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Love Overcomes Fear and Brings Freedom: The Courage of the Female Characters in the Pentateuch[1]

Abstract: Using the method of integrated literary analysis, the article examines comparatively the narratives of Genesis and Exodus, which in different ways explicitly or implicitly express the emotions of the female characters in a situation of trial. It emphasises the relationship between their fear and their courage, which leads them to experience the freedom to choose the ethical values of compassion, mercy and love. From these perspectives, the following texts are highlighted: the narrative of the conflict between Sarah and Hagar (Gen 16 and 21); the narrative of Isaac's marriage to Rebekah (Gen 24) and of Jacob's marriage to Leah and Rachel (Gen 29-30); and the narrative of Pharaoh's daughter's compassion for the Hebrew child Moses (Exod 1:8-2:10). The article emphasises the motif of motherhood and shows that the sense of motherhood brings wives and mothers from different cultural and religious backgrounds closer together in caring for their children and thus for the future of the family and the tribal community. In identifying the motives that influence female characters' decisions in trial, the article highlights the role of their religious sense as well as other personal and family circumstances and the expectations of the wider community.

Keywords: fear and courage, motherhood, love and freedom, Sarah and Hagar, Leah and Rachel, Pharaoh's daughter

Miłość pokonuje strach i przynosi wolność: odwaga postaci kobiecych w Pięcioksięgu

Streszczenie: Wykorzystując metodę zintegrowanej analizy literackiej autorka artykułu analizuje porównawczo narracje z Księgi Rodzaju 1 i 2, które w sposób jawny lub ukryty wyrażają emocje bohaterek w sytuacji próby. Podkreśla związek między ich strachem a odwagą, która prowadzi je do doświadczenia wolności wyboru wartości etycznych, takich

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jak: współczucie, miłosierdzie i miłość. Z tej perspektywy wyróżniono następujące teksty: narrację o konflikcie między Sarą i Hagar (Rdz 16 i 21); narrację o małżeństwie Izaaka z Rebeką (Rdz 24) i małżeństwie Jakuba z Leą i Rachelą (Rdz 29-30); oraz narrację o współczuciu córki faraona dla hebrajskiego dziecka Mojżesza (Wj 1:8-2:10). Artykuł podkreśla motyw macierzyństwa i pokazuje, że poczucie macierzyństwa zbliża żony i matki z różnych środowisk kulturowych i religijnych w opiece nad swoimi dziećmi, a tym samym w trosce o przyszłość rodziny i społeczności plemiennej. Identyfikując motywy, które wpływają na decyzje bohaterek podczas procesu, autorka artykuł podkreśla rolę ich poczucia religijnego, a także innych okoliczności osobistych i rodzinnych oraz oczekiwań szerszej społeczności.

Słowa kluczowe: strach i odwaga, macierzyństwo, miłość i wolność, Sara i Hagar, Leah i Rachela, córka faraona

Introduction

Feelings and emotions play an important role in human life: joy and sadness, laughter and crying, love and aggression, contempt and compassion. If we are not attentive to the power of emotions and their role in human life, we cannot judge interpersonal relationships correctly. Yet the most comprehensive insight into the ways in which emotions are manifested, experienced and realised in the life of humans and society in ancient Israel is provided by the texts of the Old Testament. Although the Hebrew word for "emotion" does not exist, the many references to emotions in the Old Testament show that emotions played an important role in ancient Israel. The studies to date on emotions in the Old Testament show that their research focus has generally been historical. Using Old Testament texts and other written sources from the Ancient Near East, and to a lesser extent visual art, they have sought to clarify how the ancient Israelites felt and perceived emotions. (Keel 1977; Kipfer 2017) Few studies to date have focused on emotions in specific Old Testament texts, and the focus of research has been less on historical issues than on the message of the texts. Other studies broaden the focus. They address questions such as what role emotions play in relation to religion and conceptions of God, how emotions relate to one's self-concept, how they contribute to one's sense of identity, how they relate to aspects such as power and gender, and what role they play in one's relationship to others in or out of the group (for a more detailed overview of such studies, see Gruber 1995; Lyke 2019; Mirguet 2019). Since female biblical characters have been less often discussed than male characters, this article focuses on the ways in which emotions are portrayed in selected female characters in the Pentateuch, specifically in Genesis and Exodus.[2]

[2] On some aspects of the treatment of values and emotions in the Old Testament, see Avsenik Nabergoj 2020; 2021a; 2021b; 2022 et al.

