, the following verses describe affectionate touch between a man and woman. In Genesis 2:24, just after Eve was created from Adam's rib, the verse reads "Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings (פֶּלֶא) to his wife, so that they become one flesh." The first part of the verse appears to be an explanation which does not necessarily have to do with the relationship between husband and wife. However, "so that

---

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Campbell, 81.

<sup>74</sup>Ruth 1:16 "Ruth replied, 'Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.'"

<sup>75</sup>Ruth 2:20 "Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, 'Blessed be he of the Lord, who has not failed in His kindness to the living or to the dead! For,' Naomi explained to her daughter in law, 'the man is related to us; he is one of our redeeming kinsmen.'"

<sup>76</sup>Campbell, 81.

they become one flesh" invites the idea of a loving relationship. The proof lies in I Kings 11:2.

To begin with verse 1: "King Solomon loved many foreign women in addition to Pharaoh's daughter -- Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Phoenician and Hittite woman, (2) from the nations of which the Lord had said to the Israelites, 'None of you shall join (Kll) them and none of them shall join (Kll) you, lest they turn your heart away to follow their gods.'<sup>77</sup> Such Solomon clung to (PlT) and loved."<sup>78</sup> Further, as the final phrase in verse 2 is הלא...PlT it appears that the "ל" defines the manner of the verb PlT.<sup>79</sup> Thus Solomon clings to women in love, as, it is hoped, did Adam and Eve in Genesis 2.

Can three verses have an impact on the overall category of affectionate touch? The answer is "yes." There are a mere ten words which denote affectionate touch in the Bible and even though PlT is used relatively infrequently (as compared to PlV for instance), because of the paucity of terms, it carries weight within this category.

PlN is basically synonymous with PlT. In its most famous verse within the poem "A season is set for

---

<sup>77</sup>For a discussion on the use of Kll in sexual terms, refer to the chapter entitled "Sexual Touch."

<sup>78</sup>Though Kll is followed by "ל" as opposed to the expected "לK," it seems to be a variant which refers to "entry into the intimacy of the harem quarters" or, in other words, marriage. Gray, 274.

<sup>79</sup>Burney, 156.

everything..." (Ecclesiastes 3:5) אָחֵב is a general term: "A time for throwing stones and a time for gathering stones, A time for embracing and a time for shunning embraces." Who is embracing whom? Ibn Ezra thinks this refers to hugging the one sleeping in one's bosom then distancing from her whereas Metzudat David thinks it is chasing after one's lover and hugging him. A modern commentator, in contrast, says אָחֵב does not imply erotic embracing, but could refer to the customary embracing of friends or between parents and children.<sup>80</sup> Thus the participants in this verse remain anonymous and, consequently, so does the exact meaning of the verb.

In Song of Songs 2:6 and 8:3 (which is a reprise of 2:6) the text reads "His left hand was under my head, his right arm embraced me." As Hezkuni says in his comments on the passage from chapter 2, this simply describes the arm encircling the body. It could be that this woman is expressing her satisfaction in being in his embrace<sup>81</sup> or that it is a wish.<sup>82</sup>

There are many examples of אָחֵב used in the context of familial closeness. In Genesis 29:13 (Jacob and Laban); 33:4 (Jacob and Esau); 48:10 (Jacob and his grandsons); II Kings 4:16 (the Shunammite woman on being told she "will

---

<sup>80</sup>Crenshaw, 95 commenting on Ecclesiastes 3:5.

<sup>81</sup>Murphy, 189.

<sup>82</sup>Murphy, 133.

be embracing a son" next year) all of the touching involves a parent embracing a child (except in Genesis 29:13 where it is two future brothers-in-law embracing<sup>83</sup>). Because Genesis 29:13 and 33:4<sup>84</sup> have already been extensively discussed, Genesis 48:10 and II Kings 4:16 will be the verses investigated here.

In Genesis 48, while lying on his deathbed, Jacob notices his grandsons. Verse 10 reads, "Now Israel's eyes were dim with age; he could not see. So [Joseph] brought them close to him, and he kissed them and embraced (קִיָּץ) them." The text then states (verse 12) that they were removed from Jacob's knees (without ever having been placed there!) and were blessed after the choreographed placing of hands (verses 13-20).

While initially Jacob's kiss and embrace were a personal welcome and caress of his grandsons, there appears to be something more to this scene. As will be discussed in the chapter entitled "Deliberate Touch," placing a child upon the knees could signify a legal rite of adoption<sup>85</sup> and the kiss and embrace could be a type of prologue. Whether or not this theory is accepted, it is clear that this action

---

<sup>83</sup>But, to some extent, Laban acts as the head of the household and therefore appears to be older than the generation of his sister Rebecca -- more like a father figure.

<sup>84</sup>In Genesis 29:13, 33:4 and 48:10, the embrace is accompanied by a kiss.

<sup>85</sup>Von Rad, *Genesis*, 410.

concludes the first proceeding surrounding the blessing since Joseph then takes the boys from Jacob's knees in verse 12.<sup>86</sup>

In II Kings 4, a wealthy Shunammite woman provided hospitality for Elisha every time he passed by. When he asked what he could do for her, he was told (verse 14) that "she has no son, and her husband is old." Elisha told her (verse 16), "At this season next year, you will be embracing (קָלַח) a son." Instead of rushing to assign to this word the value of a figure of speech, it should be accepted as a wonderful and true image: surely this woman who wanted a child, will hold him close to her.

Overall, then, קָלַח is an expressive term, whether used alone or together with other terms for affectionate touch. It occurs between lovers, friends and relatives.

Similar to קָלַח and קָלַח is the expression נָפַל עַל צַוֵּאר meaning "to fall upon one's neck" or "to embrace." The similarity can be seen especially in Genesis 33:4 which is one of the most emotional episodes in the Bible -- it uses three words for touching! There "Esau ran to greet him [Jacob]. He embraced (קָלַח) him and, falling on his neck (נָפַל עַל צַוֵּאר), he kissed him (נָשַׁק); and they wept." It is possible to understand from this sequence not only a building of emotional intensity but an indication that, in fact, the reconciliation was straight from the heart on both

---

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

sides.

It has been pointed out that the stem "נפל" often carries a reflexive connotation, as in the phrase "to fall on one's neck" found only in Genesis 45:14 and 46:29 which are both family reunions. Thus it is thought to be a voluntary act.<sup>97</sup> Similarly, when God appears to Abram in Genesis 17:3, "Abram threw himself (נפל) on his face" -- a voluntary act.

It could be that in certain situations נפל על צוואר is even more powerful an expression than נפל as seen in Genesis 45. In verse 14, as though Joseph's strength has left him, "...he fell on his brother Benjamin around the neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck." As Radak points out, both brothers are from the same parents and therefore loved one another more as shown by crying on each other's shoulders/neck. In the next verse, in contrast, Joseph kissed נפל all of his other brothers and cried on them -- the very brothers who sent him into servitude. The brothers' response was only their ability to come out of their muteness to talk to him -- their tears did not flow. It seems, then, that the intensity of emotional response connected with this term differs depending on the situation.

When Joseph and his father are reunited in Genesis 46:29 "Joseph hitched his chariot and went to Goshen to meet his father Israel; he presented himself to him and, falling

---

<sup>97</sup>Speiser, 259.

upon his neck, he wept on his neck a good while."<sup>88</sup> It could be that words were not initially exchanged for none were adequate.<sup>89</sup> Regardless, Rashi does not see this embrace as mutual. In his comments on this verse, he said that Jacob neither fell on Joseph's neck nor kissed him. It was one sided.

Ramban's explanation is much more colorful. He said that it was not respectful for Joseph to fall upon his father's neck; he should have bowed before him or kissed his hands, as in Genesis 48:12.<sup>90</sup> Further, he writes, Jacob's eyes were dim and because Joseph arrived in a carriage with a mitre on his head as was the custom of Egyptian kings, Joseph's fathers and brothers did not recognize him (as in 42:8<sup>91</sup>). When he appeared before Jacob, then, Jacob stared at him and finally recognized him whereupon he fell upon Joseph's neck and cried over him.

Ramban's colorful explanation gives rise to a question. In verse 30, it says "Then Israel said to Joseph..." which would imply that the previous subject (in verse 29) was

---

<sup>88</sup>"Falling upon his neck" is the literal translation, whereas the Jewish Publication Society's translation reads "embracing him around the neck" for this phrase. *Tanakh*, 76.

<sup>89</sup>Sarna, *Genesis*, 318.

<sup>90</sup>Genesis 48:12 "Joseph then removed them [Ephraim and Manasseh] from his [Jacob's] knees, and bowed low with his face to the ground."

<sup>91</sup>When Joseph's brothers came to procure food earlier, Genesis 42:8 reads "For though Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him."

Joseph -- not Jacob. According to this interpretation, however, the subject is Jacob even though the text mentions his name again in the next verse. (This same grammatical structure also occurs in Genesis 41:48 and 50<sup>92</sup>.) Placing Rashi against Ramban, it is unclear whether the initiator was Jacob or Joseph.

Is it literally the neck upon which one of them fell? The respective Hebrew noun and its semitic analogues designate not only the neck but also the shoulder blades. This is apparent especially since נַחֲשָׁא here is written in the dual construct, just as "shoulders" would have been.<sup>93</sup> Hezkuni, on the other hand, believes that נַחֲשָׁא is written in plural because it is from both sides of the neck that one is embraced. Either way, the emotional intensity of this expression comes from the fact that it is only used when describing family reunions.

In the majority of the cases, the root פִּנָּא means "laugh." In the episode when Sarah learns she is to become pregnant in her old age, for instance, she laughed. All of the verses surrounding this, including the naming of her son

---

<sup>92</sup>Genesis 41:48-50 "And he gathered all the grain of the seven years that were in the land of Egypt and stored the grain in the cities; he put in each city the grain of the fields around it. (49) So Joseph collected produce in very large quantity, like the sands of the sea, until he ceased to measure it, for it could not be measured. (50) Before the years of famine came, Joseph became the father of two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Poti-phera, priest of On, bore to him."

<sup>93</sup>Speiser, 339.

לִּנְיָ, testify to its meaning as "laugh."<sup>94</sup> In the episodes involving Isaac and Rebecca and later Potiphar's wife, however, it is clear that לִּנְיָ denotes physical touch.

In Genesis 26:8, after Isaac tried to pass Rebecca off as his sister in Gerar, "When some time had passed, Abimelech king of the Philistines, looking out of the window, saw Isaac fondling (לִּנְיָ) his wife Rebecca." Verse 9 continues: "Abimelech sent for Isaac and said, 'So she is your wife!...'" It is clear from these two verses that לִּנְיָ is something that only husband and wife would do in public... Hezkuni clarifies: though the same phrase was written in conjunction with לָוָה in terms of Potiphar's wife (see below), this is not to say that they engaged in sexual relations because Isaac would neither do that in public nor during the day!<sup>95</sup>

This word appears regarding Potiphar's wife in Genesis 39. After Joseph refused to "yield to her request to lie beside her, to be with her" (verse 10), Potiphar's wife "caught hold of him by his garment and said, 'Lie (לָוָה) with me!'" but he got away (verse 12). When she saw this (verse 14) "she called out to her servants and said to them, 'Look, he had to bring us a Hebrew to dally (לִּנְיָ) with us! This one came to lie with me; but I screamed loud.'" (This situation was then retold to her husband in verse 17.)

---

<sup>94</sup>See Genesis 18:12,13,15; 21:6.

<sup>95</sup>Hezkuni commenting on Genesis 26:8.

Another translation is "to make love" with the alternative, "to toy with us." While the latter translation makes more sense because of the plural pronoun "us," it does not make sense in terms of the context of Isaac and Rebecca.<sup>96</sup> There is no one translation, then, that fits both situations.

In Exodus 32:6 in the celebration surrounding the golden calf, the word  $\text{pny}$  is again employed. There, "Early next day, the people offered up burnt offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; they sat down to eat and drink, and then rose to dance ( $\text{pny}$ )."<sup>97</sup> As there is no other verse in which " $\text{pny}$ " means "dance", it becomes possible that this is a euphemism for a sexual orgy occurring at this idolatrous celebration. This is similar to the Akkadian " $\text{ṣiāhu}$ " meaning "to laugh," "to make merry."<sup>97</sup> Thus it seems that  $\text{pny}$  is neither as innocent as "fondling" nor as exhibitionist as public sexual activity. However, depending upon the situation, its translation differs so as to blend in with its context.

In the miscellaneous category, meaning those instances of affectionate touch whose terms occur only once or twice, Genesis 21 appears. It is the only example within this group which involves nothing more than platonic relations. After Sarah expelled Hagar and Ishmael and he was dying of

---

<sup>96</sup>Speiser, 303.

<sup>97</sup>Van der Toorn, 202.

thirst, God spoke to her. In Genesis 21:18, "Come, lift up the boy (KVV) and hold him (𐎧𐎶𐎵) by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him." Even though this form of touch is expected between mothers and children, precisely because it is alluded to only once, it stands out. A modern commentary points out that 𐎧𐎶𐎵 is literally "make your hand firm upon him" and thus could be idiomatic for lending support and encouragement.<sup>98</sup> There, it is translated as "Come, pick up the boy and comfort him..."<sup>99</sup> It is clear that whether translated as "comfort" or "hold," 𐎧𐎶𐎵 shows Ishmael to be in his mother's arms.

The next few verses involve leaning intimately against someone, often in romantic setting. It is interesting that only once in an Akkadian text is "you leaned your head against me" found.<sup>100</sup> This could be due to the fact that the genre of love poetry is not preserved in Akkadian with few exceptions.<sup>101</sup> In Hammurabi's Code, it is written: "If a seignior has lain in the bosom of his mother after (the death of) his father, they shall burn both of them."<sup>102</sup> In

---

<sup>98</sup>Speiser, 156.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

<sup>100</sup>As quoted from J.A. Knudtzon, Die El-Amarna-Tafeln; siglum for Amarna texts in Knudtzon and in Anson F. Rainey, El Amarna Tablets 359-379, col. IV, 1.20 by Gruber, 343.

<sup>101</sup>Gruber, 343.

<sup>102</sup>Hammurabi's Code number 157 as quoted by Pritchard, 172.

