

Divine Jealousy

The biblical notion of jealousy is something we automatically associate with the so-called Old Testament which for most of us presents a frightfully outdated picture of God. Two points in this regard need clarification right off the bat. First of all, jealousy is a base as well as embarrassing human trait that doesn't seem to have any relationship with divine reality. Putting it mildly, juxtaposing the two comes across as downright out of place. Second, the phrase "Old Testament" gives the impression of playing second fiddle to the so-called superior New Testament. And so we're more comfortable associating jealousy with the God of the Old Testament because we know it has no place with what's presented in the New Testament, notably the Gospels. This perception has been re-enforced generation after generation and has turned out to be an unfortunate misinterpretation.

To get a better handle on this somewhat awkward subject a number of scriptural verses are worth presenting but before doing this, it'd be helpful to look at a central word. Like with all things related to Hebrew it is a verb. That word is *qana'*, alternately as to be zealous, to excite to anger and to be envious. The noun *qina'h* derived from it means jealousy and connotes a sense of ardor. Everything about both the verb and noun bespeaks a certain violence and exclusivity where possessiveness plays a key role. Even their pronunciation beginning with the letter *q-* conveys this violence. Humanly speaking, you don't want to stand in the way when someone manifests *qana'*, even in the good sense.

Now apply *qana'* to God, and putting it mildly, quickly you find yourself in deep trouble. So in light of these brief remarks, let's take a look at some scriptural verses with the verbal root and noun at hand. It should be of great interest to note that there's just one New Testament verse relative to jealousy, that from an epistle of St Paul. There are none otherwise, Gospels included. The only references to jealousy are that of the human kind. That fact is revealing in and by itself. It requires some examination which will follow these verses.

Please note that most entries are lifted from various texts posted on this site devoted to the practice of *lectio divina*.

Ex 20.5-6: You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third

and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Shachah is the verb for bow down, a subservient gesture which leads naturally to a willingness to be obedient to what a person is reverencing, that is, *havad* or serving it, this verb implying slavery. *Shachah* has the preposition *l-* (to, toward) prefaced to “them” which is indicative of submission whereas *havad* does not.

Both these gestures of bondage stand in contrast to divine jealousy or *qana’* which is suggestive of envy. Instead of using an undesirable human trait projected upon the divinity, *qana’*, as opposed to *shachah* and *havad*, is indicative of the Lord’s intense desire for Israel to be free. The verb *qana’* is akin in sound though not in verbal root to the verb *qanah* meaning to acquire. So when hearing one, the other can be substituted and visa versa without out damage to the meaning at hand.

The second part of vs. 5 follows through with this jealousy with “visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me.” Given the much shorter life span of ancient times, a generation (perhaps around thirty years of age) was a considerably less time span than what we’re used to. Thus the generations total to around one hundred and twenty years. *Paqad* is the verb for visiting and is widely used having multiple means but in general connotes a one-on-one encounter or putting into action.

So this personal dealing of guilt (*hawon*) carries over several generations which traces its origins to the “fall” of Adam and Eve. God’s jealousy is in response not so much to those who may be guilty but to those who hate him, the verb *sane’* the nature of which isn’t spelled out but just stated with emphasis upon transmission. That means *sane’* is almost biological, a living virus present within a host, but one destined not to last forever. However, if a second generation and those after it submits to idol worship, the result is a whole interlacing of guilt that becomes contagious and never dies out.

Nevertheless this tendency not to worship the Lord is understandable in the harsh desert climate marked by sense deprivation and is a kind of longing after multiplicity, if you will, of desiring to be relieved of what can devolve into monotony. The Lord must have put this injunction lasting several generations to prevent backsliding into worship of Egyptian deities even though this isn’t explicit throughout Exodus.

At the same time the Lord shows steadfast love or *chesed* which can be rendered as kindness to a countless number of people, that is, to those who keep the following two requests: to love the Lord, ‘*ahav* suggestive of breathing after and keeping his commandments, *shamar* as keeping watch on a city wall. *Mitsvah*

usually applies to precepts coming from God.

Ex 34.13-16: You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim (for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they play the harlot after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and one invites you, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons and their daughters play the harlot after their gods and make your sons play the harlot after their gods.

These verses which form an extended sentence containing three verbs of physical destruction: *nachats*, *shavar* and *karath*. The first usually applies to physical structures and the latter two are more general. Other references are: “And they demolished the pillar of Baal and demolished the house of Baal and made it a latrine to this day” [2Kg 10.27]. “But you shall utterly overthrow them and break their pillars in pieces” [23.24] and “Whoever compounds any like it or whoever puts any of it on the outside shall be cut off from his people” [30.33].