1. Increased Research Interest in Women in the Bible

The study of ancient Near Eastern civilisations has recently been influenced by interest in women's history. This is due, among other things, to the realisation that women have been largely written out of the history of Western civilisation; to efforts to restore women to their rightful place in human history; and to the belief that we cannot understand our past if we exclude the experiences, perspectives and influence of half the population (Caroll, ed., 1976). To explore the feelings and values of the female characters in the Bible, it is also necessary to know the position and role of women in antiquity in Israel and Judea and the surrounding lands, who play an important role in the Bible, both those from the world of ancient Israel (the Old Testament) and those from the world of the Apocrypha and the New Testament.

Another important factor in the increased scholarly attention to women in the Bible is the growing tendency to treat the biblical narratives as literature and not merely as material for reconstructing the history of ancient Israel (Alter/Kermode, eds., 1987; Norton 2000; Avsenik Nabergoj 2021c, and others). When biblical narrative or poetry is taken seriously as literature, the treatment of the characters in their feelings, values, and attitudes, both masculine as well as feminine, cannot be neglected.

While in biblical studies it has long been assumed that neither emotions nor female characters in the Bible are worthy of special study, the bibliography on emotions in the Old Testament and on women and femininity in the biblical world shows that this is an important field that has already occupied the minds of eminent scholars in the fields of archaeology, literature, philology, history and theology (Gruber 1995 et al.).

A survey of female characters in the Bible shows that women played a very important role in the world of ancient Israel. We find them in a wide variety of social roles, from prophetesses to prostitutes, musicians and dancers, widows and nursemaids, rulers and slaves, and so on. Some women in the Bible have names, others appear without names. They play a very important role in the family, which is the nucleus of any society, because it is there that the immediate changes in society begin. Not only those women in the Hebrew Bible, in the Deuterocanonical books of the Old Testament and in the New Testament who are known by name, but also those who are not named, are important.

The field of research on the emotions of female characters and their position in the Old Testament contains many different aspects related to the status and role of women in the family, in the state of war, in the state of infidelity; their place in parables, allegories and personifications; their role in typological relations to the interpretation of the Old Testament in the New Testament and in Christian theology. When studying the emotions of female characters, special attention should be paid to questions about man that are the domain of biblical anthropology. Among the important questions are: What does the Old Testament say about the relationship between man and woman? How is this relationship ordered externally, and what is the inner strength of the emotions in this relationship? In this connection, special

attention should be paid to the main features of the law of marriage, the role of the love relationship in ancient Israel and the disorders of the love relationship, and the role of the woman in the family and in the upbringing of children. We are interested in whether the basic criterion for judging the vices and virtues exhibited by Old Testament characters is the same for men and women. Which weaknesses and which virtues predominate in the depictions of female characters and which in the depictions of male characters in different life situations? The research on emotions is based on texts that express, in words or between the lines, the emotional states of female subjects in family, social and other relationships ranging from the ardour of love to distress, fear, sadness and despair.

2. Depiction of Female Characters in Genesis and Exodus

In the Bible, only man and woman together represent the whole person, so love is essentially marked by a longing for one another. In Gen 2:18, which describes man in paradise, we have the words of the Lord: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." The institution of marriage between husband and wife is based on this ontological arrangement of God and on the covenant that God made with Israel.[3]

The importance of emotions for the ancient Israelites is shown, for example, by the fact that we find descriptions of attitudes towards women even in Old Testament legal texts, and that particular emotional events even gave rise to certain customs, regulations, and extensive reflections. One such example is the injunction "The Law concerning Slaves" (Exod 21:1-11), in which we learn that the Israelites were allowed to sell their daughters as slaves. In Exod 21:7-11 we read:

> When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. If she does not please her master, who designated her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed; he shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has dealt unfairly with her. If he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her as with a daughter. If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish the food, clothing, or marital rights of the first wife. And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out without debt, without payment of money.

We can only feel a certain amount of emotion on the part of the writers of the regulations, but we cannot find a word that reveals how the daughters feel in their helplessness.

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[3] Andrej Saje highlights this basis in his article "Marriage in Traditional Judaism" (2021).

