

Agape and Eros in relating to the Divine¹

In the mystical literature the relationship between Israel and the divine is often mirrored in the metaphor of relationships within the family. The husband-wife and brother sister form the two typologies seen in the Bible and carried through and projected onto the divine in the rabbinic imagination. The forsaken wife, the abandoned woman, the treacherous wife and the wife banished for having relations outside the marriage all form the grist for the midrashic mill in attempting to explain the fallen state of Israel after the Hurban and loss of the Holy Land. In better times the love relationship was embodied in such texts as the Song of Songs, in romantic if not erotic terms.²

I wish to explore the ways in which two such bonds, the brother-sister and the husband-wife, are used by late Hassidic mystical texts specifically the Noam Elimelech and Reb Nachman to posit the two in tension and archetypally representing two radically new ways of interacting with the divine.

The notion of chesed has traditionally represented kindness, mercy and love, grace and mutual respect in the Bible³ and Rabbinic literature. Later in mystical texts it represents a divine sefira or nodal archetype of grace, balanced by strict judgment The Law and exacting retribution (Gevurah). In a few places however it is associated with the taboo of incest namely in Kedoshim and Ki Tavo.

Biblical scholars have often complained that the word $\alpha\gamma\alpha\pi\eta$ in the Hebrew Bible is difficult to translate into English, because it really has no precise equivalent in our language. English versions usually try to represent it with such words as "loving-kindness," "mercy," "steadfast love," and sometimes "loyalty," but the full meaning of the word cannot be conveyed without a fuller exposition.⁴

¹ Eros and Agape (ISBN 0-8446-6051-5) is the title of a two-volume treatise written by the [Swedish theologian Anders Nygren](#), first published in [Swedish](#) in 1930-1936. It analyses the connotations of two [Greek](#) words for [love](#), [eros](#) (sexual love) and [agape](#) (unconditional love), and concludes that agape is the only truly [Christian](#) kind of love, and that eros (an expression of the individual's desires) turns us away from God. This may be contrasted with the conclusions of [Pope Benedict XVI](#) in his first [encyclical](#), [Deus Caritas Est](#), that both eros and agape are aspects of divine love.

² My Rebbe Hershy Worch is currently working on an translation of the Malbim's commentary to the Song of Songs which embodies a love triangle.

³ List of verses in which the word occurs: Gen 19:19; 20:13; 21:23; 24:12,14,27,49; 32:10; 39:21; 40:14; 47:29; Exod 15:13; 20:6; 34:6,7; Lev 20:17; Num 14:18,19; Deut 5:10; 7:9,12; Josh 2:12,14; Judges 1:24; 8:35; Ruth 1:8; 2:20; 3:10; 1 Sam 15:6; 20:8,14,15; 2 Sam 2:5,6; 3:8; 7:15; 9:1,3,7; 10:2; 15:20; 16:17; 22:51; 1 Kings 2:7; 3:6; 8:23; 20:31; 1 Chron 16:34,41; 17:13; 19:2; 2 Chron 1:8; 5:13; 6:14,42; 7:3,6; 20:21; 24:22; 32:32; 35:26; Ezra 3:11; 7:28; 9:9; Neh 1:5; 9:17,32; 13:14,22; Esther 2:9,17; Job 6:14; 10:12; 37:13; Psalms 5:7; 6:4; 13:5; 17:7; 18:50; 21:7; 23:6; 25:6,7,10; 26:3; 31:7,16,21; 32:10; 33:5,18,22; 36:5,7,10; 40:10,11; 42:8; 44:26; 48:9; 51:1; 52:1,8; 57:3,10; 59:10,16,17; 61:7; 62:12; 63:3; 66:20; 69:13,16; 77:8; 85:7,10; 86:5,13,15; 88:11; 89:1,2,14,24,28,33,49; 90:14; 92:2; 94:18; 98:3; 100:5; 101:1; 103:4,8,11,17; 106:1,7,45; 107:1,8,15,21,31,43; 108:4; 109:12,16,21,26; 115:1; 117:2; 118:1,2,3,4,29; 119:41,64,76,88,124,149,159; 130:7; 136:1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,24,25,26; 138:2,8; 141:5; 143:8,12; 144:2; 145:8; 147:11; Prov 3:3; 11:17; 14:22,34; 16:6; 19:22; 20:6,28; 21:21; 31:26; Isaiah 16:5; 40:6; 54:8,10; 55:3; 57:1; 63:7; Jer 2:2; 9:24; 16:5; 31:3; 32:18; 33:11; Lam 3:22,32; Dan 1:9; 9:4; Hos 2:19; 4:1; 6:4,6; 10:12; 12:6; Joel 2:13; Jonah 2:8; 4:2; Micah 6:8; 7:18,20; Zec 7:9.

