

Fathers and Sons and Wine: The Oedipal Complex

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Introduction

This article discusses a story from the Midrash [*Leviticus Rabbah* (Margalit) 12, a], which deals with the relationship between fathers and sons. The story can be read in numerous ways, and various insights and meanings with different layers of depth can be found within. By its very nature, language and structure, the story leaves the work of interpretation to the reader, which involves the dangers of exaggeration and imagination, and perhaps even subjective exegesis. However, without this exegetical process we may miss some of the messages of the story, perhaps some of the most important ones. The proposed reading is an explicit attempt to extract insights from the field of educational- psychology from the story.

Rabbi Aha says: An incident is related of one man who sold all of his household vessels to drink wine (using the proceeds), sold his house to drink wine (using the proceeds). His sons would complain and say: Our old father will leave this world and not leave us anything after his death. What should we do to him? Let's ply him with drink and get him drunk, and place him in his grave. They did just so, they took him, plied him with drink and took him out and placed him in a cemetery. Wine merchants passed the gates of the cemetery, having heard that there were tax collectors in the city. They said: let's unload these wineskins in this grave and escape. They did so. They unloaded their merchandise in the cemetery and went to see what was happening in the city. They saw this man, who was lying there, and figured him for dead. When he awoke, he saw a wineskin above his head, untied it, and placed it in his mouth and began to drink. When he was quenched he began to sing. Three days later, his sons said: 'Should we not go to see what our father is doing, if he is alive or dead? They went and found him with the wineskin in his mouth. They said to him: 'Even here, among the dead, the Creator has not forsaken you, will He forsake you among the living? Since the Heavens have granted you (wine), we do not know what to do with

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you. Let's bring him in, and make a permanent arrangement.' They made an arrangement that each son in turn would provide him with drink, one son each day. [*Leviticus Rabbah* (Margaliot) 12: 1. pp. 244–247]

This story is preceded by a homiletical interpretation of two verses: “Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations” (*Leviticus* 10:9) and “Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth its color in the cup, when it glideth down smoothly” (*Proverbs* 23:30). The first verse was stated as a unique commandment to Aharon, following the death of his two sons, who entered the Tabernacle intoxicated from drinking wine; and through the verse from Proverbs that is juxtaposed to it, the commentator gives it a universal commentary, transforming it into a commandment directed to all people. In his homiletic interpretation, the commentator describes the chain of damages that wine causes its drinkers. His conclusion is that whoever sets his eyes on the cup (of wine) will eventually become morally degraded—‘that *defiles the pure and purifies the unclean*’—and he will experience an economic downfall—he will sell all his household vessels to drink wine using the proceeds. This is the context of the story, and as said by Avigdor Shinan: “The context is the principal interpreter of things.” (In *Reizl*, 5771: 17.)¹

Our story illustrates what is said in the homiletical interpretation and elaborates on it: Whoever sets his eyes on a cup of wine will end up losing not only his household vessels but also his house, his family members and his world. However, when reading the story we cannot remain at this level of meaning, because we will deduce that the story promotes drunkenness, and that the drunk will benefit! (Elbaum, 5727: pgs. 69–79; Heinemann, 1977: 69–79).

Moreover, the encrypted writing used to write this macabre story is conducive to and even requires a search for understanding that is beyond this initial understanding. Consequently, it seems to me that wine and its dangers are the obvious moral of this story, while its hidden moral is the relationship between fathers and sons. In other words, the story teaches us not only about the father's failings, but also about the failings of the sons. At the end of the day, even though they had not drunk wine, they had become morally bankrupt, doing what they did to their father—leaving him to die in a cemetery. In the end, they were caused financial damage, also as a result of what they did to their father, having undertaken

¹ Note that Elbaum claims that the story had previously existed before being used in a commentary of wine and its damages (Elbaum, 5727: 124–129).

the burden of his drinking. This teaches us that sometimes what sons do while they are sober is worse than what the father does while he is drunk.

The Father's Sons

The sons' position in facing their drunken father is a very difficult situation for them, because in this situation the father is revealed to them in all his 'nakedness.' "Nakedness" implies shame and weakness of mind. On this matter, Maimonides says that drunkenness is a greater shame than nakedness, because it is a 'loss of the mind and the body.' This situation is difficult and perhaps impossible for the sons, from an emotional standpoint. Janusz Korczak described this well:

I have witnessed three wars. I've seen wounded people whose limbs were shot off, whose bellies were split open, and whose intestines were hanging out. I have seen wounds on the face and the head. Wounded soldiers and adults and children. But, believe me, the worst thing one can see is a child leading his drunken father, pleading: "Daddy, Daddy, please come home..." (Korczak, 1977: 25).

