

**Shayla:** Does the Bible portray godly fathers as dominant and uncaring?

**Meforshim:**

Early Hebrew life was carried out in the mountainous regions of Canaan in a situation comparable to that of early pioneer families in the United States. Families were involved together in clearing land, small scale gardening and herding, and sporadic defense. Halakha promoted more egalitarian relationships between males and females and a greater participation of males in all aspects of child care.

The Biblical text supports a view that the Hebrew male shared in nurturing his young children. Tenderness toward child life, appreciation of parents for their children, and children for their parents; all these are features of the Bible which the most superficial reader cannot fail to observe. Material such as Samuel's rearing by Eli,<sup>1</sup> Jacob's attachment to Joseph<sup>2</sup> and Benjamin,<sup>3</sup> and David's relationship to Absalom, shown by his grief at his son's death,<sup>4</sup> provide evidence of the father-son bond. The "my son" passages in Psalms and the instructions in Proverbs concerning the parent (father and mother)-child relationship,<sup>5</sup> provide further insights. Other passages show the father to be responsible for discipline<sup>6</sup> and instruction in religious and livelihood matters.<sup>7</sup> The importance of a child, especially a son, to a father is shown by passages in Psalms which portray a father's joy in his children,<sup>8</sup> and by instances in the lives of righteous persons where God's highest reward for faithful service is children.<sup>9</sup> Examples of children as God's reward occur for Sarah and Abraham,<sup>10</sup> Rachel and Jacob,<sup>11</sup> Manoah and his wife,<sup>12</sup> Ruth and Boaz,<sup>13</sup> and Hannah and Elkanah.<sup>14</sup> These and other passages suggest a strong father-child concern and attachment from the child's conception on.

Looking at the Biblical material, the Bible notes a process whereby males involved themselves in the responsibilities of caring for children which some Lowlanders would probably consider an effemination of the male. In coming to share in the care of children, he came to share in the archaic function of the female. In coming to understand that he was biologically connected with children, he became like a mother.<sup>15</sup>

"Like a mother" brings us full circle to presage a term depicting the male nurturing role that reflected actual fathering roles of Hebrew males, and could thereby be realistically associated with God, the Father.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Samuel 1-4

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 37

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 44:20-34

<sup>4</sup> 2 Samuel 18:12-19:8

<sup>5</sup> e.g., Proverbs 4:1-5, 4:20

<sup>6</sup> Deuteronomy 21:18-21

<sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy 4:9, 32:7; Psalm 78:1-8

<sup>8</sup> Psalm 127:4-5, 128:3, 144:12

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 127:3

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 17:15-22

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 30:1-2, 22-24

<sup>12</sup> Judges 13:1-25

<sup>13</sup> Ruth 4:13-17

<sup>14</sup> 1 Samuel 1:1-28

<sup>15</sup> Numbers 11:12; Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34