⁴ See Norman H. Snaitch, from A Theological Word Book of the Bible, edited by Alan Richardson (New York: MacMillan, 1951), pp. 136-7.

The following text is by the Beis Yaakov (Reb Gershon Chanoch Heynoch of Radzyn) from his commentary to Parsha Toldos in Genesis.

“And there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine”

In order to understand the redundancy of the word “famine” one may posit the notion that this refers to the very famine from Isaac’s time. In our exposition Abraham is the archetypal rememberer, for the earlier generations who were closer to the very creation of the world fulfilled God’s will and also realized that all is in the hands of heaven. However this later got forgotten from their hearts. Abraham then was the first to publicize the notion of Godliness and to worship God whose sole focus in his actions were directed to performing God’s will. He thereby magnified and multiplied the honor of heaven in the world. When he arrived in Egypt which was full of (signified) memory loss and forgetfulness meaning they felt that their actions were self-serving, then Abraham stated “she is my sister” in order to remind them of their origins (the former generations where) all works were directed to fulfilling God’s will and crowing all their actions with His desire.

As is stated in (Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 58b):

Cain married his sister as is written (Ps. 89) “the world is based on chesed”

As my sainted father wrote in his commentary Mei Ha-shiloach to Kedoshim:

“Before the Revelation of Torah on Mt Sinai the world was run according to chesed meaning without man’s actions and even man’s actions were seen to be in accordance with the divine will. The world ran according to His grace and the love of God was as natural as the love of a brother for a sister.

However afterwards (after the giving of the law on Mt Sinai) incest was forbidden meaning a person must now contract his own actions (in the service of God) like the romantic love between strangers, which requires much effort. Nevertheless where man’s actions are insufficient he may rely on the primordial incest type of love of God.

As it says (Ps. 25) “remember Your mercies and Your chesed, for they were from olam (primordial times)”

So too in this situation with Abraham in Egypt where the modus Vivendi of that society was epitomized by the phrase “my works and the product of my own hand has wrought all this” there he had to resort to the claim “she is my sister” meaning he needed to accept the yolk of heaven with all his talents.

So too a person needs to accept the yolk of the Kingdom of Heaven “when lying down as well as when rising” meaning prior to man’s working his own efforts when he might forget and think all his efforts causes things to happen, therefore he needs to accept Heaven at these two times of the day (when lying down and when rising) and then (only) recite “Blessed be the Name of the honored kingdom” .

The Radzyner, working off the text from his grandfather, defines the notion of chesed sequentially. Avoiding the pitfall of having to translate this hapax legomenon according to its context, and preferring to hold onto its meaning of grace despite the context of incest, he quotes the early midrash Pike deReb Eliezer that seems to compartmentalize the usage of incest prior to and after the giving of the Torah on Mt Sinai.

This ingenious theory then posits a time of primordial grace when incest was in fact approved because it led to the spread of the original family into the nations of the world. After the giving of the Law however, the incest taboo was instituted and the same word *chesed* was kept to describe what now had become taboo.

This is a brilliant reading of the midrash but beyond that it belies a new notion of history hitherto not recognized. The Rebbe has divided history into pre-law giving and after. By splitting the history into these two historical periods he also splits the very moral order into two distinct periods. In the prior period what is now considered incest was in fact *chesed*...grace or the ability to procreate and allow the survival of the species. Whereas after the giving of the law the incest taboo disallows relations of primary family members.