Song of Songs 8:5 "Who is she that comes up from the desert, leaning upon (מחרפקה) her beloved? Under the apple tree I roused you; it was there your mother conceived you, there she who bore you conceived you." This verb appears once (in the החפכל) and Ibn Ezra understands it to mean "clinging." The general meaning for מחרפקה (which is all that can be given) seems to be "support" as attested for the root פקח in other Semitic languages, especially Arabic.<sup>103</sup> On the other hand, it could be, as Rashi argues, that rather than "beloved," חפץ could mean "breast" which teaches that she is his girlfriend and clings to him. Either way, the two lovers are in each other's arms.

Unlike the in the previous example, Samson probably regretted getting so comfortable with Delilah. In Judges 16:19, "She [Delilah] lulled him [Samson] to sleep (שָׁן) on her lap (בְּרֶכְלֶהּ). Then she called in a man, and she had him cut off the seven locks of his head; thus she weakened him and made him helpless: his strength slipped away from him." While none of these words mean affectionate touch in and of themselves, the manner in which Samson fell asleep is clearly one in which he was comfortable and secure. He did not even wake up during his haircut! Samson should have listened to the advice given in Micah.

The text reads (Micah 7:5) "Trust no friend, rely on no intimate (יָד); be guarded in speech with her who lies in

---

<sup>103</sup>Murphy, 191.

your bosom (קִרְבִּי). Here the list of those who can not be trusted increases in intimacy: friend, intimate, wife...<sup>104</sup> It is sensible that the one who lies in your bosom is your wife and Metzudat David agrees: from your wife that lies in your bosom, guard your mouth. Though it is a sad thought that one can not trust his wife, the term for wife shows their physical, and implied emotional, closeness.

The same phrase is also used in I Kings 1. King David was now old and could not get warm. According to verse 2 "His courtiers said to him, 'Let a young virgin be sought for my lord the king, to wait upon Your Majesty and be his attendant; and let her lie in your bosom (קִרְבִּי), and my lord the king will be warm.'" This procedure in I Kings is known technically as "osphresiology" which asserts that new vigor can be imparted to the aged and infirm by physical contact with, or proximity to, young people.<sup>105</sup> Apparently the change from third to second person is common in Hebrew when a superior is addressed.<sup>106</sup> In the Septuagint versions -- the Codex Alexandrinus and Vaticanus -- which read "his bosom," second person is intelligible in spite of the previous reference to the king in third person as it is

---

<sup>104</sup>It should be noted that, according to the translation in the Old Testament Library, this list would be "neighbor, close friend, wife." Mays, *Micah*, 152.

<sup>105</sup>Gaster, 489.

<sup>106</sup>Burney, 2.

characteristic of deferential address.<sup>107</sup>

The difference between this verse and the verse from Micah is that here King David would lie in the girl's bosom whereas there, the wife lay in Micah's bosom. It could be a parallel situation to who in stature kisses whom, as discussed above. Here, the stronger more vibrant person holds the weaker.

In Song of Songs 1:4, it is questionable as to the exact meaning of the term used. The verse reads "Draw me (TVQ) after you, let us run! The king has brought me to his chambers. Let us delight and rejoice in your love, savoring it more than wine -- like new wine they love you!" Rashi, in his comments on this verse, understands TVQ as "in order to be for you a wife" thus implying sexual touch. This is logical given the reference to her lover's chambers. It could be also that her lover simply takes her by the hand to lead her to his chambers... Either way, this constitutes affectionate touch.

In summary, the few verses which involve affectionate touch stand out from the rest of the biblical text because they are isolated events -- often occurring either within one extended family or as a lone phrase in the middle of an otherwise "hands-off" narrative. Rarely do they suggest erotic touch. Thus it becomes clear that the public demonstration of affection, unless with members of the

---

<sup>107</sup>Gray, 76.

immediate family, are, for the most part, contrary to social mores.<sup>108</sup> Due to the small pool of words, however, each carries many nuances and translations. While these words and phrases do provide a relief to the negativity of sexual and aggressive touch as portrayed in the Hebrew Bible and have varying measures of emotional intensity, this category has neither the numerical nor emotional force to lend a positive tone to the "body" of words describing touch.

---

<sup>108</sup>Murphy, 188.

### Chapter III

#### Aggressive Touch

It has been said that love and hate are two sides of the same coin. The Hebrew Bible upholds that adage to some degree in that of the categories of touch discussed in this thesis, sexual, affectionate and aggressive touch employ the greatest number of terms. For the purposes of this chapter, aggressive touch refers to any struggle whereby two people are in direct physical contact with each other. Whether macabre, accidental, fatal, or not, the goal of this chapter is to prove, once again, that touch carries with it negative overtones. This goal may seem superfluous given that aggressive touch is negative by definition, yet there are not only varying degrees of aggressiveness but differing victors.

The most common word used for aggressive touch is נָחַץ. From the start, however, it should be noted that the verses which describe when God strikes the Nile (Exodus 7:25), when people strike a nation (II Kings 3:24) or when a person is struck with an implement as in falling by the sword of enemies (Jeremiah 20:4) will not be discussed for these usages do not fall into the previously delineated category of interpersonal touch. Even when used solely to describe a physical fight between people, moreover, there is some uncertainty regarding usage of נָחַץ -- as sometimes it seems

to mean "to fatally strike" (as in Exodus 22:1) and other times, "to strike" (as in II Samuel 13:28).

The incident in which Moses is first a witness to a beating then fatally beats someone is instructive (and will be discussed not only here but further on in this chapter in relation to another word). Two adjacent verses teach that the same root,  $\text{נָסַח}$ , can be used both for beating (verse 11) and for fatally beating (verse 12). In Exodus 2:11-12, "Some time after that, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his kinsfolk and witnessed their labors. He saw an Egyptian beating a ( $\text{נָסַח}$ ) a Hebrew, one of his kinsmen. (12) He turned this way and that and, seeing no one about, he struck down ( $\text{נָסַח}$ ) the Egyptian and hid him in the sand." Two inferences can be drawn from these verses: (1) Moses' blows in verse 12 were fatal and (2) the Hebrew in the first verse lived -- and thus the beating was not fatal -- because when Moses later saw two Hebrews fighting (verse 13), one of the questions they asked him was "Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" And who, other than the Hebrew, could have reported the initial incident from verse 11?!

Examples of beating which, in and of themselves, are not fatal, include Exodus 21:18 and 26. In the former "When men quarrel and one strikes the other one with stone or fist, and he does not die but has to take to his bed..." there is a deterioration from an exchange of words into a

fist fight.<sup>1</sup> If two men are quarreling and one hits the other with a rock or his fist and he does not die but has to take to his bed... then clearly, no death has occurred. (Incidentally, according to Rashbam in his comments on verse 18 and similar to Targum Onkelos, the weapon described here may not be a fist at all, but a hammer, as in a type of rock or brick.)

In the latter, "When a man strikes the eye of his slave, male or female, and destroys it, he shall let him go free on account of his eye." Again, no death occurs. The Bible took pity on the slave (which is the case also regarding a tooth) so as to ensure that slave owners did not beat slaves ruthlessly.<sup>2</sup> Therefore in the Bible the intent to cause injury is assumed; for not only does an injured eye or tooth cause the slave to go free, but this would apply to "any chief external organs of the body."<sup>3</sup> Thus one can be hit and live; but if one injures a slave, by the act of freeing him, the owner is punished economically.

In Hammurabi's code, similarly, if a man destroys the eye of another man's slave, he pays the master one-half the price of the slave.<sup>4</sup> In other codes, nothing is said regarding one who blinds the eye of his own slave,

---

<sup>1</sup>Sarna, *Exodus*, 123.

<sup>2</sup>Cassuto, 278.

<sup>3</sup>Sarna, *Exodus*, 127.

<sup>4</sup>Pritchard, 175. Hammurabi's Code, number 199.

apparently because the owner's only punishment is the loss of the slave's value.

There are also many circumstances in which one fatally strikes another -- the broadest sub-division being whether or not it is premeditated. In Exodus 22:1, for example, a thief caught in the act of breaking in is beaten (נָדָה) to death and there is no bloodguilt -- i.e. the manslayer is not put to death. Because the manslayer is not punished, it is clearly not only not premeditated but, according to such verses as Joshua 21:13<sup>5</sup>, the one who strikes would actually be offered protection in a city of refuge.

In Exodus 21:12, on the other hand, the verse reads "He who fatally strikes a man shall be put to death." This is "criminal homicide with malice aforethought."<sup>6</sup> (The same law can be found in Leviticus 24:17,21.) This verse, in fact, inaugurates a list of offenses punishable by death which "deal with fundamental attacks on the common life of family and people as ordered according to the will of God."<sup>7</sup> It should also be pointed out that while it is assumed here that in practice acts of this kind occur only among men, the murder of a woman would also be punished.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup>Joshua 21:13 "But to the descendants of Aaron the priest they assigned Hebron -- the city of refuge for manslayers -- together with its pastures, Libnah with its pastures."

<sup>6</sup>Sarna, *Exodus*, 121.

<sup>7</sup>Noth, *Exodus*, 179.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

Striking a person does not only occur in private arguments, however. According to Nehemiah 13:25, Nehemiah beat Jews who married women of Ashdod, Ammon and Moav and tore out their hair. This can not be construed as taking legal action against them or having recourse to torture.<sup>9</sup> It could, however, be a conventional expression of public humiliation, as in Isaiah 50:6<sup>10</sup> for "it matches other indications of an impulsive and even intemperate nature. This was the kind of man he [Nehemiah] was."<sup>11</sup> Commenting on the same verse but taking a less judgmental stand, Rashi wrote that the beating was done in order to prove them wrong and remind them of the right path.

Despite the undifferentiated use of *נָחַץ* in terms of whether the blow is fatal or not or whether dealt publicly or privately, the Bible, surprisingly enough, does specify various places on the body which receive the blows. Aside from the tooth and eye already mentioned, there is the cheek (Micah 4:14, I Kings 22:24, Psalms 3:8, II Chronicles 18:23), thigh (Judges 15:8) and belly (II Samuel 3:27 and 20:10). (While Ezekiel 6:11 uses *נָחַץ* with "palm," the text seems to be saying "strike your [own] hands together" and thus is not inter-personal touch.)

---

<sup>9</sup>Blenkinsopp, *Nehemiah*, 364.

<sup>10</sup>Isaiah 50:6 "I offered my back to the floggers, and my cheeks to those who tore out my hair. I did not hide my face from insult and spittle."

<sup>11</sup>Blenkinsopp, *Nehemiah*, 364.

As already seen from the consequences of engaging in illicit sexual touch, the consequences of striking attest to its negativity. Whether the object of the punch is hurt or killed, or the one swinging is punished by a financial burden or death, נָלַךְ can only mean trouble.

The word נָלַךְ is used twelve times in the Bible. While used to describe both physical and idealistic struggles between people (the former being the topic of study at hand), it also describes idealistic struggles with God and the ruin and desolation of cities. Only by studying the context of each situation and reviewing the word in its totality, may a conclusion as to its meaning be reached.

In Deuteronomy 25:11, the following situation is given: "If two men get into a fight with (נָלַךְ) each other, and the wife of one comes up to save her husband from his antagonist and puts out her hand and seizes him by his genitals, (12) you shall cut off her hand; show no pity." As Saadia Gaon points out in his comments on this verse, one man overpowers the other. Rashi focuses on the deterioration of negotiations, on the other hand. When men strive together, he writes, it will in the end come to blows, as shown by the fact that the wife comes to deliver him out of the hand of the one who hits him (which is the literal translation). Rashi seems to imply that נָלַךְ is the first in a series of events that eventually leads to physical violence. It is possible, according to Rashi's view, that נָלַךְ refers to a

verbal confrontation. This is the case in the next example.

In II Samuel 14:6, Joab commissioned a woman to approach King David in order to reunite him with Absalom. She told the following tale: "Your maidservant had two sons. The two of them came to blows (הִלָּצוּ) out in the fields where there was no one to stop them, and one of them struck (הִכָּה) the other and killed him." Despite the fact that they "came to blows," only once one struck (הִכָּה) the other did that one die. הִלָּצוּ, then, does not cause death and could therefore still be construed as a verbal argument. Remembering back to Saadia Gaon's argument from Deuteronomy 25:11, הִלָּצוּ could also mean that the two were of comparable strength. It is time to take another look at the second chapter of Exodus which was already discussed regarding הִכָּה.

In Exodus 2:11, Moses saw an Egyptian beating (הִכָּה) a Hebrew. After hitting the Egyptian and burying him in the sand (verse 12), (verse 13) he went out again and saw two Hebrews fighting (הִלָּצוּ) and asked the offender, "Why do you strike (הִכָּה) your fellow?" to which he answered (verse 14) "...Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" It is clear from a comparison of verses 12 and 13 that הִלָּצוּ is the equivalent of הִכָּה and thus is more than a verbal exchange. As already discussed, הִכָּה is used both as a word for strike and fatally strike as further attested both by Moses' action of הִכָּה in verse 12 where he buried the man and by the Egyptian's recall using הִכָּה in verse 14. Thus הִלָּצוּ

seems to be an equal match as no one prevails (as contrasted with  $\text{לָחָם}$  which means one overpowers the other even to the extent of taking his life).  $\text{לָחָם}$ , then, translates as "struggle" and implies two parties of equal strength.

Aside from physical fighting,  $\text{לָחָם}$  can be done with God. In the only instance in which this word is used twice in one sentence, in Numbers 26:9, it says "The sons of Eliab were Nemuel, and Dathan and Abiram. These are the same Dathan and Abiram, chosen in the assembly, who agitated against ( $\text{לָחָם}$ ) Moses and Aaron as part of Korach's band when they agitated against ( $\text{לָחָם}$ ) the Lord." Obviously, they did not have a fist fight with God, but rather, it seems, more of a "butting of heads." Also, with Moses and Aaron there was not a brawl, but rather a challenge of authority amply translated as "agitated against." What happened to them? "...the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up..." (verse 10) It is clear, from their punishment that they were in the wrong.

The only other common usage of this term is in relation to causing the desolation and ruin of cities or entire armies. In II Kings 19:25 and Isaiah 37:26 this phrase is translated as "...laying waste fortified towns", in Jeremiah 4:7 "...your cities shall be ruined, without inhabitants" and in the case of armies, Psalm 60:2 "...Joab returned and defeated Edom -- [an army] of twelve thousand men..." When used in destructive grandeur (which is not necessarily

interpersonal touch),  $\eta\lambda\eta$  becomes a more devastating event than when used between individuals.