As for the altars, the chief one mentioned in Exodus is that of 27.1, the altar of acacia wood, but most likely the Lord had in mind the example of Aaron who built an altar in honor of the molten calf (cf. 32.5). As for the pillars, the word is *matsevah* as used in 24.5, “the twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel.”

New to this familiar terminology is Asherim or these pillars which symbolized Asherah, the mother goddess of the Canaanites. Actually the Asherim are not found elsewhere in Exodus nor the preceding book of Genesis. After two similar injunctions in Deuteronomy their next appearance is 1Kg 14.15: “and scatter them beyond the Euphrates because they have made their Asherim, provoking the Lord to anger.” Even though this is the sole reference in Exodus it intimates that some preliminary contact has been made with the inhabitants of Canaan in the Sinai wilderness.

Similarly, the Asherim may have worked their way into the Egyptian pantheon or entered that country through traders, etc. Regardless, the main point is that the Asherim are established firmly in Canaan and must be cut down just as ruthlessly as the worshipers. Because the verbal root *karath* applies to the cutting of a covenant as pointed out numerous times above, to *karath* one with the Asherim results in being *karath*.

Vs. 14 follows as one sentence and flows into vss. 15 and 16: (‘for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God’). The RSV has it in parentheses which are left here, indicative that it is a footnote of sorts,

albeit an important one, to the destruction of the altars, pillars and Asherim. *Shachah* is the verb for worship not just here but earlier; if an other term were used, it would be noted. *Qana'* is given as the proper name for the Lord, that is, vis-a-vis the Asherim and is suggestive of being envious, again, due to the recently erected molten calf of which he had been jealous.

As for making a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, the idea of one that has been cut or *karath* is brought out clearly...not so much with the gods but with the concrete inhabitants of Canaan itself. *Zanah* is the verb for play the harlot, one of two uses in Exodus, the next being in vs. 16. Because *zanah* is used in reference to “their gods,” it could refer to sacred prostitutes. *Qara'* is the verb to invites and fundamentally means to call but here in the sense of being enticed. In the verse at hand, such *zanah* applies to sons and daughters, possibly those who will become of age once Israel reaches Canaan (cf. vs. 16).

Dt 4.24: For the Lord your God is a devouring fire, a jealous God.

Vs. 23 the Israelites are bidden to take heed to themselves, *shamar* which as noted earlier implies keeping guard on a city wall. Thus vs. 24 puts *shamar* and what it involves into perspective, that the Lord is jealous, *qana'* also meaning zealous.

In the verse at hand such jealousy is compared to a burning fire, *'akal* meaning to eat, often in the sense as to devour. Such language reminded the Israelites who were alive at the time of Mount Horeb: “Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring (*'akal*) fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people” [Ex 24.17].

Dt 5.9-10: You shall not make for yourself a graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Vs. 9 is a continuation of the extended sentence begun in the previous verse, here dealing with prohibiting worship of *pesel* and *temunah* put as neither bowing down nor serving them, *shatach* and *havad*, the two used in the same sense as in 4.19. The Lord describes himself as being jealous (*qana'*, cf. 4.24) which for the Israelites is double-edged. On the one hand, they're fortunate to have such a divine protector who boasts of his concern for them, whereas on the other hand they can't

succumb to their inclination to worship alien gods. This jealousy compels the Lord to visit iniquity not just upon children but up to the fourth generation, a very long time for it to peter out.

Paqad is the verb for visit which has multiple meanings and can be used in a military sense not unlike here. In the verse at hand, *havon* is the noun for iniquity which connotes something depraved. Hatred for the Lord here is bound up with *havon*, the verb being *sane*’ found last in 4.42 but not noted there.

Vs. 10 begins with but or the conjunctive *v-* often rendered as “and” to show the close connection with the previous verse, the other side of *paqad*, if you will. That side consists of *chesed* or love in the sense of ardent desire and not unlike *agape*. Such *chesed* pertains to thousands, a way of saying that at least at this stage most of the Israelites are firmly with the Lord. However, that will change shortly.

Dt 6.14-15: You shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the peoples who are round about you; for the Lord your God in the midst of you is a jealous God lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.