He then brilliantly projects such relationships onto the human-divine plane. Here too there were to be two typological relationships. In one the safe sister relationship characterized the pre-lawgiving period where we might rely on primary family ties and understandings and comforts in our search for the divine. However after the giving of the law a new order and relationship with the divine was in process. This demanded a typology of man and stranger woman. No longer able to rely on primary ties he must now go out and form attachments with strangers unfamiliar to him with all the danger and possibility of rejection as in all romance. This type of relationship is what God now demanded, the possibility of rejection colors the whole enterprise since it becomes fraught with danger and rejection.

This new relationship is a more mature type and the very bonds can be called into question at any time by either party as in all romantic affairs of the heart.

(כח) ויהי רעב בארץ מלכד הרעב
הראשון. להבין היתור לשון, הלא
בודאי היה זה הרעב בימי יצחק. אך הענין
בזה, כי אאע"ה היה זוכר הנשכחות, כי
דורות הראשונים שהיו קרובים לבריאת
עולם היו עושים רצון השי"ת וגם ידעו
שהכל בידי שמים, אך אח"כ נשכח זאת
מלבם, ואאע"ה היה הראשון שפרסם
אלהותו ית' לעבוד את השי"ת ולפעול דק
כפי רצון השי"ת, והגדיל והרחיב כבוד
שמים בכל העולם, וכשבא למצרים ששם
הוא מלא שכחה, היינו שנדמה להם
שפעולתם פועלים לעצמם, אז אמר אברהם
אבינו אחותי היא, היינו לזכור הראשונות

את התחלת בריאת עולם, להמליך עליו השי"ת על כל פעולותיו, וכדאיתא בש"ס (סנהדרין נח:) קין נשא אחותו משום דכתיב (תהלים פט) כי אמרתי עולם חסד יבנה. כמו שביאר בזה אאמו"ר זללה"ה (מי השלוח ח"ב קדושים ד"ה ואיש) כי קודם קבלת התורה היה העולם מתנהג **בחסד** השי"ת בלי פעולת אדם, ואפילו הפעולות היו גם כן רואין שהם מהשי"ת, והעולם היה מתנהג בחסדו ואהבת השי"ת בתולדה כמו אח ואחותו. אבל אח"כ נאסרו העריות, היינו שצריך האדם לצמצומים ופעולות אדם, כמו אהבת איש ואשתו שהם אינם בתולדה רק יגיע כפיך ק"כ. אבל במקום שפעולת אדם לא יספיק, צריך האדם לבטוח על חסד השי"ת, כדכתיב (תהלים כה) זכור רחמיך ה' וחסדיך כי מעולם המה. ולכן בעת שבא אאע"ה למצרים, ששם נדמה להם שכחם ועוצם ידם הם פועלים, לכן בכאן הוצרך אברהם אבינו לומר אחותי היא, היינו לקבל עליו עול מלכות שמים בכל פעולותיו. וכמו שהאדם צריך לקבל עליו עול מלכות שמים בשכבך ובקומך, היינו קודם הפעולות שהאדם פועל, שאז יכול להיות בשכחה ולומר כחי ועוצם ידי. לכן צריך לקבל עול מלכות שמים בשני עתים הללו, ואח"כ אומרים, ברוך שם

כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד, היינו שהשי"ת
העמיד עבודה גם כן שע"י עבודה יש
כבוד שמים קבא. וכן בברכת המזון, איתא
בש"ס (ברכות מח:) משה תקן לישראל
ברכת הזן בשעה שירד להם הזמן מן
השמים, היינו שהשי"ת זן אותם בחסדו
בלי פעולות אדם, ובברכת הזן לא נזכר
ארץ. ויהושע תיקן להם ברכת הארץ, היינו
שהשי"ת חפץ בפעולות אדם. וזה היה
כונת אברהם שאמר אחותי היא. והאומות
קבלו את הלבוש ממדת החסד, והתפשטו
עצמם בזה עד שבאו לכעוס על הבורא,
כדאיתא ברבה (תולדות סג) באותו זמן פגעה
מדת הדין, והיינו שאמרו שאין צריך
לעשות דין. וזה שכתוב מלבד הרעב
הראשון אשר היה בימי אברהם. היינו
שקלקלו בשתי המדות, במדת אברהם
שהתפשטו בחסד עד שעשו היפך מרצון
השי"ת, וגם במדת יצחק, שבאו לכעוס על
השי"ת. ומדת יצחק היא שהשי"ת חפץ
בעבודה, ודיוקנא דאברהם הוה ביה, ולכן
אמר אחותי היא. וזהו דאיתא בזוה"ק
(תולדות קמ:) על אברהם ויצחק שאמרו
אחותי היא דבגין שכינתא קאמרי דכתיב
(משלי ז) אמרו לחכמה אחותי את. היינו
שבזה קיבל עליו מלכות שמים והדביק
עצמו בהשי"ת. והם הכריזו כל הנוגע
באיש הזה ובאשתו מות יומת, היינו דברי
ליצנות ושחוק על יצחק, שנדמה להם
שהם נקיים בשתי המדות חסד וגבורה,
כיון שיש להם שני הפכיים אם כן אינם
יכולים להשתקע במדה אחת, ובאמת חטאו

בשתייהן, במדת החסד שהתפשטו עצמם
היפך מרצון השי"ת, ובמדת הגבורה, שהיו
מלאים כעס על השי"ת. ולזה אצל אברהם
נאמר כי הבאת עלי ועל ממלכתי חטאה
גדולה (וירא כ) ובכאן נאמר (תולדות כו)
והבאת עלינו אשם. כי חטאה, היינו שלא
נשתרש כ"כ בחטא, ואשם היינו שנשתרש
לגמרי בחטא, כמבואר (בית יעקב ויקרא
פרשת ויקרא אות מד) קכב. והיינו שבאם עשו
בכאן עבירה היו נשתרשים בחטא לגמרי.
ובזה שאמר בכאן יצחק אחותי היא הועיל
קצת שהכירו חסרונם, בזה שאמרו אח"כ
ראו ראינו, שהם ראו שהם מלאים
חסרונות הן בתאווה והן בכעס. וזה דאיתא
במדרש רבה (תולדות סד) ראינו מעשיך
ומעשי אבותיך, היינו משום דדיוקנא
דאברהם אתכליל ביה:

In the following text of the Mei Hashiloach the term chesed is explored further:

Parshas Kedoshim Leviticus 20:17

17 And if a man shall take his sister, his father's daughter, or his mother's daughter, and see her nakedness, and she see his nakedness; it is a wicked thing; and they shall be cut off in the sight of their people; he has uncovered his sister's nakedness; he shall bear his iniquity.

וְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִקַּח אֶת אֶחָתוֹ וְגוֹ' חֶסֶד

הוא. בפרקי דר"א (פכ"א) ר' מיאשא
אומר נולד קין ותאומתו עמו נולד הבל
ותאומתו עמו אמר לו רבי ישמעאל והלא
כבר נאמר ואיש אשר יקח את אחת וגו'
וכו', ועל זה נאמר (תהלים פ"ט,ג') כי
אמרחי עולם חסד יצנה, בחסד נצרה העולם
עד שלא נימנה המורה. זה הענין מורה לנו
שלא יאמר האדם מאחר שהשי"ת אוהב אותי
בשרשי אוכל לעשות כחפץ לבי, אך זה
האהבה הוא דוגמת אהבת אה ואחות
המושרשים באהבת החולדה בלי השמלותם,
והשי"ת רוצה שהאדם על ידי השמלותו
ופעולותיו יאהבנו השי"ת, ואם תאמר והלא
התחלת הצריאה לא היה מנד פעולות אדם
והמעוררות מנדו, רק השי"ת בחסדו וצטובו
נרא את העולם כי חפץ חסד הוא, כמו
שכתיב זכר רחמיך ה' וחסדיך כי מעולם
המה, (תהלים כ"ה,ו') שהשי"ת חפץ בחסדו
בלי פעולות אדם כמו שהיה צריאת העולם,
אכן זה היה רק בהתחלת הצריאה שכתיב
עולם חסד יצנה, אבל אחר צריאת עולם
רוצה השי"ת שרק ע"י עבודה וצדקים יבחר
בישראל, וזה שאיתא (חגיגה ע"ז). אם יאמר
לך יצר הרע חטוא והקב"ה מוחל אל תאמין,
ע"ז כתיב חסד הוא ונכרתו לעיני בני עמם,
שבאם האדם לא ישמלל בפעולות ומעשי
המנות אז יסיר השי"ת את אהבתו ממנו
ויראה לעין כל כי הוא מרוחק מהשי"ת.³