However, this is not the picture illustrated here, and is not the thing that leads the children in our story to do what they did. The boys said: "Our old father will leave this world and not leave us anything after his death." It was not his honor or his wellbeing, or even their honor or wellbeing that concerned them; rather they were worried about their money - inheritance - rescuing their 'money' from their father's drinking. As if to say: "When this old man dies, we will not inherit his money." This thing, anticipating the death of the father in order to inherit him, is reminiscent of the sin of Nadav and Avihu, as is told in the *Midrash*:

Moses and Aharon were walking along, as Nadav and Avihu were behind them, and all of Israel behind them. Nadav said to Avihu: "When these two elders die, you and I will lead this generation." God said to them "Let's see who buries whom." (*Sanhedrin*, 52a)²

And naturally, wine connects our story to theirs: 'as they entered intoxicated into the Tabernacle [*Leviticus Rabbah* (Margaliot), 12, a].³

² According to the *Midrash* [*Genesis Rabbah* (Theodore Albek), 24, 8], Cain and Abel tried to appropriate their parents' assets for themselves while they were still alive. "They said: Let's share the world. One took the land and the other took the chattel," and this brought about the first fratricide to the world.

³ Levinson conducted a detailed comparison between the two stories and presented one as the opposite of the other. (See: Levinson, 5753: 21–23.)

Throughout the story, the sons do not turn to their father and say even one word to him, either before or after what they did to him.⁴ What is the meaning of this silencing of him? Wouldn't a person ask his father's opinion, especially if the matter involved him?! And he, the subject of the story, becomes its object! It seems to me that they silenced him because they did not take him into consideration. While the narrator calls him 'one man,' they call him 'this old man,' as someone who has already left this world.⁵ In their eyes, he is someone who did not find anything good for the body other than drinking. And this is only in **their eyes**, because the narrator does not explicitly attribute drunkenness to him.⁶ Drunkenness is stated only in the sons' reference to their father, when they first conspire: "Let's ply him with drink and get him drunk"; and finally, when they execute their plans: "they plied him with drink and got him drunk." Obviously, a drunk is not fit for conversation, and definitely not to consult with for advice. Or perhaps they silenced him because they thought highly of him and were worried that he would say intelligent things that would contradict them.⁷ In any event, all their conversations were **about him** and not with him; they consulted **about him** and not **with him**. This can be compared to an object carried by a person from one place and left in another place and which he used as he wished. This depersonalization⁸ creates a partition between the sons and the father and

⁴ Even 'they said to him' at the end of the story sounds like 'they said about him,' as in: (Genesis 20:2) "And Abraham said to Sarah his wife" - "About Sarah his wife" (Rashi on site).

⁵ The expression '**this old man**' and not 'one man' and not even 'one old man' - sounds like an expression of mockery and ridicule.

⁶ The *Midrash* knows how to do this when it wants to, as in another Midrashic story, similar in plot and subject to our story [*Tanbuma* (Warsaw) *Shemini* 11]: "A tale of a righteous student who had a father who drank a lot of wine and each time would fall down in the market. Boys would come and hit him with stones and chain and scream and call after him: 'Look at the drunk'..." And the narrator goes on to describe the father's disgrace and shame, something we don't see in our story. In addition, in the second story this is a father who 'drank a lot of wine' and this also differs from what is written about the father in our story [(about this story see in my book (5774: 133-141)].

⁷ This phenomenon is also found in therapeutic practice—the patient who is perceived as speaking excessively, without a stop, and so he takes control of the conversation and 'silences' the therapist, out of fear that he will say things that he, the patient, is running away from.

