The Children in Egypt and the Theophany at the Sea

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MODERN JEWISH THINKING ABOUT GOD HAS LONG suffered from a striking lack of poetic and symbolic imagination Rooted in the world of German post-Idealism, our theologians chose to write in the language of abstraction, and thus produced little which reached into the depths of man's religious consciousness, a consciousness which is more easily aroused (if all the studies on pre-modern religion are to be believed) by myth and symbol than by the antiseptic niceties of philosophical theology

When modern Jewish scholars and theologians did turn to models from the Jewish past, it was most frequently in Maimonides that they found what they had sought Here was an intellectual elitist in their own image, towering far above all the vulgarisms of popular piety, and committed to an idea of God which, for abstraction, could easily vie with their own If one views the amount of attention to Maimonides and the entire Medieval school that was given by late nineteenth and early twentieth century Jewish scholarship, as reflected in writing as well as in curricula of Jewish studies at seminaries and universities, it becomes clear that the great model of Jewish thought for those generations was the Medieval philosophical sage, one who spent much of his life in explaining away those very metaphors and symbols for the divine which earlier men of piety, the Biblical and particularly the Aggadic authors, had created

The existentialist trend in modern Jewish theology has offered but a partial solution to the problem True, Buber's rediscovery of Hasidism and Rosenzweig's turn to Halevi both represented a search for alternative spiritual ancestors of a more poetic variety Nevertheless, the language in which these and others who followed them chose to express their own thoughts continued to be one of abstraction, concreteness and unabashed anthropomorphism in religious writing were still the domain of poets, not of theologians One need only to contrast the Yiddish poetry of such figures as A J Heschel and Aaron Zeitlin with the theological writings of their Germanophone and Anglophone contemporaries to perceive the ongoing bifurcation of religious language and religious thought in the modern Jewish consciousness

The great task of Jewish theology today is the recovery of an authentic Jewish religious language The dramatic and frightening events

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of recent Jewish history have lent to the theological enterprise a new and desperate seriousness, revealing a depth of longing which can no longer be sated by the language of abstraction Our search for authentic religious voices draws us to the writings of Isaac Bashevis Singer and Elie Wiesel, only there do we find a spiritual texture sufficiently rich to encompass our grief and anger, while finding some room (at least in Wiesel) for the exultation of personal and national rebirth The turn of such a figure as Emil Fackenheim to the search for a new Midrash, and perhaps, above all, the work of Gershom Scholem and his followers in making available to us the great wellsprings of Jewish mystical literature, are guideposts toward the old/new avenues which Jewish religious thought must explore in our age

It is in this spirit that the present literary/historical study is offered It is hoped that the rediscovery of this and other long-neglected aspects of Jewish religious language will serve to enrich the discussion of theological matters in contemporary Jewish circles The new Midrash, while taking its own directions, will become an authentic Jewish voice only insofar as it is nurtured by the old As is the way of Midrash, the reader is left to draw his own conclusions from the complex of images here presented

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Classical Jewish literature may be said to be marked by two opposing tendencies with regard to the question of physical anthropomorphism Well-known is that strain, running through certain Rabbinic texts,[1] the Targumim, and culminating in the classics of medieval Jewish philosophy, which seeks to deny the attribution of any bodily characteristics to the Creator or, at the very least, to deny the possibility that human beings may "see" any physical representation of God during their lifetimes Beginning with Alexandria,[2] much of Jewish theology has accepted as an essential part of its task the re-reading of seemingly anthropomorphic passages in the Bible, and, by means of various literary devices or quasi-philosophical machinations, to explain away those claims which seem to run counter to the assumption that God is not possessed of a body and cannot be seen by the human eye [3]

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1 Cf, for example, *Yevamot* 49b, where Isaiah is said to have been sentenced to death for having claimed that he saw God, and *Sifrei* Numbers 103 (ed Friedmann 27b), where it is made clear that Moses himself attained no more than a "vision of the Word" (*mar'eh dibbur*)

