

as Rock help us understand how connected each of us is to those with whom we share our world. The "Rock of Ages" is that which holds our history, whether on a geological or a human time scale. This name of God—*Tzur Olamim*—can also be translated as "Rock of Many Worlds." In the earthiness that each of us shares with every being, animate and inanimate, on this rock orbiting around the sun, we are invited to connect our own personal "world" to the many other "worlds" around us. We can learn that our fates are interconnected: whether as citizens of a nation with a complex and fraught history; as individuals vulnerable to the violence of dictatorship and war; or as interdependent denizens of this planet. In the words of Arthur Walker-Jones:

God as Rock is a resource from the Hebrew Bible that represents a radical shift in perspective. It may help us to imagine a more livable reality in which humanity is part of a sacred, interdependent and living Earth community made up of many diverse human and nonhuman subjects.¹⁶

Mother Rock

There is one place in the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, that God is called *Rock*. It comes near the very

end of Deuteronomy, in a long poem that Moses recites to the Israelites on the border of the promised land. Moses knows that he will not be going in with them, and these verses are among his final words to the community he has spent the past forty years guiding through the desert.

In the opening of the poem, Moses declares, "*I will call out the name of YHVH, praise the greatness of our God—the Rock, Its actions are wholesome, all Its ways are justice.*"¹⁷ Moses goes on to relate how the people have been cared for by YHVH, yet they have rebelled, forgetting all that God—the Rock of their salvation¹⁸—has done for them. And it is here, in the description of God's care and the people's ignorance, that we get a whole new way of thinking about God as Rock:

*YHVH alone did lead [you] . . . made [you] ride on the heights of the land, fed [you] the produce of the fields. [YHVH] suckled you with honey from the craggy stone, and oil from the rock . . . But you neglected the Rock that bore you, and forgot God who birthed you.*¹⁹

Beginning with the image of the Israelites being "suckled," like a baby, with honey and olive oil flowing from rocks, to the striking metaphor of God as a Rock that gave birth to them, we are introduced to the idea of God as a

Mother Rock. It is unclear what the image of honey and oil flowing from rocks might have literally referred to. One possibility may have been the honeycomb of hives of wild bees found in the crags of mountain rocks, and the olive oil that flowed from stone oil presses. Or perhaps the reference was to the ability of the rocky land of Canaan to nurture date and olive trees (the "honey" mentioned in the Torah often refers to date syrup). Either way, this image of the people being nursed like a baby with such rich and delicious foods from the loving breast of the Mother Rock is quite marvelous.

Rock as the source of communal sustenance finds an echo in an earlier episode in the Exodus story, right after the Israelites have escaped from slavery in Egypt. Out in the desert, the people lack water and food. They complain loudly to Moses, accusing him of bringing them out of Egypt just to kill them with thirst. Moses cries out to God for help and receives these somewhat strange instructions:

YHWH said to Moses: Go before the people and take some of the elders of Israel with you; and take the rod with which you struck the Nile river, and go. Here I am standing before you, there on the rock at Horev. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, and the people will drink.²⁰

Moses does as instructed, and the crisis is (momentarily) resolved. But what can we make of this image of God standing on the rock that Moses is supposed to hit with his staff? Is God somehow in the rock? A divine Presence surrounding it? It's all a bit mysterious, but what is important for our purposes is this association of God with a rock that produces water for the thirsty Israelites. Like the rocks of Moses's song which produce honey and oil, this rock is a source of sustenance in the wilderness. All are associated with YHWH's bounty and care for the people.

Rock as refuge, as strength, as nurturing breast—all of these associations combine to suggest Something to which we can turn for support, protection, and nourishment. This Rock holds us, connects us, grounds us in the truth of our own lives, and in the godly soil of wholeness and justice.

God as Rock Practice

As recorded in the Psalms, singing and speaking to the Rock appears to have been something our biblical ancestors did as part of their spiritual practice, whether asking "my Rock and my Redeemer" to accept their meditations and words of prayer (Psalm 19:15), crying out

On Foolishness

Am naval v'lo khakham. You are a foolish, not wise nation.