In Parshat Ki Tavo again he refers to this chesed concept:

**אָרֹר שָׁכַב עִם אַחֲתוֹ. הוּא נֹגֵד אֶשֶׁל
כִּי לֹאֲשֶׁר הִיָּה הִרְחַצָּה וְהִתְפַּשְׁטוֹ
כִּמוֹ שְׁנִתְצַאֵר בְּחֶלֶק רֵאשׁוֹן (פִּרְשַׁת חֲלוֹה דִּי
וּמִלֵּאחַת) וּמִי שֵׁישׁ לוֹ כָּל הַטּוֹבוֹת בְּהִרְחַצָּה יִכּוֹל
לְטַעוֹת שְׂאִינוֹ צְרִיךְ לְעִבּוּדָה, רַק אֲהַצְמוֹ
לְהַשִּׁי"ת בְּאַהֲבַת הַשׁוֹרֵשׁ כְּאַהֲבַת אִתּוֹ וְאַחֲמוֹ
וּכְמוֹ שְׁנִתְצַאֵר בְּחֶלֶק זֶה (פִּרְשַׁת קְדוּשִׁים) עַל
פְּסוּק וְאִישׁ כִּי יִקַּח אִתּוֹ אֲחִתּוֹ חֶמֶד הוּא לִכְן
נֹגֵד אֶשֶׁר נֹאמַר אָרֹר שָׁכַב עִם אַחֲתוֹ.**

This notion of incestuous sister love might explain a strange pericope in the Talmud:

Babylonian Talmud Nazir 48a:

[Futher],for his father, or for his mother, he may not defile himself, but he may defile himself for a meth mitzvah. But even if this [expression] did not occur, I could infer it as follows: Seeing that a High Priest whose consecration is permanent may defile himself for a meth mitzvah, then surely a nazirite whose consecration is not permanent may defile himself?1

But this inference is not valid. For if it is true in the case of a High Priest, it may be because he is not required to offer a sacrifice as a consequence of his defilement, whereas a nazirite must offer a sacrifice as a consequence of his defilement, [and it might be objected that] since he must offer a sacrifice in consequence of his defilement, he may not defile himself for a meth mitzvah.

And so Scripture says, He shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother, [implying], 'but he may make himself unclean for a meth mitzvah'.

But perhaps [the correct inference is that] he may not defile himself for his father or for his mother, but he may defile himself for other corpses? This follows by an argument a fortiori. Seeing that a common priest who may defile himself for

his kinsmen is forbidden to defile himself for other dead, then a nazirite who may not defile himself for kinsmen is surely forbidden to defile himself for other dead.

And so why does Scripture say, 'for' his father, or 'for his mother'?

For his father or for his mother he is forbidden to defile himself, but he may defile himself for a meth mitzvah. But even if this¹ were not written, I could infer it as follows: A general prohibition is stated for the High Priest, and a general prohibition³ is stated for the nazirite, and so just as, though there is a general prohibition for the High Priest, he is forbidden to defile himself for his father, but he may defile himself for a meth mitzvah, so when there is a general prohibition for the nazirite [it signifies that] he may not defile himself for his father but he may defile himself for a meth mitzvah.

But it is possible to argue in another direction. A general prohibition is stated for the common priest, and a general prohibition is stated for the nazirite, and so just as, though there is a general prohibition stated for the common priest, he may defile himself for his father, so too though there is a general prohibition stated for the nazirite he may defile himself for his father. Scripture therefore says, 'He shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother,' but he may make himself unclean for a meth mitzvah.

