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Ancient Prayers and the Psychology of Religion: Deities as Parental Figures

DAVID A. BOSWORTH
bosworth@cua.edu
The Catholic University of America, Washington, DC 20064

This article examines the image of deities in Hebrew and Akkadian prayers through the lens of attachment theory. Attachment theory describes how infants form attachments with their caregivers, and how caregivers form reciprocal bonds with their children. Children form mental representations of their "attachment figures" or caregivers that help them develop a sense of self, others, and relationship that persists into adulthood. Research in the psychology of religion indicates that believers often understand the deity they worship as an attachment figure. This essay draws on this research and extends it to investigate ancient Hebrew and Akkadian prayers to determine how extensively these texts reflect the image of deities as attachment figures. This analysis permits an enhanced understanding of deities as parent-like figures that is not limited to texts that explicitly use parental imagery of the deity. It also grounds the study of ancient prayer texts in a well-developed modern theory that can inform further research.

Attachment theory is a well-established scientific theory of considerable significance for the study of human beings and their cultural productions and practices. In brief, attachment theory describes how infants form attachments to their caregivers and how these caregivers form reciprocal bonds with their young. Infants and young children form ideas about their caregivers or "attachment figures" based on their experience. The present article will examine ancient Hebrew and Akkadian prayers for evidence that deities served as attachment figures for the ancient Near Eastern peoples who prayed to them. It represents a corpus-based examination of prayers, using the Psalms and Marie-Joseph Seux's anthology of Akkadian prayers.[1]

[1] Marie-Joseph Seux, *Hymnes et prières aux dieux de Babylonie et d'Assyrie,* LAPO 8 (Paris: Cerf, 1976). Seux's anthology is dated but is still widely used due to its substantial collection of 239 prayers. Benjamin Foster (*Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature,* 3rd ed. [Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2005]) includes many prayers with updated bibliographies, and he acknowledges his debt to Seux. The present work assumes the definition of prayer discussed by Alan Lenzi in *Reading Akkadian Prayers and Hymns: An Introduction,* ed. Alan Lenzi, ANEM 3

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Since the absence of attachment language is as significant as its presence, the corpus-based approach allows one to discern how common or uncommon attachment language is, and whether patterns may be discerned in its distribution. This study will first describe attachment theory and its relation to the psychology of religion more broadly (sections I–II), then turn to the discernment of attachment dynamics within Hebrew and Akkadian prayer texts (sections III–VII). I argue that insights from the psychology of religion can significantly enhance readings of ancient prayers and clarify, specify, and extend some scholarly intuitions about ancient religion.

I. Attachment Theory

Although attachment theory is rooted in psychology and ethology (the study of animal behavior), scholars from a range of sciences have contributed to it and an enormous volume of data now supports it.[2] The present section will summarize attachment theory and describe its relevance to the psychology of religion.

The attachment system is a pattern of behaviors specific to the young of a species that results in predictable outcomes that enhance survival by eliciting caring behaviors in parents and maintaining proximity to them. Human babies consistently monitor themselves and their environment for signs of distress (hunger, the appearance of a stranger) and for the availability of their attachment figure.[3] They seek to maintain proximity to the attachment figure and experience anxiety when separated from that figure. Within attachment relationships with caregivers, infants learn social and cognitive skills that facilitate their development into socially integrated adults.[4] When frightened or injured, children seek the safe haven of their

(Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 9–14, https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/pubs/9781589835962_OA.pdf.

[2] For an excellent and readable introduction to attachment theory and its development, see Robert Karen, *Becoming Attached: First Relationships and How They Shape Our Capacity to Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). The foundational texts for attachment theory include John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss*, 3 vols. (New York: Basic Books, 1969–1980); and Mary Ainsworth et al., *Patterns of Attachment: A Psychological Study of the Strange Situation* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1978). For a current summary, see David Howe, *Attachment across the Lifespan: A Brief Introduction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). *Handbook of Attachment,* ed. Jude Cassidy and Phillip R. Shaver, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford, 2008) is a massive collection of essays presenting the full range of attachment research for the convenience of scholars and clinicians.

[3] Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss*, 1:177–262; Ainsworth, *Patterns of Attachment*, 255–84; Howe, *Attachment across the Lifespan*, 9–10; Robert S. Marvin and Preston A. Britner, “Normative Development: The Ontology of Attachment,” in Cassidy and Shaver, *Handbook of Attachment*, 269–94.

[4] Howe, *Attachment across the Lifespan*, 25–26; James A. Coan, “Towards a Neuroscience of Attachment,” in Cassidy and Shaver, *Handbook of Attachment*, 241–65, esp. 245–47; and, in the

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attachment figures for comfort and protection. The secure base function enables a child to feel a sense of security and confidence so that the child may explore his or her environment and engage with unfamiliar objects and people.[5] As a result of their experience within attachment relationships, children form internal working models of their caregivers and themselves. These mental representations of themselves and others allow them to predict how interactions may unfold.[6] The models developed in attachment relationships appear to be particularly significant as the child matures. A child who experiences a negligent or unresponsive primary caregiver may form a model of the self as unloved and unlovable, and this internal working model of the self affects other relationships. Although internal working models can be revised based on experience, patterns of behaviors in early attachment relationships lead to relatively fixed models that persist into adulthood.

II. Attachment and Religion

Psychologists of religion have discerned the importance of attachment theory in how people relate to deities.[7] At least one theologian has explicitly perceived God as an attachment figure:

> The idea of God is the idea of an ultimately adequate attachment figure. This is made clear by the images in and through which the notion of God has traditionally been spelled out.
>
> In the Christian tradition God has been described preeminently as a father —not just any sort of father but a loving father who cares for his children. We need not to debate here whether mother-imagery or father-imagery would be more to the purpose: the point is that God is thought of as a protective and caring parent who is always reliable and always available to its children when they are in need.[8]

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same volume, Mario Mikulincer and Phillip R. Shaver, "Adult Attachment and Affect Regulation," 503–31.