2 Rabbinic and Hellenistic sources are quoted in Wolfson's *Philo* (Cambridge, 1947), v 1, p 116 and v 2 p 97f and p 127ff Wolfson claims that Palestinian Judaism contained within it a native discomfort with anthropomorphism, which is not necessarily to be traced to Hellenistic influences through Philo

3 Of course, from a rigorous philosophical point of view, these are two separate problems It is perfectly conceivable that God is, indeed, possessed of bodily attri-

Surely less well-known is the opposing strain, one that is nonetheless equally representative of a major portion of Jewish literature: a tradition of acceptance of anthropomorphism, and even of radical anthropomorphization far beyond the rather restrained claims of the Hebrew Bible. This current may also be found in Midrashic literature, particularly in those passages which involve interpretation of the Song of Songs, and is traceable through the long-respected literature of *Shi'ur Qomah*,[4] which discusses the dimensions of the mystical body of God, the *Idrot* of the Zohar,[5] which deal in detail with such matters as the difference between the hairs of God's head and those of His beard, and the vast literature of Lurianic Kabbalah, which describes the various states of conjugal union of the male and female aspects of the Deity in strikingly unabashed detail.

Until rather recent times, it was still commonplace to present the former of these two tendencies as that of "normative" Rabbinic Judaism, while the latter was seen as a rather minor aberration of the mystics, surely not rooted in authentic Jewish sources and ways of thinking.[6] The direction of Jewish scholarship in the past few decades, however, has been one which expands the canon of the normative, often to the point where esoteric and exoteric doctrines are used to shed light upon one another.

The examination of a particularly rich complex of legends surrounding the suffering of Israel in Egypt and the crossing of the Sea of Reeds may serve to demonstrate anew the presence of this latter stream within the sources of Rabbinic literature and, indeed, may shed light on certain major theological motifs in Rabbinic Judaism.

We read in *Exodus Rabbah* 23:8, commenting on the Song of Moses:

> Rabbi Judah says: "Who spoke the praise of God? The children whom Pharaoh had sought to cast into the Nile—they are the ones who recognized God. How is this? When Israel were in Egypt and an Israelite woman felt that she was about to give birth, she would go out to the fields and have her children there. After she had given birth, she would

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butes, but that these cannot be perceived by living humans. In the classical discussions, however, the two issues are generally intertwined.

4 Lieberman, in "Appendix D," pp. 118–126 (G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition* [New York, 1960]) has shown that the traditions of Shi'ur Qomah are related to ancient Midrashic understandings of the Song of Songs. Many of the sources discussed in this article have been collected and commented upon by Lieberman, though toward a somewhat different purpose.

5 These sections are not included in the five volumes of the Soncino translation of the Zohar, but their publication in English has now been announced by Roy A. Rosenberg under the title *The Anatomy of God* (New York: Ktav, 1973). I have not yet seen this volume.

6 Discussions of the problem of anthropomorphism in Rabbinic Judaism are to be found in Marmorstein, *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God*, v. 2 (London, 1937), Kadushin, *The Rabbinic Mind* (New York, 1952), Chapter VII, Urbach, *HaZal* (Jerusalem, 1969), pp. 30–35 and 75f, 131f.

> leave the infant there, saying to God 'Lord of the World! I have done mine, now You do yours!' "
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> Rabbi Yohanan said "God Himself[7] would immediately come down to cut the umbilical cord and to wash and anoint the infant He would place two stones in the child's hand From one he could suckle oil, and from the other honey and so the children would grow up in the fields When they were asked 'Who took care of you?,' they replied 'A certain beautiful and praiseworthy young man came down and took care of all our needs,' as is written 'My beloved is fair and ruddy, a paragon among ten thousands' " (Cant 5 10)
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> When Israel reached the Sea, those same children were among them They saw God at the Sea, and said to their parents "This is the one who did all those things for us when we were in Egypt!" Thus, Scripture says "*This* is my God and I will glorify Him!" (Ex 15 2)

