

## God as Mother

### Question:

Why did Mary Baker Eddy call God “Mother” as well as Father when it clearly states that God is Father in the Bible? God is male, not female.

### Response:

When reading and interpreting the Bible, we do need to take into account the fact that the Biblical texts were written in a very male-dominated culture, which is reflected in the ways that the authors of these texts thought and wrote about God.

In reality, God, as Jesus tells us, is Spirit (see John 4:24) — above and beyond human concepts of gender. But the simplest basis for considering God to be equally our Father and our Mother is found in the very first chapter of the Bible, where both “male and female” — all men and women collectively — are created explicitly “in the image of God” (Gen. 1:27).

Since God’s image or likeness includes both male and female, it follows that God must include equally the qualities we call masculine and the qualities we call feminine — not in any material sense, of course, but in a wholly spiritual sense. Understood spiritually, the qualities of both genders complement, balance, support, and strengthen each other, both being equally part of the nature of God.

Jesus told us that the way to know the Father is through him:

No-one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also.... Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. (John 14:6, 9)

Jesus himself expressed the qualities of both fatherhood and motherhood in his ministry on earth. Along with fatherly authority, boldness, wisdom, strength, decisiveness, fearlessness (and many more), he equally embodied grace, love, compassion, tenderness, gentleness, patience, kindness, thoughtfulness, care, consideration (and many more) — all attributes of motherhood, of mothering love.

The Apostle John wrote:

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for **God is love.** (1 John 4:7-8, emphasis added)

Even in the very patriarchal atmosphere of the Old Testament, there are hints of the nurturing, mothering nature of God. In Deuteronomy, Moses compares God to a mother eagle watching over her young. While most modern English translations use the neuter (“its nest”, etc.) in this passage, the original Hebrew is feminine, as seen in the King James Version:

As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young,  
spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings:  
So the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.  
(Deut. 32:10-12)

Much later in Jewish history, the final chapter of Isaiah uses explicitly feminine and mothering imagery to describe the return of the exiled Hebrews to Jerusalem, culminating in this declaration from God:

As one whom his mother comforts,  
so will I comfort you;  
you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. (Isa. 66:13)

A particular word used many times throughout the Hebrew Scriptures to refer to God’s nature is *racham*, meaning compassion or mercy; it is even used specifically as a name for God in Deut. 4:31 — *El Rachum*, “God of Compassion”. This term derives directly from the Hebrew root word meaning “womb” – a very clear reference to God’s love as the love of a mother for her child.

One of the earliest names for God given in the Bible is *El Shaddai*, dating from the time of the patriarchs onwards. There is no absolute agreement among scholars on what this name signifies, with a range of interpretations being put forward. Most English translators have rendered it as “God Almighty”, on the basis that *Shaddai* may derive from the verb *shadad*, “to overpower or destroy”. However, other Hebrew scholars have suggested that it could derive from *shad*, the Hebrew word for “breast”, and may also be connected with *dai*, meaning “sufficient” or “enough” — implying the nourishing, sustaining, all-sufficient nature of God’s goodness, nurturing as a mother nurtures her child.

One hint of this feminine, mothering aspect of *El Shaddai*, even in the midst of the heavily male-dominated patriarchal era, is seen in Jacob’s blessing on Joseph in Gen. 49:25:

by the God of your father, who will help you,  
by the Almighty [*Shaddai*] who will bless you  
with blessings of heaven above,  
blessings of the deep that lies beneath,  
blessings of the breasts [*shadaim*] and of the womb [*racham*].

Mary Baker Eddy, who founded the Christian Science Church, gave this explanation of the name Father-Mother, again tying in with the first chapter of Genesis:

... God being infinite Mind, He is the all-wise, all-knowing, all-loving Father-Mother, for God made man in His own image and likeness, and made them male and female as the Scriptures declare; then does not our heavenly Parent — the divine Mind — include within this Mind the thoughts that express the different mentalities of man and woman, whereby we may consistently say, “Our Father-Mother God”? (Mary Baker Eddy, *Message to The Mother Church for 1901*, p. 7)

All these elements lead to Christian Scientists concluding that God is indeed equally our Father and Mother, and that recognizing God’s Motherhood adds greatly to one’s appreciation of the wholeness and fullness of God’s strength, wisdom, grace, and love.