⁸ Zelda (Mishkovsky), the famous poetess, in a poem she wrote on her hospital bed: "Ten heads of the dragon will rise/Look into my eyes/**Without asking how I am**" (Mishkovsky, 5745: 227). In this matter, it is related that the famous

‘protects’ them from feeling him and his pain. This is the mental mechanism that ‘enables’ a person to do things to other people that should not be done. These sons, who were many, spoke in one voice, were of one mind, and took steps that seemed decisive and determined: **“they took him, plied him with drink, got him drunk and took him out and placed him** in a cemetery.” This is a sequence of five verbs, one following another. This multitude of activity is known in psychological terminology as **overdoing**, which is an outer layer of the doubts and worries that ate away at their hearts when they set out to do this terrible act. Perhaps there is a loss of restraints and loss of control here.⁹ In any case, they take advantage of their father’s weakness—literal or figurative: either weakness of mind or weakness of body, or both—in order to try to take control of his assets, either through deviousness or cruelty. “They placed him in a cemetery,” i.e., they buried him alive—literally—patricide! Indeed, a cruel, absurd and outrageous act, even though it cannot be called ‘impossible’! It is definitely possible that sons could do this to the father who sired them, as the issue of the ‘thief who is found breaking in’ will prove.

As a father has mercy on his sons

“If a thief is found breaking in, and is smitten so that he dyeth, he is not guilty of bloodshed. If the sun has risen upon him, he is guilty of bloodshed...” (Exodus 22:1-2). Our Sages interpreted these verses as follows: A thief that breaks into a house and while doing so was hit by the owner of house and died, ‘there is no blood guiltiness’—this is not murder, because he came for this purpose, because if the house owner would confront him in order to save his money, the thief would kill him. However, if it is clear as day (as the sun) that he did not come in order to kill, as in the case of a father who conspires to steal his son’s money, he must not kill him, because it is acknowledged that a father would have mercy on his son and would not risk his life. In other words, the basic assumption is that the father has no intention of killing his son if he stands

psychoanalyst Donald Woods Winnicott was hospitalized for three months during his studies, due to an illness. This experience led him to the conclusion that the doctor must experience the patient’s experience and hospitalization himself, ‘from the inside’ (Kolka, 1995: 20).

⁹ Similar to what is said of Esau: “And he did **eat and drink and rose up, and went** his way...and he **despised**” (Genesis 25:34)—“five transgressions trespassed the evil on that day...” [*Exodus Rabba* (Shinan) A]. And unlike said about Yaakov: “Forced, bent over and crying” [*Genesis Rabbah* (Theodore Albek) 65, 14].

up to him. However, what is the law if the situation is reversed—the son conspires to steal his father’s money? Would it also be said that ‘it is acknowledged that a son has mercy on his father, and has no intention of killing him?’ The answer is: “A father who is found breaking in to his son’s house—if he has any doubt, the son must not kill him, because certainly the father will have mercy for his son, and even if he is rescuing his money, he must not kill him. However, a son breaking in to his father’s house... he should kill him if he has any doubt, because certainly based on this opinion, he intends to kill you, if you oppose him (Sanhedrin 72b). In other words, with regard to the son, the basic assumption is that he intends to kill his father if the situation requires it.

This subject introduces a person to the deviant and the perverted, an encounter that evokes repulsion and disgust, leading him to ignore and even deny it, or to label it as ‘sick,’ ‘deviant,’ etc. However, such a reaction is only an escape from dealing with the challenge posed by this encounter, namely: to see the external ‘other person’ as a reflection of one’s inner ‘other self’ that is hidden within him, as referred to in the famous quote of the Baal Shem Tov: “*As one who looks in the mirror and sees his shortcomings, so too does someone who sees shortcoming in others know that he shares some of it.*” (Raz, 1992, 48.)

Indeed, our story is an extreme and terrifying one, but it illustrates and represents the dark side of a person, the existence of which he refuses to recognize as part of him. He opposes the attempt to push the deviance and perversion outside the boundaries of his awareness. That the characters in the story lack unique personality characteristics, are nameless and lack an identity, invites the reader to fill in these blanks by ‘projecting’ his characteristics onto one of the characters and suiting its story to his own image; thus, the story becomes the story of any person.

It seems to me that this fundamental principle was what our sages intended to teach us in their commentary regarding a difficult topic, known as *Parasbat Sota* or the matter of an adulterous wife (Numbers 5: 11–31), which is also related to wine. Rebbi says: *why are the issues of the Nazir (a nazirite or one who took the ascetic vow described in Numbers 6:1–21) and the Sota (an adulterous wife) juxtaposed? to tell you that anyone who sees a Sota in her disgrace shall make a nazirite vow to refrain from wine.*” (*Sotah* 2a). An adulterous woman is a difficult human phenomenon, deviant and extreme, but a person must not consequently say that it is irrelevant. It is best for someone who saw an ‘*adulterous woman in her disgrace*,’ who saw how she was shamed (*ibid*), to ensure that he has ‘refrained from wine,’ because if he did not, such a serious deviation may also happen to him.

