

## **Punishment**

It seems natural to punish that person who, as we say, breaks the law. If a youngster spills his mother's cake mix he will probably be punished. He will expect it. In anticipation of the blow on the back of his neck he will bend over as though inviting the blow. The blow will inevitably land right on the preferred nape. What has been accomplished? What has the youngster learned? He has learned what he already knew, that if you enter your mom's workspace carelessly you will be punished. Will this learning prove to be useful to the youngster? How will he describe his learning to himself when he is older? He will think back on a predictable behavior and a predictable consequence. The spilling of the cake mix will not seem an important part of the transaction. He will long ago have been forgiven. The event will have been forgotten. The punishment will seem to have been much more significant than the crime. He will wish it had never happened, if forced to think of it, but will rarely remember it, unless forced to think of it. To be punished is like that, and yet to punish is to take another in hand, to make plans for the other's future, a future in which mixes are not spilled, shoulders are not swatted, and in which errors committed in childhood can erase themselves by a simple lapse of memory. To punish is to take responsibility, is to bear the weight of authority and above all to stand inside the exhausting circle of you do this I do that instead of walking out into the air with the other whose neck is bent before you, to extract as did Abraham when he was freed of the cycle, at the simple expense of a ram.