

Abba/Father: "As a father chastises his son, so God chastises us" (Deut. 8:5).

Some 7 odd years ago I had an argument with my Pastor at the time regarding the use of the Aramaic term 'Abba' or 'Avva' ('Av' means Father in Hebrew).

He had stated that "GENERALLY the Old Testament did not convey the "concept" of the Fatherhood of God. It was a new revelation of Jesus i.e.. the GENERAL idea of the Fatherhood of God."

He was not disputing that the Tanakh declares that the God of Israel is also the Father of Israel and the Father of Israelites. Rather, he was arguing that it was not common use in Yeshua's day to use the title 'Father' or 'Abba' when speaking about the Almighty.

If I remember correctly he was not disputing that Ps 89:27; Ps 2:7; 2 Sam 7:14 & 1 Chron 22:10 speak specifically of Yahweh as the Father of the Messiah and that Hosea 11:1; 1 Chron 28:6 and Ezek 21:10 speak of Yahweh as the Father of Israel.

He also conceded that new light might be shed on this question from archaeology.

That light is now here. In "Abba and Father: Imperial Theology in the Contexts of Jesus and the Gospels" (a chapter in "The Historical Jesus in Context - Princeton Readings in Religions" - see http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001PGXDZC/ref=docs-os-doi_0), Mary Rose D'Angelo discusses this very issue.

At the time I had not properly appreciated the underlying presuppositions and biases that led many to prefer and profer this argument.

D'Angelo for example states that: "This argument was laid out in an article in the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT) by Gerhard Kittel, who interpreted the word abba as a form of baby talk and concluded that "Jewish usage shows how this Father-child relationship to God far surpasses any possibilities of intimacy assumed in Judaism, introducing indeed something which is wholly new."

The TDNT is held in very high regard by many theologians. I had not realised how this argument was used to promote anti-Semitism. For example, D'Angelo goes on to state that: "Kittel was not only editor of the TDNT but also the author of 'Die Judenfrage' (1933) and of contributions to the Nazi publication 'Forschungen zur Judenfrage' (Studies on the Jewish Problem).

Texts have been found from Qumran which demonstrate that the Jews of and before Yeshua's time could and did address God as "my father."

These texts show that this term was particularly important in prayers that sought God as the refuge of the afflicted and persecuted.

For example in 1QHODAYOTH (composed late in the Second Century BCE) reads in part: "You have made me a father for the sons of kindness, like a wet-nurse to the men of portent; they open their mouth like a chi[ld on the breast of its mother,] like a suckling child in the lap of its wet-nurse"

For you have known me since my father, from the womb [...of] my mother you have rendered good to me from the breasts of her who conceived me your compassion has been upon me, on the lap of the wet-nurse [...] from my youth you have shown yourself to me in the intelligence of your judgment and with certain truth you have supported me....For my father did not know me and my mother abandoned me to you. Because you are a father to all the [son]s of your truth.

And while all this happened, Joseph [was delivered] into the hand of foreigners who consumed his strength and broke all his bones up by the time of his end. And he became wear[y...] and he summoned the powerful God to save him from their hands. And he said, "My father and my God, do not abandon me to the hands of the Gentiles [...] do me justice, so that the poor and afflicted do not perish. You have

no need of any people or nation for any help. [Your] fing[er] is bigger and stronger than any there are in the world. For you choose truth and in your hand there is no violence at all. And your mercies are great and great is your compassion for all who seek you; [...] they are greater than me and my brothers who are associated with me. An enemy people lives in it [...] and opens its mouth against all the sons of your beloved Jacob with in- sults for [...] the moment of their annihilation from the whole world and they shall be delivered [...] I shall arise to do right and just[ice...] the will of my creator, to offer sacrifices [of thanksgiving...] to my God.” (translated by García Martínez and Tigchelaar) – text in square brackets was missing from the fragment found.

The evidence then seems quite strong that in calling HaShem his Father or ‘Abba’, Yeshua was not doing a new thing; he was not giving a new revelation, but speaking with the same desire for intimacy for the King of the Universe that all his fellow righteous Jews shared.

A short but very good article at aish.com on this concept is ‘Loving Father’ – *Ekev*(Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25)”

A famous Jewish phrase appears in this week's portion, "As a father chastises his son, so God chastises us" (Deut. 8:5). The idea of God as our "Father in Heaven" is one that we Jews shared with the world.

It was once pointed out to me that God is a Father in Heaven, not a grandfather in Heaven.

Grandparents come bearing gifts and are happy to look after their grandchildren when the going is good. But as soon as the kids get tired or start misbehaving, they hand them back to the parents to sort out. Grandparents love their grandchildren, but do not take the same degree of responsibility as parents do.

And that's no small difference.

Taking responsibility for someone's success and happiness is consistent with the greatest levels of love. Marriage, in theory, is an example; we take responsibility for another person's happiness. If my wife is not happy, it's my problem just as much as it is hers. As a great rabbi once said when visiting the doctor with his wife, "My wife's foot is hurting us." The greatest level of love requires us to commit to the other person such that his pain is our pain and his problems are our problems.

Parents most often feel this with children. Spouses sometimes feel this with each other. It is very difficult for unmarried people to feel this. But God? God feels this way unequivocally, unconditionally and without exception about each and every one of us - His children.

Judaism tells us that God is committed to not only the physical, but also the spiritual, wellbeing of his children. And if spiritual and physical priorities come into conflict, the spiritual will always take priority -- because it is more valuable and more permanent.

God is not a grandfather. He doesn't walk away frustrated when we are misbehaving. He stands by us and tries to guide us to a better way of living. His guidance might sometimes require us to endure hardship, but it is always done out of love. Parents sometimes put their children through painful experiences -- I had to pull out my daughter's wobbly tooth last week and she thought I was Tomas de Torquemada himself -- but from my perspective it was done with love.

God too, always does what He does with love. It might not always be so easy to see, but our Father in Heaven guides our lives with a level of love and care that is far greater than even the greatest of parents. – from <http://www.aish.com/tp/b/st/52304802.html>