The Father of the Sons

If the father of the sons did not die of grief from being placed by them in the grave, then he died from the sorrow of the wine that they denied him (or perhaps other things as well). It seems that this is what the sons thought, and perhaps even anticipated, and so they buried him. Rabbi Yissachar Ber Hacoen Katz, who wrote the commentary *Matanot Kebuna* on the *Midrash*, says this explicitly: “They took him out and buried him, and the sons intended for him to die there.” However, when they came three days later to check what happened to him, they were shocked to see:

And there was the wineskin in his mouth and he was sitting and drinking. They said: Even here among the dead, the Creator did not abandon you, will He abandon you among the living? Since the Heavens have granted you (wine), we don't know what to do with you. Let's bring him in and make a permanent arrangement. They made an arrangement that each son in turn would provide him with drink, one son each day.

What is the meaning of this inspection that they conducted after three days? It may be a reference to an ancient custom: “they would go to the cemetery to examine the dead for three days (Tractate *Smachot* 8a).¹⁰ Commentary: “To see if he was still alive,”¹¹ just as these sons did, i.e. to ‘confirm the kill!’ Levinson says that this is indeed the motive for this inspection: “the sons go not to see whether their father is alive, rather to reassure themselves that the ‘old man’ is dead.” (Levinson, 5753: 21.)

But the sight they saw was a bitter irony for them. The silenced father, whose voice was not heard from the beginning to the end of the story, the one that found nothing better for the body than silence, makes his voice heard here for the first time, and in song! As if to say: ‘Even here (in the grave!) I found a way to connect with a lifeline, because the key to the graves is in the hands of the Holy One Blessed be He, and not in yours.’ (See: *Tanhuma* (Buber) *Vayetze* 17.) Moreover, ironically, the ones who were worried about wasting his money are the ones to ‘waste’ their own money on him: “They made an arrangement that each son in turn would provide him with drink, one son each day.” Previously, they worked as one entity, with one voice and one opinion. Now this entity

¹⁰ *Baal Haturim*, Rabbi Yaakov Ben R’ Asher, refers to this as a Halachic ruling: “And the dead should be examined for three days” (*Yoreh Deah*, *Siman* 364, paragraph 3). And Rabbi Yehoshua Falk Katz, author of the *Prisha V’Drisha* on the *Tur*, writes: “It was actually in their days.” Notice that “Grave” in this Jewish law and in our story means a grave in a burial cave and not a grave in the ground.

¹¹ R’ Yaakov ben Baruch Noimberg, who wrote the commentary ‘*Nahalat Yaakov*’ on the small tractates of the Talmud.

has been split into its components, which seems to be what enabled them to hear the other voices, and primarily the voice of their heart that said: “Even here among the dead, the Creator did not abandon you, will He abandon you among the living? Since the Heavens have granted you...” Now, in the final part of the story, something that had been hidden from the eyes of the sons and our eyes, as well, is revealed: indeed there is the fear of G-d in this place. Making G-d present at this moment and in this place gives this relationship a metaphysical dimension that lends it a different significance. This opens their eyes to see what they had not previously seen, to hear what they had not previously heard, and to understand what they had not previously understood, namely: Even in a situation in which the behavior of the father seems unacceptable, and his deeds are not honorable in their eyes, *since this is his wish, his sons must honor him by fulfilling it.*¹² A father is always a father and they are sons who are obliged to pay him respect and take his opinion and wishes into consideration as much as possible. And this is what they now do: “***They made an arrangement that each son in turn would provide him with drink, one son each day.***” The presence of the Holy One Blessed be He also leads to a rectification in the relationship between the sons and their father, and their attitude toward the wine. Fundamentally, wine is not the ‘elixir of death,’ rather the ‘elixir of life’—because it serves as the beverage of blessing, happiness and holiness and it is also ritually poured onto the altar. Therefore: “***They made an arrangement that each son in turn would provide him with drink, one son each day.***” This does not mean that from now on they would ply him with drink until he would become drunk and lose all his money. Henceforth, his drinking would be appropriate, regular and monitored drinking, which does not lead to drunkenness, as Yehoshua Levinson writes: “Drinking one jug of wine per day is not excessive drinking.”¹³ And through this arrangement, they also corrected themselves. If at first, they had conspired to take him out and ply him with drink in order to kill him: “Let us ply him with drink and get him drunk and take him out and say that he is dead”; now their idea was to bring him in and give him drink in order to live: “Let us bring him in and

¹² That is how the sages instructed R' Yishmael to act with this elderly mother, even though her acts were strange [see the discussion on this story in my book (5774: 160-161)].