2.1. Presentation of Sarah and Hagar in Genesis 16 in 21

There is also evidence of concubines in several texts from the patriarchal period, e.g. in Gen 25:6; 16:1sl. and 30:3. Gen 16:1-16 tells of Hagar, the Egyptian concubine of Abram's wife Sarai, who bore Abram a son, Ishmael, at Sarai's suggestion. In Gen 16:1-4 we read:

> Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian slave-girl whose name was Hagar, and Sarai said to Abram, "You see that the Lord has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my slave-girl; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave-girl, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife. He went in to Hagar, and she conceived.

However, Hagar, knowing that she had conceived a child while her mistress could not, felt superior to her and began to despise Sarai:

> And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. Then Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my slave-girl to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me!" But Abram said to Sarai, "Your slave-girl is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she ran away from her. (Gen 16:4-6).

The patriarchal stories in Genesis repeatedly emphasise that a foreign wife is inferior and less desirable than a woman from her husband's clan or ethno-national group. Ishmael is inferior because he was born to a woman of foreign birth and low status.

The story of Abram's family in Gen 16 is complemented in Gen 21:1-21 by the account of God's miraculous intervention, which does not resolve the conflict between Hagar and Sarah, but deepens it. In this story, Abram already has the longer form, "Abraham," and Sarai the shorter form, "Sarah." The narrative of Genesis 18:1-15 recounts how the Lord appeared to Abraham and gave him an unexpected promise: "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son." (Gen 18:10) This promise foreshadowed a miracle, because Abraham and Sarah were already years old and Sarah could no longer cherish the hope of a child. The story in Gen 21:1-21 relates this prediction of a miracle:

> The Lord dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. (Gen 21,1-5)

Abraham's age at the birth of his first son Ishmael (86 years) and his second son Isaac (100 years) shows that Ishmael was 14 years old at the time of Isaac's birth. However, when Sarah had her biological son Isaac, her negative feelings towards Ishmael flared up, causing intense family conflict. The conflict escalates to the point that Sarah, with Abraham's consent, banishes Hagar into the wilderness with her son Ishmael (Gen 21:9-14).

When Hagar was "wandering in the wilderness of Beersheba" with the boy on her shoulders and the water from the bellows ran dry, she wept bitterly because it seemed that she was about to witness the death of her son Ishmael from hunger and thirst. Then the Lord again intervenes unexpectedly in an impasse of the human story:

> And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angle of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him." Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink. (Gen 21,17-19).

2.2. Isaac Marries Rebekah (Gen 24)

A particular challenge in the study of emotions is that the Old Testament has no word for the institution of marriage. The man and the wife normally find their place in the family community in order to ensure the continuation of the "father's house". The woman normally enters the man's family community (e.g., Gen 24:5-8, 58ff.) and legally the man is the "owner" of his wife (Exod 21:3, 22; Deut 24:4; 2 Sam 11:26), and the wife is considered her husband's "property" (Gen 20:3; Deut 22:22). Since marriage is often decided by the father, love often develops only after marriage.

An example of this is found in the family story of Isaac in his mutual relationship with Rebekah, whom he met in the city of Abraham's brother Nahor (Gen 24:1-66). In the narrative of Gen 24:1-9 we learn how Abraham instructed the eldest servant of his house to go to his land, to his kinsfolk, and there obtain a wife for his son Isaac. From the conversation between the servant and Abraham, we clearly discover that it is the woman who is to join the man' Ins family community, not the other way around. In Gen 24:5-8 we read:

> The servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land; must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?" Abraham said o it that you do not take my son back there. The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and who swore to me, saying, 'To your offspring I will give this land,' he will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there."

The text then recounts the servant's journey to Mesopotamia to the city of Nahor. On the way, he stopped outside the city to rest his camels. God instructs him to choose Isaac's future wife from among the women who will go to draw water from the well in the evening. He is to choose the one who, according to God's order, will give him and his camels water from the well to drink.