[5] Ainsworth, *Patterns of Attachment*, 255–60, 264–65; Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss*, 2:181–83, 354–59; Howe, *Attachment across the Lifespan*, 18–19; Jude Cassidy, "The Nature of the Child's Ties," in Cassidy and Shaver, *Handbook of Attachment*, 3–22, esp. 8.

[6] These internal working models are not limited to attachment relationships, since people form similar mental models for all kinds of relationships. See Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss*, 1:80–84; Howe, *Attachment across the Lifespan*, 32–40; Inge Bretherton and Kristine A. Munholland, "Internal Working Models in Attachment Relationships: Elaborating a Central Construct in Attachment Theory," in Cassidy and Shaver, *Handbook of Attachment*, 102–27.

[7] See Lee A. Kirkpatrick, *Attachment, Evolution, and the Psychology of Religion* (New York: Guilford, 2005), which is grounded in previous research. See also Pehr Granqvist and Lee A. Kirkpatrick, "Attachment and Religious Representations and Behavior," in Cassidy and Shaver, *Handbook of Attachment*, 906–33.

[8] Gordon Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 67.

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Gordon Kaufman's remark has been frequently quoted in the scholarship on the psychology of religion but does not appear to have been noticed by theologians. Kaufman continues to reflect that the parent imagery is not sufficient to establish God as an ideal attachment figure since all humans (including parents) are weak, finite, and not completely reliable. He then quotes Psalms to illustrate that God is a mighty warrior (24:7–8, 10), a powerful creator (95:3–7), and a completely dependable (146:3–6) and moral (146:6–9) being. These attributes make God the perfect attachment figure. Believers develop internal working models of deities that represent these deities as always and everywhere available in ways that not even the most attentive human parents can be.

There is some risk that "attachment figure" may be understood as another metaphor for God, like "father," "warrior," or "shepherd." Yet Kaufman and psychologists of religion appear to agree that God is not *like* an attachment figure, God *is* an attachment figure.[9] The attachment system in the human mind/brain is fundamentally involved in thinking about deities and relating to them.[10] Surveys of modern Western populations find that relationship with God is an important aspect of religion for most respondents, and further analysis suggests that the relationship with God is an attachment relationship.[11] As an attachment figure, the deity provides a safe haven in times of distress and a secure base from which to engage the world. Believers seek proximity to the deity and experience anxiety when separated from the deity.[12] These features of attachment relationships appear in ancient prayer texts, a point that suggests some similarity between modern people who have been studied by psychologists and ancient peoples who are not available for study by the same methods. The present article will examine specifically the dynamics of attachment theory as reflected in ancient Hebrew and Akkadian prayer texts. The following four sections will describe how attachment language may be identified in prayer texts (III), how the texts present the deity as a safe haven (IV) and secure base (V), and how they use explicit parental metaphors to speak of deities (VI).

III. Attachment Language in Prayers

Previous scholars have noted the parentlike aspects of deities as presented in ancient prayers. For example, Thorkild Jacobsen suggests that ancient Mesopotamians considered their personal gods as parental figures. He identifies four aspects that make up this parental image of deity: "First, its physical aspect: the father as engenderer of the child; the mother as giving birth to it. Second, the provider

[9] Kirkpatrick, *Attachment*, *Evolution,* 55–56.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid., 54.
[12] Ibid., 56–72.

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aspect: the father as provider for his family. Third, the protector as intercessor aspect. Fourth, the claim that parents have upon their children for honor and obedience."[13] We will see how Jacobsen's first aspect is relevant to the explicit use of parental images for deities. His second and third aspects resemble the roles of secure base and safe haven, respectively. His fourth aspect will be less relevant to this study. Superior power and wisdom are qualities of attachment figures, but not only of attachment figures. Alan Lenzi's study of Akkadian prayers similarly suggests that personal gods resembled parents, while the high gods were regarded as more remote social superiors.[14] A. Leo Oppenheim notes that Akkadian prayers express the "security that is taken to result from the immediate presence of a supernatural power," or what attachment theory identifies as a secure base.[15] Parental images of YHWH have been extensively studied, although this research has been limited to explicit parental language in biblical literature and occasional use of outdated Freudian theories.[16] Attachment theory can significantly expand and improve this discussion. The present study develops the above insight into deities as parental figures by correlating prayer language with attachment theory. This correlation enables one to identify more precisely those aspects of prayers that involve the attachment system in the human mind/brain and to speak about deities directly and literally as attachment figures rather than only metaphorically as parental figures.

The task of identifying attachment language in prayers is not as simple as it may at first appear since there is no specific, limited set of lexical items that may

[13] Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 158. For more detail on personal gods, see Karel van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel: Continuity and Change in the Forms of Religious Life,* SHCANE 7 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), esp. 71–93.

[14] Alan Lenzi, "Invoking the God: Interpreting Invocations in Mesopotamian Prayers and Biblical Laments of the Individual," *JBL* (2010): 303–15, esp. 313.

[15] A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization,* rev. ed. by Erica Reiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 199.

[16] Bernhard Lang (*The Hebrew God: Portrait of an Ancient Deity* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002], 126–38) relies on Freud's notion of "oral fixation" in his discussion of explicit parental images of deities rather than the much more sophisticated and empirically grounded attachment theory. Other scholars are similarly narrow in the focus on explicit parental imagery: Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament,* trans. David E. Orton (Leiden: Deo, 2005), 618–21; Hans-Winfried Jüngling, "'Was anders ist Gott für den Menschen, wenn nicht sein Vater und seine Mutter?' Zu einer Doppelmetaphor der religiösen Sprache," in *Ein Gott allein? JHWH-Verehrung und biblischer Monotheismus im Kontext der israelitischen und altorientalischen Religionsgeschichte,* ed. Walter Dietrich and Martin A. Klopfenstein, OBO 139 (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 365–85; David R. Tasker, *Ancient Near Eastern Literature and the Hebrew Scriptures about the Fatherhood of God,* StBibLit 69 (New York: Lang, 2004). See the discussion and bibliography in Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 137–47.