¹³ Levinson, 5753: 11 and the references there. The Sages have already taught us that wine reveals man’s real and profound opinion (*Erwin* 65b), and “Anyone who is tempted by wine resembles his Creator” (Ibid pg. A).

remedy him... each son in turn would provide him with drink, one son each day.”

The Oedipal Complex

Two stories from the Bible, which also describe wine as causing a rift between father and sons,¹⁴ and in which the sons experienced serious failures vis-à-vis their father, are echoed in our story. One is the story of Noah’s drunkenness, where it is written: “And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent” (Genesis 9, 21). Regarding this story, our Sages explain in their commentaries: “He drank disproportionately, became drunk and was disgraced.” (Genesis Rabbah [Theodore-Albek] 36, 4.) “*And who caused him to be disgraced? It was the wine, and it caused him to **bring a curse upon his seed.***” (Tanhuma [Warsaw] Shemini, 11). And it is further written: “And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his youngest son had done unto him” (Ibid, 24). In the commentary on this verse, the Sages differed in their opinions: “*One said he castrated him and the other said he raped him.*” (Sanhedrin, 70a.)

The other story is of Lot’s drunkenness: “And the firstborn said unto the younger: ‘Our father is old, and there is not a man in the earth to come in unto us after the manner of all the earth. Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve the seed of our father.’” (Genesis 19: 31-32.) Rashi explains: “Our father is old—he may die or cease to be able to produce children.”

These two stories are related to our story with regard to three matters:

[A] The drunkenness of the father leads the children to perform acts onto their father that should not be performed. [B] The motive that brought the children to do these acts with their father was their concern that the father will leave nothing behind after his death: in the Bible stories—offspring—and in our story, money. [C] Together, the three stories create the Oedipus Complex or Oedipal Trinity (Erikson, 1990: 40) as postulated by Freud.¹⁵ The first side of this triangle is the son’s wish to ‘marry his mother’ and the daughter’s wish to ‘marry her father,’ as described in the case of Lot and his daughters. The second side is the

¹⁴ The Midrash refers to this later, and also mentions the story of the death of Nadav and Avihu, as one of the stories in which wine separated a father from his sons (Leviticus Rabbah [Margaliot] 12, 1).

¹⁵ The gist of this complex is the subconscious desire to ‘conquer’ the parent of the opposite sex and to ‘do away with’ the same-sex parent (Freud, 1988: 219–232).

Castration Complex, the son's fear that his father will castrate him as punishment for his desire for his mother, which relates to the story of Noah's drunkenness and what his son did to him, according to the *Midrash*.¹⁶ The third side is patricide, as related in our story of what the sons did to their father.¹⁷

In all these matters, the story teaches us about the duty of both sides toward one another: the duty of the sons toward their father and the duty of the father toward his sons. Just as there are commandments regarding one's father that are incumbent upon the son, so too are there commandments regarding one's son that are incumbent upon the father" (*Kiddushin* 29a). The father is commanded to refrain from putting his son in an impossible situation, where he may fail, as the Bible says—"Do not put an obstacle in front of a blind person" (Leviticus 19, 14).¹⁸ In other words, the responsibility for the embarrassing situation in which the sons found themselves with regard to their father is also placed on the father's shoulders, and the failure of the sons is also a result of the father's failure. Moreover, the father is commanded to note that the time has come to 'reduce' his presence and make himself 'redundant' so as not to force his sons to breathe down his neck and usurp his place, as was the case with Nadav and Avihu in the *Midrash* I quoted above, and as the sons did to their father in our story. Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Korcha tried to teach Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi (*Rebbi*) this theory of redundancy in the following story:

Rebbi asked Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Korcha: "How did you live so long?" When Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha responds with "Why, are you tired of me being alive?" Rebbi answers "Rabbi, this is Torah, and I must learn ... When he (Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha) was about to die, he (Rebbi) said: 'Rabbi, bless me.' He said: 'May it be His will that you live to half of my days.' And he (Rebbi) said: 'And not all of them?' He said to Rebbi: "Those who live after you, shall they graze like cattle?!" (*Megilla* 28a).