The story tells how Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel and Milcah, the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor, approached the servant with a pitcher on her shoulder. She was very beautiful and a virgin. She filled a pitcher at the well and gave the servant and his camels something to drink. She also kindly helped the servant to find a place to stay. Rebekah's brother Laban and her father Bethuel recognised that the servant had been sent by the Lord and agreed to take Rebekah with him to become his master's wife. The text in Gen 24:58-67 indicates that Rebekah willingly went with the servant and became Isaac's wife:

> And they called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" She said, "I will." So they sent away their sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham's servant and his men. And they blessed Rebekah and said to her:
>
> "May you, our sister, become
> thousands of myriads;
> may your offspring gain possession
> of the gates of their foes."
>
> Then Rebekah and her maids rose up, mounted the camels, and followed the man; thus the servant took Rebekah, and went his way.
>
> Now Isaac had come from Beer-lahairoi, and was settled in the Negeb. Isaac went out in the evening to walk in the field; and looking up, he saw camels coming. And Rebekah looked up, and when she saw Isaac, she slipped quickly from the camel, and said to the servant, "Who is the man over there, walking in the field to meet us?" The servant said, It is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent. He took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

The text does not say a word about Rebekah's feelings. The text presupposes her knowledge that God is calling her to be Isaac's wife. We are told only that Rebekah and her maidservants got up, mounted their camels, and followed Isaac's servant. A little more emotion is hidden in the words of Rebekah's brother Laban and her mother, who try to delay Rebekah's departure, at least for a while: "Her brother and her mother said, 'Let the girl remain with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go'." (Gen 24:55) When Rebekah meets Isaac, she takes off her veil and covers herself. While there is no word about her feelings, it is clear that both Rebekah and her household believe that God's command is to be fulfilled. This is clearly seen in Laban's and Bethuel's response to the servant's explanation of the purpose of his coming: "The thing comes from the Lord; we cannot speak to you

anything bad or good. Look, Rebekah is before you, take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has spoken." (Gen 24:50-51)

Rebecca's strong faith in God and her conviction that He is guiding her life according to His mysterious plan gave her the courage to make the immediate free decision to become Isaac's wife.

2.3. Jacob Marries Sisters Leah and Rachel (Gen 2930)

The Old Testament narratives, which represent historical events, are not lacking in descriptions of passionate love and the differences in love's ardour. For example, we learn that Jacob loved Rachel much more than Leah (Gen 29:16-18, 20).

The passage in Gen 29 tells of Jacob's encounter with Rachel. As he was going into the land of the children of the east, he saw a well in a field by which three herds of small cattle were resting. He approached the shepherds of Haran and asked them if they knew Laban, the son of Nahor. While he was still talking to them, Rachel the shepherdess came with her father's sheep. When Jacob saw her, he went over and rolled away the stone from the opening of the well and watered her shepherdess. Then he kissed her and cried aloud. He told Rachel that he was a relative of her father and Rebekah's son. Rachel ran to tell her father Laban and he ran to meet Jacob, hugged and kissed him and took him to his house. Jacob stayed with him for a month. In Gen 29:15-21, we learn how Jacob's marriage took place:

> Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, shoud you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" Now Laban had two daughters; the name of elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Lea's eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." So Jacob served years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her. Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed."

Jacob served Rachel for seven years, but because he loved her, they seemed like a few days to him. But just when Jacob thought he had earned Rachel, he got his elder daughter Leah from Laban, and had to serve for Rachel for another seven years. Laban explained his modified decision by saying: "This is not done in our country – giving the younger before the firstborn." (Gen 29:26) Jacob was annoyed that Laban had deceived him, but finally accepted his decision. Because he loved Rachel so much, he was willing to serve her father Laban for another seven years. After this period Laban finally gave him his daughter Rachel, as he had promised.

Between the lines of the text, we learn that Leah felt neglected because Jacob loved her younger sister more. God saw her pain so he made it possible for Leah to have children, but

Rachel remained barren. Klaus Westermann notes that the patriarchal stories of Gen 29:1-30 for the first time

> "work in the context of service appears; it is work willingly and joyfully undertaken for a loved one. […] [S]ocial and economic interests in the person of Laban lead to a crude intervention in the love between two people. When Jacob arrived he inquired about the "peace" (well-being) of Laban and his household; but Laban by his deceit himself threatens in the most extreme way this peace and the well-being for the community. Unavoidable conflicts in the social, economic, and personal areas lie along the way from patriarchs to people; one will prevail at the expense of the other. "Blessing" and "peace" will undergo profound changes in the process; Jacob must endure what has happened to him. Suffering is part of the way. (Westermann 1984, vol. 2, 468)