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reflect attachment dynamics. The researcher must make a range of decisions about what counts and what does not count. The following is a brief description of what did and did not count as attachment language in prayers for the purposes of this study. Each line of a prayer either reflects attachment language or not. If it does, it was coded in one of five ways. First, if the language expressed the desire for proximity to the deity, then it was identified as imaging God as an attachment figure in this particular respect. One should note that the very act of prayer is a drawing close to the deity and therefore all prayer might be coded for this feature. For example, a person may pray a text that does not read as a typical prayer because it lacks direct address to the deity (e.g., Ps 1), and yet this person may seek closeness to the deity through the prayer. This study, however, concerns attachment language present in the text, not intentions present in the person praying.[17] Therefore, only language explicitly invoking proximity to the deity was coded for this feature of attachment figures. Yet proximity-seeking language appears in some prayers in the corpus without seeming to be connected specifically to attachment language. For example, Pss 15 and 24 have been called "entrance hymns" due to their focus on gaining access to the temple, but these prayers do not explicitly reflect a notion of the temple of God as a safe haven or secure base. Examples like these that express desire for proximity without specific language of safe haven or secure base were not included among prayers that reflect attachment dynamics. Second, anxiety at separation from the deity is closely related to desire for proximity. The differences between proximity-seeking language and the language of separation anxiety may at times be subtle or unclear, and various readers may make different judgments. For example, several psalms include invocations of the deity, and these were coded as proximity-seeking (e.g., Pss 4:2; 25:2). By contrast, Ps 22:2–3 invokes God in terms that express separation anxiety. Consequently, the interpreter must examine context to discern whether the turning to the deity that is expressed is motivated by separation anxiety, or even whether to make this distinction. For this study, only passages clearly describing the absence of the deity as the source of fear counted as separation anxiety. A similar problem arises in distinguishing the third and fourth aspects of attachment language: safe haven and secure base. These functions are similar, but the emotional valence of safe haven implies fear, anxiety, or other serious distressful emotion and the consequent activation of the attachment system to seek out protection for the sake of survival. By contrast, the secure base implies the opposite emotional experience of trust, security, confidence, and tranquillity that inoculate against anxiety and allow the person to engage in joyful play and social pursuits. In general, psalms recognized by scholars as "psalms of trust/confidence" (e.g., Pss 4, 23, 131) tend to verbalize an image of God as a secure base. The many petitions and laments, by contrast, tend to depict God as a safe haven. Many prayers

[17] Lenzi ("Invoking the God," 314) notes the inaccessibility of the psychological state of the supplicant. I substantially agree, and the present study is primarily textual rather than psychological. The two cannot be entirely separated, however, since texts are products of human minds.

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include language of both features because there is a close connection between them: the secure-base function enables the confidence to engage in the world and supplies the obvious place to return to when the world proves frightening. Consequently, language of divine protection sometimes appears in prayers of petition when the speaker hopes that the deity will become (again) a secure base. Fifth, in some cases, the prayers use explicit parental language concerning the deity. These instances were also counted as attachment language because this analogy explicitly identifies the deity as an attachment figure. The distribution and context of these explicit analogies provide some indication of the ways in which deities resemble parents and how the speaker(s) of the prayer see themselves involved in an attachment relationship with the deity.

A further decision concerns what passages do and do not count. I have opted for a minimalist approach in the sense that I have counted as attachment language only those passages that seemed most clearly to articulate the features above even when taken out of context. Kaufman's notion that the image of God as a warrior constitutes part of the image of God as an attachment figure may be correct, since an attachment figure should be thought to have the power to act as a safe haven in times of danger. The passage he cites (Ps 24:7–8, 10), however, like many other passages about the divine warrior, does not reflect language about God as a safe haven or secure base. Consequently, these passages were not counted as examples of attachment language, even though a case may be made that they are. In the wider context of many petitions, the extended descriptions of the enemies contribute to the sense of anxiety and the need for the deity as a safe haven. Similarly, although passages that elaborate the suffering of the speaker contribute to the overall dynamic of attachment relationships and the image of the deity as a safe haven, I counted only those verses that indicate the deity as a safe haven when taken out of context, and many of these lament passages make no reference to the deity (e.g., Pss 109:6–20; 22:13–18). In identifying attachment language, I err on the side of minimalism.

IV. Safe Haven

Scholars have long noted that people turn to religion in times of stress, and this phenomenon has been well documented.[18] An attachment-theoretical perspective on religion would predict this result, since children seek their attachment

[18] See Kenneth I. Pargament, *The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory, Research, Practice* (New York: Guilford, 1997), 131–57, esp. 138–42, and see the list of research studies in appendixes A and B; Melissa Soenke et al., "Sacred Armor: Religion's Role as a Buffer against the Anxieties of Life and the Fear of Death," in *APA Handbook of Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality*, ed. Kenneth Pargament, 2 vols. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2013), 1:105–22.

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figures most urgently in response to distress.[19] Furthermore, in times of distress, people turn especially to prayer as distinct from other aspects of religion (e.g., attendance at worship services). This finding indicates that people seek the attachment relationship with the deity more than other aspects of religion, such as the social dimension.[20] The need for social support from a community can be met in a nonreligious context, but the need for prayer is specifically a need for relationship with a deity. Hebrew and Akkadian prayers are filled with language reflecting the image of the deity as a safe haven in times of distress. Lee A. Kirkpatrick and Pehr Granqvist note three motivations for turning to an attachment figure as a safe haven:

> Bowlby discussed three kinds of situations that activate the attachment system and thus elicit attachment behavior: (a) illness, injury, or fatigue; (b) separation or threat of separation from attachment figures; (c) frightening or alarming environmental events. This list bears an almost uncanny resemblance for the list of potential triggers for people to turn to God: "[a] illness, disability, and other negative life events that cause both mental and physical distress; [b] the anticipated or actual death of friends and relatives; and [c] dealing with an adverse life situation."[21]

People may prayerfully seek deities as safe havens in a range of circumstances. The present discussion will focus on illness as a particularly stressful event that causes people to turn to the divine.[22] Some prayers specifically concern illness, and many more reflect a serious distress that may or may not result from physical illness.