To counter the temptation mentioned in vs. 14 the Lord says that he’s in their midst, *qerev*, this being dependent upon the collective *shamah* or hearing put forth in vs. 3 along with other exhortations. “Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them (divine commandments).” Not only is the Lord *qerev* his people, he’s jealous or *qana*’. While this may seem beneficial, for the Israelites it would turn out to be a painful reminder later when they succumb to the worship of Canaanite gods.

From this *qana*’ will issue divine anger or ‘*aph*’ which refers to the nose and hence the an image of the Lord breathing forth flames. “Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly” [7.4]. The verb in the verse at hand is *charah* and connotes intense ardor. Also it’s akin to the verb *chamad* or to destroy (cf. 5.21) found in vs. 15.

Note the similar sounding words in vs. 16: *nasah* (cf. 4.34) and *Massah*, the latter being derived from the former and is an obviously uncomfortable reminder which the Israelites would prefer to forget. This can be relegated to the past, however, provided they not just keep the Lord’s commandments and testimonies (*mitsvah*, *hedah* and *choq*, vs. 1, vs. 2 and 4.45 respectively) but do so diligently which is conveyed by double use of the verb *shamar* (cf. vs. 2).

Dt 29.20: The Lord would not pardon him, but rather the anger of the Lord and his jealousy would smoke against that man, and the curses written in this book would

settle upon him, and the Lord would blot out his name from under heaven.

Vs. 20 speaks of the Lord's anger and jealousy or *'aph* and *qin'ah*, the former being found last in 13.17 and the only use of the latter in Deuteronomy. "For zeal for your house has consumed me" [Ps 69.9]. In the verse at hand, both smoke against (literally 'in') the man who is object of the divine wrath. If this weren't bad enough, there follows curses (*'alah*, cf. vs. 19) settling upon him, the verb being *ravats* which is applicable to beasts laying down with their four feet tucked under them (cf. 22.6 but not used there).

Once in that position, the Lord will simply blot out (*machah*, cf. 25.19) his name from under heaven. If this weren't enough, in vs. 21 the Lord does something which later will happen to Achan who was singled out tribe by tribe, man by man (cf. Jos 7.16+). *Badal* (cf. 19.2) is the verb in the verse at hand also as to set aside, that is, for curses or evil, *rah* (cf. 17.12). Again, this is done in accord with the curses or *'alah* in the *Torah* or law.

Josh 24.19: But Joshua said to the people, "You cannot serve the Lord; for he is a holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins.

In vs. 19 Joshua retorts—and this must have been extremely difficult for him so close to death—saying that the Israelites "cannot serve the Lord." In other words, from his days at Moses' side he had witnessed a persistent rebellious streak in the people which he barely managed to control and direct while conquering Canaan but was fearful it couldn't last after his death.

Joshua reminds the people that the Lord is both holy and jealous, *qadosh* (cf. 5.15 but with *qodesh*) and *qano'*. The former intimates separation, being apart, and the latter is the only use of this adjective in the Book of Joshua and derives from the verbal root *qana'* which as noted above connotes envy. So with these two characteristics belonging to the Lord—and there had been plenty of evidence of it throughout Joshua's leadership—it was natural for the people to feel some revulsion. It was too overwhelming an experience for the nation as a whole to adopt, let alone maintain, and hence made it easier to slip into worship of the alien gods through intermarriage.

Such divine holiness and jealousy spills over to not forgiving transgression, etc., the verb being *nasa'* which means to raise up. In other words, the Lord will allow the weight of Israel's sins both collectively and individually to weigh them down.

Ezk 5.13: Thus shall my anger spend itself, and I will vent my fury upon them and

satisfy myself; and they shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken in my jealousy when I spend my fury upon them.

The verse at hand speaks of divine anger and fury, *‘aph* and *chemah*. The former also means nostrils and heavy breathing associated with it (cf. vs. 15) whereas the latter (cf. 3.15) connotes something that burns. The verb associated with *‘aph* is *kalah* which suggests bringing to an end whereas the one associated with *chemah* is *nuach* or to rest. Despite the strong words, ultimately the Lord wishes the Israelites to know (*yadah*, cf. 2.5 but not noted there) that it is he who has spoken (*davar*), the former meaning intimate knowledge.

The remaining five verses of Chapter Five present a rapid-fire list of woes that will befall Israel and are outlined as follows:

Vs. 14: desolation and object of reproach: these are literally “in (*b-*) the nations” around Jerusalem.