The same legend appears in various forms in a number of Rabbinic sources The relevant passages have been cited by Ginzberg[8] and Lieberman[9] It is interesting to note that a number of these versions sought to tell the tale in a theologically more guarded manner It was the angels, rather than God Himself, who cared for the Israelite children The price of such theological propriety was, however, the total obfuscation of the point of the legend If the children had not seen God Himself in their infancy, but only an angel, how would they have been able to recognize the Lord when they saw Him at the Sea? Thus, Rabbi Yohanan's account, quoted elsewhere[10] in the name of Rabbi Hiyya, must be an original part of the tale The children saw God Himself in Egypt, and it was in that same form, as the comely young man, described in the Song of Songs, that He appeared at the Sea

Further examination of the versions of our legend will show that they abound, sometimes gratuitously, in allusions to verses from the Song of Songs Thus, we find in Exodus Rabbah 1 12 that the Israelite women gave birth beneath apple trees in the fields, fulfilling the verse "Beneath the apple-trees I roused you" (Cant 8 5)[11] Another version has the mothers in Egypt asking their children, as they entered their parents' homes "Tell me, my beloved, how did you feed? How did you lie down at midday?" (Cant 1 7)[12] "The flocks of your companions" in the same verse is also viewed as a reference to the children, who came back to their homes like flocks returning from pasture

The most complete version of this tale appears in a variant text of

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7 Lit "in His glory" (*bi-khevodo*), but generally used to indicate God's own presence

8 *Legends of the Jews,* v 5, p 394, n 25

9 Lieberman, *Op cit*, p 120f

10 See below, n 13 In the version of this legend that is preserved in *Targum Jonathan* to Exodus 15 2, the angels have become quite superfluous

11 The verse is also used in this context in B *Sotah* 11b

12 *Midrash Shir ha-Shirim* (ed Grunhut), p 10

Deuteronomy Rabbah[13] It has a richness of detail lacking in the other sources, which makes it worthy of being quoted in its entirety·

> "The Lord your God has caused you to multiply (Deut 1 10) " When did God cause you to multiply? In Egypt, as Scripture says "I caused you to multiply like plants of the field (Ezek 16 7) " How did this happen? When Pharoah decreed that every male child be cast into the Nile, an Israelite woman would go out into the fields when she felt herself ready to give birth After her child was born, she would turn her eyes heavenward and say "I have done mine, as You have said 'Be fruitful and multiply' (Gen 1 28)[14] Now You do Yours!"
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> What would the Egyptians do when they saw the Israelite women going out to the fields to give birth? They would keep watch from some distance, but as soon as the woman got up to return to town, they would take rocks in their hands to kill the infant As the Egyptians approached, however, the child would be swallowed up by the field When the attackers moved away again, the child would reappear, but each time they approached, he would again be swallowed up by the field This went on until the Egyptians tired of it and went away
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> How did those children live in the fields? Said Rabbi Levi "God would send two angels to each of them, one to wash him and one to dress him They would provide for him to be nursed and annointed with oil, as is said 'He suckled him with oil from the rock, and honey from the flintstone' (Deut 32 33) Thus, Scripture further says I bathed you in water and gave you garments of brocade' (Ezek 16 10) "[15]
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> Rabbi Hiyya Rabba said "It was not the angels who did this, but rather God Himself, for Scripture says 'I bathed you '[16] Had the verse said 'I caused you to be bathed,' one might think it was done by an angel But 'I bathed you' means that there was no angel involved Praised be the name of God! He Himself did this for them!"
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> The children grew up in the field like plants, and when they were grown they would return in flocks to their homes But how would a child know the home of his own parents? God would go along with them, and to each child he would point out his father's house He would tell them "Your father is to be called thus, and your mother thus " The child would say to his mother "Do you remember the day you gave birth to me, in such-and-such a field, on such-and-such a day, five months ago?" Then the mother would ask "Who cared for you?" And the child would answer "A young man with beautiful curls,[17] there is none like him He brought me here and is waiting outisde " The mother would say "Show him to me " When they went outside, however, though they would search everywhere, they could never find him
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> When they saw Him at the Sea of Reeds, they pointed with their fingers to show their mothers "This is the one who raised me! '*This* is my God and I will glorify Him!' " (Ex 15 2)