Psalms of illness express a turning to YHWH as a safe haven. The proximity desired in an attachment relationship is fundamentally psychological rather than spatial.[23] The particular problem that deities present is that they are not corporeally present in the way humans are. People often believe that their deity is omnipresent in some sense, and this belief facilitates psychological access to the deity. God is everywhere, so one is never far from God (cf. Ps 139:7–8).[24] Hermann Gunkel

[19] Kirkpatrick, *Attachment*, *Evolution,* 23.

[20] Ibid., 62.

[21] Lee A. Kirkpatrick and Pehr Granqvist ("Religion, Spirituality, and Attachment," in Pargament, *APA Handbook of Psychology, Religion,* 1:139–55, here 141) correlate Bowlby's attachment theory with empirical evidence about when people turn to religion, and they quote from R. W. Hood et al., *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach,* 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford, 1996).

[22] Kirkpatrick, *Attachment*, *Evolution,* 63–64; Pargament, *Psychology of Religion*, 140–42; Harold G. Koenig, "Religion and Spirituality in Coping with Acute and Chronic Illness," in *APA Handbook of Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality*, 2:275–95.

[23] Kirkpatrick, *Attachment*, *Evolution,* 59–61.

[24] Akkadian prayers often speak of the deity as all-seeing, which makes the deity psychologically available to everyone. For example, a prayer to Marduk says, "You are high in the heavens, you examine all peoples" (Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 293–94). Kirkpatrick notes that places of worship and artistic representations of deities facilitate psychological access to the divine (*Attachment*, *Evolution,* 59–61).

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identified a large number of individual laments as psalms of illness, but more recent scholarship has narrowed the field.[25] Psalms 38 and 88 seem the most like psalms of illness, and both express a turning to God for healing. Klaus Seybold also identifies Ps 41 as concerned with illness. He is fairly certain that Pss 30, 39, 69, 102, and 103 also concern illness and possibly also Pss 6, 13, 31, 32, 35, 51, 71, 73, 91.[26] These prayers express a speaker's petition in time of illness or express thanksgiving for healing. Psalms 38, 41, and 88 provide the clearest examples of the speaker of the psalms describing serious illness (38:3–9; 41:4–9; 88:4–10, 16), and the illness is attributed to YHWH. Each also expresses a turning to YHWH as a safe haven and potential healer. Even Ps 88, which seems hopeless because it does not end on a note of praise as most petitions do, indicates that the speaker turns to God in the hope of finding a safe haven:

> YHWH, God of my deliverance [ישועתי],
> by day I cry out and by night before you,
> let my prayer come before you,
> incline your ear to my wail. (vv. 2–3)

The psalmist imagines entering Sheol, understood as a place far removed from YHWH, and this expectation induces separation anxiety:

> I am like a man without help [אין־איל]
> forsaken [חפשי] among the dead,
> like the slain lying in the grave
> whom you no longer remember [לא זכרתם עוד],
> they are cut off [נגזרו] from your hand. (88:5–6)
>
> Why, YHWH, do you reject me [תזנח נפשי],
> Why do you hide your face from me? (88:15)

This anxiety at the prospect of death and separation from God induces a constant seeking after YHWH expressed in the prayer itself and its repeated references to the speaker's incessant petition. Other psalms of illness also express separation anxiety over the possibility that God will not intervene (e.g., Pss 13:2, 30:8, 38:22–23), and other psalms express similar fears at the sense of divine absence (42:10–11, 77:8–10). Other scholars are less confident that psalms can be identified specifically as motivated by illness or other suffering. The above psalms of illness include language about enemies (e.g., Pss 13:3, 5; 38:13, 20–21; 41:6–10), which may point to problems other than illness. Alternatively, the enemies may be either the cause of the illness (i.e., sorcerers) or people who intensify the sick person's suffering

[25] Hermann Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel,* trans. James Nogalski, Mercer Library of Biblical Studies (German, 1933; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998); Klaus Seybold, *Das Gebet des Kranken im Alten Testament: Untersuchungen zur Bestimmung und Zuordnung der Krankheits- und Heilungspsalmen,* BWANT 99 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 1973).

[26] Seybold, *Das Gebet des Kranken*, 169.

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through social isolation. Based on Mesopotamian evidence, Sigmund Mowinckel suggested that the enemies in the psalms generally were sorcerers deemed responsible for causing illness.[27]

The available sources have generated a significant body of scholarship on ancient Mesopotamian medicine.[28] The cuneiform material can be broadly classified into medical and magical texts, although the medical texts include some rituals and prayers along with medicinal recipes and the magical texts include some medical recipes amid the incantations.[29] These sources clarify that the Mesopotamians turned to deities when they were afflicted with illness, which was thought to result from angry deities, demons, witchcraft, or ghosts. Several prayers to appease the heart of a deity seek forgiveness for sins that have resulted in the suffering of the sinner.[30] In some cases, the language indicates that this suffering includes illness. For example, one prayer addressed to "whichever" god/goddess (*idû lā idû*, indicating that the speaker does not know which deity has caused the illness) describes the consequence of an unknown sin:

> A lord in the rage [*uggat*] of his heart glowered at me [*ikkelmânni*],
> A god the anger [*uzzi*] of his heart has made me confront,
> A goddess has become angry [*isbus*] with me and made me sick [*marṣiš*].[31]

The prayer continues to ask the unknown god or goddess to "return to me," and "look at me," asks "how long" the suffering will continue, and begs forgiveness ("the wrong I did let the wind carry away").

An exorcistic prayer to Marduk is designed to counteract the malicious work of a witch who has caused the sufferer to become ill. The speaker refers to an interred image of himself as part of a ritual representing the magical attack that has caused the alienation of the normally protective personal deities:

> The powerful misfortune from which I suffer
> flattens me like [a net].
> Torment [lit., *alû*-demon] draws near, and distress, an[xiety and depression]

[27] Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship,* trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas, 2 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 1:229.