Vs. 15: reproach, taunt, warning, horror, fury and furious chastisements: these are spoken (*davar*) by the Lord.

Vs. 16: famine and destruction presented as arrows.

Vs. 17: famine, wild beasts, pestilence, blood and sword: as spoken (*davar*) by the Lord.

Thus all come transmitted by the spoken expression or *davar* of the Lord and are uttered against Israel in Babylon which makes the situation all the more painful to bear.

Ezk 16.42: So will I satisfy my fury on you, and my jealousy shall depart from you; I will be calm and will no more be angry.

The verse at hand provides some relief from this all-out divine assault, if you will. The Lord says that he will satisfy his fury, *nuach* and *chemah*, 5.13 and vs. 38 respectively, the verb meaning that such anger will come to a rest. The same applies to his jealousy or *qin’ah* (cf. vs. 38) followed by being calm and having no anger. The two verbs are *shaqat* and *kahas* (cf. vs. 26), the former also meaning to lie down. The former occurs next in vs. 49 as “prosperous ease.”

Ezk 38.19-20: For in my jealousy and in my blazing wrath I declare, “On that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel; the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and the beasts of the field and all creeping things that creep on the ground and all the men that are upon the face of the earth shall quake at my presence, and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the cliffs shall fall, and every wall shall

tumble to the ground.”

Here both *qin’ah* and *‘esh* with *hevrah* (jealousy and the common now for fire with outpouring) the Lord will declare, that being an adequate rendition for *davar* (word as expression). As for the *davar* at hand, that consists of a “that day” which is equivalent to a *kairos* event.

On that fourth and last day the land of Israel itself will shake...perhaps not out of fear but of arousal because as vs. 16 has it, Gog will be invading “my land” or the Lord’s. This shaking will extend to all living things in preparation for the Lord to throw, as vs. 21 puts it literally, “a sword to all my mountains” or those places on which Gog and his allies have taken position. The remaining verses of this chapter go into vivid detail as to how the Lord will destroy Gog ending with the expected that “they will know (*yadah* often intimating intimate knowledge) that I am the Lord.”

Nah 1.2: The Lord is a jealous God and avenging, the Lord is avenging and wrathful; the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies.

This book of vision begins in vs. 2 with the Lord as being described in two pairs. The first is he (as God) both jealous and avenging, *qana’* and *naqam*, the latter as desirous for taking revenge. The second is he (as Lord) as *naqam* and *bahal* with *chemah*, literally “possessor of fury.”

The two pairs are directed on the Lord’s adversaries, *tsar* also as opponent and keeping (*natar* also to guard) wrath for his enemies.

Zec 8.2: Thus says the Lord of hosts: “I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath.”

We can detect that the Lord is somewhat uneasy with himself through the frequent use of “Thus says the Lord” in this chapter. It occurs ten times and can be taken as a kind of exaggerated way to let everyone know that he’s in charge. Such is his jealousy which comes off in a child-like way that has a certain charm about it. This will be discussed at the end of the document. The verb is *qana’* along with the noun *qin’ah* (cf. ch 1 for both). Such jealousy is amplified, if you will, with great wrath or *chemah* also as warmth.

Sg 8.6: Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a most vehement flame.

The bride wishes her spouse to bestow a token of his love, that is, “a seal upon your heart.” A *chotam* or seal was often in the form of a signet ring worn around the

neck, thereby hanging on one's breast which appears the case in this verse (on your heart). This sentence may be read in light of Christ's tomb where they went and made the sepulcher secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard (Mt 27.66). With this in mind, we may say that "love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave." The seal of which the bride speaks is equivalent to having her lover impart an image of himself "to lie between my breasts" (Sg 1.13).

In the book of Revelation, a seal (*sphragis*) plays an important role, for example, 5.1: "And I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back sealed with seven seals." These scrolls contained various plagues which God's angels were to inflict on the human race and culminate in the seventh seal.

The second seal which the bride requests is to be located on her lover's arm, *zeroah*. While the seal upon his heart signifies transmission of love between the two spouses in the form of an image, the one on his arm may signify activity. After all, it is the bridegroom's arms which makes the bride "a garden enclosed, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed" (Sg 5.12), that is, *chatom* as discussed above.

"For love is strong as death:" Not stronger than death but strong as death. I.e., here love (*'ahavah*) and death are put on the same level. The bride can boldly say this because of her experience of the groom's comings and goings which were for her an emotional roller coaster ride. By this time towards the end of the Song, she has gained sufficient experience of these mini deaths and risings and now has authority to speak of them to other persons.