A passage from Genesis 30 sheds light on the importance of offspring and the ways in which wives gave children to their husbands when they themselves were barren. Among other things, it tells of the feelings Rachel felt when she realised that she would not be able to bear children for her husband Jacob. In the passage we learn that she was jealous of her sister Leah. She begged Jacob to give her children or she would die. But Jacob was angry with her and said to her, "Am I in the place of God, who has denied you the fruit of the womb?" (Gen 30:2) Rachel then suggested to Jacob that her servant Bilhah bear them children instead of her. The text tells us that Bilhah bore Jacob two sons in succession; Rachel named them Dan and Naphtali:

> Then she said "Here is my maid Bilhah; go in to her, that she may bear upon my knees and that I too may have children through her." So she gave him her maid Bilhah as a wife; ad Jacob went in to her. And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. Then Rachel said, "God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son"; therefore she named him Dan. Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. Then Rachel said, "With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and have prevailed"; so she named him Naphtali. (Gen 30:3-8)

But when Rachel's sister Leah realised that she would not bear any more children after having four, she took her maid Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. Zilpah also bore Jacob two sons in succession, and Leah named them Gad and Asher.

The text goes on to show that the sisters Leah and Rachel competed with each other to see who would be more loved by their common husband Jacob. When Rachel asked Leah to give her some of the mandrakes that Leah's son Reuben had found in the field during the wheat harvest, Leah flatly refused: "Is it small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take my son's mandrakes also?" (Gen 30:15) Rachel's reaction to her sister's annoyance was surprising – she offered Lea to spend the night with Jacob in exchange for the mandrakes, saying, "Then he may lie with you tonight for your son's mandrakes." (Gen 30:15)

When Jacob was returning from the field in the evening, Leah came to him and told him to go to her, because she had paid for him with her son's mandrakes. And when Jacob lay with Leah that night, God heard her; and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. She experienced the birth of her son Issachar as God's reward for having given her handmaid to her husband. Then she conceived again and gave birth to a sixth son, named Zebulun, to Jacob, and then she gave him a daughter named Dinah. The text goes on to say that God then helped Rachel, who was depressed because of her infertility:

> Then God remembered Rachel, and God heeded her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son, and said, "God has taken away my reproach"; and she named him Joseph, saying, "May the Lord add to me another son!" (Gen 30:22-24)

At the birth of Joseph, Rachel felt gratitude to God; she felt that God had "taken away her shame" (v. 24).

In the passage Deut 21:15-17, it is clear that a man who had two wives could love them to different degrees. Nevertheless, in the division of property, he was not to favour the children of the more beloved wife, but was to act "justly" and always give the preeminence to his firstborn, even if he was the son of the less loved wife. What is more, he had to give him a double portion. In Deut 21:15-17 the ordinance about the right of the firstborn reads:

> If a man has two wives, one of them loved and the other disliked, and if both the loved and the disliked have borne him sons, the firstborn being the son of the one who is disliked, then on the day when he wills his possessions to his sons, he is not permitted to treat the son of the loved as the firstborn in preference to the son of the disliked, who is the firstborn. He must acknowledge as firstborn the son of the one who is disliked, giving him a double portion of all that he has; since he is the first issue of his virility, the right of the firstborn is his.

Although not explicitly stated in the texts, the ripples of emotion between two wives of the same husband, and the depictions of their relationship to their husbands, suggest that each of the wives longed for the security that a strictly monogamous marriage would have provided. Rachel Brenner-Idan notes about feelings and emotions of Leah and Rachel:

> One gets the impression that even Jacob's love is sought after not for its own sake, but as a means for begetting more male heirs. Within the imagined world of these imaginary women, it is possible to achieve personal security only through an abundance of sons. Love is secondary to a personal need which goes far and beyond a 'natural' maternal urge, and which is never wholly fulfilled. Thus, despite the fact that they are sisters, they cannot develop any kind of mutual intimacy, and their whole being is wrapped up in the conflict. The interests of the family, which is the basic unit for communal and individual survival, do not enter into the picture. (Brenner-Idan 2015, 94)

From the action of Rachel, who at one point voluntarily gave up physical relations with her husband in favour of her sister Leah, we can discover that, despite the competition for Jacob's affection, she and her sister were also bound together by sisterly love. She received the reward for her selfless conduct when God finally favoured her with a son, Joseph, and then with Benjamin. At the same time, despite having fewer offspring, Rahela remained the wife Jacob loved most (Gen 29:16-18, 20).

