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REVISIONING TEFILLIN FROM A FEMINIST-REFORM PERSPECTIVE

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Graduate Rabbinical Program
New York, New York

February 2006
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Project Summary: Revisioning Tefillin From A Feminist-Reform Perspective

This project focuses on the ritual of tefillin. Within the context of traditional Judaism, tefillin are a central ritual object and observance. For most feminist and Reform Jews, tefillin are not central. Indeed traditional tefillin pose theological and halakhic challenges to Jewish feminists and Reform Jews. This project suggests that by revisioning of tefillin, through the process of creating a feminist-Reform narrative of tefillin, tefillin would be transformed into a ritual and observance that furthers some of the salient theological and communal concerns of feminist-Reform Jews.

This project bases its revisioning of tefillin within a dialouge with traditional sources connected to tefillin. The first section, looks at the biblical texts placed inside tefillin. The biblical references to tefillin are vauge at best but the verses contained highlight the issues of God, covenant and Israel.

From a traditional rabbinic point of view, the shape and form of tefillin can not be changed. The second chapter of this project looks at the framework that argues against change and finds that the basis for this reasoning, *Halakhah l'Moshe miSinai* emerges from a larger narrative vision in which the word of God was revealed to Moses at Sinai and the power to interpret that revelation is indeed very limited. Chapter three takes up the question of narratives of Judaism more broadly. Building on the work of Rachel Adler and Tikva Frymer-Kensky, it explores the importance of non-Orthodox narratives of Judaism as they pertain to defining ritual, theology and observance. The chapter argues that instead of a single feminist narrative of Judaism there should be multiple feminist narratives of Judaism and focuses on the places where Reform and feminist Judaism might come together to create such a narrative. Chapter four return directly to the topic of tefillin, this time from a feminist-Reform perspective. This chapter looks at the central themes raised by tefillin and explores how they might be understood from a feminist-Reform perspective. It focuses on the importance of personal visions of God, entering into covenant by choice, and Israel.

Tefillin revisioned from a feminist-Reform perspective will have the potential to give expression individual visions of God, covenant, Israel. These tefillin will provide a ritual means to balance individual theologies with communal understandings of Judaism within a prayer setting.

Acknowledgements

Much has to happen to nurture ideas and creativity, to spark ideas and then to turn those ideas into a project. I have been blessed to be helped and encouraged in this process. Professor Alyssa Gray helped me grow my initial ideas and delve deeply into the sources. Professor Nancy Wiener helped me put the final puzzle of ideas together into a readable text. Many friends have been instrumental in helping shape both the conceptual and practical elements. In particular, Ilana Goldhaber-Gordon is the kind of *chaverah* any *chevrutah* should be. Beth Parks is a model of the generous friend. Her work towards the final manuscript was essential. I owe Paula Hyman and Judith Plaskow a great debt. They taught me to read texts and to question textual authority. Daily, I see the divine presence in Oren and Aliza. They teach me much about knowing God and covenant. I hope one day to wrap tefillin with them. Finally, I am in awe of my partner in Jewish living, David. He is an ongoing source of revelation.

Ruth Abusch-Magder
February 23, 2006

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Introduction

In The Beginning

One evening near the end of my first year studying at HUC in New York, I went out for falafel with a classmate. It was a kosher establishment, frequented by Israelis, and in particular Israeli men. While we sat in the back garden and discussed the state of Jewish feminist thought an interesting tableau unfolded. A Hassidic man entered the garden carrying a worn velvet bag and a money box. He set both down on an empty table and proceeded to remove a set of well used tefillin from the bag. This must have been a common occurrence because the regulars who had been huddled around several tables playing backgammon and reading Israeli newspapers barely looked up. Yet one by one they went over to the Hassid and with his aid, wrapped the tefillin according to the traditional fashion. We were not close enough to hear what was said but presumably some blessings were uttered. Each man in turn then removed the tefillin, placed them on the table and stuffed a few coins in the money box on the table. The entire episode lasted less than ten minutes.

