Gender in the imagery of God

A. Introduction

- Does divine imagery involve gender?
- What does this imply about human gender and sex? "sex" is biological, from birth
 and mostly binary, while "gender" is a social construction relating to behaviours and
 attributes based on labels of masculinity and femininity, and gender identity is a
 personal, internal perception and so may not match a person's sex. (ONS.gov.uk)



B. Some male imagery for God:

Exodus 15:3 - The Lord is a man of war, the Lord is His name.

: הי אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה הי שְׁמוֹ

Jeremiah 3:19-20 - As for me, I said, How shall I place you among children? I gave you a land of delight, an estate of the greatest splendour of nations, and I said, You shall call Me "my Father" and you shall not turn back from Me. Yet, as a woman betrays her companion, you have betrayed Me, O house of Israel, said the Lord.

וְאָלֹכִי אָמַרְתִּי אֵידְּ אֲשִׁיתֵדְּ בַּבָּנִים וְאֶתֶן לָדְּ אֶרֶץ חֶמְדָּה נַחֲלַת צְבִי צִבְאוֹת גּוֹיִם וָאֹמֵר אָבִי תִּקְרְאִי לִי וּמֵאַחֲרִי לֹא תָשׁוּבִי: אָכֵן בָּגְדָה אִשָּׁה מֵרֵעָהּ כֵּן בָּגַדְתֵּם בִּי בִּית יִשְׂרָאֵל נָאָם ה׳:

Malachi 2:10 - Do we not all have one father, did not one God create us? הַלוֹא אָב אֶחָד לְכַלָנוּ הֲלוֹא קֵל

Psalms 103:13 - As a father has compassion for his children, the Lord has compassion for those who revere Him.

כְּרַחֵם אָב עַל בָּנִים רָחַם ה׳ עַל יָרֵאַיו :

C. Some female imagery for God:

Deuteronomy 32:18 - You neglected the rock that bore you; and forgot God who birthed you.

צוּר יְלָדְדּ תֶּשִׁי וַתִּשִּׁכַּח קֵל מִחֹלֵלֵדְּ :

Isaiah 42:14 - I have been silent a very long time. Kept my peace, held Myself in check – like a woman in labour now I shriek, I gasp and I also pant.

ָהֶחֱשִׁיתִי מֵעוֹלָם אַחֲרִישׁ אֶתְאַפָּק בּיוֹלֵדָה אֶפְעֶה אֶשֹּׁם וְאֶשְׁאַף יָחַד:

Isaiah 49:15 - Does a woman forget her babe, have no mercy on the child of her womb? Though she forget, I will not forget you.

הֲתִשְׁכַּח אִשָּׁה עוּלָהּ מֵרַחֵם בֶּן בִּטְנָהּ גַּם אֱלֵה תִשְׁכַּחָנָה וָאָנֹכִי לֹא אֵשְׁכַּחֵדּ :

Isaiah 66:13 - As a man whose mother comforts him, so I myself will comfort you, and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

בְּאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר אִמּוֹ הְנַחֲמֶנּוּ כֵּן אָנֹכִי אֲנַחֶמְכֶם וֹבִירוּשָׁלַם הְנַחָמוּ :

D. Some imagery for God which is both male and female:

Genesis 1:26-27 - And God said: Let us make humanity in our image, by our likeness... And God created humanity in His image: in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

וּיאמֶר אֱלֹקִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כִּדְמוּתֵנוּ... וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹקִים אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֵלֹקִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זַכַר וּנִקָבָה בָּרָא אֹתַם:

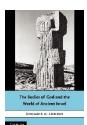
Psalm 123:2 – Look, like the eyes of slaves to their masters, like the eyes of a slave girl to her mistress, so are our eyes to the Lord our God, until He grants us grace.

הָנֵּה כְעֵינֵי עֲבָדִים אֶל יַד אֲדוֹנֵיהֶם כְּעֵינֵי שִׁבְּחָה אֶל יַד גְּבִרְתָּהּ כֵּן עֵינֵינוּ אֶל ה׳ אֱלֹקֵינוּ עַד שֶׁיְּחָנֵנוּ :

E. Some imagery for God which is neither male nor female:

Isaiah 40:25 - And to whom would you liken Me that I be compared, says the Holy One?

וְאֶל מִי תְדַמְיוּנִי וְאֶשְׁנֶה יאמַר קָדושׁ :



"The Hebrew Bible's authors regarded God as a being who could be located at particular times in specific places – that is to say, an embodied being... Does God have a gender? ...[Gen. 1:26-27 implies that] God has no one gender. God is either without gender, or perhaps we might say (if we take the language of the verse quite literally) that God is both male and female. The text's need to address the question of humanity's gender immediately after it informs us that humanity has the form and shape as God helps confirm that these terms refer to a bodily image."

(The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel, Benjamin D. Sommer, CUP 2009, p.10,70)

Midrash - Genesis Rabbah 8:1

"And God said: Let us make humanity in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26) - Rabbi Yochanan began: "From behind (achor) and in front (kedem) You shaped me" (Ps. 139:5). R. Yochanan said: If a person merits, they eat the fruits of two worlds [this world and the next], as it is written, "From behind and in front You shaped me", and if not, a person comes to receive judgment and accounting, as its written "and You set Your palm upon me" (ibid.).