Some Old Testament female characters openly express their distress (e.g. Samuel's mother Hannah in 1 Sam 1, etc.), but the narratives are silent about the distress of others. The suffering of female characters is often linked to the fear that they will not be able to produce offspring. This fear provokes in them negative feelings of sadness, despair, envy and competition with women who are fertile, whether they are their servants or even sisters of the same blood. They feel inferior to them until their negative feelings are gradually overcome by the hope that, according to God's promise, their sad fate will be reversed and God will grant them the gift of motherhood in their later years. Brenner Idan notes that the same pattern emerges in all the female characters who represent the mothers of the great men-heroes:

> The female pairs (Sarah and Hagar; Lot's daughters) and double pairs (Leah and Rachel and the respective maidservants) are described, in each case, as mothers or hopeful mothers-to-be. Despite differences in personality, circumstances, and setting they all conform to one literary type. In fact, they all belong to the 'Matriarch' or 'Hero's Mother' type that is an integral part of every narrative which belongs to the 'Birth of the Hero' paradigm. /…/ The mother-to-be is barren until a relatively advanced age (Sarah, Rachel; also Rebecca, Genesis 25; Samson's mother, Judges 13; Samuel's mother, 1 Samuel 1; and others). She usually receives an ironic divine promise to assure her of an imminent change in her sad plight (Sarah, Hagar, Rebecca, Samson's mother, Samuel's mother). She competes with and is humiliated by a maidservant, sister, or co-wife (Sarah, Jacob's wives, Samuel's mother) who is usually inferior to the heroine from the aspect of social status or the husband's affection, or both. The competition is so strong that both woman figures involved cannot control it, to the point that all other values, including the welfare of the family unit, are overshadowed by it. They continue to quarrel and bicker until they conceive. They are unable to experience personal security, even though they might enjoy an elevated position within the family, unless they do. They cannot cooperate with one another unless an external danger has to be faced. (Brenner-Idan 2015, 95).

It should be noted, however, that analyses of texts in which root *'hb* occurs (Ackerman 2002; Lapsley 2003; van Wolde 2008; Arnold 2011; Avsenik Nabergoj 2021a-c) shows, that love in the Old Testament includes an affective as well as a political or hierarchical dimension.

2.4. Compassion of Midwives and the Pharaoh's Daughter in Exodus 1:82:10

In an article entitled "Human and Divine Authority and Human Emotions in Hebrew Narrative and Greek Tragedy" (2022a) the author points out the important message of the actions of the two Egyptian midwives Shiphrah and Puah and of Pharaoh's daughter. All three act in accordance with their innate compassion for the weak, their maternal sense for their children and their strong sense of morality. The midwives Shiphrah and Puah "feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live" (Exod 1:17). Their fear of God in this passage can be understood as love for God overcoming the fear of possible punishment from unjust human authority.

The response of Pharaoh's daughter to the violence of her father Pharaoh, who ordered all newborn male children of Israel to be killed so that the people of the children of Israel would not multiply too much and endanger him, is particularly striking. As the text reports, Pharaoh's daughter saw a papyrus basket containing a three-month-old baby while bathing in the Nile. She sent her maid to fetch it, and when Pharaoh's daughter opened the basket, she saw a crying baby boy inside. "She took pity on him" (Exod 2:6) and assumed he was a Hebrew child.

Despite her father's orders to the contrary, she immediately accepted the suggestion of the child's sister to call a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby for her. The girl rushed and called the child's mother, who took the child and nursed him. It seems that the reward for the severe suffering of the boy's mother, who had trembled for the child's life, hidden him for three months and done everything to ensure his survival, was that she was finally able to breastfeed him. At the same time, we cannot overlook the great role played by Moses' little sister; in her action we feel her great love for her little helpless brother and for her desperate mother, and her maturity and resourcefulness in finding the best solution for their family. The text says:

> Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water." (Exod 2,7-10)

The text reveals the goodness of Pharaoh's daughter, who ignored her father's murderous command and took care of a Hebrew child. Her moral superiority over her father is emphasised in the narrative by her free decision to allow the little Hebrew child to be nursed by a Hebrew woman, whom she may even know to be the child's real mother.