In conclusion, then,  $\eta\lambda\eta$  takes on different meanings depending on its context. While there are grounds to question whether it involves physical contact at all, it has been proven that it does. Its image of utter ruin and desolation in reference to cities influences its overall meaning to be one more destructive than the situations given between individuals may imply. Never, however, does it cause loss of life for it seems to mean a struggle between equal partners.

$\nu\pi\lambda$ , commonly translated as "split," can be used with water as in "You split the sea before them..." (Nehemiah 9:11) or trees "...he who splits wood will be harmed by it" (Ecclesiastes 10:9). It is also used as an aggressive offense against people.

The most common of these usages is "ripping open pregnant women" which is found in Amos 1:13: "Thus said the Lord: For three transgressions of the Ammonites, for four I will not revoke it: Because they ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead in order to enlarge their own territory."<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that this falls among the "barbarities of border warfare among Semites where women and children were not spared."<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup>For Ancient Near Eastern parallels, see Paul, 68.

<sup>13</sup>Gray, 531. As noted regarding Amos 1:13.

When King Ben-hadad was ill, he sent his servant to ask Elisha if he would recover. Though the servant was told to tell the King that he would, the servant was told that, in reality, he would not. Elisha then began to weep -- to which Hazael said (II Kings 8:12) "'Why does my lord weep?' asked Hazael. 'Because I know,' he replied, 'what harm you will do to the Israelite people: you will set their fortresses on fire, put their young men to the sword, dash their little ones in pieces, and rip open (V<sup>7</sup>L) their pregnant women.'" The phrases "dash their little ones in pieces" and "rip open their pregnant women" appear to be literary phrases used to impress upon the reader the horrors of war, especially an attack on defenseless women and children<sup>14</sup> as in Amos 1:13 and II Kings 15:16 (discussed below). In other words, this expression can be understood to be hyperbole.

In II Kings 15:16 during the reign of Menachem (who had killed Shallum), the following happened: "At that time, [marching] from Tirzah, Menachem subdued Tiphseh and all who were in it, and its territory; and because it did not surrender he massacred [its people] and ripped open all its pregnant women." In analyzing this verse it appears to be possible that verse 16b does not stem from the same source as 16a. Rather, it is a critical comment of a later editor who recorded that Menachem behaved as cruelly as the

---

<sup>14</sup>Cogan and Tadmor, 91.

Arameans.<sup>15</sup> This comparison to other ferocious peoples supports the idea that Menachem's severe treatment of the inhabitants of Tappuah is unparalleled in inter-tribal warfare in Israel<sup>16</sup> though he probably did not actually rip open pregnant women.

וּפָל, like נָפַל, is used with a variety of body parts. In Ezekiel 29:7 during a prophecy against Pharaoh king of Egypt, it says, "When they grasped you with the hand (וְנָפַל -- another phrase to be discussed), you would splinter, and wound (וּפָל) all their shoulders, and when they leaned on you, you would break, and make all their loins unsteady." The Septuagint and Syriac read "palms" in place of "shoulders"<sup>17</sup> as in II Kings 18:21<sup>18</sup> and Isaiah 36:6<sup>19</sup>.

The cruelty of the act described by וּפָל shows it to be a verb that is clearly negative when used between people. It remains unclear whether it is used for effect or to describe actual events, however.

In its almost 300 citations, the verb פָּל can be used

---

<sup>15</sup>Cogan and Tadmor, 171.

<sup>16</sup>Gray, 622.

<sup>17</sup>Tanakh, 942.

<sup>18</sup> II Kings 18:21 "You rely, of all things, on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff, which enters and punctures the palm of anyone who leans on it! That's what Pharaoh king of Egypt is like to all who rely on him."

<sup>19</sup>Isaiah 36:6 "You are relying on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff, which enters and punctures the palm of anyone who leans on it. That's what Pharaoh king of Egypt is like to all who rely on him."

both in isolation or in conjunction with other words. While it is somewhat common to read the phrase "the famine had become severe ( $\text{פָּתַח}$ ) throughout the world" (Genesis 41:57) or "strengthen hands" (Nehemiah 6:3 and Isaiah 35:3), for the purposes of this study only interpersonal touch involving the verb  $\text{פָּתַח}$  will be probed.

When Abner son of Ner and the soldiers of Ish-bosheth son of Saul and Joab son of Zeruiah and the soldiers of David all came out to Gibeon, Abner said to Joab (II Samuel 2:14) "Let the young men come forward and sport before us." After counting off, II Samuel 2:16 reads "Each one grasped ( $\text{פָּתַח}$ ) his opponent's head [and thrust] his dagger into his opponent's side; thus they fell together." According to at least one modern commentary, this was a sport that got out of hand.<sup>20</sup> Others disagree. They say it was not just for fun. This claim is supported by the idea that it is possible that the word used for "young men,"  $\text{נָעָרִים}$  in verse 14 could refer to a trained fighting man<sup>21</sup> (as in Judges 8:14<sup>22</sup>) thus showing the battle to have been planned. Furthermore, the word used for "sport" ( $\text{פָּתַח}$ ) in verse 14 apparently does not always mean carefree play. In fact, it

---

<sup>20</sup>McCarter, *II Samuel*, 95.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Judges 8:13 "On his way back from the battle at the Ascent of Heres, Gideon son of Joash (14) captured a boy ( $\text{נָעָר}$ ) from among the people of Succoth and interrogated him. The latter drew up for him a list of the officials and elders of Succoth, seventy-seven in number."

could be a "battle by representative" -- a well-attested ancient practice made most infamous by the Roman legend which speaks of a contest between Horatii and Curiatii<sup>23</sup> which would support the definition given for [קָיָן].

Another example of קָיָן used by itself occurs in Zechariah 14:13 in which it is written about "the day of the Lord" (from verse 1). "In that day, a great panic from the Lord shall fall upon them, and everyone shall snatch at the hand of another (causative of קָיָן), and everyone shall raise his hand against everyone else's hand. It is uncommon, however, for קָיָן to be used for interpersonal touch without another verb -- probably because "grasped" does not fully describe the incident; after one grasps someone else while struggling, it is expected that the action then continues.

In II Samuel 13:14, a verse already analyzed in the chapter entitled "Sexual Touch," it says regarding Amnon and Tamar "But he would not listen to her; he overpowered (קָיָן) her and lay with her by force (הִלָּץ, לָשָׁ).". Later on, in II Samuel 15:5, Absalom used this verb again in an effort to take over the kingdom through deceit. (This verse could also be described as "deliberate touch.") The verse reads "And if a man approached to bow to him, [Absalom] would extend his hand (וַיִּשְׁלַח יָדוֹ) and take hold of him (קָיָן) and kiss him (וַיִּשְׁוֹק). It is interesting that here Absalom enacted the

---

<sup>23</sup>McCarter, II Samuel, 95.

exact reverse of how obeisance was often given in the ancient Near East. In Akkadian, for example, kings kissed the feet of other kings to show their loyalty<sup>24</sup> or as a sign of surrender.<sup>25</sup> In this example from II Samuel there is no question that Absalom is acting deviously. It appears, however, that the chain of events from  $\pi\pi$  to  $\pi\omega$  could also apply to loving situations. That is never, however, the case.

$\pi\pi$  is rarely used to represent interpersonal touch by itself. Rather, it appears in combination with other, increasingly negative words. The negativity of the clause is dependent on the other words whereas  $\pi\pi$ , used often in non-contact situations to bolster strength, is guilty by association as opposed to in absolute terms.

A synonym for  $\pi\pi$  is  $\pi\kappa$ . This becomes clear when comparing II Samuel 15:5 and 20:9. In the first case Absalom was deviously trying to become king in Hebron (as seen above): "And if a man approached to bow to him, [Absalom] would extend his hand and take hold ( $\pi\pi$ ) of him and kiss him." In the second case, which ended with Amasa's unsuspecting death: "Joab said to Amasa, 'How are you,

---

<sup>24</sup>Gruber, 266. For example Sargon II writes, "Yanza king of Nairi came four 'miles' from Hubushkia his capital to me, and he kissed my feet. I received from him in Hubushkia his city his tribute -- harness-broken horses, cattle and sheep."

<sup>25</sup>Gruber, 267. Elsewhere in Sargon's annals: "Huninu, Same'u, Sapharru and Rapiu [the rulers] of the Hindarians presented to me horses, cattle, and sheep, their valuable tribute at Dur-Athara, and they kissed my feet."

brother?' and with his right hand Joab took hold (יָנַח) of Amasa's beard as if to kiss him." Two deceitful actions, two verbs, one meaning.

While its listings number sixty-eight (excluding the term for "inheritance/possession"), the majority mean "seize." From this abbreviated list, however, a large number must be deleted as they do not involve interpersonal touch. Examples of this include: Job 38:13,<sup>26</sup> Judges 16:3,<sup>27</sup> and Ecclesiastes 9:12.<sup>28</sup>

There are only two instances in which יָנַח is used by itself in order to denote touching. In Psalm 56:1 the text reads, "...Of David. A michtam; when the Philistines seized him in Gath." While this is clearly an episode involving touch, the nature of the touch is not clear other than from the negative-sounding translation of "seized." The second instance may be more informative.

When Jacob and Esau were first born, it says in Genesis 25:26 "Then his brother emerged, holding on (יָנַח) to the

---

<sup>26</sup>Job 38:12 "Have you ever commanded the day to break, assigned the dawn its place, (13) so that it seizes (יָנַח) the corners of the earth and shakes the wicked out of it?"

<sup>27</sup>Judges 16:3 (when the Gazites were plotting to kill Samson at daylight): "But Samson lay in bed only till midnight. At midnight he got up, grasped (יָנַח) the doors of the town gate together with the two gateposts, and pulled them out along with the bar."

<sup>28</sup>Ecclesiastes 9:12 "And a man cannot even know his time. As fishes are enmeshed in a fatal net, and as birds are trapped (יָנַח in the passive form) in a snare, so men are caught at the time of calamity, when it comes upon them without warning."

heel of Esau; so they named him Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when they were born." Here, Jacob (יַעֲקֹב) was named because of his action. It should be noted that יַעֲקֹב can be understood to be a euphemism for genitals which, in turn, could be symbolic of wanting to assume the procreative power promised to Abraham.<sup>29</sup>

In other verses, in which more than one verb is used, other body parts are involved. In Psalm 73:23 "Yet I was always with You, You held my right hand..." (though "You" here is God) and II Samuel 20:9 as discussed above, "Joab said to Amasa, 'How are you, brother?' and with his right hand Joab took hold of Amasa's beard as if to kiss him."

Used in conjunction with other words, in II Samuel 4:10, when David was retelling how he heard of Saul's death, it says "The man who told me in Ziklag that Saul was dead thought he was bringing good news. But instead of rewarding him for the news, I seized (יָרַח) him and killed (רָצַח) him." In order to kill him, then, he had to seize him first. In Judges 1:6, "Adoni-bezek fled, but they pursued him and captured (יָרַח) him; and they cut off his thumbs and his big toes." Again, "to seize" is the precedent to the intended action.

When the Gileadites held the fords of the Jordan against the Ephraimites (Judges 12), they would ask each fugitive if he was an Ephraimite and if he said, "No," verse

---

<sup>29</sup>Smith, 465.

6 continues "they would say to him, 'then say שכלל; but he would say, שכלל not being able to pronounce it correctly. Thereupon they would seize (ינק) him and slay (שחט) him by the fords of the Jordan. Forty-two thousand Ephraimites fell at that time." Being seized could lead to death.

While not as violent as the above incidents, in yet another instance, in II Samuel 2 right after the fatal "sport" at the pool between Abner and Joab's soldiers, there was a fierce battle during which Asahel, the son of Zeruiah, ran after Abner. In verse 21, "Abner said to him, 'Turn to the right or to the left, and seize (ינק) one of our boys and strip off his tunic.' But Asahel would not leave off."

The above verses constitute the entire list of interpersonal uses of ינק in the Hebrew Bible. (The others either involve inanimate objects, animals, or God.) One of the two verses in which ינק is used by itself, involving Jacob and Esau, is somewhat benign in and of itself -- despite what the midrash may say. When used as a prelude to other words, however, ינק (like קינ) takes on a negative tone -- once someone is seized, injury or death results.

Synonymous with קינ and ינק is שפח. While שפח is commonly used in terms of grasping a weapon as in "grasping a sword" in Ezekiel 30:21<sup>30</sup> or as in "the bowman"

---

<sup>30</sup>Ezekiel 30:21 "O mortal, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt; it has not been bound up to be healed nor firmly bandaged to make it strong enough to grasp the sword."

(literally, "the one who grasps the bow") in Amos 2:15,<sup>31</sup> these examples do not constitute interpersonal touch. This word is also used in large-scale events, as in "Babylon's capture" in Jeremiah 50:46.<sup>32</sup> In a few instances, **וּפָנ** is also used in the expression "take them alive" as in II Kings 10:14.<sup>33</sup> While these incidents could be construed as involving touch, in all probability they do not. Capturing a city or taking live hostages could be under threat of the sword or bow rather than hand-to-hand combat. The verses in which **וּפָנ** is used for aggressive touch, like its synonyms, are found both within verbal phrases and alone.

Two examples of **וּפָנ** used by itself are II Kings 14:13 and its retelling in II Chronicles 25:23. Both verses use the same phrase. In the former, the setting is the confrontation between King Amaziah of Judah and King Jehoash of Israel. The verse reads, "King Jehoash son of Amaziah of Israel captured (**וּפָנ**) King Amaziah son of Jehoash son of Amaziah of Judah at Beth-shemesh. He marched on Jerusalem, and he made a breach of four hundred cubits in the wall of Jerusalem, at the Ephraim Gate to the Corner Gate." While

---

<sup>31</sup>Amos 2:15 "The bowman shall not hold his ground, and the fleet-footed shall not escape, nor the horseman save his life."

<sup>32</sup>Jeremiah 50:46 "At the sound of Babylon's capture (**וּפָנ**) the earth quakes, and an outcry is heard among the nations."

