

and salvific acts, punctuating each of the twenty-six verses with “For his mercy [*hesed*]<sup>46</sup> is eternal [*l’olām*].”

COMMUNICABLE AGENCY. As with other deities, YHWH’s agency was conceptualized as communicable, and not uncommonly through material media. Within the Hebrew Bible, the Jerusalem temple and whatever cultic image may have been housed in the inner sanctum constituted the single most prominent means of presencing YHWH, but a number of cultic objects and other entities functioned to presence the deity’s agency. The ark of the covenant and the messenger of YHWH are two examples that will be discussed in much greater detail below. One of the more explicit examples of a Yahwistic cult object facilitating YHWH’s communicable agency is that of the bronze serpent created by Moses in Num 21:4–9. In verse 8, YHWH instructs Moses to produce a *šārāp* (“seraph”) and set it on a pole to facilitate the healing of those Israelites suffering from the bites of “the fiery serpents” (*hannāḥāšīm haššārāpīm*). In verse 9, Moses makes a bronze serpent (*nāḥāš nāḥōšet*), and those who look at it are healed. Attributing its construction to YHWH’s command sidesteps the prohibitions on such practices, but it also suggests it is YHWH’s agency that is ultimately responsible for the healing, even though it is channeled through an explicitly human-made cultic object (Gertz 2016).<sup>47</sup>

The description in 2 Kgs 18:4 of the later destruction of this object by Hezekiah on the grounds that incense offerings were being made to it may suggest the editors could tolerate the object’s conceptualization as a Yahwistic tool, but not as an object of worship. It is possible they understood the icon to mediate worship directed ultimately at YHWH, or they may have understood that worship to suggest its independent divine status. In other words, directing worship at the object centered its status as “is not YHWH,”<sup>48</sup> which was unacceptable for an ideology that sought a monopoly on accessing divine agency (cf. Eichler 2019). The authors of 2 Kgs 18:4 suggest someone (the subject is not perfectly clear) named the object *Nehushtan*, which may be an attempt to frame it as an independent agent. Whatever the case, COMMUNICABLE AGENCY was clearly a salient semantic domain.

I suggest the entities that presenced that agency could be profiled along a spectrum from deity to divine image, depending on how independently the hearer/reader understood the cultic object and the agency it presenced to be operating from the primary loci of the deity’s self. The rhetorical compartmentalization of those loci from the vehicles of the deity’s agency subordinated and

<sup>46</sup> “Mercy” is admittedly an imperfect gloss for *hesed*. For a helpful cognitive linguistic interrogation of the term, see Ziegert 2020.

<sup>47</sup> On the relationship of the sounds used in the story to broader sociocultural notions of the “magic” of words, see Hurowitz 2004.

<sup>48</sup> This is in reference to Jacobsen’s “is” and “is not” dichotomy (see introduction).