Traditional tefillin come in a set of two black boxes called *batim*, literally houses. One *bayit* is meant to be affixed to the head and is called the *bayit shel rosh*, the *bayit* of the head. It is meant to be worn high on the forehead. It is marked by the Hebrew letter *shin*. The second *bayit* is meant to be affixed to the arm above the elbow facing the heart. It is called the *bayit shel yad*, the *bayit*, of the hand. The tefillin are attached to the body by black straps called *retzuot*. Both the straps and the *batim* are

made from the leather hide of a kosher animal, generally a sheep or a cow, and are colored black. The *batim* contain biblical passages which the rabbis divided into four distinct groups: Exodus 13:1-10, Exodus 13:11-16, Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and Deuteronomy 11:13-21. These passages are considered by the rabbis to be the biblical source for the commandment to don tefillin as they refer to the wearing of a sign on your arm and between your eyes and state that one should wrap the sign on the arm. Like the tefillin themselves, the passages are written on parchment made from the hide of a kosher animal. In the tefillin *shel yad* all four passages are inscribed on a single piece of parchment and enclosed in a single compartment. In the tefillin *shel rosh*, each of the passages is inscribed on its own distinct piece of parchment and placed into it own distinct compartment. There is general agreement among traditional rabbinic authorities about the construction of the tefillin but there are some slight variations in the ways in which the tefillin are affixed and wrapped upon the body. Through the generations, different rabbis and schools of thought ascribed their own meanings to the manner of wrapping and the shape of the knots. Ideally, according to rabbinic law, tefillin are donned as part of the morning prayers. But if it happens that one does not fulfill this obligation at that time, then one may put on and bless tefillin even into the evening, as was the case in garden that day.

The Hassid never approached me or my classmate, nor did we expect him to. Both of us are female and according to traditional rabbinic Halakhah, women are not obligated to wear tefillin. And while some women, even among the orthodox, do wear tefillin, overwhelmingly tefillin remains a men's mitzvah. In truth, I am not sure what would have happened if we were men not women and he had offered us the

possibility. Traditional tefillin seem to hold little appeal for Reform Jews. There is nothing ideological or technical within Reform Judaism that would preclude its members from wrapping tefillin. Indeed most Reform Jews and certainly Reform Rabbinical students welcome the idea of doing mitzvot and identify with religious visions of Judaism more than–if I am to hazard a guess–a good number of the secular men sitting in the garden that night. But unlike more Orthodox Judaism, Reform Judaism prizes choice in matters of mitzvot. And tefillin do not rank highly among the mitzvot that Reform Jews choose to perform. Even amidst recent moves to re-embrace elements of traditional ritual garb such as kippah and tallit, tefillin remain for the most part outside the realm of Reform observance.

Nonetheless, I watched the scene with particular interest. My friend and I had been talking about the subject of tefillin. I was sharing with her some of my musings on how I might create feminist tefillin. My ideas were just in the beginning stages but I was excited about the possibilities. I had a rough sketch in my mind of what I hoped to create. I wanted to make tefillin that differed drastically from the traditional version. I did not feel the need to have black boxes or black straps. In this I was by no means original; there have been some, like Jewish feminist artist Ayana Freidman, who have redesigned the external boxes of tefillin so that they are less rigid and more feminine. Freidman also added a prayer to the texts traditionally found in tefillin.[1] While admiring such efforts, I wanted to push the envelope even further. I wanted to change not only the box but also the entire text that was inside the box. I envisioned tefillin

[1] Ayana Friedman, *Women's Tefillin* (Ritual Well, [cited January 5 2006]); available from http://www.ritualwell.org/shabbat/daily/sitefolder.2005-06-10.2444481936/primaryobject.2005-07-25.6064300835.

that were personal signs of the divine and personalized markers of what it means to be Jewish. I wanted tefillin that gave voice to the idea that we each choose to affirm our covenant with God, not simply that we are obligated without choice.

I was drawn to the idea of working with tefillin for many of the same reasons that the scene at the restaurant drew my attention. Tefillin are an ancient ritual that are more easily identified with the Hassid—a representative of idealized vision of a world where religion and ritual were essential elements of daily life—than they are connected to the young hip Israeli men playing backgammon. Nonetheless, as far as these modern Jewish men were from a traditional way of Jewish living, they found some appeal in the opportunity to don tefillin that evening. Even for these secular Israeli men, tefillin stood as a significant sign of Jewishness. In wrapping tefillin they too connected themselves—if only temporarily—with a more traditional vision of the world. As a modern Jew, seriously involved with religious Jewish expression, my life is an ongoing dialogue with tradition. I am constantly looking for ways to be both modern and tied to the tradition.

Tefillin, like kippah, and like tallit, are external signs of connection to rabbinic Judaism. For the men who put on tefillin that evening, this was no private moment. Each in turn literally stood in front of his friends and wore a sign of his connection to Jewish tradition. Whether they intended it to be or not, this act of wrapping tefillin was an external declaration of identity that distinguished these men from the Hispanic busboy wearing a cross. For me, being Jewish is an ongoing dialogue between the internal monologue about identity and meaning and the means by which I externalize that dialogue through actions, rituals and the choices I make in the world. Tefillin are

meant, according to traditional rabbinic wisdom, to be a sign of our connection to God and covenant. Tefillin offer me, no less than the men in the garden, a possible means of giving expression to important aspects of my understanding of God and covenant.