The claims of such an Aggadic text are startling to the Jewish reader who has been trained in the later dominant tradition which teaches him

13 *Deuteronomy Rabbah* (ed Lieberman), p 14f

14 An interesting formulation, in view of the fact that Jewish law considers this commandment to be binding only upon men

15 This chapter is also often quoted in our legend, due to the strikingly direct applicability of Ezek 16 4–7

16 In the *qal* conjugation, rather than the *hif'il*

17 A reflex of *Cant* 5 11

that all anthropomorphisms are to be explained away It is not surprising, therefore, to find a later commentator attempting to apologize for our legend·

> *A Certain Beautiful and Praiseworthy Young Man* Any bodily attribute is far from being applicable to God, praised be He The meaning here is rather that they *understood* that God, as a pure and holy transcendent power, had saved them through His providence and the Scriptural passages quoted here are only meant figuratively and to serve as literary adornment[18]

While it is true that other well-known Aggadic motifs speak of God Himself as having been directly present in the redemption from Egypt,[19] those sources do not speak of Israel *seeing* God in Egypt, but only indicate, as does the Biblical text itself, that they knew of His presence through His saving deeds It is the physical manifestation of God in Egypt and at the Sea which lends to this text its unique significance

The tale of the children in Egypt is always linked to the crossing of the Sea of Reeds This latter event seems to take a central role in the speculations of certain of the early Rabbis, a role which goes even beyond those of the plagues in Egypt or the Exodus itself[20] It is only by understanding the significance of that event to the Midrashic authors that we may come to understand the boldness with which our legend speaks of God's appearance In order to do so, however, we must turn our attention not to the Song of the Sea, as one might expect, but, rather, to the Song of Songs

There is considerable difference of opinion in Rabbinic sources as to the authorship and original setting of this Biblical book While some views unhesitatingly accept the ascription to Solomon, in the first verse, and speak of Canticles as one of the three books which Solomon wrote under the guidance of the holy spirit,[21] others try to trace the origin

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18 *Yefeh To'ar* to *Exodus Rabbah* 23 8

19 The famous passage which appears in the Passover Haggadah and in *Mekhilta Bo* 7 (ed Horovitz Rabin, p 23) has been discussed by Judah Goldin in his article, "Not by Means of an Angel and Not by Means of a Messenger" in *Studies in the History of Religion, 1968* (Goodenough Memorial Volume), pp 412ff The articles by Morton Smith in that volume (pp 315ff) and in the Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, 1958, also have bearing on the subject matter of this paper

20 A contrary view, according to which the Exodus is given primacy over the splitting of the Sea, is recorded in *Exodus Rabbah* 22 3, couched in halakhic terms The obligation to make daily mention of the Exodus in the blessing which follows the recitation of the *Shema* is more stringent than that to recall the events at the Sea Two reasons are given the Exodus was the more difficult of the two feats, and it is mentioned in conjunction with God's name in the first commandment, while the splitting of the Sea is not The discussion concludes with the statement that the crossing of the Sea is worthy of mention in the liturgy only because it brought Israel to have faith (Ex 14 31) One wonders whether this downplay of the centrality of the events at the Sea is not a direct polemic against those tendencies, discussed below, which saw such great significance in those events

21 *Canticles Rabbah* 1 1 10

of the Song of Songs to the generation of the Exodus, claiming that the *Shelomoh* of the superscription refers not to Solomon, but to the King of Peace, and thus claim God Himself as the author of the Song

Rabbi Akiba, in describing the Song of Songs as the "holy of holies" within Scripture,[22] refers to "the day when the Song of Songs was given to Israel" The term "given" is the same as that consistently applied in Rabbinic literature to the revelation at Sinai, it would not be applied to a work of human authorship, even one written under divine inspiration Other Midrashic sources discuss quite plainly whether it was God or the angels who first recited the Song of Songs[23]