But surely this is needed to tell us [the plain fact] that he may not defile himself for his father?— In point of fact, 'for his father' tells us that he may not defile himself for his father; 'for his brother' he may not defile himself but he may defile himself for a corpse [the burial of] which is a religious duty; 'or for his mother'⁸ is used to form the basis of a Gezerah shawah after the manner of Rabbi;

whilst 'or for his sister' is required for the following [teaching]. For it has been taught: For what purpose is 'for his sister' mentioned? *If a [nazirite] was on his way to slaughter his Paschal lamb, or to circumcise his son and he heard that a near kinsmen had died, it might be thought that he ought to defile himself*

It therefore says, 'He shall not make himself unclean'. But it might [then] be thought he should not defile himself for a meth mitzvah. The text therefore adds, 'for his sister', [implying that] for his sister he is forbidden to defile himself, but he may defile himself for a meth mitzvah.

ב"ע חמ פד ריזו

שי, רמאי אלש דע הוצמ תמל אוה אמטימ לבא, אמטימ אלד אוה ומאלו ויבאל? ומאלו ויבאל ל"ת המ אה לבא אמטימ וניא ויבאל ג"כ תורומאה תוללכ המ, ריזנב תוללכ ורמאנו ג"כ תוללכ ורמאנו: ידב יל זו ררדל רלכ וא הוצמ תמל אמטימ לבא אמטימ וניא ויבאל ריזנב תורומאה תוללכ פא, הוצמ תמל אמטימ תוללכ פא, ויבאל אמטימ טוידה נהכב תורומאה תוללכ המ, ריזנב תוללכ ורמאנו טוידה נהכב תוללכ ורמאנו רמול: היל יעבימ אה. אמטימ הוצמ תמל אה, אמטי אל ומאלו ויבאל: ל"ת? ויבאל אמטימ ריזנב תורומאה ומאלו אמטימ הוצמ תמל אה, אמטימ וניא ויחאל ויבאל אמטימ וניא רמול ויבאל, אלא! ויבאל אמטימ וניא **לומלו וחספ תא טוחשל קלהש ירה? ל"ת המ ותוחאל: ינתד, אינתדכל ותוחאלו יברדכל הוש הרזגל ותוחאל: ל"ת? הוצמ תמל** אמטי אל לוכי, אמטי אל: תרמא? אמטי לוכי, תמ ול תמש עמשו, ונב תא ויבורקה ולא תמ, ויקוחרה ולא תושפנ: רמא ע"ר. אמטימ הוצמ תמל אה, אמטימ וניא אה **ותוחאל** אמטימ וניא ויחאל, ריזנב אוהו ג"כ היה עאש ויחאל, הוצמ תמל אוה אמטימ לבא אמטימ וניא ומאלו ויבאל יברלו. ו'כ ונב תא לומלו וחספ תא טוחשל קלוה היהש ירה: אינתדכ ותוחאל, הוצמ תמל אוה אמטימ לבא אמטימ לבא אמטימ וניא ויחאל ריזנו ג"כ היה עא: רמ רמאד וייכ, קל רמא? הילנמ יברד הוש הריזג, אביקע? הילנמ ריזנ אוהו לודג נהכ, לאעמשי יברלו. ג"כ ריזנ יל המ, הידוחל ג"כ יל המ, הוצמ תמל אוה אמטימ רתעד אקלס? יל המל ותוחא. ויואל וירת יל המ, ואל דח יל המ, הוצמ תמ יבג ואל דח אנמחר ארשד וייכ תמל אמטי אל תרכד חספו הלימ לבא, אוה ויאל רוסיאד נהכו ריזנב הוצמ תמל אנמחר ארש יכ, אנימא ל"מק, הוצמ

The Talmud is discussing cases where a priest may defile himself with the impurity of burying a dead relative, a primary relative. If he is a High priest he may not even defile himself for a close relative. However the redundancy of the additional relative 'his sister' in the verse comes to teach us the exception to the rule, that of a meis mitzvah, the lost soul found as a corpse by the wayside, if there is none else to bury it he must defile himself to perform this rite. Or in the case of a non priest on his way to Jerusalem to sacrifice the Passover lamb or on his way to circumcise his son, these two commandments are time bound so that were he to busy himself with burying the dead he might well miss the time to perform these commands in the first case the evening of the 14th of Nissan, and in the second the daytime of the eighth day of his son's life. Both these commandments are unique in receiving the penalty of kares were they not fulfilled. The only two positive commandments in the Torah one gets the penalty of kares for omission. The word "his sister" in the verse thus comes to teach us that if there is by chance a meis mitzvah long the way to Jerusalem for example he should delay performing it in order to bury the dead person.