Said R. Yirmiyah b. Elazar: When the Holy One blessed be God created the first of humanity, God created them as androgynous, as it is said, "male and female He created them" (Gen. 5:2).

Said R. Shmuel bar Nachman: When the Holy One created the first of humanity, God created them double-fronted (*du-partsufin*), and sliced them and made them backs, a back here and a back here.

They challenged him: But it says, "And God took one of their ribs (tzalotav)" (Gen. 2:21)! He said to them: Here it means, one of their sides (sitrohi), just as you would say, "And for the side (tzela) of the Tabernacle" (Ex 26:20), which they translate in Aramaic as "And for the side (setar) of the Tabernacle" [i.e. not a rib].

Mishnah – Bikkurim: Chapter 4 [later addition to the Mishnah]

- 1. An hermaphrodite is in some ways equivalent to men, and in some ways equivalent to women, and in some ways equivalent to men and to women, and in some ways not equivalent to men or to women.
- 2. How are they equivalent to men? They become impure with white discharge, like men; may marry [a woman] but may not be married [to a man], like men; may not be in seclusion with women, like men; are not supported with the daughters, like men; dresses and grooms themself, like men; may not [if a Kohen] become impure from a corpse, and is obligated not to round [corner's of their head] and not to destroy [beard corners], like men; and are obligated in all of the commandments which are said in the Torah, like men.
- 3. How are they equivalent to women? They become impure with red [discharge], like women; may not be in seclusion with men, like women; do not necessitate *yibum*, like women; do not receive a portion [of inheritance] with the sons, like women; does not receive a portion in the holy things of the Temple, like women; is disqualified from all testimony of the Torah, like women; may not cohabit with forbidden relations, like women; and is disqualified from the priesthood, like women.
- 4. How are they equivalent to men and to women? One who strikes or curses them is liable, like men & women; one murders them accidently must go into exile, and if on purpose, receives the death penalty, like men & women; their mother sits for them [at birth] for impure blood and pure blood, like men & women; receives a portion of the 'holy things of the borders', like men & women; and if someone says, "I am a *nazir* if this person is a man and a woman," then they become a *nazir*.
- 5. How are they equivalent not to men and not to women? They are not liable due to their *tumah*, they do not burn [*terumah*] on their *tumah*; and they cannot have an *erech* vow on them, not like men and not like women; they cannot be sold as a Hebrew slave, not like men and not like women, and if someone says, "I am a *nazir* if this person is not a man and not a woman," then they becomes a *nazir*.

Rabbi Meir says: An hermaphrodite is a creature unto themself, and the sages could not decide concerning them whether they were a man or a woman. But this is not so with a *tumtum*, for sometimes they are treated as a man and sometimes as a woman.

ײַנִיאֹמֶר אֱלֹקִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כִּדְמוּתֵנוּיִ (בראשית א:כו). רַבִּי יוֹחָנֶן פָּתַח ייאָחוֹר נָקֵדֶם צַרְתָּנִיי (תהלים קלט:ה). אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנֶן: אִם זָכָה אָדָם, אוֹכֵל שְׁנֵי עוֹלָמוֹת, שְׁנֶּאֱמַר: ייאָחוֹר נָקֶדֶם צַרְתָּנִיי, וְאִם לָאוֹ הוּא בָּא לִתֵּן דִּין וְחֶשְׁבּוֹן, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר ייוַתְּשֶׁת עָלַי כַּפֵּכָהיי.

אָמֵר רַבִּי יִרְמְיָה בֶּן אֶלְעָזָר: בְּשְׁנְה שַּבָּרָא הִקבייה אֶת אָדָם הָרְאשׁוֹן, אַנְדְּרוֹגִינוֹס בְּרָאוֹ, הַדָּא הוּא דְכָתִיב ייזָכָר וּנְקַבָּה בְּרָאִםיי (בראשית ה:ב). אָמֵר רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר נַחְמָן: בְּשָׁעָה שָׁבָּרָא הקבייה אֶת אָדָם הָרְאשׁוֹן, דְיוּ פַּרְצוֹפִים בְּרָאוֹ, וְנִסְּרוֹ וַעֲשָׂאוֹ גַּבִּים, גַּב לְכַאן וָגַב לְכָאן.

אֲתִיבוּן לֵיהּ וְהָכְתִיב ״וַיְּקַח אַחַת מִצְּלִעָּיוּ״ (בראשית ב:כא), אַמַר לְהוֹן מִתְּרֵין סִטְרוֹהִי, הֵידְּ מָה דְאַתְּ אָמַר ״וּלְצֶלַע הַמִּשְׁכָּן״ (שמות כו:כ), דְּמִתַרְגָּמִינַן יְוְלִסְטַר מַשְׁכְּנָא׳.