What was the "day on which the Song of Songs was given?" "Where was it said?" asks Midrash[24] Various answers are supplied—at the Sea, at Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting, in the Temple—and appropriate verses are adduced to support each opinion As Lieberman has shown,[25] each of these opinions has its roots in the Tannaitic schools Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus teaches that the Song of Songs was said at the Sea,[26] Rabbi Akiba is the author of the view that it was first recited at Sinai,[27] Rabbi Meir traces it to the Tent of Meeting, and an anonymous Tannaitic source holds that its origin was in the Temple

The latter three opinions can all be readily explained That the "holy of holies" was revealed at the holiest of moments, at Sinai,[28] should come as no surprise The Tent of Meeting is also the site of revelation, a more intimate revelation, as it was apprehended only by Moses The Temple as the original location of the Song of Songs fits well with the tradition of Solomonic authorship It is only the suggestion of Rabbi Eliezer that seems in need of further explication The verse quoted by R Hanina bar Papa "I would compare you, my dearest, to Pharaoh's chariot-horses" (Cant 1 9),[29] hardly seems to provide sufficient justification for such an elaborate claim Nor does the exegesis of Canticles 2 14, ascribed to Rabbi Eliezer himself[30] seem particularly convincing. The opinion that the Song of Songs was first said or "given" at the Sea of Reeds must be based on something other than the exegesis of the text itself

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22 *Mishnah Yadayim* 3 5

23 *Canticles Rabbah* 1 2, *Shir ha-Shirim Zuta*, beginning Cf Lieberman, *Op cit*, p 118f

24 *Canticles Rabbah* 1 2

25 Lieberman, *Op cit*, p 119

26 *Mekhilta de RaSHbI* (ed Epstein), p 143, *Canticles Rabbah* 2 14

27 *Mekhilta de-RaSHbI*, loc cit In that text, the controversy is presented as one specifically between R Akiba and R Eliezer See Lieberman, for the other sources

28 This interpretation accords particularly well with the interpretation of R Akiba's view of the unique centrality of Sinai, as propounded by A J Heschel in his *Torah Min ha-Shamayim*, v 2 (London, 1965)

29 *Canticles Rabbah* 1 2

30 *Mekhilta de-RaSHbI*, loc cit

Fortunately, another text is preserved, in the name of Rabbi Eliezer, on the very same verse around which our legend was elaborated

> "This is my God and I will glorify Him (Ex 15 2)" Rabbi Eliezer comments "How do we know that a handmaiden at the Sea saw more than Isaiah or Ezekiel? From the verse 'I speak through the prophets in parables'" (Hosea 12 11) [31]

The prophets know God only through *demut,* parables or similitudes, while the handmaiden at the Sea actually *sees* in a way not vouchsafed to prophets! Rabbi Eliezer conceives of the crossing of the Sea as a moment of *seeing,* as an experience of revelation higher than that granted even to the greatest visionaries among the prophets of Israel We are now dealing, not only with a moment of miraculous salvation at the Sea of Reeds, but with a theophany which, as we shall see, is comparable to that of Sinai itself While such a moment of revelation is not mentioned in the Biblical narrative, it seems possible that the verse "Israel saw the great hand" (Ex 14 31) may have been a point of departure for such speculations

In the context of Rabbi Eliezer's view of the event at the Sea, the legend with which we began takes on new meaning It is not accidental that the vision of God as a comely young man was vouchsafed to those children who were to stand at the Sea, any more than it is accidental that our legend is replete with references to the Song of Songs The crossing of the Sea is the moment of a great visionary experience, and it is the day on which the Song of Songs was given And what is the content of this vision? The God whom the handmaiden sees at the Sea is none other than that black-curled young man whom the children saw in Egypt, the lover of the Song of Songs! Nor is the "handmaiden" herself coincidental What more appropriate image for Israel than that of the handmaiden, who, at the final moment of her long-awaited liberation, sees her bridegroom coming toward her?