1) LOVING FOOLISHNESS

AM NAVAL V'LO KHAKHAM. (DEUT. 32:6)

The most valuable quality of Israel is their cultivation of innocence. This intentional semi-foolishness emerges from a conscious attempt to put distance between ourselves and wise-cracking cynicism, scathing sarcasm, teasing disbelief, and put-down witticisms that distances everyone, speaker and listener alike, from the heart.

based on Rebbe Nakfiman of Bratislava's teachings brought down in Lekutei Moharan in P'ninay Hakhasidut

2) OF DEAD COWS AND TORAH TEACHERS

AM NAVAL V'LO KHAKHAM. (DEUT. 32:6)

How can those who study Torah be accused of foolishness, of not being wise? As long as one has not cultivated a sense of

hushed, awesome respect for the way things are, the study of Torah may lose its inherent wisdom and come across as mere floundering or even

עם נבל ולא חכם — כל עוד לא קלטו
כקרבם יראה, כחוצאה מלימוד התורה. דקבילו
אורייתא, חרי הם בגדר — עם נבל — כי כל
חלמיד חכם שאין בו דעה נכילה טובה הומנו
— ולא חכם.
רבי אברהם ישכר מרדומסק, חסד לאברהם

foolishness.

A teacher who teaches Torah knowledge but sidesteps cultivating conscious awareness of the Torah's depths is a less effective teacher than the carcass of a dead cow.

based on Rebbe Avraham Yisakhar of Radomsk brought down in Khesed L'Avraham in P'ninay Hakhasidut

3) SEPARATE FROM THE TREE OF WISDOM

AM NAVAL V'LO KHAKHAM. (DEUT. 32:6)

Naval means unripe, as in a fruit which has fallen away from the tree too early.

Lo Khakham "not wise" can suggest being beyond wisdom — not in wisdom, but beyond it.

What is beyond wisdom, beyond Khokhma? Keter! Beingness itself is beyond being wise about being!

We may then interpret this sentence fragment as a guidance and a compliment. What a group! Capable of Not Wisdom! Even separating from the Tree of Mind by going deeply into the miracle of Existence, the wonder of Being! Beyond Khokhmah!!

based on Rebbe Khai-yim of Tchernovitz brought down in B'er Mai-yim Khai-yim in P'ninay Hakhasidut

On Upside-Downness

Ki Dor Tahapukhot Hayma, banim lo umayn bam.

They are an upside-down generation, children not to have faith in.

1) "MARRY ME ON CONDITION THAT I AM A SAINT"

KI DOR TAHAPUKHOT HAYMA (DEUT. 32:20)

"They are an upside down generation."

The best quality of the Jewish people is their ability to turn themselves suddenly upside-down. In one minute they can become different, the opposite, the reverse of what they had previously been.

In *halakha* (Jewish legal guidance) We find this expressed by the law: If a person makes a condition when making a partner commitment, saying, "Marry me on the condition that I am a complete saint," and the partner accepts, this marriage is considered binding even if the person was known to be a villain, before and after this event. The reasoning: maybe, in that instant, the betrother thought of *Teshuvah* in her or his heart, and for that moment was indeed a perfect *Tzaddik*.

They are an upside-down generation. You never know who they will turn out to be. Don't judge anyone by what you they have been, only by the root of their soul.

based on Rebbe Yitzkhak of Neshkiz's teachings in Tol'dot Yitzkhak brought down in P'ninay Hakhasidut



2) FROM DIN TO RAKHAMIM IS UPSIDE DOWN

KI DOR TAHAPUKHOT HAYMA (DEUT. 32:20)

"They are an upside down generation."

These people have the power to change the world from a place of wrath and judgment to a place of compassion and gentleness. They are reversers of the negative.

based on Rebbe Yosef Binyamin of Helitsch's teachings in B'nay Yosef brought down in P'ninay Hakhasidut

3) DON'T BELIEVE THEM

... BANIM LO UMayN BAM. CHILDREN NOT TO BELIEVE IN. (DEUT. 32:20)

Don't believe that the children are bad, even if you see them doing bad things. In the seeds of their *neshama* they are whole. The badness is a passing phase. Only look at the *neshama*.

based on Rebbe Asher of Stoln's teachings in Bet Aharon brought down in P'ninay Hakhasidut

4) THEY DON'T BELIEVE THEY'RE FINISHED

... BANIM LO UMayN BAM. CHILDREN NOT TO BELIEVE IN. (DEUT. 32:20)

The most valuable quality of Israel is that they don't believe that they have reached their own potential. They are always exploring to find a further edge of their awareness.

based on Rebbe Aharon of Koydinov's teachings in Siakhi Avot brought down in P'ninay Hakhasidut