Athalya Brenner-Idan notes that in the story of Moses' birth, men are almost absent.[4] The real heroines are the three anonymous women who care for Moses: his biological mother, his sister, who watches over him and later provides his food, and his adoptive mother, Pharaoh's daughter. She argues:

> Why did the storyteller deviate from the conventional model suitable for the description of the 'Hero's Birth'? It is as if the author wanted to convey to us that the danger to the male heir and future hero, who is the pivotal centre of the tale, is so great that two mother figures cannot overcome it without additional support. Two mothers are not enough, and therefore three figures have to pool all their resources in order to succeed. The greater the danger for the infant, the greater the miracle of salvation; and both danger and salvation indicate that the destiny of the child on whom all this care and effort are bestowed will be extraordinary indeed. Thus, a 'matriarchal' theme is expanded so as to draw our attention to the idea that this new hero, Moses, whose birth legend we have just read, will be an even more significant person than previous heroes (Genesis). In other words, the change made in the structural pattern of the story serves a purpose: it points to the future eminence of the newborn male son. (Benner-Idan 2015, 99-100)

Unlike in cases of polygamy, in which two wives, sometimes even half-sisters, jealously compete for their husbands' championship, in this case all the female persons seem to feel a common bond in maternal emotion, whether they themselves bore the child or whether it is the child of another, even a stranger's wife.

Conclusion

In selected stories of female characters in Genesis and Exodus, we can repeatedly discover their experience of the fear associated with their motherhood. Some women fear that God will not favour them with offspring; they fear that this will cause them to lose their husband's favour and be overshadowed by another woman. Because they do not lose confidence in God, despite their feelings of deprivation due to their supposed infertility, God grants their petitions and prayers and, after a long period of anxiety related to their experience of shame, favours them with offspring.

Conceiving a child late in life is experienced by these women as a gift from God. Their fear is transformed into a mixture of positive emotions: gratitude to God, fulfilment,

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[4] Moses father does not appear by name in this passage, but is elsewhere identified as Amram. Moses' legal adoptive father, Pharaoh, in whose palace Moses grows up, remains in the background. Even Moses himself, around whom all the action revolves, is a helpless infant who takes no active part in the action. Cf. Brenner-Idan 2015, 98.

contentment and increased self-reliance in relation to their husbands. They realise that they have made it possible to continue the lineage, and thus have gained a stronger status in the immediate and wider society. They often want more children, and God most often hears their pleas.

In the selected narratives of Genesis and Exodus, the role of Old Testament women is limited primarily to the family. As long as they feel that they will not be able to have children, they feel weak, vulnerable and inferior. They compete with women who are fertile, sometimes behave immorally towards them, and try to maintain their status in the family and in society by providing surrogate mothers of inferior descent who will give their husbands a child and thus ensure the continuity of the line. These Old Testament women seem to be well aware that the continuity of society is one of the highest values in the Old Testament. In their efforts to provide offspring for the family, they want to fulfil the task expected of them in the best possible way.

The portraits of women in the selected Old Testament stories seem to be similar in many respects and represent models that recur in literary fiction. Often the female type is similar in terms of the nature of her personality, but also in terms of the sequence of her actions.

Several of the narratives from Genesis and Exodus are characterized by the contrast between the heroine and her opposite (Sarah and Hagar, Leah and Rachel, etc.). We also find that the husband has either two wives, or one or two wives and, in addition, one or two concubines. This creates a strong and varied emotional dynamic in the relationships between the female characters and in their relationship with their husbands, undermining their sense of security and reinforcing their feelings of insecurity and fear. They find true peace in the fear of God, which stimulates in them good, noble actions, a greater sense of courage and with it a freedom that is not dependent on external actions, but that they intuitively feel within themselves.

A comprehensive analysis of the texts with the selected female characters gives a clearer insight into the specific Hebrew anthropological, cultural and religious basis of the interpersonal relationships between the female and male characters. This leads us to the expression of the personal Hebrew basis of the expression of emotions and values. The texts reflect in different ways the personal perception of God's being in its oneness, unity, absoluteness, holiness and providence.

The important question becomes how the biblical writers use linguistic and literary means to express the manifestation of God's hidden plan and power as portrayed in various stories, most emotionally in family stories. The greater attention to literary forms of depicting female characters points to the biblical characteristic of portraying spiritual power in the weakness of female characters as mothers. Most women sooner or later show the strength of maternal emotion and the ability to overcome the most difficult trials to save their children.

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