The vision of God as a young man at the Sea is not unknown in other Rabbinic sources A series of Aggadot which seek to attest to the oneness of God, despite His varied appearances, make reference to God's appearance at the Sea as a young warrior

> *The Lord Is a Man of War* (Ex 15 3) Why is this said? Because He was revealed at the Sea as a warrior in battle and at Sinai as an old man full of compassion Scripture took care not to allow an opening for the nations of the world to say "They are two domains" "YHWH is a man of war, YHWH is His name" He it was in Egypt, He it was at the

31 *Mekhilta Shirta* 3, (ed Horowitz-Rabin), p 126 Cf the translation and commentary by Judah Goldin in *The Song at the Sea* (New Haven, 1971), p 112 The Rabbinic understanding of the stem *DMH* as meaning "to make similitudes" is well-attested by *Genesis Rabbah* 27 1 and its many parallels A study of the meaning of various terms derived from this stem could have interesting implications for a better understanding of classical Jewish theology

> Sea He was in the past and He shall be in the future! He is in this World to Come! Thus Scripture says "See now that I, I am He" (Deut 32 39)[32] And it is written "Unto old age I am He" (Is 46 4) and further "Thus says the Lord of Hosts, King and Redeemer of Israel I am the Lord of Hosts, the first and the last " (Is 44 6) [33]

This motif of the two theophanies, that of the warrior at the Sea and that of the compassionate elderly man, sometimes depicted as a judge, entered Jewish liturgy through the *Shir ha-Kavod*, composed in Medieval Germany and still recited in the Ashkenazic rite While some Midrashic sources list three or even four examples of God's varying revealed forms (the revelations to Solomon and Daniel are added),[34] the central place of Sinai and the Sea is maintained [35] The implications of this motif, namely that the people of Israel experienced *two* great moments of collective revelation in the great period of their sacred history, have seldom been drawn out in the literature of Jewish theology

With Sinai and the Sea established as the two great moments of Israel's revelation, we may now proceed one step further in our analysis of Rabbi Eliezer's view that the Song of Songs was "given" at the crossing of the Sea, particularly as contrasted with the view of Rabbi Akiba He may agree with Akiba that the Song of Songs is "holy of holies," recited at the greatest moment of Israel's revelation But he chooses to assign that dignity to the Sea, rather than to Sinai Alternatively, it may be argued that Akiba seeks to identify the lover of Canticles with the God of Sinai, in keeping with the tradition which sees Sinai as the moment of sacred marriage between God and Israel Eliezer takes the obvious difference between the two moments more seriously, if Sinai is a revelation of God as elderly judge, the Song of Songs is hardly an appropriate metaphor for that particular moment The Song, in his view, describes not the fatherly compassion of the God of Sinai, its erotic tone is appropriate rather to the handsome yonng hero of the Sea!

These two images, God as young lover-bridegroom and God as com-

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32 The continuation of the verse reads "There is no god beside Me" Isaiah 44 6 continues in similar fashion, a pointed reference to this phrase seems to be clearly indicated

33 *Mekhilta Shirta* 4, p 129f Translation and commentary by Goldin, *Op cit*, p 126ff The Lauterbach text from which Goldin has translated omits the two verses from Isaiah here quoted, and substitutes Isaiah 41 4 Might these verses, particularly 46 4, have been too offensively sharp a reference at some point in the history of Jewish-Christian relations, and thus have been replaced by the less pointed verse in the Lauterbach text?

34 *She'iltot, 'eqev* #145 (ed Jerusalem 1966/67, p 203) and other sources

35 Note, for example, in the Addenda to *Aggadat Shir ha-Shirim* (ed Shechter, p 87), that although God is said to reveal Himself in "many' forms, the only two examples given are those of Sinai and the Sea In the above-quoted *Mekhilta* text [see footnote 33], the images of God ascribed to Sinai and Daniel seem to be conflated into a single figure of the elderly, throned judge Cf also Grunhut's edition of *Midrash Shir ha-Shirim*, pp 50b-51a

passionate father-judge, may be seen as the central metaphors in the Rabbinic discussion of the love of God In the course of later Jewish literature, however, (with the notable exception of the Kabbalah) the former image seems to all but disappear Jewish liturgy, which had a tremendous impact on the imagination of later generations, is almost exclusively a liturgy of the father/king[36] Where the God of the Sea does appear, He is warrior, but not lover While this process of literary change is a long and complicated one, a significant clue to one aspect of it may be found in a text we have already examined