Why choose these two examples of oleh regel to Jerusalem for the paschal lamb and circumcision out of hundreds of other commandments?

Using my understanding of agape versus eros I would like to suggest the following. The use of "his sister" in the verse as the redundant word to expound was no accident by ties in to the very nature of our relationship to God prior and subsequent to the giving of the law on Sinai.

Prior to Sinai the midrash Pirke deReb Eliezer had taught that incest with sisters was permissible prompting the Ishbitzer to suggest that in our relationship to God we too relied on a kind of incestuous relationship that was built on the notion of *olam chesed yibone*, the world being dependant solely upon Gods grace, undeservedly. After Sinai the giving of the Torah prompts the erotic relationship whereby we need to perform with the commandments and earn God's love the way of romantic courtship.

These two commandments were unique *in having been given in Egypt prior to Mt Sinai epiphany*. Thus the "sister" redundant word comes to abrogate those two laws specifically as they were based on a pre-Sinai notion of the divine and must give in to the new law of burying the dead ...even though they carry a kares penalty.

In my own struggles I found these texts to be healing texts.

The notion of "my sister my love" echoes the refrains found in the Song of Songs and the relationship God characterizes between Himself and the People of Israel:

25. EVEN UPON THE CROWN WHEREWITH HIS MOTHER HATH CROWNED HIM. R. Johanan said: R. Simeon b. Yohai asked R. Eleazar b. R. Jose: 'Have you perhaps heard from your father what is the meaning of THE CROWN WHEREWITH HIS MOTHER CROWNED HIM?' He replied, 'Yes.' 'How did he explain it,' he asked? He said: 'By a parable of a king who had an only daughter of whom he was exceedingly fond' so that at first he called her "daughter", till not satisfied with that he called her "sister", and still not satisfied with that he called her "mother". So the Holy One, blessed be He, loved Israel exceedingly and called them "daughter", as it says, Hearken, O daughter, and consider (Ps. XLV, 11); till not satisfied with that he called them "sister", as it says, Open to me, my sister, my love (S.S. V, 2); and still not satisfied with that He called them "mother", as it says, Attend unto Me, O My people, and give ear unto Me, O My nation— u-le'umi (Isa. LI, 4), where it is written ul'immi (and to my mother). R. Simeon b. Yohai rose and kissed him on his head, saying, 'Had I come only to hear this explanation from your lips, it would have repaid me'

This excerpt from Midrash to the Song of Songs (3:25) calls into relief the sister relationship God at times, had with His people. Interestingly the sister relationship lies as an intermediate between daughter and mother. Each of the three relationships reflects a different tone. The sister typos reflects a sense of equality and unconditional love.

I would like to suggest that the sister relationship also recalls the notion of chesed, the Grace that we discussed earlier as possible taboos and incest in kedoshim but also the notion that this paradoxically reflects the very foundation of the world and the way it became populated, through the archetype of chesed or grace.

In the pain of illness and suffering where grace is so desperately needed Rabbi Nachman tells us that we may depend upon 'olam chesed yibone' that very grace upon which the world came into being and was populated that notion of chesed...the ozar matnas chinam...the treasury of unearned gifts, we MAY return to that primordial relationship when all else fails.

The Rebbe teaches us that when all else fails we do have something to fall back on, the grace of God, when in the darkest depths of despair, when there appears to be no hope, the Rebbe says 'I've been there!' and I myself have relied not on my Torah or my righteousness, rather that very old primordial chesed or grace by which the world itself was able to remain without anything but God's grace.

This is the promise and the claim, the hope and the future for those of us who have experienced the dark night of the soul. The Grace. The Chesed.