 אַנְדְּרוֹגִינוֹס יֵשׁ בּוֹ דְּרָכִים שְׁנֶה לַאֲנָשִׁים, וְיֵשׁ בּוֹ דְּרָכִים שְׁנֶה לַנְשִׁים, וְיֵשׁ בּוֹ דְּרָכִים שְׁנֶה לַאֲנָשִׁים וְנָשִׁים, וְיֵשׁ בּוֹ דְּרָכִים אֵינוֹ שְׁנֶה לֹא לַאֲנָשִׁים וֹלֹא לנשׁים :

 בַּיצַׁד שָׁנֶה לַאֲנָשִׁים! מטַמֵּא בְּלֹבֶן פַּאֲנָשִׁים, וְנִוֹשֵׁא אֲבָל לֹא נִשְׂא פַּאֲנָשִׁים, וְאֵינוֹ מִתְיַחֵד עִם הְנָשִׁים פַּאֲנָשִׁים, וְאֵינוֹ נֹזוֹן עִם הבנות פַּאֲנָשִׁים, וְאֵינוֹ מֹטַמֵּא לֹמֵתִים, וְחַיָּב פַּאֲנָשִׁים, וְאֵינוֹ מֹטַמֵּא לֹמֵתִים, וְחַיָּב בּבל תַּקִּיף ובבל תַּשְׁחִית כַּאֲנָשִׁים, בֹבל מַצְוֹת הָאֲמוּרוֹת בַּתּוֹרָה כַּאֵנַשִִים.

בִּיצַד שָׁנֶה לַנְּשִׁים: מְטַמֵּא בְּאֹדֶם בַּנְשִׁים, וְאֵינוֹ מִתְיַחֵד עִם הָאֲנָשִׁים, פַּנָשִׁים, וְאֵינוֹ זוֹקֵק לְיִבּוּם בְּנָשִׁים, וְאֵינוֹ חוֹלֵק לְיִבּוּם וְבָנְשִׁים, וְאֵינוֹ חוֹלֵק בְּאָים, וְאֵינוֹ חוֹלֵק בְּקְדְשִׁי קְדָשִׁים כַּנְשִׁים, וְבָּסוּל לכל בְּקַדְשֵׁי קֻבְּדְשִׁים כַּנְשִׁים, וְאֵינוֹ נְבְעַל עֵדוּת שֶׁבַּתּוֹרָה כַּנְשִׁים, וְמִסוֹל מִן הַכְּהֻנָּה בַּנְשִׁים, וְפּסוֹל מִן הַכְּהָשָׁים, בַּעֲבִירָה כַּנְשִׁים, וְפּסוֹל מִן הַכְּהֻנָּה כַּנָשִׁים.

בִּיצַד שָׁנֶה לַאֲנָשִׁים וְלַנָּשִׁים: חַיָּבִים עַל מַפְּתוֹ וְעַל קַלְלֶתוֹ כַּאֲנָשִׁים חַיָּבִים עַל מַפְּתוֹ וְעַל קַלְלֶתוֹ כַּאֲנָשִׁים וְלַבָּשִׁים, וְהַהוֹרְגוֹ שׁוֹגֵג גּוֹלֶה וּמֵזִיד נְהֲרֵג כַּאֲנָשִׁים נְהָבִיּ הְּצִיים וְנָשִׁים, וְאֹם אָמֵר יּהְרֵינִי הַלְּשִׁים וְלַנְשִׁים וְלַנְשִׁים וְלַנְשִׁים וְלַנְשִׁים וְלַנְשִׁים וְלַנְשִׁים וְלַנְשִׁים אֵינ האיש וְאִשְּׁהיי הֲרִי זֶה נָזִיר.
 בִּיצַד אִינוֹ שְׁנֶה לֹא לַאֲנָשִׁים וְלֹא לַנְשִׁיִשִׁים וְלֹא לֵבְשִׁיִשִׁים וְלֹא לֵשְׁיִם וְלֹא בַּנְשִׁים, וְאֵינוֹ נֵעֲרְךְּ, לֹא בַּצְנְשִׁים וְלֹא בַּנְשִׁים, וְאֵים וְלֵא בַּנְשִׁים, וְאֵים וְלֹא בַּנְשִׁים, וְאִם בְּברוּ, לֹא בִּעְנִים וְלֹא בִּעְבִים וְלֹא בְּבְּיִשִׁים וְלֹא בְּנִשְׁים וְלֹא בַּנְשִׁים, וְאָם אָמַר יִהְרֵינִ נָזִיר שָׁנָּה לֹא אִשְׁרִי וְלָזִיר שָׁנָּים לֹא אִשְׁרִי וְזִיר שָׁנָּה לֹא אִישׁ וְלֹא אִשְּׁהִיי הְרֵי זָה נְזִיר שָׁנָּה.

רַבִּי מַאִיר אוֹמֵר: אַנְדְּרוֹגִינוֹס בְּרִיָּה בִּבְּנֵי עַצְמָה הוּא וְלֹא יָכְלוּ חַכָּמִים לְהַבְּרִיע עָלָיו אִם הוּא אִישׁ או אָשָׁה. אַבָל טַמְטוּם אֵינוֹ כֵּן, בְּעָמִים שָׁהוּא אִישׁ בְּעָמִים שָׁהוּא אשה.