"YHWH is His name" in Exodus 15 3 was written in order "not to allow an opening for the nations of the world to say 'They are two domains' " Who are these "nations of the world" who would distinguish between the young man of the Sea and the elderly father figure of Sinai? It seems most likely that the reference is to Christianity and its distinction betweeu the Father and the Son[37] In the face of the distinctions made between the two Persons even in pre-trinitarian Christian doctrine, the Rabbis sought to assert in the strongest terms that God as elder and God as young man are one and the same The verses quoted in the text, particularly Isaiah 44 6, seem clearly suggestive of the early Jewish-Christian polemic

This understanding of the passage of the Mekhilta is confirmed by another version of the same Aggadah, where its anti-Christian character is still more obvious

> "Face to face the Lord spoke to you" (Deut 5 4) Rabbi Levi said "In many images He appeared to them To one He appeared standing, to another, seated To one as an old man, to another as a youth How is this? When God was revealed at the Sea of Reeds to do battle for His children and to demand of the Egyptians their due, He appeared as a youth, for battle is appropriate only to the young But when God revealed Him self at Sinai to give Torah to Israel, He appeared as an elder Why? For it is written 'Wisdom is with the aged, and length of days is understanding' (Job 12 12) Thus Daniel says 'I kept looking until the thrones were set in place and the Ancient of Days took His seat' (Dan 7 9)"

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36 The liturgical exception to this general trend is to be found in the *Piyyutim* for certain occasions In the Ashkenazic rite, several of the *Yozerot* and *Ofanim* are note worthy examples of the religious use of the romantic metaphor It is also interesting to note that later Jewish liturgical practice supports the view of Rabbi Eliezer that the Song of Songs was recited at the Sea, by assigning its place in the liturgical cal endar at Passover (and on the seventh day, if there is no intermediate Sabbath) The seventh day of Passover is taken to be the day when the Sea was crossed

37 Unlike those *shtei reshuyot* passages discussing Creation, there is no sense of de monic force or demiurge implied here It thus seems unlikely that the reference would be to Gnostic or other dualisms, but entirely appropriate that it be to orthodox Christianity It is especially worthy of note that Canticles 5 10, which appears so promi nently in this series of legends, is interpreted by the church father Theodoret as referring to Jesus The relevant passage is quoted by Raphael Loewe in his article "The Targum to the Song of Songs in Biblical Motifs" (Lown Institute, *Studies and Texts*, v 3, [Cambridge, 1966]), p 187

> Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba said "If the son of a whore should say to you 'There are two gods,' answer him 'I am He at the Sea, I am He at Sinai' "[38]

The likelihood that *bar zenayta* (son of a whore) here is a Christian was already noted by Meir Friedman in his edition of *Pesikta Rabbati*

We are now in a position to suggest why it happened that the God of the Sea of Reeds, particularly insofar as He was lover and not just warrior, disappears from later Jewish literature The Rabbis could not hold onto this image of God in the face of the Christian usage Christianity usurped from Judaism the image of the youthful Deity, the archetype of God as young lover/hero became so deeply identified with Jesus in the Western world that it lost its place in Judaism By default, exoteric Judaism was left with the worship of God the Father True, the Song of Songs was retained as sacred Scripture, but it was overlaid with national and historical allegory[39] which left little room for its original passion, and it was linked with Sinai rather than the Sea Only the Kabbalists, with their re-assertion of bold anthropomorphism and religious eroticism, were able to reveal again the God of the children in Egypt and the handmaiden at the Sea

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38 *Pesikta Rabbati* 21 6, ed Friedmann, pp 100b-101a, and cf Friedmann's notes *ad loc* Recent scholarship confirms Friedmann's suggestion Cf Encyclopedia Judaica, v 10, s v "Jesus"

39 On the exoteric and esoteric aspects of Jewish interpretations of the Song of Songs, cf the comments by Abraham Halkin in the *Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume*, p 392 ff and R Loewe's important article quoted in note 37