<sup>33</sup>II Kings 10:14 "Take them alive!" he said. They took them alive and then slaughtered them at the pit of Beth-eked, forty-two of them; he did not spare a single one."

these instances could be physical touch, it seems just as likely that they involve something along the order of kidnapping, which does not necessarily involve touch.<sup>34</sup>

Used in combination with other words, **שפח** behaves exactly as did **ינק** and **קין**. In Deuteronomy 22:28, for example, "If a man comes upon a virgin who is not engaged and he seizes (**שפח**) her and lies (**יכב**) with her, and they are discovered, (29) the man who lay with her shall pay the girl's father fifty [shekels of] silver, and she shall be his wife." The punishment continues in the continuation of verse 29: "Because he has violated (**יכב**) her, he can never have the right to divorce her." There is a parallel situation in verse 25 in terms of the action, if not the players. There, "If the man comes upon the engaged girl in the open country, and the man lies with her by force (**קין**, **יכב**), only the man who lay with her shall die." In the second verse, the punishment is significantly more serious than in the previous example -- as befits the crime.

In Ezekiel 19:4 "Nations heeded [the call] against him; he was caught (**שפח**) in their snare. They dragged him off (causative of **קלל**) with hooks to the land of Egypt." Their mission was not "to catch" him, but to bring him to Egypt.

---

<sup>34</sup>Similarly, in Exodus 21:16 "He who kidnaps (**קלל**) a man - whether he has sold him or is still holding (**קלל** **קלל**) him - shall be put to death." This example of kidnapping, incidentally, would, by the definition of touch used in this paper, be possible touch. It is more likely that this man is found in the kidnapper's possession than in his actual hand. Thus it will not be discussed further.

It could be that *וּפָנָה* is used in an aggressive yet ritual sense, as in Isaiah 3:6. (This verse could also have been assigned to the chapter entitled "Deliberate Touch.") In Isaiah it says "For should a man seize his brother, in whose father's house there is clothing: 'Come, be a chief over us, and let this ruin be under your care.'" It is clear that this man did not volunteer to be the chief. Rather, possession of a mantle or other "professional" clothing was regarded as adequate qualification given the current hopelessness of the country and capital's situation.<sup>35</sup>

In Deuteronomy 21:19, in discussing a defiant son, "his father and mother shall take hold (*וּפָנָה*) of him and bring him out (*וַיֵּצֵאוּ*) to the elders of his town at the public place of his community." Verse 20 continues "They shall say to the elders of his town, 'This son of ours is disloyal and defiant; he does not heed us. He is a glutton and a drunkard.'" And the punishment in verse 22 is: "Thereupon the men of his town shall stone him to death." It would seem, from this example, that this boy's parents, given his defiance, would have to physically bring him to stand before the elders -- which could require some force.

In Jeremiah 26:8, similarly, only *וּפָנָה* describes the action occurring. In the beginning of this chapter, God tells Jeremiah to say to the men of the towns of Judah that

---

<sup>35</sup>Kaiser, 72.

if they do not heed the words of the prophets, God will make this city a curse for all of the nations. In verse 8, "And when Jeremiah finished speaking all that the Lord had commanded him to speak to all the people, the priests and the prophets and all the people seized (שפח) him, shouting, 'You shall die!'" Thus in these three examples (Isaiah 3:6, Deuteronomy 21:19 and Jeremiah 26:8), people are seized in order that they are forced to hear what others say.

This is further confirmed by II Kings 25:6. During Zedekiah's rebellion against the king of Babylon: "They [the Chaldeans] captured the king and brought him (causative of עלה) before the king of Babylon at Riblah; and they put him on trial." Thus שפח, when used alone, as well as when used with the causative of עלה, can mean: bringing a person to trial.<sup>6</sup>

Thus when used alone, שפח can mean simply "to capture." When used with other non-aggressive terms, it means to bring someone before a jury of his/her peers or before a king in order to bring judgement. On the other hand, when used in conjunction with other verbs, שפח is the verb used to ready someone for another more-specific and harmful action to take place. This is similar to the way in which תכ and פת are used. Overall, then, שפח balances out to be more or less neutral in tone.

---

<sup>6</sup>See also Jeremiah 52:9 "They captured (שפח) the king and brought him (עלה) before the king of Babylon at Riblah, in the region of Hamath; and he put him on trial."

Of the forty-nine citations of  $\text{לָּ}$ , in approximately half, God is one of the participants. Those verses are excluded from this study as they do not revolve around interpersonal touch. There are also many examples of the usage of  $\text{לָּ}$  by an entire people. In I Kings 8:33, for example, "Should Your people Israel be routed ( $\text{לָּ}$ ) by an enemy because they have sinned against You, and then turn back to You and acknowledge Your name..." the entire people Israel is doing the action. Similarly, in II Samuel 10:15, "When the Arameans saw that they had been routed by Israel, they regrouped their forces."<sup>37</sup> Because these actions take place within the context of large battles, it is unrealistic that each person was struck. Therefore, to some extent, this word becomes a hyperbole for the ravages of war and, as even the New Jewish Publication Society's translation shows by using "routed," does not necessarily involve personal touch. These verses are therefore expelled. Once the expressions using  $\text{לָּ}$  which do not involve touching are also expelled<sup>38</sup>, only one verse remains: Exodus 21:22.

There (as already quoted) it is written "When men fight, and one of them pushes ( $\text{לָּ}$ ) a pregnant woman and a

---

<sup>37</sup>See also such verses as Leviticus 26:17, Judges 20:36, II Samuel 10:19, I Kings 8:33, I Chronicles 19:16,19 etc.

<sup>38</sup>For example, Exodus 21:35 "When a man's ox injures ( $\text{לָּ}$ ) his neighbor's ox and it dies, they shall sell the live ox and divide its price; they shall also divide the dead animal." and Proverbs 3:23 "Then you will go your way safely and not injure ( $\text{לָּ}$ ) your feet."

miscarriage results, but no other damage ensues, he shall be fined according as the woman's husband may exact from him, the payment to be based on reckoning." Saadia Gaon understands ׀ל to mean: hit in the way of pushing. Rashi, also commenting on this verse, thinks that ׀ל always means dashing against and striking, as in Jeremiah 13:16<sup>39</sup> and Isaiah 8:14.<sup>40</sup> Beyond the exact definition, there is the idea, suggested by a modern commentary, that since this episode was physically violent from the beginning, there was prior intent making it unlawful and dangerous.<sup>41</sup> Ancient Near Eastern parallels can be found in many law codes including Summerian Law,<sup>42</sup> Hittite Law,<sup>43</sup> Hammurabi's

---

<sup>39</sup>Jeremiah 13:16 "Give honor to the Lord your God before He brings darkness, Before our feet stumble (׀ל) on the mountains in shadow -- when you hope for light, and it is turned to darkness and becomes deep gloom."

<sup>40</sup>Isaiah 8:14 "He shall be for a sanctuary, a stone men strike against (׀ל): a rock men stumble over for the two Houses of Israel, and a trap and a snare for those who dwell in Jerusalem."

<sup>41</sup>Sarna, *Exodus*, 125.

<sup>42</sup>Summarian Law: (1) "If (a man accidentally) buffeted a woman of the free-citizen class and caused her to have a miscarriage, he must pay 10 shekels of silver." (2) "If (a man deliberately) struck a woman of the free-citizen class and caused her to have a miscarriage he must pay one-third mina of silver." Pritchard, 525.

<sup>43</sup>Hittite Law: (17) "If anyone causes a free woman to miscarry - if (it is) the 10th month, he shall give 10 shekels of silver, if (it is) the 5th month, he shall give 5 shekels of silver and pledge his estate as security." (18) "If anyone causes a slave-woman to miscarry, if (it is) the 10th month, he shall give 5 shekels of silver." The later versions carry more severe penalties. Pritchard, 190.

Code<sup>44</sup> and Middle Assyrian Law.<sup>45</sup> As has been shown previously, with so many verses in this category of aggressive touch, one verse can not have a substantial impact on whether the overall category is portrayed as positive or negative in the Bible. It is of interest, however, that the one time in which this verb -- which is used frequently to describe war -- can be examined in the context of this study, it is a woman who is accidentally accosted.

---

<sup>44</sup>Hammurabi's Code: (209) "If a seignior struck a(nother) seignior's daughter and has caused her to have a miscarriage, he shall pay ten shekels of silver for her fetus." (210) "If that woman has died, they shall put his daughter to death." (211) "If by a blow he has caused a commoner's daughter to have a miscarriage, he shall pay five shekels of silver." (212) "If that woman has died, he shall pay one-half mina of silver." (213) "If he struck a seignior's female slave and has caused her to have a miscarriage, he shall pay two shekels of silver." (214) "If that female slave has died, he shall pay one-third mina of silver." Pritchard, 175.

<sup>45</sup>The Middle Assyrian Laws: (21) "If a seignior struck a(nother) seignior's daughter and has caused her to have a miscarriage, when they have prosecuted him (and) convicted him, he shall pay two talents thirty minas of lead; they shall flog him fifty (times) with staves (and) he shall do the work of the king for one full month." Pritchard, 181.

(50) "[If a seignior] struck a(nother) seignior's [wife] and caused her to have [a miscarriage], they shall treat [the wife of the seignior], who caused the (other) seignior's wife to [have a miscarriage], as he treated her; he shall compensate for her fetus with a life. However, if that woman died, they shall put the seignior to death; he shall compensate for her fetus with a life. But, when that woman's husband has no son, if someone struck her so that she had a miscarriage, they shall put the striker to death; even if her fetus is a girl, he shall compensate with a life." Pritchard, 184.

(51) "If a seignior struck a(nother) seignior's wife who does not rear her children and caused her to have a miscarriage, this punishment (shall hold): he shall pay two talents of lead." Pritchard, 185.

יד נלש is another common expression for touch -- both aggressive and non-aggressive touch. (The latter will be studied in the chapter entitled "Deliberate Touch.") Occurring just over fifty times in the Bible, this expression signifies many events.

Often, יד נלש is used in terms of killing, as in Esther 2:21. Just after Ahasuerus made Esther the queen, "At that time, when Mordecai was sitting in the palace gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the threshold, became angry, and plotted to do away (יד נלש) with King Ahasuerus." The two were executed.

Similarly, when David had the opportunity to kill Saul and let it pass, Abishai, who was with him, wanted to kill Saul. In I Samuel 26:9 "But David said to Abishai, 'Don't do him violence (נלש)! No one can lay hands (יד נלש) on the Lord's anointed with impunity." Thus "doing him violence" and "laying hands" refer to the same fatal act. The Hebrew word נלש is not simply "do not kill him" but rather, it carries the connotation of spoilation and is related to the Syrian word which is equivalent in translation to "mutilate." Being anointed by the Lord was sacrosanct and Saul was therefore not to be physically defiled.<sup>46</sup> Further, in I Samuel 26:22-23, after David had the opportunity to kill Saul and he did not take it, David spoke with Saul. "'Here is your Majesty's spear, Let one of the

---

<sup>46</sup>McCarter, *I Samuel*, 407.

young men come over and get it. (23) And the Lord will requite every man for his right conduct and loyalty -- for this day the Lord delivered you into my hands and I would not raise a hand against the Lord's anointed.'" Being "delivered into one's hands" is not a place of security, then, but quite the opposite.

Also, in Nehemiah 13:21 when merchants were selling their wares on the Sabbath and Nehemiah stationed his servants at the gates so that no goods could be available, he said, "...I warned them, saying, 'What do you mean by spending the night alongside the wall? If you do so again, I will lay my hands upon you!' From then on they did not come on the Sabbath." Ibn Ezra, commenting on this verse, writes that Nehemiah's threat was to hit or kill them. Clearly, from their reaction, whatever the exact nature of "I will lay my hands upon you" was, it was enough to prevent them from coming again on the Sabbath!

More commonly, however, this phrase is used in connection with another verb. In I Samuel 22:17, for example, when Saul accused the priests of conspiring with David, "The king commanded the guards standing by, 'Turn about and kill the priests of the Lord, for they are in league with David; they knew he was running away and they did not inform me.' But the king's servants would not raise a hand (וְלֹא יָרָאוּ) to strike down (וַיַּכּוּ) the priests of the

Lord."<sup>47</sup> While he was saved, it was because the guards would not יָשַׁלְח; the next instance tells of how one is saved when people would יָשַׁלְח.

In Genesis 19:10 the men surrounding Lot's house "stretched out their hands (יָשַׁלְח) and pulled (causative of יָשַׁלְח) Lot into the house with them, and shut the door." Thus he was saved from the angry mob.

Yet again, once the verses involving God, inanimate objects or animals are extracted, the list becomes significantly smaller. As the examples have shown, יָשַׁלְח, when used in the context of aggressive behavior, can be either the main action or the precursor to the action. When used alone, this phrase takes on a clearly negative character whereas by contrast, when used as part of a verbal clause, while it does provide the opportunity for violence, it, in and of itself, does not cause harm.

The verb יָשַׁלְח was examined in the chapter on sexual touch in the Bible. Once again, however, it is appropriate to turn to that word in that it is also used for aggressive touch. That being the case, it is clear from the start that the nuance of this word is wholly dependent on its context.

Examples of יָשַׁלְח being used between people are numerous. When Abimelech realized that he had been tricked by Isaac in

---

<sup>47</sup>There is no evidence that יָשַׁלְח involves interpersonal touch. While there are instances, as in I Kings 2:31 where יָשַׁלְח is immediately followed by "bury," it is not clear whether the hostile act was committed by hand or with implements and therefore will not be a part of this study.

Genesis 26, he was frightened into action. Verse 11 reads, "Abimelech then charged all the people, saying, 'Anyone who molests (Vll) this man or his wife shall be put to death.'" While it remains unclear, to some degree, as to whether "molestation" must be physical, it is clear that even in translation, this word takes on a negative connotation.

After the incident with Amnon and Tamar, Joab brought a clever woman to see King David in order to settle his mind about the incident. After she told him a parable, II Samuel 14:10 reads, "The king said, 'If anyone says anything more to you, have him brought to me, and he will never trouble (Vll) you again.'" Clearly, "trouble" is not the expected translation of Vll yet it fits this context.

Why is it possible that one verb can have such different translations? Perhaps it is because Vll is so general and nondescript, that, in order to best represent the context, the translators take advantage of the opportunity given. While these are only two out of many examples, it is clear even from the translations that Vll has the capability, though not the sole directive, to take on a negative meaning.

Jacob is the only person in the Hebrew Bible for which "wrestling" is described either as אבק or שרה. The word "person" is emphasized here since in other references to these events involving Jacob, the "man" with whom he wrestled or strove, is alternately an "angel" or a "divine

being."