[28] For introductions to the literature, see Markham J. Geller, *Ancient Babylonian Medicine: Theory and Practice,* Ancient Cultures (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); Tzvi Abusch, "Witchcraft Literature in Mesopotamia," in *The Babylonian World,* ed. Gwendolyn Leick, Routledge Worlds (New York: Routledge, 2007), 373–85; Abusch, "Illness and Other Crises: Mesopotamia," in *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide,* ed. Sarah Iles Johnson, Harvard University Press Reference Library (Cambridge: Belknap, 2004), 456–59; Graham Cunningham, *Deliver Me from Evil: Mesopotamian Incantations, 2500–1500 BC,* StPohl.SM 17 (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1997).

[29] Geller, *Ancient Babylonian Medicine*, 161–68.

[30] On *ershaḫunga* prayers, see Lenzi, *Reading Akkadian Prayers,* 43–46.

[31] Prayer to an unknown deity, lines 30–32; trans. modified from Lenzi, *Reading Akkadian Prayers,* 447–64.

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disease [*murṣu*], oath, and curse, overwhelm me.
My whole body they afflict.
I am clothed in them as if with a garment.
Symbols and images of me are interred.
They have collected dust from under my feet,
they have taken my measure,
they have taken away my dignity.
I am infected and beset by people's wicked machinations,
the fury of my [personal] god and goddess and humankind are against me.[32]

In the throes of this sickness attributed to a magical attack, the speaker turns to Marduk, a god associated with exorcism, and begs:

Remove the illness [*muruṣ*] of my head,
the problem that is upon me.
May my (personal) god and goddess
and humankind be reconciled with me.
At your command may no evil approach me
from machinations of sorcerer or sorceress.[33]

Mesopotamian magical and medical texts are full of similar prayers to deities seeking relief from illness. A royal prayer representing Assurbanipal supplicating Ishtar resembles these incantations. He attributes his illness to an unknown sin against Ishtar, whom he also credits with bringing him to the throne, and therefore turns to her for relief, as these excerpts illustrate:

You have blanketed me with disease [*murṣa*], why am I short of breath?[34]

For how long mistress have you afflicted me with this illness [*murṣa*]?[35]

You who were angry, take pity on me. May your feelings be eased,
may your benevolent heart grow pained on my account.
Drive out my illness [*murṣi*], remove my guilt.[36]

The spirits of the dead could cause a range of evils including sickness. The solution might involve prayers to the ghosts themselves or to a deity who could provide relief. The following prayer to Shamash attributes several physical and psychological symptoms to the influence of a ghost or demon:

[32] Seux, *Hymnes et prières,* 443–49; Erich Ebeling, *Die Akkadische Gebetsserie "Handerhebung,"* Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Institut für Orientforschung 20 (Berlin: Akademie, 1953), 78, lines 49–58; Foster, *Before the Muses*, 682–86, lines 33–41.

[33] Ebeling, *Die Akkadische Gebetsserie*, 78, lines 60–62; Foster, *Before the Muses*, 682–86, lines 44–46.

[34] Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 497–501; Wolfram von Soden, "Zwei Königsgebete an Ištar aus Assyrien," *AfO* 25 (1974–1977): 37–49, here p. 39 line 42. Trans. modified from Foster, *Before the Muses*, 327–30 line 42.

[35] Foster, *Before the Muses,* 327–30, line 71.

[36] Ibid., lines 74–78.

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A ghost, a lurking demon, a spirit, a "wind" spirit,
Goose bumps, dizziness, paralysis[?], vertigo,
Joint pain, irrational behavior, have exacted a toll
On me and each day has left me [more] stunned.
O Shamash you are the judge, I bring you my life,
I kneel for verdict on the disease [*marṣi*] that has me in its grasp.[37]

The above examples could easily be multiplied with further evidence from a range of prayer genres in which ancient Mesopotamians turn to deities as safe havens in times of serious illness and express anxiety at the prospect of separation from the deity. Illness was just one form of distress that caused the Mesopotamians to turn to their deities. In this respect, they resemble ancient Israelites and modern believers who also turn to the divine in times of major stress, including serious illness. This behavior indicates that all these peoples perceived their deities as offering a safe haven in times of distress.

V. Secure Base

Researchers in the psychology of religion have explored at length the tendency of people to turn to religion in times of stress, so the safe haven aspect of deity is well established. Deity as secure base has drawn less attention, but it is not less important since believers regularly experience the deity's nearness as a source of comfort and confidence that alleviates anxiety. The extensive attention paid to religion as a resource during periods of distress overlooks the importance of religion in the absence of stress, and the corpus of prayers seems to reflect the same disproportionate interest. For example, the Psalms include a great many prayers of petition or lament but relatively few psalms of trust or confidence. Akkadian prayers show a similar emphasis on petition over trust.

Psalms of trust or confidence depict God as a secure base, often employing metaphors. The following psalms are widely regarded as psalms of trust: 11, 16, 23, 27, 62, 91, 115, 121, 125, 129, and 131. These psalms include images of trust:

In YHWH I take refuge [חסיתי].
How can you say to me,
"Flee like a bird to the mountains"? (Ps 11:1)

This quotation of the voice addressing the psalmist may continue through v. 3, which describes the triumph of the wicked and the unraveling of society. Under such circumstances, one might be tempted to flee like a nervous bird, but the psalmist reflects the belief that YHWH is in the temple and in heaven and is

[37] Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 426–27; Erich Ebeling, *Quellen zur Kenntnis der babylonischen Religion,* 2 vols., MVAG 23 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1918), 1:44, lines 29–31; trans. Foster, *Before the Muses*, 731–32, lines 13–16.