The meaning of the story is this: Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi (*Rebbi*), attained wisdom, Torah, wealth and respect. If he would also have attained longevity, what would be left for his sons? If they did not find an available field in which to excel, how would they make their mark? A

¹⁶ Although here the son is the one who castrates his father, this story contributes to the castration component in father-son relationships.

¹⁷ The Midrashic story of Nadav and Avihu (*Sanhedrin* 54A) is also a story of a patricidal wish; however in our story, the sons' wish is explicit and out in the open. For a detailed comparison between our story and the deaths of Nadav and Avihu and the story of Josef and his brothers, see: Mali, 5764.

¹⁸ And it is an explicit Jewish law (*Halacha*).

father must leave room for his sons to find an available area in which to excel; and consequently, they will not ‘wish for his death’ in order to inherit him. Indeed, the father’s money is his and his only; and as long as he is alive, the sons have no right or claim to this money. But eventually, and this is the way of the world, this money will become the sons’ money—as is written: “*And leave their wealth to others*” (Psalms 49:11). The fruits that a man eats in his world are from the tree that his forefathers planted for him, and just as his forefathers planted for him, so too is he commanded to plant for his sons. If a father spends all of his money, what will he leave for his sons after his death?

Drunkenness should not be understood only literally; it can also be interpreted as an expression of excessive, disproportionate and wasteful consumption. Aside from its immediate damages, this consumption also causes harm in the future. It reduces the wealth of the generations to come. Excessive and wasteful consumption during one generation, the fathers’ generation, leads to a shortage in the next generation, the sons’ generation.

The Oedipal Complex

As previously mentioned, it is not drunkenness that is the focus of the story, but rather the relationship between fathers and sons. Studying this subject has led me to Freud’s Oedipal Complex, which is primarily the child’s preoccupation with his parental figures—his father and mother, who are the two most profound pillars of his development. If so, there is a figure missing from the story! Where then is the third figure of the triangle (i.e., the mother)?!

Let us return to the vision that was revealed to the sons when they went to visit their father in the cemetery:

And this man was lying there (in the cemetery)... and when he awoke he saw a wine skin hanging above his head. He untied it and put it in his mouth and began to drink. When he was quenched he began to sing.

From a psychoanalytic point of view, this can be viewed as a picture of a sleeping baby cradled in his mother’s lap. When he awakens, the first thing he sees ‘above his head’ is the mother’s breast (wineskin).¹⁹ He puts

¹⁹ In Winnicott’s psychoanalytic theory, the term ‘mother’s breast’ relates to its symbolic psychological representation. The breast becomes the ‘mother’ which is the focus of the oral desires, the source of psychological feeding and the object that satisfies needs (1995: 35–56). *Rabbeinu Bechaye ben R’ Yosef Ibn Pakuda*

it in his mouth and suckles something that revives him (wine), and when he has suckled enough, he begins to sing. This picture contains all the emotional constructs related to the mother figure (Winnicott, 1995, pgs. 35–56) and is reminiscent of the verse “*Like a weaned child with his mother; my soul is with me like a weaned child*” (Psalms 131: 2), which means: the baby who has just finished suckling his mother’s milk lies in her lap feeling satisfied, and is quiet and tranquil (Rashi and *Da’at Mikra* on site). This is the most fitting image of the soul’s reconciliation with itself and others (Samet, 5772:475-476). Moreover, as previously mentioned, after three days, the sons went to open their father’s grave and check whether he was dead or alive. “Opening of the grave” appears in the Talmud to connote birth. A woman whose womb is opened prior to birth is described as ‘a grave [that] cannot be opened without blood’ (*Niddah* 21b). What the sons saw as they stood in front of their father’s grave was like the father’s rebirth in their eyes. Because they saw the wine as something that revived their father, they stopped opposing him, and transformed his excessive drinking into appropriate drinking. Now that they finally saw their father’s distress, they learned to accept him and they resolved to support and assist him. And so, the story that began with conspiracy and corruption ended with rectification, acceptance and reconciliation. Thus our story is diametrically opposed to its Greek counterpart, which began badly—with drunkenness—and ends worse, with drunkenness that became second nature, as is common in Greek Mythology which is fatalistic—with no way out.²⁰ ❧

also describes the childhood period as a period of complete dependence on the mother’s breast: ‘The child at the beginning of his development puts his trust in his mother’s breasts’ (pp. 361-362).

²⁰ The Greek story, from Aesop’s Fables, is related by Yaakov Elboim, who claims that this is the origin of our story.

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