In Genesis 32:25, after planning the reunion with Esau and sending off his wives and children, "Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled (לָחָם) with him until the break of dawn." Then, in verse 26, it continues "When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he wrenched (שָׁדַח) Jacob's hip at its socket (לְרֵגְלֵי הָיָד) so that the socket of his hip was strained as he wrestled with him." Was it actually his hip that was touched? According to some, the לְרֵגְלֵי הָיָד is yet another euphemism for genitals.<sup>48</sup> The explanation for this is that while לָחָם denotes thigh, הָיָד is more ambiguous. If its common translation of "hollow" is retained, then "hollow of the thigh" could be the genitals.<sup>49</sup> Because לָחָם can also be a euphemism for penis it is thought that another common word for hand, הָיָד, can also carry sexual connotations.<sup>50</sup> It seems that this jump from לָחָם to הָיָד is neither well-founded nor necessary. It is already commonly accepted, as will be seen in "Deliberate Touch", that לָחָם is a euphemism for genitals... an idea further attested by the fact that Jacob's offspring comes from his thighs in Genesis 46:26<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup>Smith, 465.

<sup>49</sup>Smith, 467.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Genesis 46:26 "All the persons belonging to Jacob who came to Egypt -- his own issue (לְרֵגְלֵי הָיָד), aside from the wives of Jacob's sons -- all these persons numbered sixty-six."

and Exodus 1:5<sup>52</sup>. Ultimately, then, there is no question that the "hollow of his hip" could be his genitals.

It was clearly a long bout of wrestling because it was indecisive. This is not necessarily logical, however, since Jacob was wounded yet the stranger wanted to be released in verse 27 ("Let me go for dawn is breaking.").<sup>53</sup> There seem to be two possible solutions to this problem: (1) It could be similar to a story in which demons attack a man and he extorts some of their strength<sup>54</sup> or (2) the effectiveness of the beings is tied to night time and dawn is approaching.<sup>55</sup>

The principal problem remains, however. Is it a man with whom Jacob wrestles or a divine being? Hezkuni, Rashbam and Radak, all commenting on this verse, believe it to be an angel. This is in keeping with verses 29 and 31 as well as the account in Hosea 12:4 and 12:5 (to be discussed below). Apparently, furthermore, the interchangeability of these terms is frequent in passages dealing with angels.<sup>56</sup>

After Jacob wrestled (יָלַח) with "a man" (Genesis 32:25), he asked for a blessing. The being, after finding

---

<sup>52</sup>Exodus 1:5 "The total number of persons that were of Jacob's issue (יָלַדְתִּי) came to seventy, Joseph being already in Egypt."

<sup>53</sup>Von Rad, *Genesis*, 316.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

out his name was Jacob, (verse 29) says "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven (יָרָוּ) with beings divine and human, and have prevailed." The only other two citations of יָרָוּ can be found in Hosea 12:4 and 12:5. In the first verse: "In the womb he tried to supplant his brother; grown to manhood, he strove (יָרָוּ) with a divine being." Then the second verse reads: "He strove (יָרָוּ) with an angel and prevailed -- the other had to weep and implore him. At Bethel [Jacob] would meet him, there to commune with him." This incident, then, would better be described as wrestling with a non-human contender.

Before leaving this episode, there is one more word to be discussed. The word יָקַח, while used elsewhere in the Bible, is used for interpersonal touch only in this episode. In Genesis 32:26, "When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he wrenched (יָקַח) Jacob's hip at its socket, so that the socket of his hip was strained as he wrestled with him." One modern commentary says "As the dawn approaches, the assailant becomes desperate to disengage himself. Unable to overcome Jacob by sheer force, he delivers a sudden, powerful blow to the 'hollow of Jacob's hip,' that is, to the acetabulum, the cup-shaped socket in the hipbone that receives the head of the thighbone."<sup>57</sup> Since the

---

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

other verses are not helpful in understanding this usage<sup>58</sup>, and since it only appears once, its influence on the "body" of terms for aggressive touch is negative (since it wounds Jacob), but negligible.

Therefore, whether *שרה*, *אבק* or *חקע* is used to describe the encounter with Jacob at the shores of the Jabbok, it seems clear that it was not another man with whom he struggled. Whether due to the unusual length of the match, the references to it later on in Hosea which use the word "angel" as do the commentaries, or its ability to change Jacob's name, that was no mortal! It is therefore irrelevant to this paper whether *אבק*, *שרה* and *חקע* are words used in a positive or negative context. It can be left to the midrash to sort out.

One last point of interest should be noted: during a fight between two people, after one is struck, that person never strikes back in self-defense (regardless of what term is used). Thus the fighting is portrayed as either completely one-sided or an even struggle. Finally, in order to be thorough, it must be noted that there is no biblical evidence that *חִקַּע* involves interpersonal touch.

From the evidence shown, the many words that are used for aggressive touch are negative in tone. While one may wonder how war or fighting could ever be positive, there is

---

<sup>58</sup>See Numbers 25:4, II Samuel 21:6,9,13; Jeremiah 6:8, Ezekiel 23:17,18.

an answer. If the text showed that in the majority of aggressive situations the Israelite(s) prevailed, for them this category would be seen in a positive light. That, however, is not the case.

## Chapter IV

### Deliberate Touch

The intention of this chapter is to analyze those places in the Hebrew Bible in which two people deliberately touch and to determine, if possible, whether they can be construed as positive or negative. While touch during sexual relations, times of affection and times of aggression can be deliberate as well, the verses studied here will show touch to be of a ceremonial nature. While a comprehensive theme encompassing these various situations does not exist, there are some trends. The part of the body most often used, as would be expected, is the hand and similar to the chapter entitled "Affectionate Touch," there are a few characters who are most noted for deliberately touching others.

In the ancient world, it was universal for gestures to accompany oath-taking and, in fact, the most common was raising a hand as in Genesis 14:22<sup>1</sup> or holding a ritual object.<sup>2</sup> Yet one of the most famous incidents of oath-taking in the Bible uses neither of these forms. It is the oath by the thigh (יָדָי) which can be found in both

---

<sup>1</sup>Genesis 14:22 "But Abram said to the king of Sodom, 'I swear [literally: lift up my hand] to the Lord, God Most High, creator of heaven and earth: (23)I will not take so much as a thread or a sandal strap of what is yours; you shall not say, "It is I who made Abram rich."'"

<sup>2</sup>Sarna, *Genesis*, 162

Genesis 24 (between Abraham and his servant) and Genesis 47 (between Jacob and Joseph).<sup>3</sup> As will be seen, there are two main links between the two verses: the thigh belongs to the aged patriarch whose days are numbered and both are concerned with a land removed from where he lives.<sup>4</sup>

In chapter 24, after Abraham mourned Sarah's death, he sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac. The text reads (verse 2): "And Abraham said to the senior servant of his household, who had charge of all that he owned, "Put your hand under my thigh (3)and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell, (4)but will go to the land of my birth and get a wife for my son Isaac." Clearly an oath such as this is of enormous importance to Abraham; his wife had just died and he wanted to be assured that Isaac would father another generation. Thus instead of leaving anything to chance, he invoked a ritualistic oath-taking ceremony.

The only other appearance of this phrase is also linked

---

<sup>3</sup>According to Malul, it is also possible that Jacob's oath, taken by his father's 𐤓𐤓 in Genesis 31:42 and 31:53 (regarding not marrying anyone other than Laban's daughters and regarding a land division) is analogous to the other two oaths by the thigh. This is due to the fact that 𐤓𐤓 contains the Aramaic word "phd" or "thigh" and should be translated literally "the thigh (=the genitals) of Isaac." (p.196) In this way, Jacob invokes the spirits of the family who were to protect their descendants (p.200). Malul, "More on Pahad Yishaq," 192-200.

<sup>4</sup>Malul, "More on Pahad Yishaq," 196-7.

to a man's last request. In Genesis 47:29 it is written "And when the time approached for Israel to die, he summoned his son Joseph and said to him, 'Do me this favor, place your hand under my thigh as a pledge of your steadfast loyalty: please do not bury me in Egypt.'" Apparently, Joseph's word in verse 30<sup>5</sup> was not enough for in verse 31<sup>6</sup>, Jacob demanded the explicit oath. The oath is a "formal adjuration which carried sanctions"<sup>7</sup> as further shown by the retelling of Abraham's servant's oath in Genesis 24:8<sup>8</sup> and 24:41<sup>9</sup>. There, different words are used for this same deliberate act. As one commentator concisely writes: "Abraham chooses the term tactfully; the servant rephrases it realistically and the author subtly varies the emphasis."<sup>10</sup>

There is a parallel to this ceremony found in an Old

---

<sup>5</sup>Genesis 47:30 "'When I lie down with my fathers, take me up from Egypt and bury me in their burial-place.' He replied, 'I will do as you have spoken.'"

<sup>6</sup>Genesis 47:31 "And he said, 'Swear to me.' And he swore to him. Then Israel bowed at the head of the bed."

<sup>7</sup>Speiser, 179.

<sup>8</sup>In Genesis 24:8 Abraham is defining the terms of the oath. "And if the woman does not consent to follow you, you shall then be clear of this oath to me; but do not take my son back there."

<sup>9</sup>In Genesis 24:41, the servant was explaining the situation to Laban. "Thus only shall you be freed from my adjuration: if, when you come to my kindred, they refuse you - only then shall you be freed from my adjuration."

<sup>10</sup>Speiser, 179.

Babylonian letter from the city Kisurra in South Mesopotamia. There, it is written: "Thus you (have said to me): 'Let your envoy grasp my testicles and my penis, and then I will give (it) to you. Concerning (??) then what you have said to me, (I am dispatching to you) Burriya the son of Menanum.'" While no historical connection between this ceremony and its biblical counterpart is claimed, the resemblances are striking.<sup>11</sup>

It is interesting that the biblical narrative specifies the thigh for oath-taking. Because sons are said to issue from their fathers' thighs (as in Genesis 46:26<sup>12</sup> and Exodus 1:5<sup>13</sup>), interpreters agree unanimously that "thigh" is a euphemism for genitalia and thus was thought to be the seat of procreative powers.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, giving an oath with the intention of maintaining the cohesion of the family would (logically?) entail invoking the ancestral spirits of the family to witness the fulfillment or violation of the

---

<sup>11</sup>Malul, "Touching the Sexual Organs," 491-2. It should be noted that "Even the derived meaning of one's 'seed, posterity', which the word for thigh has in Biblical Hebrew, is attested in Akkadian, at least for the word... 'testicle' which can also mean 'son.'"

<sup>12</sup>Genesis 46:26 "All the persons belonging to Jacob who came to Egypt -- his own issue (ל' קצ'), aside from the wives of Jacob's sons -- all these persons numbered 66."

<sup>13</sup>Exodus 1:5 "The total number of persons that were of Jacob's issue (ל' קצ') came to seventy, Joseph being already in Egypt."

<sup>14</sup>Sarna, *Genesis*, 179.

promise and to act accordingly.<sup>15</sup> Non-compliance may invite the threat of sterility for the offender or extinction of his offspring.<sup>16</sup>

Another interpretation is that the oath by the "thigh" is a reference to circumcision which, in turn, would remind the oath-taker of the sign of the covenant and could even evoke God as a guarantor.<sup>17</sup> Rashi, Targum Yonatan and Shadal agree with this explanation whereas Radak, Ibn Ezra and Hezkuni do not.<sup>18</sup> According to Rashi's comments on this verse, because circumcision was the first commandment given to Abraham and because it became his only through much pain, it was dear to him and he therefore selected this ritual as the way to take an oath. The problem is that such symbolism is valid only if both sides recognize it; it would be meaningless to an uncircumcised man (in the case of Abraham's servant) thus nullifying the oath. Furthermore, if the servant were circumcised, why would he touch Abraham's "thigh" rather than his own?<sup>19</sup>

That the oath by the "thigh" is binding is clear.

---

<sup>15</sup>Malul, "More on Pahad Yishaq," 198.

<sup>16</sup>Speiser, 178.

<sup>17</sup>Sarna, *Genesis*, 162

<sup>18</sup>In their comments on Genesis 24:2, Ibn Ezra, Hezkuni and Radak said that each man who served another man would put his hand under his master's thigh in order to show that he is his master.

<sup>19</sup>Sarna, *Genesis*, 162.

Since it is attested in other ancient Near Eastern sources, it was presumably not only common but a proven formula. More than positive or negative, it was practical.

ט' ידו ("lay hand(s)") is an expression which may seem common to the Bible. In fact, though it appears approximately twenty times, only five of them would constitute interpersonal, deliberate touch. This can be at least partially explained by the fact that very often when a biblical character lays his hand down, he rests it on a ram or bull which is then offered as a sacrifice. This is the case in such verses as Leviticus 1:4<sup>20</sup> and Numbers 8:12<sup>21</sup>.

In the following two verses, the phrase is used identically, despite the fact that, as will be seen, the situations vary dramatically. Similar to the physical touch of the arbiter (seen below), in Leviticus 24:14 the case of a blasphemer is discussed. There it says, "Take the blasphemer outside the camp; and let all who were within hearing lay their hands (ט' ידו) upon his head, and let the whole community stone him."

Why do they lay their hands upon him? According to one modern commentator, this is done in order to transfer to the malefactor the "objective and guilt in which their common

---

<sup>20</sup>Leviticus 1:4 "He shall lay his hand upon the head of the burnt offering, that it may be acceptable in his behalf, in expiation for him."

<sup>21</sup>Numbers 8:12 "The Levites shall now lay their hands upon the heads of the bulls..."

hearing of the oath has involved them."<sup>22</sup> This would approximate the ritual involving a sacrifice as seen from Leviticus 1:4 (quoted above) in which the head of the burnt offering is touched in order to provide expiation.<sup>23</sup> Thus it has both cultic and legal functions.

In Numbers 8:9 "You shall bring the Levites forward before the Tent of Meeting. Assemble the whole Israelite community, (10) and bring the Levites forward before the Lord. Let the Israelites lay their hands (לִּידָיו) upon the Levites (11) and let Aaron elevate the Levites before the Lord as an elevation offering from the Israelites, that they may perform the service of the Lord." Regardless of whether לִּידָיו implies pressure<sup>24</sup> (as in Judges 16:29<sup>25</sup>) or not, it seems that it was performed by the elders who were representatives of the people. This is paralleled by a custom in Ugarit whereby village elders took an oath in the sanctuary on behalf of the entire population.<sup>26</sup>

It is further assumed that the elders used one hand just as the Levites did upon their offerings as in Numbers

---

<sup>22</sup>Noth, *Leviticus*, 180.