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watching and testing humans with a view toward rewarding the righteous. This faith in God as a secure base provides the speaker with the trust and courage to resist fear in a time of upheaval. Psalm 23 famously articulates trust in a shepherd-like God and confidence in divine protection. Other psalms of trust indicate the confidence that a secure base can provide:

> YHWH is my light and my salvation [וישעי],
> whom shall I fear?
> YHWH is the stronghold of my life [מעוז־חיי],
> of whom shall I be afraid? (Ps 27:1)
>
> He is my rock and salvation [צורי וישועתי],
> my fortress [משגבי] I shall never be shaken. (Ps 62:3, 7)
>
> Because you made YHWH "my refuge" [מחסי]
> the Most High your haven [מעונך],
> no evil will befall you,
> no plague touch your tent,
> for he will order his angels
> to guard [לשמרך] you wherever you go. (Ps 91:9–11)
>
> YHWH will guard [שמרך] you from all evil,
> he will guard [ישמר] your life. (Ps 121:7)

Some of the psalms of trust extend trust in God to a communal level. The psalms of Zion make this communal dimension primary by articulating God's protection and care for Jerusalem as a metonym for God's protection of the people (e.g., Pss 46:6, 48:4, 125:2). Even psalms of petition express divine protection and identify YHWH as a secure base (e.g., Pss 4:8, 25:5, 28:7–9, 61:4, 140:8).

Although there are no Akkadian parallels to the "psalm of trust/confidence," the dynamic of trust and the image of the deity as a secure base are well attested in Akkadian prayers. As in the psalms, these expressions of trust often appear in prayers that include petitions:

> At her glance, well-being [*bani*] is born,
> Vigor, health, good fortune and divine protection [*lamassum šēdum*].[38]
>
> You care [*tapaqqid*] for the people of all lands.
> All those king Ea, the counselor, has created are entrusted to you [*paqdaka*],
> You are shepherd of all living creatures together,
> you are their herdsman [*nāqidsina*], above and below.[39]

[38] To Ishtar, Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 39–42; Foster, *Before the Muses*, 85–88, lines 15–16; trans. modified from Lenzi, *Reading Akkadian Hymns*, 111–30. The terms *lamassum* and *šēdum* refer to protective spirits.

[39] To Shamash, Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 51–63; W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 121–38; trans. modified from Foster, *Before the Muses*, 627–35, lines 23–26.

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Your protection [*andullaka*] is cast over the lands.[40]

Set above me a watcher of well-being and life,
station at my head a protective spirit [*šēda*] and a god who safeguards.
Let them be looking out for me all night until daybreak.[41]

May I acquire the protective spirit [*šēda*] that is before you,
may I acquire the guardian spirit [*lamassa*] that goes behind you,
may I add [to mine] the wealth [*mešrâ*] at your right,
may I attain the good fortune [*dumqa*] at your left.[42]

May your broad protection and imposing forgiveness be with me.[43]

Both Hebrew and Akkadian prayer traditions reflect images of deities as secure bases that provide protection against anxiety and fear. The sense of security that believers draw from this image of deity enables them to regulate their emotion and engage the world.[44]

VI. Parental Metaphors

We have seen above that Hebrew and Akkadian prayers sometimes reflect an image of deity as safe haven and secure base whose absence provokes anxiety. The internal working model of deity therefore corresponds to an attachment figure, and the prayers sometimes employ explicitly parental imagery. These references to deities as parents may be categorized roughly into three types: royal prayers that identify the king as the son of a deity; language that identifies all humans as children due to the divine involvement in the creation of new human life; and examples drawing on the merciful quality of parents to ascribe mercy to or ask mercy from a deity. More than one of these types may appear in a single example. Both Israelite and Mesopotamian royal ideologies represent the king as the son of the deity:[45]

You are my son [בני אתה]. Today I hereby beget you [ילדתיך] (Ps 2:7)

[40] Foster, *Before the Muses,* 627–35, line 40.

[41] To Nusku, Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 254–55; Foster, *Before the Muses*, 717, lines 9–11.

[42] To Ishtar, Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 321–23; Ebeling, *Die Akkadische Gebetsserie*, 62, lines 31–32; Foster, *Before the Muses*, 674–76, lines 31–34.

[43] To Gula, Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 337–39; Foster, *Before the Muses*, 671–72, line 22.

[44] Soenke et al. (“Sacred Armor”) summarize research on the role of religion in terror management.

[45] Both narrative and prophetic genres in Akkadian and Hebrew reflect a royal ideology in which the king is the son of a deity. See John H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms,* SBT 2/32 (Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1976), 146–49; Simo Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies,* SAA 9 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1997), xxvi–xliv; Adela Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human, and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 1–24.

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He shall say to me, "You are my father [אבי אתה], my God, the rock of my deliverance."
I will appoint him firstborn [בכור], highest of the kings of the earth. (Ps 89:27–28)

I knew neither father nor mother [*abe u umme*].
I grew up on my goddess's knees.
The great gods guided me like a child.[46]

The Lady-of-Nineveh, the mother who bore me [*ummu ālittīya*],
Has given (me) an unrivaled kingship.
The Lady-of-Arbela, who created me [*bānitīya*],
Has ordered a long life for me.[47]

Other passages speak of the deity begetting the person in terms that seem to suggest the deity's involvement in all human conception and birth. Surviving literature from Israel and Mesopotamia does not provide detailed information concerning beliefs about conception and the development of embryos, but several texts indicate a common understanding that babies are created by deities as well as by their human parents:[48]

It was you who created [קנית] my kidneys,
you fashioned me [תסכני] in my mother's womb. (Ps 139:13)

On you I depended from the womb.
In the belly of my mother, you were my refuge. (Ps 71:6)

You are the lord, you called […]
At your command the womb [*šasurra*)] […][49]

Shamash, eminent judge, father of the black-headed people,
This woman, daughter of your divinity [*marti ili*][50]

[46] Assurbanipal's Prayer to Ishtar, Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 100–102; Foster, *Before the Muses*, 819–21, lines 13–14; Alasdair Livingston, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea,* SAA 3 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1989), 10–13, lines 13–14.

[47] Livingston, *Court Poetry,* 10–13, lines 40–41.