"Jealousy is cruel as the grave:" A similar comparison to love and death above, only here between jealousy and the grave. The bride is alluding to the inevitability of death regardless of how exalted her experiences of love have been. In this verse the word for grave is *she'ol*, traditional abode of the dead. Despite this unavoidable destiny, the bride can exclaim "If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there" (Ps 139.8). Such is the bride's jealousy or *qin'ah* which is cruel, *qashah*; note the similar sounding words with regard to the grave, *she'ol*. One cannot but help Christ's words, "Zeal (*qin'ath*) for your house will consume me" (Jn 2.17), words lifted from Ps 69.9.

The love of which the bride speaks in verse 6 is characterized by coals of fire, *resheph*, which also means lightning as Ps 78.48: "He gave over their cattle to the hail and their flocks to thunderbolts." See Is 6.6-7 where one of the seraphim touched Isaiah's lips with *resheph*: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin forgiven." Note that the seraph took this *respheph* from the altar, that is, from the place where incense was being offered to God. The coal must have been hot indeed for a seraph to use tongs; the very word seraph means a

consuming fire.

Even the seraph had to take it with a tong, not his hands, because of its heat which was a most vehement flame. Such a flame or *lehavah* Isaiah spoke of prior to his purification: “Then the Lord will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy and a pavilion” (4.5). This *lehavah*, an image of the bride’s love, partakes of this divine flame, otherwise she could not say that it was strong as death.

2Cor 11.2: I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband.

Zeloo or to be zealous is used with the noun *zelos*, the latter being “of God.” The reason? *Harmozo* or to fit together which here pertains to the betrothal to Christ by the Corinthians. This is done in order to present (*paristemi*: to stand near or close by, *para*-) them as a pure virgin (*parthenos* modified by *hagnos*) to one husband.

As noted in this essay’s brief introductory words, the verse from Second Corinthians represents the only one from the New Testament pertinent to divine jealousy.

Should we stay with the human definition and apply it to God, we get not so much a less than desirable picture but one which reveals a side of God he’d rather not show. Nevertheless he did manifest it but unwillingly. It was more in response to human misbehavior and foolishness. Despite the unpleasantness of both, they had the unintended result of showing a side of God which for us is quite astounding.

The manifested of divine jealousy has its roots in the Garden of Eden where the serpent tempted the woman to eat the tree in the garden’s midst: “and you will be like God knowing good and evil” [Gn 3.5]. Being like God is pretty close to have all his attributes and being in his place...two divine beings with the same attributes, if you will. One must stay and the other leave.

From Eden onward through the development of the human race and emergence of Israel as God’s chosen people God had to struggle with what essentially were ignorant or semi-ignorant peasants. Even those who dwelt in cities and had a more

basic education they were not that much better. And so we have wide open field where God could slam his people with every imaginable threat. Jealously of course played a large part in all this. It was an effect way of keeping mere mortals in line.

Then with the passage of time Jesus Christ was born. But before that came to pass, the Father in heaven was putting some serious thought into why he had to manifest jealousy towards people. It seemed both he and the people were getting nowhere. Perhaps a more direct though discreet intervention was called for. Though the Father had visited the earth on several rare occasions (there comes to mind when he descended to see the city and tower of Babel, Gn 11.5), he didn't make his presence known. In other words, the Father visited incognito which reveals a lot about his character.

Hopefully with the dispatch of his Son things might work out more favorably. Jesus was born the normal human way or better, he did so by appearance, as it were, having no physical father. He spent most of his years engaged in normal human activity before setting out on three short years of preaching and healing. After an apparently tragic death, Jesus ascended into heaven from which he had come. In the meanwhile the Father had been paying close attention and admittedly was a bit fearful of his Son's return. The reason? In essence Jesus didn't engage in the slightest manifestation jealousy his Father had done for countless generations. Now the Father would have to face that.

The Father saw that his behavior was essentially wrong though at first it seemed the proper way to deal with unruly human beings. Now he had to face a dressing-down by his beloved Son and thus stand corrected. Both were reconciled and sent the Holy Spirit as a kind of mediator. His task is to communicate to humans, albeit not in such direct language as between the two divine persons, but in a disarming fashion to convey the fact that they have nothing more to fear coming from above. And so the Holy Spirit brings around to full circle the Father's jealousy, curing him just as much if not more so than the members of the newly founded church.

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