<sup>23</sup>Levine, 167.

<sup>24</sup>Milgrom, *Numbers*, 62.

<sup>25</sup>Judges 16:29 "He [Samson] embraced the two middle pillars that the temple rested upon, one with his right arm and one with his left, and leaned (לִּידָיו) against them."

<sup>26</sup>Milgrom, *Numbers*, 62.

8:12.<sup>27</sup> Following this logic, the Levites were designated as Israel's sacrifice -- meaning their representatives in the sanctuary.<sup>28</sup> This is analogous to the situation in which the Levites replace the Israelite first-born in doing guard duty at the sanctuary (Leviticus 3:11-13)).<sup>29</sup> Here, they replace all Israel in upholding the responsibility of transporting the tabernacle.<sup>30</sup>

In Numbers 27:18 and 27:23, God told Moses to lay his hands upon Joshua, which he did. (This is again recalled in Deuteronomy 34:9<sup>31</sup>.) In verse 18 "And the Lord answered Moses, 'Single out Joshua son of Nun, an inspired man, and lay your hand upon him.'" When the action was done, verse 23 reports, "He laid his hands upon him and commissioned him -- as the Lord had spoken through Moses." Rashi points out that Moses did more than what he was commanded since he was told to lay one hand on Joshua in verse 18 and in verse 23 but he laid both. Others think that only via laying both hands is the transfer of authority and power complete and

---

<sup>27</sup>Numbers 8:12 "The Levites shall now lay their hands upon the heads of the bulls; one shall be offered to the Lord as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering, to make expiation for the Levites."

<sup>28</sup>Milgrom, *Numbers*, 62.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Deuteronomy 34:9 "Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands upon him; and the Israelites heeded him, doing as the Lord had commanded Moses."

point to Numbers 8:10 and Leviticus 16:21 which show that laying one hand is limited to a ritual whereby the offerer of the sacrificial animal identifies himself as its owner and declares its purpose.<sup>32</sup> Therefore this act was understood to signify a transference of tasks (and was even originally thought of as magically effective).<sup>33</sup>

The laying on of hands represents the transfer of authority. While it is surprising that in order to do this one must touch another, this in and of itself may lend a special effect since touching is so rare.

The root  $\gamma\psi$  can be used to describe the relationship with God. In Isaiah 50:10, for example, the verse reads, "Who among you reveres the Lord and heeds the voice of His servant? Though he walk in darkness and have no light, let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely ( $\gamma\psi$ ) upon his God." Clearly, this scene does not involve physical touch. The fact that this person is reliant upon God, however, will help to analyze  $\gamma\psi$  when it is used to describe interpersonal touch.

$\gamma\psi$  alone never describes interpersonal touch. Rather, takes its place within the expression,  $\tau' \gamma \gamma\psi$  which is commonly translated as "lean on one's arm." In that form, it is found in two similar situations: II Kings 5:18 and II Kings 7:2,17. In II Kings 5 after Naaman, a leper, is cured

---

<sup>32</sup>Milgrom, *Numbers*, 235.

<sup>33</sup>Noth, *Numbers*, p.215.

of his leprosy, he offered Elisha a gift (verse 15) which was not accepted (verse 16). Instead, he promised never again to offer burnt offerings or sacrifices to any god except the Lord (verse 17). In verse 18, Naaman said, "But may the Lord pardon your servant for this: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow low in worship there, and he is leaning on my arm (וְעָלָיָא) so that I must bow low in the temple of Rimmon -- when I bow low in the temple of Rimmon, may the Lord pardon your servant in this." וְעָלָיָא here simply refers to physical support.

When there was a famine in Samaria, King Ben-hadad of Aram wanted to kill Elisha for interfering with his war efforts. When the king's messenger approached Elisha to kill him, Elisha told him that (despite the famine) by the next day, barley and flour would be sold for a shekel. Then the text says (II Kings 7:2): "The aide on whose arm the king was leaning (וְעָלָיָא) spoke up and said to the man of God, 'Even if the Lord were to make windows in the sky, could this come to pass?' And he retorted, 'You shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat of it.'"

When, later that same night, the Aramean camp was suddenly deserted, there was plenty of food left behind. Verse 17 records "Now the king had put the aide on whose arm he leaned in charge of the gate; and he was trampled to death in the gate by the people -- just as the man of God had spoken, as he had spoken when the king came down to

him.'" Thus, as was said in verse 7, he saw the food but did not eat any of it.

Commenting on verse 2, Ralbag said that the king leaned on his arm in such a way that the king could hear his words when he said "It is a lie about Elisha's coming and this will not happen... just like God will not make windows in the sky." According to Ralbag, Elisha seems to be more of an advisor than a provider of physical support.

What is the job description of the person on whom the king leans? A look at II Chronicles 16:7 will assist in answering the question. "At that time, Hanani the seer came to King Asa of Judah and said to him, "Because you relied (לָוַו) on the king of Aram and did not rely (לָוַו) on the Lord your God, therefore the army of the king of Aram has slipped out of your hands." While clearly לָוַו here is not physical (for how could one lean on God?!), King Asa of Judah was dependent upon the King of Aram. The person on whom the king leans physically, then, is one on whom he also relies for advice. Different dependencies are emphasized in different situations.

The act of striking another person was discussed in the chapter "Aggressive Touch." When the punch or slap is directed at a specific part of the body, however, that motion becomes deliberate touch. This occurs only once.

When Micaiah was prophesying a bad future for the army of Israel (I Kings 22) the reaction in verse 24 was:

"Thereupon Zedekiah son of Chenaanah stepped up and struck (חָכַם) Micaiah on the cheek (לִּנְיָ), and demanded, 'Which way did the spirit of the Lord pass from me to speak with you?'<sup>34</sup> Metzudat David explains the לִּנְיָ to be the place near the eye<sup>35</sup> causing this type of slap to be of an insulting nature.<sup>36</sup> This is proven by a look at Micah 4:14. There, "Now you gash yourself in grief. They have laid siege to us; they strike the ruler of Israel on the cheek with a staff." God too slaps enemies in the cheek, as in Psalm 3:8.<sup>37</sup>

Thus slapping one in the face is seen as an affront, perhaps parallel to the challenge to a duel. It certainly is not intended for physical harm.

Another expression which refers specifically to touching a particular part of the body can be found in Joshua 10:24. After Joshua defeated the five Amorite kings in Gibeon, the five kings hid in a cave. Joshua blockaded them in, defeated the enemy and brought out the kings. "And then when the kings were brought out to Joshua, Joshua summoned all the men of Israel and ordered the army officers who had accompanied him, 'Come forward and place your feet

---

<sup>34</sup>This is also retold in II Chronicles 18:23.

<sup>35</sup>Metzudat David commenting on II Chronicles 18:23.

<sup>36</sup>Myers, *II Chronicles*, 104.

<sup>37</sup>Psalm 3:8 "Rise, O Lord! Deliver me, O my God! For your slap all my enemies in the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked."

on the necks of these kings.' They came forward and placed their feet on their necks." After that, the kings were put to death. This can be compared to Psalm 110:1<sup>38</sup> and Deuteronomy 33:29<sup>39</sup> though these verses appear to be more metaphoric than actual.

A parallel situation can be found in the Annals of Tukulti-Ninurta I (1242-1206) when he humiliated the captured Babylonian King Kashtiliah IV: "His royal neck I trod with my foot, like a footstool."<sup>40</sup> It is also attested to in pictures from the Ancient Near East.<sup>41</sup>

Thus the rare action of placing one's feet on the necks of kings who have been conquered is primarily an act of humiliation. The verse from Joshua shows that it is not done in order to wound or kill the kings since they are put to death later, but rather to hurt their pride.

The word  $\text{נָֿשָׂא}$  can be translated in many ways, depending upon its context. In Psalms 45:17<sup>42</sup>, for instance, it is translated as "appoint," in Job 7:17 (used together with  $\text{נָֿשָׂא}$ )

---

<sup>38</sup>Psalm 110:1 "Of David. A psalm. The Lord said to my lord, 'Sit at My right hand while I make your enemies your footstool."

<sup>39</sup>Deuteronomy 33:29 "O happy Israel! Who is like you, a people delivered by the Lord, your protecting Shield, your Sword triumphant! Your enemies shall come cringing before you, and you shall tread on their backs."

<sup>40</sup>As quoted by Boling, 286.

<sup>41</sup>Soggin, 129.

<sup>42</sup>Psalm 45:17 "Your sons will succeed your ancestors; you will appoint them princes throughout the land."

it means "fix your attention"<sup>43</sup> and it simply means "made" in Jeremiah 2:15.<sup>44</sup> Under the auspices of deliberate touch, only five verses which use  $\text{נָטַח}$  can be found. Four are used in conjunction with "hand."

$\text{נָטַח}$ , commonly translated as "lay one's hand" is an expression found relatively often in Genesis 48. There, Jacob meets and blesses his grandchildren, Ephraim and Manasseh. "(14)Israel stretched out his right hand and laid ( $\text{נָטַח}$ ) it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head -- thus crossing his hands -- although Manasseh was the first born." [In verses 15-16 he blessed them.] "(17)When Joseph saw that his father was placing ( $\text{נָטַח}$ ) his right hand on Ephraim's head, he thought it wrong; so he took hold of his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's."

From the fact that "right" and "left" are repeated so often, it is clear that nothing was left to chance. Because the right hand, further, was thought to be the stronger hand, according to Sforino<sup>45</sup> and because the privilege of the first-born was a position of honor (though not always

---

<sup>43</sup>Job 7:17 "What is man, that You make much of him, that You fix Your attention upon him?"

<sup>44</sup>Jeremiah 2:15 "Lions have roared over him, have raised their cries. They have made his land a waste, his cities desolate, without inhabitants."

<sup>45</sup>Commenting on verse 17.

adhered to<sup>46</sup>) in the ancient Orient, Manasseh was brought to him such that Jacob's right hand lay on him.

What was this all about? For the ancients, the act of blessing was a positive occurrence which, when accompanied by definite rites and gestures (parallel to oath-taking), could be effectively and irrevocably bestowed upon another person.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, as important as the words of the blessing was the way in which it was given.<sup>48</sup> Phrased another way, God's blessing is the responsible decision of the one bestowing it and therefore the suspicion of arbitrariness would be of concern.<sup>49</sup>

Another use of  $\text{ט} \text{נ} \text{ו}$  can be found in Genesis 46:4. There, Jacob was on his way to his reunion with Joseph. God called to him and told him not to fear going down to Egypt (verse 2-3). God's words continue: "I Myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I Myself will also bring you back; and Joseph's hand shall close [literally: put his hand on] ( $\text{ט} \text{נ} \text{ו}$ ) your eyes."

Clearly, this represents a ritual surrounding Jacob's own death whereby, ironically, the last one to touch him is to be the very son whose death he mourned years before. While it is not the task of this chapter to explore touch

---

<sup>46</sup>As with Joseph himself!

<sup>47</sup>Von Rad, *Genesis*, 410.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

involving the dead, once again<sup>50</sup> it becomes clear that touch is an important aspect of Jacob's family's relationships.

In Job 9:33, "No arbiter is between us to lay his hand (טַח יָדָיו) on us both." While the referent from the previous verse<sup>51</sup> is God, the action taking place seems to be one paralleled in human affairs. The word "arbiter" (שֹׁפֵט) is derived from the root שָׁפַט which has a variety of meanings. In Job 16:21<sup>52</sup> it means "the role of the third party who arbitrates between a human and God."<sup>53</sup> And what is the function of the arbiter? To lay a hand on each of two parties and force them to submit to proper legal proceedings.<sup>54</sup> Rashi, commenting on this verse, said his role is to police fear and urge him [to testify]. Thus the arbiter appears in form like the scales of justice -- a neutral party.

The final usage of טַח in the Hebrew Bible which involves deliberate touch is Ruth 4:16. "Naomi took the child and held (טַח) it to her bosom. She became its foster

---

<sup>50</sup>As was seen in the chapter entitled "Affectionate Touch."

<sup>51</sup>Job 9:32 "He is not a man, like me, that I can answer Him, that we can go to law together."

<sup>52</sup>Job 16:21 "Let Him arbitrate (שֹׁפֵט) between a man and God as between a man and his fellow."

<sup>53</sup>Habel, 196.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

mother (17) and the women said to Naomi, 'Blessed be the Lord, who has not withheld a redeemer from you today! May his name be perpetuated in Israel!'" Some say that this action demonstrates Naomi's acceptance of her new role: being a nurse to a child who assures her future well-being and new condition of blessedness.<sup>55</sup>

It is also possible that this hints at a ritual for adoption. In fact, as will be shown, not only is it possible that putting a child to one's bosom is an adoption ceremony, but so is putting a child on one's knees. There is need, then, for a further discussion of Ruth 4:16 as well as a discussion of Genesis 30:3 and 48:12.

Placing a child on the bosom can be understood to be a gesture of adoption which symbolizes suckling and which can be performed by either men or women.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, both males and females can be "nurses" (of course a better English translation would be "caregivers")<sup>57</sup> and Ruth is shown to be an נָדָה in Ruth 4:16. This does not, however, have to do with wet-nursing as שָׁדָן is found in both male and female anatomy (as in II Samuel 12:3 and Isaiah 40:11).<sup>58</sup> Rather, it is thought to be the location of tender or possibly angry feelings and for comforting the weak,

---

<sup>55</sup>Campbell, 168.

<sup>56</sup>Gaster, 448.

<sup>57</sup>See II Kings 10:1,5 and Esther 2:7.