[48] Marten Stol, "Embryology in Babylonia and the Bible," in *Imagining the Fetus: The Unborn in Myth, Religion, and Culture,* ed. Vanessa R. Sasson and Jane Marie Law, AAR Religion and Culture (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 137–55; Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible: Its Mediterranean Setting,* CM 14 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), esp. 9–25; L. Cilliers, "Vindicianus' *Gynaecia* and Theories on Generation and Embryology from the Babylonians up to Graeco-Roman Times," in *Magic and Rationality in Ancient Near Eastern and Graeco-Roman Medicine,* ed. H. F. J. Horstmanshoff and M. Stol, Studies in Ancient Medicine 27 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 343–67; Claudia D. Bergmann, *Childbirth as a Metaphor for Crisis: Evidence from the Ancient Near East, the Hebrew Bible, and 1QH XI, 1–18*, BZAW 382 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 9–43.

[49] Great Hymn to Nabu, Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 181–85; Wolfram von Soden, "Der große Hymnus an Nabû," *ZA* 61 (1971): 44–71; Foster, *Before the Muses*, 621–26, lines 81–82.

[50] Prayer for Parturient, Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 217.

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> Me, Shamash-shum-ukin, son of your divinity [*mari ili*][51]

> At your command humankind is born [*utallada*].[52]

Most often, prayers speak of the deity as being like a parent who is caring or merciful. These passages do not present the deity as a parent in the somewhat literal embryonic sense noted above, and some of them make a clear distinction between human and divine parents even while comparing them:

> Though my father and mother abandon me, YHWH will take me in (Ps 27:10)

> Father to the fatherless [אבי יתומים] (Ps 68:6)

> Like the compassion [כרחם] of a father for his children,
> so YHWH has compassion [רחם] for those who fear him,
> for he knows how we are formed,
> he is mindful that we are dust. (Ps 103:13–14)

> The girl who invokes(?) finds i(n her?) a mother [*umma*].[53]

> May your heart like a real mother's [*umme ālitti*], like a real father's, be restored,
> Like a real mother's, like a real father's, may it be restored.[54]

> like a father's your mercy [*rēmuk*][55]

> [ ] like the father who begot me [*kīma abi ālidiya*],
> Like the mother who bore me [*kīma ummi ālittiya*], have pity on me.[56]

> Shamash, like a father and mother you have opened their ears [of animals in wilderness].[57]

[51] To Nisiba, Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 339. For the same expression ("son of your god/divinity") in royal contexts, see ibid., 225 and 439.

[52] To Enlil, Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 271–73; Ebeling, *Die Akkadische Gebetsserie*, 20, line 17; Foster, *Before the Muse*s, 652–53, line 16. Repeated in another prayer to Enlil, Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 274–75.

[53] To Ishtar, Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 39–42; Foster, *Before the Muses*, 85–88, line 19.

[54] Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 143–45; Foster, *Before the Muses*, 723–24, lines 22–23; Stefan Maul, '*Herzberuhigungsklagen*': *Die sumerisch-akkadischen Erschahunga-Gebete* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1988), 216–28. This expression appears in many "heart appeasing laments." See also Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 147–49 (to Enlil), 149–52 (to Enlil), 153–54 (to Marduk), 155–57 and 157–59 (to Judge), 164–66 (to Aya). See also the prayer to Marduk resembling a heart-appeasing lament in Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 169–72; Foster, *Before the Muses*, 680–82. For a fuller list of examples from Maul, '*Herzberuhigungsklagen*,' see Jüngling, "'Was anders ist Gott für den Menschen?'" 373 n. 27.

[55] To Marduk, Suex, *Hymnes et prières*, 172–81; W. G. Lambert, "Three Literary Prayers of the Babylonians," *AfO* 19 (1959–1960): 47–66, here 55, lines 10 and 12; Foster, *Before the Muses*, 611–16, lines 10 and 12.

[56] To Ishtar, Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 194–99; Lambert, "Three Literary Prayers," 50–55; Foster, *Before the Muses*, 606–10, lines 208–9.

[57] Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 230.

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Gula, most great lady, merciful mother [*umma rēmēnītum*][58]

Merciful mother who gives life[59]

You are like "father" and "mother" [*abi u umme*] in people's speech,
you are the one who, like the sun, illuminates their darkness[60]

Although some of the Akkadian prayers are gender specific (Marduk is like a merciful father; Gula, a merciful mother), others apply both maternal and paternal imagery to the same god or goddess. Both Shamash and Ishtar are like father and mother, although Shamash is male and Ishtar female. The prayers to appease personal deities frequently ask the deity to be merciful like "my real father" and "my real mother." The prayer language that explicitly compares deities to parents seeks specifically the merciful quality of the father or mother. Deities frequently appear as the causes of distress (e.g., illness) and the sources of relief (e.g., healing). The prayers seek an intimate connection with a deity who is at once disciplining and merciful in the way a parent might be. The language about deities as creators of humans also points to this merciful quality. Deities cooperate with human parents to create new life. Like parents, they may therefore be expected to have great power over these offspring and to exercise that power with mercy, reflecting the deep bonds of love that parents form with their children. Prayers that invoke parental deities reflect the emotional regulation that takes place in parent–child relationships. The disciplined child experiences stress and a sense of rejection that evoke negative emotions such as shame and fear. Parents help young children to navigate and regulate these emotional reactions and repair their relationship. Some prayers, especially those seeking to appease the heart of a deity, may be understood as attempts to regulate both the anger of the deity and the shame and anxiety of the speaker. Such prayers, therefore, reflect the most central aspect of the attachment relationship: the co-regulation of emotion.

VII. Frequency of Attachment Language

This discussion illustrates that attachment language is present in both Hebrew and Akkadian prayers, which suggests that these ancient peoples understood their deities as attachment figures. But how frequent is attachment language within these prayer traditions? Are any patterns discernible in the distribution of attachment language? Is attachment language gender specific? Are these attachment dynamics present in all prayer traditions across cultures? Is attachment the only psychological

[58] Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 337–39; Foster, *Before the Muses*, 671–72. The same expression appears in another prayer to Gula in Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 335–36.