<sup>58</sup>Campbell, 164.

unprotected or beloved.<sup>59</sup>

While it is questionable as to whether Naomi even could effect a change of Obed's status by herself, if she could why would she adopt Obed? One reason would be to "Judaize" him since David's ancestor would otherwise have a Moabite mother. On the other hand, adoption would not only deprive Ruth of someone to carry on her late husband's name but would seem to invalidate the Levirate marriage. It could be, however, that the information is lacking and the phrase "A son is born to Naomi" (Ruth 4:17) actually completes the Levirate requirement. This, however, is doubtful since all other legal matters in the Book of Ruth were scrupulously dealt with throughout the story. This would be too great a contrast.<sup>60</sup>

The biblical proof that taking a child to one's bosom is a form of adoption lies in a critical analysis of Psalms 2:7. If an emendation of one letter were made in that verse, an obscure, ungrammatical phrase would become proof that holding a child to the bosom can be understood to be a form of adoption.<sup>61</sup> Using the Revised Standard Version, "I will tell (אספרה) of the decree (קל) of the Lord: He said to me, You are my son, today I have begotten you" which, with the change, would render, "I gather (אספה) thee unto my

---

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Campbell, 105.

<sup>61</sup>Gaster, 449.

bosom (קן)' so saith the Lord unto me - 'Thou art my son, this day have I acknowledged thee mine offspring.'" The "ך" would be left out of קנא in the emendation, yielding קנא which is a technical term for adoption, as in Psalms 27:10.<sup>62</sup> This is further attested by a variant practice mentioned in a Mesopotamian document whereby if a child's biological parents wished to reclaim it from a foster-mother, they placed a vessel filled with human milk (which symbolized suckling) in front of it.<sup>63</sup>

In Ruth 4:16, the ceremony for adoption is thought to occur at the breast whereas in the following verses from Genesis it is thought to occur on, or between, the knees. Ancient Near Eastern literature provides associations between the breast, the knees and even the genitals. In Hittite "genu" means knee and is related to the constructions which seem to mean "bosom" in Summarian.<sup>64</sup> According to the *Assyrian Dictionary*, "birku" means knee,<sup>65</sup> lap (as in "May the king, my lord, be able to lift even his grandchildren to his lap."),<sup>66</sup> or is a euphemism for male and female sexual parts (as in "you bring forth from a man's

---

<sup>62</sup>Psalm 27:10 "Though my father and mother abandon me, the Lord will take me in (קנא)."

<sup>63</sup>Gaster, 449.

<sup>64</sup>Hoffner, 201.

<sup>65</sup>*Assyrian Dictionary*, vol. 2, 255.

<sup>66</sup>*Assyrian Dictionary*, vol.2, 256.

loins the body to be born")<sup>67</sup>.

The Hebrew word for "knee," כָּנִי is similar to the Babylonian "birku" (meaning "knee" or "generative organ"). The connection can also be made phonetically (though not etiologically) between "knee" and "blessing"<sup>68</sup> -- especially as it relates to having children -- as in I Samuel 2:20<sup>69</sup> in which Eli blesses Hannah and then she conceived.<sup>70</sup>

In Genesis 30:3 the text reads, "She [Rachel] said, 'Here is my maid Bilhah. Consort with her, that she may bear on my knees and that through her I too may have children.'" Apparently this was a legal procedure by which childless women acquired children by their handmaids. This would mean that it was as though Dan and Naphtali were born to Rachel.<sup>71</sup> Interestingly, the adoptive act in the ancient Near East was normally performed by the father

---

<sup>67</sup>Assyrian Dictionary, vol. 2, 257.

<sup>68</sup>The Akkadian root for "bless" is "karābu." Thus the Hebrew for both "bless" and "knee" stem from different roots. Assyrian Dictionary, vol. 8, 192-198.

<sup>69</sup>I Samuel 2:20 "Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, 'May the Lord grant you offspring by this woman in place of the loan she made to the Lord.' Then they would return home."

<sup>70</sup>According to the *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, כָּנִי is translated as "kneel, bless" Brown, Driver, Briggs, 138.

<sup>71</sup>Von Rad, *Genesis*, 289-290.

though in this case and in Genesis 16:2,<sup>72</sup> the mother was especially intent on establishing her legal right to the child.<sup>73</sup>

Another incident which is thought to be an adoption ceremony involving a male and involving touch is found in Genesis 48. There, after Jacob kisses and embraces his grandchildren (verse 10), Joseph removed them from his knees (verse 12) and placed Ephraim to Jacob's left and Manasseh to Jacob's right (verse 13) but Israel crossed his hands (verse 14) and blessed them (verse 15). Though Joseph tried to correct what he thought to be Jacob's mistake (verse 17-18), Jacob said that he knew what he was doing (verse 19).

The removal of Ephraim and Manasseh from Jacob's knees (verse 12) could represent the conclusion of an adoption ceremony. (The Hebrew text never has them placed on Jacob's knees, only removed.) Placing a child on a father's knees is a symbolic gesture which not only relates that the child is accepted as legitimate, but formalizes adoption.<sup>74</sup> This legal rite of adoption would be even clearer if ׀׀ were translated according to Procksch and others not by "bless"

---

<sup>72</sup>Genesis 16:2 "And Sarai said to Abram, 'Look, the Lord has kept me from bearing. Consort with my maid; perhaps I shall be built up through her.' And Abram heeded Sarai's request."

<sup>73</sup>Speiser, 230.

<sup>74</sup>Speiser, 357.

but by "taken upon the knee" in verse 9.<sup>75</sup>

In the Hurrian myths, the following parallel story is told: "Appus' wife became pregnant. The first and second months passed. The third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eight and ninth months passed. The tenth month arrived, and Appus' wife bore a son. The nurse lifted up the boy and set him on Appus' knees..."<sup>76</sup> The usage of "lift" here could be simply to "lift the child onto his father's knee," or "to raise, rear." Because the perfect form of the verb is used, the latter idea is preferred even though "rearing" is usually referred to by a different word.<sup>77</sup>

Why would Jacob feel the need to adopt his grandsons? According to some, because the boys' mother is Egyptian.<sup>78</sup> According to others, for etiological purposes: both Ephraim and Manasseh became eponyms of tribes and therefore were equal to Jacob's natural sons<sup>79</sup> as verse 5 intimates.<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup>Genesis 48:8 "Noticing Joseph's sons, Israel asked, 'Who are these?' (9)And Joseph said to his father, 'They are my sons, whom God has given me here.' 'Bring them up to me,' he said, 'that I may bless (יְבָרֵךְ) them.'"

<sup>76</sup>Hoffner, 199.

<sup>77</sup>Hoffner, 200.

<sup>78</sup>Speiser, 357.

<sup>79</sup>Speiser, 359.

<sup>80</sup>Genesis 48:5 "Now, your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, shall be mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine no less than Reuben and Simeon."

This is supported by Hammurabi's Code<sup>81</sup> and an Ugaritic parallel.<sup>82</sup> Finally, it could be that because Rachel died (verse 7) after giving birth to only two children, Jacob may have felt justified in substituting two of Rachel's grandsons for such other sons that were never conceived due to her early death.<sup>83</sup>

Similar to this is Joseph adopting Machir in Genesis 50:23. There it is written "Joseph lived to see children of the third generation of Ephraim; the children of Machir son of Manasseh were likewise born upon Joseph's knees. This adoption, however, would not explain anything. It is more likely that Joseph formally accepted (or welcomed) Machir's children into the family<sup>84</sup> similar to the way in which Naomi held Obed to her breast and to Job.

When Job cursed the day of his birth (Job 3:12<sup>85</sup>),

---

<sup>81</sup>Hammurabi's Code, number 170: "When a seignior's first wife bore him children and his female slave also bore him children, if the father during his lifetime has ever said 'My children!' to the children whom the slave bore him, thus having counted them with the children of the first wife, after the father has gone to [his] fate, the children of the first wife and the children of the slave shall share equally in the goods of the paternal estate, with the first-born, the son of the first wife, receiving a preferential share." Pritchard, 173.

<sup>82</sup>The Ugaritic document reads "Abdiya has ad[opted] Ana-Teshub as his son..." Mendelsohn, 181-182.

<sup>83</sup>Speiser, 357.

<sup>84</sup>Speiser, 376.

<sup>85</sup>Job 3:12 "Why were there knees to receive me, or breasts for me to suck?"

similarly, he was not upset that he was adopted(1). Rather, according to Metzudat David, he wonders why there were knees to catch him rather than letting him fall on the ground and die then. For Job, then, part of the normal process of birth was to land on someone's knees.

That the knees do not have to symbolize an adoption ceremony can be further attested by "Stele of the Vultures" which relates how the goddess In-anna took the newborn E-Anna-tum on her arm, named him, then placed him on the knee of the goddess Nin-hursaga who suckled him.<sup>86</sup> There is no proof that this is adoption. It could simply show that the child is legitimate.<sup>87</sup>

Thus while adoption is widely attested in ancient sources, it is never directly alluded to in the Bible. The mention of placing children on knees, then, may simply be a gesture of affection without being associated with a rite of passage.

There are two instances in which a child is resuscitated in the Bible. Though the terminology differs slightly from one case to the other, it is clear that the same action is occurring and perhaps more than anywhere else in the Bible (excluding sexual touch), a great deal of touching is occurring simultaneously.

---

<sup>86</sup>"The Concept of Divine Parentage of the Ruler in the Stele of the Vultures," 120.

<sup>87</sup>Speiser, 357.

In I Kings 17 the son of the woman with whom Elijah was staying fell ill until "he had no breath left in him" (verse 17). In verse 21 "Then he stretched (טָטַח) out over the child three times, and cried out to the Lord, saying, 'O Lord my God, let this child's life return to his body!'" And, in the following verse, it did. This is the only place in the Bible where טָטַח refers to interpersonal touch and also the only verse in which it is used in the הִחְפִּיעַל form.

Ralbag and Metzudat David say that Elijah would have lined himself up with the boy eye to eye, and so forth, as did Elisa in II Kings (as will be seen) so as to transfer the vitality of the prophet's limbs into the boy's limbs. While Radak agrees that Elijah lined his body up with the boy's, he thinks it was so his prayer would have more kavannah or, back to practicality, simply to respire him and warm him.

What is happening here? The general idea is that sickness can be shed by being transferred into the corresponding parts of an animal -- i.e. a sheep. Here, in the reverse order, Elijah's good health is transferred to the corresponding organs of the sick boy.<sup>88</sup> (חַיָּ does not always mean death just as the return of the נְשָׁם could signify breath or animation rather than life<sup>89</sup>) This could be a case of "contactual magic," such as was well

---

<sup>88</sup>Gray, 382.

<sup>89</sup>Gray, 382-3.

known in the ancient Near East in Mesopotamia and in Canaan.<sup>90</sup> (Incidentally, the three-fold repetition is said to be a characteristic feature of magical procedures and folk tales.<sup>91</sup>) The Ugaritic legend of Krt, for example, mentions the transference of the sickness of Kinto into a clay image.<sup>92</sup>

מָדַד, furthermore, is often translated as "measure" and is used primarily in Ezekiel. Since in its reflexive form it would mean literally, "measured himself," there seem to be two ideas that are combined. The first is that the sick or dead person can be cured or revived by having the essence of a numinous or holy being superimposed upon him.<sup>93</sup> The second idea is that measuring a sick person -- or "sizing him up" -- effects a cure.<sup>94</sup>

While it has been suggested that the following episode may be the original version of the story,<sup>95</sup> both versions have folkloristic motifs at their hearts and therefore could have developed independently within the Elijah and Elisha cycles.<sup>96</sup> In II Kings 4:34, after the Shunnamite woman

---

<sup>90</sup>Gray, 382.

<sup>91</sup>Gaster, 503.

<sup>92</sup>Cited by Gray, 382.

<sup>93</sup>Gaster, 503.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>Gray, 382.

<sup>96</sup>Cogan and Tadmor, 59.

named Gehazi prayed for a child and then had one, he became ill. The text reads "Then he [Elisha] mounted [the bed] and placed himself over (לע ללל) the child. He put his mouth on its mouth, his eyes on its eyes, and his hands on its hands, as he bent (ללל) over it. And the body of the child became warm. (35) He stepped down, walked once up and down the room, then mounted and bent over him. Thereupon, the boy sneezed seven times, and the boy opened his eyes."

It has been pointed out that in this version, as in the Septuagint<sup>97</sup>, the point of the prophet's action was forgotten. This is shown by the fact that the writer substitutes the "more neutral" term "bent over" for "stretched himself out."<sup>98</sup>

The word ללל only appears three times in the Bible: here in verse 34 and 35 and in I Kings 18:42<sup>99</sup>. Both prophets do it. In the verse from I Kings, it is interesting that putting his face between his knees meant that Elijah was not lying flat. This could be the case also in II Kings 4:34 and 35 in that because Elisha was larger than the boy, in order to line his body up with the boy's, his body had to have been bent and thus does not necessarily

---

<sup>97</sup>Gaster, 503. In the Septuagint, "he breathed into the child" is written in place of "he stretched himself out upon the child."

<sup>98</sup>Ibid.

<sup>99</sup>I Kings 18:42 "...Elijah meanwhile climbed to the top of Mount Carmel, crouched (ללל) on the ground, and put his face between his knees."

take away from its true meaning.

Though limited to placing one's hands upon those of another, II Kings 13:16 parallels the above examples. There, Elisha was deathly ill and King Joash of Israel went down to see him. "Then he said to the king of Israel, 'Grasp the bow!' And when he had grasped it, Elisha put his hands over the king's hands (טַרְטַר)." After shooting the arrow, Elisha told him that he would be victorious over Aram. What did the motion of Elisha putting his hands over those of the king signify? It was to give reassurance that the power or divine blessing of the prophet as the vehicle of the "spirit of Yahweh" was being communicated to him.<sup>100</sup> (This is further shown by the fact that in the sequel, the king no longer shared the dynamic faith and enthusiasm of the prophet.<sup>101</sup>)

As Radak poetically wrote in his comments on this verse: this was done in order to strengthen his heart to believe in the sign of the arrow. According to Ralbag, it was to make him aware that his hands will be in wars under the private guidance of the prophet. Further, Ralbag wrote, if there were more wonders after the death of the prophet (as there were after Moses' death) like bringing life to the man that touched Elisha's bones, it was because of his honor.

---

<sup>100</sup>Gray, 599.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid.

Therefore whether bringing a child back to life or strengthening the resolve and hope of a king, these examples testify to the idea that a prophet's aura could be transferred via touching to another person.

Of the many verses already discussed, Exodus 4:24-26 is the most mysterious: "At a night encampment on the way, the Lord encountered him [Moses] and sought to kill him. (25) So Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and touched (וַלְלָהּ) his legs (לְגָלְיוֹ) with it, saying, 'You are truly a bridegroom of blood to me!' (26) And when He let him alone, she added, 'A bridegroom of blood because of the circumcision.'" It could be, as elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, that "feet" is a euphemism for genitals (as in Judges 3:24,<sup>102</sup> II Samuel 11:8<sup>103</sup>).<sup>104</sup> This would make sense here.