[59] To Gula, Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 335–36.

[60] To Marduk, Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 443–49; Ebeling, *Die Akkadische Gebetsserie*, 78 line 34; Foster, *Before the Muses*, 682–86, line 18.

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system operative in prayer? In this section I seek to provide tentative answers to these questions. The investigation has shown that attachment dynamics are present in these ancient prayer traditions. The following remarks provide further clarification and context for the present study.

How frequent is attachment language within Hebrew and Akkadian prayer traditions? Since the study has been corpus-based, it is possible to indicate how prevalent attachment language appears to be within the corpus. By contrast, selecting only those prayers that reflect attachment language could create the mistaken impression that this language is ubiquitous. It is not. Of the 148 psalms (counting Pss 9–10 and 42–43 as two rather than four), three-fourths include attachment language. Of those psalms that incorporate attachment language, only about one-third employ this language in more than half the poem. In other words, although most psalms (75%) have some attachment language, most of these (66%) do not have a lot of it. Of the 239 prayers included in Seux's anthology, about 33% include some attachment language. As with Psalms, most prayers do not include a high proportion of attachment language. In part because Akkadian prayers tend to be longer and often include more elaborate hymnic introductions, attachment language usually constitutes a very small fraction of the Akkadian prayers that include it at all. Although not present everywhere, attachment dynamics emerge as an important element in many Hebrew and Akkadian prayers.

Are any patterns discernible in the distribution of attachment language? Attachment language is not evenly distributed across various genres of prayer. Psalms of lament/petition typically include attachment language, but it is less common in psalms of praise. In the Akkadian corpus, attachment language is concentrated in the prayers to personal deities. These prayers also include explicit parental similes as an almost standard feature and have less elaborate invocations and less distancing or politeness language. This finding in the Akkadian corpus tends to reinforce Lenzi's suggestion that the prayers to personal gods are more comparable to biblical psalms than are other genres of Akkadian prayers because YHWH resembles a Mesopotamian personal god rather than a more remote high god. Lenzi notes that part of this distinction appears in the use of distancing or politeness language, which Akkadian prayers use much more often than psalms.[61] The familiar form of address employed in the psalms directed toward a figure of superior status who serves as a safe haven and secure base suggests a relatively intimate relationship between the speaker and YHWH that resembles that between a child and a parent. Hebrew speakers used distancing language in other contexts to address social superiors (e.g., 1 Sam 25:24–31; 2 Sam 14:4–20; Lachish letters; Mesad Hashavyahu ostracon; Moussaieff ostracon 2), so the lack of such language in prayer suggests comparative closeness as might be expected of children addressing a parent, who is both intimate and superior (but note the distancing language

[61] Lenzi, "Invoking the God," 313–15.

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in Ps 86). Most Akkadian prayers employ more polite forms of address, but the prayers to personal gods provide an exception.

Is attachment language gender specific? Within attachment theory, children can and do have multiple attachment figures, although they normally have a primary attachment figure. Attachment theorists often speak of the primary attachment figure as the mother and then use masculine pronouns to identify the child because (1) these gendered pronouns allow for easy distinctions of caregiver and infant and (2) the mother is the primary attachment figure for most infants. Fathers, however, can be primary attachment figures, and at least half of infants are female, so this gendered language is only a matter of convenience. What matters in the attachment relationship is the relationship, not the gender. We have seen in Akkadian prayers that both paternal and maternal imagery may be used for a given deity. In either case, the emphasis in the parental image falls on the love and mercy of the deity, which resemble the love and mercy of a parent (mother and/or father). Both fathers and mothers can and do serve as safe havens and secure bases, and prayer language reflects this reality.

Are these attachment dynamics present in all prayer traditions across cultures? This question would require an enormous body of research to begin to establish an answer. Kirkpatrick suggests that attachment to deity would not be evident in some religious traditions such as Zen Buddhism.[62] For the purposes of this study, I chose Hebrew and Akkadian prayers because there is a significant corpus of both and both languages are accessible to me. But one could just as easily examine a corpus of Hindu, Buddhist, or other prayers for attachment language. The first problem will be to discern whether the definition of prayer operative in the present study (see n. 1 above) can be applied to other traditions. In the case of Buddhism, it is not clear that a comparable corpus of texts exists.

Is attachment the only psychological system operative in prayer? Since not all prayers in the corpus reflect attachment language, it follows that attachment dynamics are not the only psychological dynamics present in prayer traditions. Kirkpatrick also recognizes that attachment theory does not exhaust the resources that psychology can bring to the study of religion. He proposes several other aspects of human behavior that may be relevant to the study of religion and that appear relevant to the study of prayer.[63] Many prayers emphasize the power of the deity, and prayer gestures include kneeling and prostration, which signal submission to a dominant power. The constructs of status, dominance, and prestige seem applicable to deities and are reflected in prayer texts. Submission behavior can be differentiated from attachment behavior, since submission displays in multiple species are not found between child and parent as they are between inferior and

[62] Kirkpatrick, *Attachment*, *Evolution,* 99: "It may well be the case that, for example, attachment processes are widely implicated in the religious beliefs and experience within Western Christianity, but much less so in Zen Buddhism."

[63] Ibid., 240–66.

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superior. In addition, apart from being attachment figures or social superiors, deities may be understood as social exchange partners. Language of reciprocity appears frequently in prayers, which sometimes refer to good deeds performed or sacrifices offered that might please the deity and motivate divine favor. Both Hebrew and Akkadian prayers of illness offer the promise of praise in exchange for life-saving healing.

Attachment theory can enhance our understanding of human relationship with the divine as expressed in prayer texts. In particular, the extensive literature on deities as fathers and mothers has been limited to examination of texts that use explicitly parental language, but an attachment-theoretical perspective allows analysis of a wider range of texts that express the safe-haven or secure-base function of a deity. Research in the psychology of religion also enables biblical scholars to be more precise about the nature, genesis, and significance of these parentlike images of deity.

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