This ceremony invites many possible explanations. A modern author thinks that Moses was never circumcised, for then his nationality would have been betrayed to Zipporah, (whom, this author argues, he married in order to gain a

---

<sup>102</sup>Judges 3:24 "After he left, the courtiers returned. When they saw that the doors of the upper chamber were locked, they thought, 'He must be relieving himself in the cool chamber.'"

<sup>103</sup>II Samuel 11:8 "Then David said to Uriah, 'Go down to your house and bathe your feet.' When Uriah left the royal palace, a present from the king followed him."

<sup>104</sup>Noth, *Exodus*, 50.

more prominent social position).<sup>105</sup> When Zipporah then circumcises their son, she touches the foreskin to Moses' genitals "to make a sign in blood on the flesh where there should have been a sign in the flesh."<sup>106</sup> When she uses the phrase "bridegroom of blood," it is an insult. (Leviticus 15 reports that a man becomes impure if he bleeds or touches another's blood or bedding.)<sup>107</sup>

It could also be that the euphemism applied to the child's genitals meaning either that the circumcision was completed or it refers to placing the bloodstain on the child since *WJ* was the same used for putting the blood of the paschal lamb on the doorposts (Exodus 12:22). In either case, the purpose is the same: to act as a protective sign.<sup>108</sup>

Yet another modern commentary asserts that Moses was indeed circumcised for otherwise it would be strange that God commissioned him as leader of the Hebrews.<sup>109</sup> While it is surprising that after "many days" his own son was not circumcised, it could have been because his mother was not a Hebrew.<sup>110</sup> This too would be surprising.

---

<sup>105</sup>Reis, 326.

<sup>106</sup>Reis, 328.

<sup>107</sup>Reis, 329.

<sup>108</sup>Sarna, *Exodus*, 26.

<sup>109</sup>Robinson, 456.

<sup>110</sup>Robinson, 457.

Since it appears to be Moses' life that is at risk, then, it is his feet or genitals, the argument goes, that Zipporah touches with her son's foreskin. This will spare Moses, who stands for Israel, because of the smearing of blood, as on the doorposts.<sup>111</sup> By circumcising her son, which is commonly a male role, Zipporah has taken the place of her father and therefore becomes Moses' "surrogate father-in-law" (1) shown through the force of □□□ -- a son-in-law by virtue of the pouring out of blood. When she circumcised her son, she symbolically re-circumcised Moses.<sup>112</sup>

The solution could also be that the presence of the son was an addition since child circumcision was a later custom. Therefore, the original material dealt with older adult circumcision and touching the feet was a circumcision effected symbolically.<sup>113</sup>

The few examples of touch discussed in this chapter attest to the fact that it was rare for ceremonies recorded in the Bible to include person-to-person touch. While this is not surprising given the paucity of examples of sexual, affectionate and aggressive touch already discussed, it is surprising in comparison to those recorded in other ancient Near Eastern sources. Ultimately the practices discussed in

---

<sup>111</sup>Ibid.

<sup>112</sup>Robinson, 458.

<sup>113</sup>Noth, *Exodus*, 50.

this chapter can neither be labeled as positive nor negative. The only scale on which they can be measured is on the basis of practicality and on that scale, they should be commended.

## Conclusion

Every word or phrase which signifies interpersonal touch in the Hebrew Bible was discussed in the previous pages. The most succinct yet telling way to present the research was to divide the words and phrases into the categories of Sexual, Affectionate, Aggressive and Deliberate Touch. Rarely did any of the words overlap into more than one category and when they did, it was because the word was ambiguous enough to allow for a range of definitions. On the other side, it was often the case that a word was used only once or twice in total which also led to ambiguity. One thing is clear, however: touch in general was portrayed in a negative manner. This was determined not only from the textual citations, but also from the frequent textual silence.

The fact that it was not only possible to create two distinct categories of sexual and affectionate touch, but helpful to do so, was the first hint that sexual touch was not portrayed in a positive manner; lovers did not caress each other. Many of the words used for sexual touch, in fact, were non-descriptive common-place words that could be used to describe any number of non-sexual routine events. The many euphemisms used -- from "knowing" someone to "washing feet" -- served to shield the reader from being exposed to the portrayal of the biblical characters as

willingly intimate while simultaneously putting sexual activity on a plane of the, quite literally, untouchable. Other terms described illicit or immoral sexual relations. The limited group of terms that did focus primarily on normal sexual activity were by no means romantic. Quite the opposite, they were often used within verbal clauses that described forced or immoral sexual activity. With few exceptions, either it was wrong to engage in sexual relations or the relations were hidden.

The category of affectionate touch garnered its own surprises in that it was much more common for two same-sex relatives to kiss than for a man and woman (whether related or not) to kiss. Most of these kisses occurred during greetings, reunions, farewells and reconciliations. While embraces occurred far less frequently than kisses, it was fairly common for them to be romantic. Many terms for affectionate touch were used only once or twice. When a term was used so infrequently, as pointed out earlier, it drew attention to itself. This was the case in terms of coddling a child and nestling close to a loved one -- actions which are assumed to have taken place frequently yet were not described. It was demonstrated that the families who were openly affectionate -- in particular those of Jacob, Moses and Ruth -- were the exception rather than the rule and thus portrayed affectionate touch as unique to a few.

Aggressive touch mostly involved hitting or struggling with someone. While the Bible never specifically reported anyone striking back in defense, it was often the case that two people of seemingly equal strength fought. Many of the words in this category occurred within verbal clauses as preludes to the principal action. Both the absence of striking back in defense as well as the ambiguity of words which meant both striking and fatally striking invite the idea that there was no need to differentiate; once a fight began, both sides were, for the most part, equally involved.

Deliberate touch, more than any other category, focused on specific body parts including the "thigh," (a euphemism for genitals), the knees and the bosom. There were oath ceremonies and hints at adoption ceremonies as well as mysterious events such as Jacob's wrestling match and Zipporah's act of circumcision. While it was difficult to classify these instances of deliberate touch as either positive or negative, the outcomes were generally positive: a wife was found so the generations could continue, a child was adopted or a child was resuscitated. The terms themselves, however, were basically neutral.

As a whole then, whether sexual, affectionate, aggressive or deliberate, touch in the Hebrew Bible was portrayed in a negative manner.

There were also many instances in which the reader may have yearned for the biblical characters to touch, yet the

text remained silent. When Abraham and Isaac left for the mountain, there should have been a hug from Sarah. After Jephthah realized that he would have to sacrifice his only daughter, it would have been expected for father and daughter to embrace. When Rachel and Jacob finally joined together, their passionate embraces and kisses would have redefined romance. For all of these examples, the text recorded only silence. And the silence, because it was so pervasive, not only seemed to be intentional but spoke inordinately loudly. The text, then, showed positive interpersonal touch to be of a private nature. It was more common to read of a fight or even a rape than a couple embracing or a pat on the back. Whether the text's silence was a true reflection of contemporary society or an effort to fill the limited space with more important events, touching does not fare well.

What, then, are the implications for Jewish law and custom? The silence and modesty of the text seem to extend into the lives of contemporary traditional Jews through such phenomena as arranged marriages and the building of mehitzas. While the lives of traditional Jews may appear to be extensions of the Hebrew Bible's selective silence, liberal Jews heave a sigh of relief when told that the Torah portion is about Jacob and Rachel; theirs is a kiss that spans the generations.

## Bibliography

- Andersen, Francis I., and David Noel Freedman. *Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1989. (Anchor)
- Andersen, Francis I., and David Noel Freedman. *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1980. (Anchor)
- Assyrian Dictionary*. vols. 2 and 8. Chicago: The Oriental Institute; Gluckstadt, Germany: J.J. Augustin Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1965.
- Blenkinsopp, Joseph. *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988. (Old Testament Library)
- Boling, Robert G. *Joshua: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1982. (Anchor)
- Bright, John. *Jeremiah*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1965. (Anchor)
- Brown, Francis, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Burney, C.F. *The Book of Judges with Introduction and Notes and Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Kings with an Introduction and Appendix*. New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1970.
- Campbell, Edward F. *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1975. (Anchor)
- Carroll, Robert P. *Jeremiah: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986. (Old Testament Library)
- Cassuto, U. *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*. Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1951.
- Chavel, Charles B., *Ramban Commentary on the Torah*. 5 vols. New York: Shilo Publishing House, 1971-1976.
- Cogan, Mordechai, and Hayim Tadmor. *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1988. (Anchor)

Cohen, A., ed. *The Twelve Prophets: Hebrew Text, English Translation and Commentary*. London: The Soncino Press, 1961.

"The Concept of Divine Parentage of the Ruler in the Stele of the Vultures." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 2, no. 2 (April 1943): 119-121.

Crenshaw, James L. *Ecclesiastes: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987. (Old Testament Library)

Dahood, Mitchell. *Psalms II 51-100 Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1968. (Anchor)

Dahood, Mitchell. *Psalms III 101-150 Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1970. (Anchor)

Eichrodt, Walther. *Ezekiel: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970. (Old Testament Library)

Even-Shoshan, Abraham, ed. *A New Concordance of the Bible*. Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer Publishing House, Ltd., 1989.

Gaster, Theodor H. *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament*. New York: Harper and Row, 1969.

Gordis, Robert. *The Song of Songs and Lamentations: A Study, Modern Translation and Commentary*. New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1908.

Gray, John. *I and II Kings: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970. (Old Testament Library)

Greenberg, Moshe. *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1983. (Anchor)

Gruber, Mayer I. *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East*. Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980.

Habel, Normal C. *The Book of Job: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985. (Old Testament Library)

Hillers, Delbert R. *Micah*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984. (Hermeneia)

Hoffner, Harry A. "Birth and Name-Giving in Hittite Texts." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 27, no. 3 (July 1968): 198-203.

- Kaiser, Otto. *Isaiah 1-12: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983. (Old Testament Library)
- Levine, Baruch A. *The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989.
- Maimonides, Moses. *The Guide to the Perplexed*. Translated by Shlomo Pines. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963
- Malul, Mair. "More on Pahad Yishaq (Genesis XXXI 42,53) and the Oath by the Thigh." *Vetus Testamentum* 35, no. 2 (1985): 192-200.
- Malul, Mair. "Touching the Sexual Organs as an Oath Ceremony in an Akkadian Letter." *Vetus Testamentum* 37, no. 4 (October 1987): 491-2.
- Mason, Rex. *The Books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- Mays, James Luther. *Amos: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969. (Old Testament Library)
- Mays, James Luther. *Hosea: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969. (Old Testament Library)
- Mays, James Luther. *Micah: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976. (Old Testament Library)
- McCarter Jr., P. Kyle. *I Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1980. (Anchor)
- McCarter Jr., P. Kyle. *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1984. (Anchor)
- McKane, William. *Proverbs: A New Approach*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970. (Old Testament Library)
- McKenzie, John L. *Second Isaiah: Introduction, Translation and Notes*. New York: Doubleday, 1968. (Anchor)
- Mendelsohn, I, "A Ugaritic Parallel to the Adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh." *Israel Exploration Journal* 9, no. 3 (1959): 180-183.
- Mikraot Gedolot*. 8 vols. Standard Version.
- Milgrom, Jacob. *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1991. (Anchor)

- Milgrom, Jacob. *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1990.
- Moore, Carey A. *Esther: Introduction, Translation and Notes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1971. (Anchor)
- Murphy, Roland E. *The Song of Songs*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990. (Hermeneia)
- Myers, Jacob M. *I Chronicles: Introduction, Translation and Notes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1965. (Anchor)
- Myers, Jacob M. *II Chronicles: Introduction, Translation and Notes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1965. (Anchor)
- Noth, Martin. *Exodus: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962. (Old Testament Library)
- Noth, Martin. *Leviticus: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977. (Old Testament Library)
- Noth, Martin. *Numbers: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968. (Old Testament Library)
- Oden, Robert A. "Jacob as Father, Husband, and Nephew: Kinship Studies and the Patriarchal Narratives." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102, no. 2 (1983): 189-205.
- Paul, Shalom M. *Amos*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991. (Hermeneia)
- Petersen, David L. *Haggai and Zecharia 1-8: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984. (Old Testament Library)
- Pritchard, James B., ed. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969.
- Reis, Pamela Tamarkin. "The Bridegroom of Blood: A New Reading." *Judaism* 159, vol. 40, no.3, (Summer 1991): 325-331.
- Robinson, Bernard P. "Zipporah to the Rescue: A Contextual Study of Exodus IV 24-6." *Vetus Testamentum* 36, no. 4 (1986): 447-461.
- Sarna, Nahum M. *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991.

- Sarna, Nahum M. *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989.
- Scott, R.B.Y. *Proverbs \* Ecclesiastes: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1965. (Anchor)
- Silbermann, A.M., trans., *Chumash with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Rashi's Commentary*. 5 vols. Jerusalem: The Silberman Family, 1934.
- Smith, S.B. "'Heel' and 'Thigh': The Concept of Sexuality in the Jacob-Esau Narratives." *Vetus Testamentum* 40, no. 4 (1990): 464-473.
- Speiser, E.A. *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1986. (Anchor)
- Soggin, J. Alberto. *Joshua: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972. (Old Testament Library)
- Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1988.
- Torat Hayyim: The Five Books of the Torah*. 7 vols. Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1986-1993.
- van der Toorn, Karel. "Female Prostitution in Payment of Vows in Ancient Israel." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108, no. 2 (1989): 193-205.
- Vermes, G. *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*. England: Penguin Books, 1987.
- von Rad, Gerhard. *Genesis: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961. (Old Testament Library)
- von Rad, Gerhard. *Deuteronomy: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966. (Old Testament Library)
- Weinfeld, Moshe. *Deuteronomy 1-11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1991. (Anchor)
- Wenham, G.J. "Why Does Sexual Intercourse Defile (Lev 15:18)?" *Zeitschrift fuer die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 95, no. 3 (1983): 432-434.
- Westermann, Claus. *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969. (Old Testament Library)

Wolff, Hans Walter. *Joel and Amos*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977. (Hermeneia)

Zimmerli, Walther. *Ezekiel 1*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979. (Hermeneia)