I was also drawn to tefillin because I saw in reconstructed tefillin an opportunity to address directly some of the challenges faced by Jewish feminists. The tefillin I envisioned held the possibility of giving voice to personal theology and individual visions of God. This plurality was important to me both as a feminist and as a Reform Jew. There are of course many ways to express personal visions of God but I saw in tefillin several advantages. Feminists have had only limited success in bringing their theology into the mainstream of Jewish life. Feminist attempts at reforming the language of prayer, for example, have overwhelmingly been limited to small pockets of the Jewish world and to gender sensitive translation of male pronouns that refer to the divine. I wanted to create a vehicle for bringing feminist approaches to God into the sanctuary without demanding an overhaul of the entire vision of the service and prayer.

Furthermore, I also saw this sort of tefillin as a means by which one could potentially preserve the individual voice within the context of community. If every Jew has an individual vision of Judaism divorced from community then there will be no continuity with the past or foundation for the future. But if individuals wear personal signs of their theology that are distinct from that of their neighbors, while praying together from the same words on the page, both the individual voice and the communal voice find expression. This idea that we can both pray together and express our own individual theologies is at the core of the design of the new Reform prayer

book *Mishkan Tefillah*. This new prayer book provides commentaries and creative readings alongside the traditional Hebrew text. Not only does this format allow prayer leaders to choose alternative readings, but also it frees congregants to depart, without difficulty or disruption, from the communal liturgy into readings and commentaries that come closer to their own vision of prayer.[2] My vision of tefillin hoped to push this balance further still. I envisioned a room filled with people praying the same words yet simultaneously giving public expression to their own vision of God, Israel and Law.

Even in the context of community innovation is not without perils. Judaism has always been open to innovation and change. Jews have absorbed practices and beliefs from the broader communities in which they lived. Those innovations have been absorbed into Judaism in no small part because they existed as part of a dialogue with practice and text that had already been established as Jewish. While my vision for tefillin sprang from a place of protest against the established norms of Judaism that excluded women and defined our relationship to God and covenant from the perspective of an elite group of men, I wanted to place my vision within the larger Jewish conversation. By first looking at traditional sources, both biblical and rabbinic, I hoped that I would be able to create a framework for endorsing and rejecting specific elements of traditional vision of tefillin as I looked to create my own. In searching for a framework I came to understand the importance of narrative as a means for framing the Jewish choices we make. I began to consider how I might create a new narrative that would provide a scaffolding for my vision. As I sat in the garden that evening, I

[2] Elyse D. Frishman, "Entering *Mishkan T'filah*," *CCAR Journal*, no. Fall (2004).

was not sure where either my own thinking or my encounter with the traditional texts would take me. Still, I was fired by the possibilities.

Chapter One

Biblical Origins and Text of Tefillin

My desire to connect my modern revision of tefillin in a conversation with traditional Jewish practice and sources brought me first to Bible. Traditional rabbinic Judaism builds on the biblical text as the basis for mitzvot. In the case of tefillin, not only are the traditional rabbinic laws based on biblical verses, but also the tefillin themselves contain the verses upon which the framework and form of the traditional tefillin are based. The biblical passages contained in traditional tefillin are taken from one passage in Exodus, 13:1-16, and two in Deuteronomy, 6:4-9 and 11:12-21. All of these verses are written on a single parchment that makes up the traditional tefillin *shel yad.* In the traditional tefillin *shel rosh* where there are four distinct compartments, each with its own parchment with a biblical passage, the passage in Exodus is further broken down into two sections: 13:1-10 and 11-16. Aside from containing the kernel upon which the traditional understanding of tefillin is based, these passages also highlight theological and communal themes that are brought to the fore with this mitzvah.

It is notable that aside from the Torah itself, the mezuzah is the only ritual object other than tefillin that incorporates biblical passages into the object itself. The two sets of verses contained in the traditional mezuzah are the exact verses from Deuteronomy that are contained in traditional tefillin: 6:4-9 and 11:12-21. Moreover, these same passages appear centrally as part of the traditional liturgy which in praying

the Sh'ma includes Deuteronomy 6:4-8 and 11:13-2. In order to understand why these passages have been highlighted so centrally within the liturgy and ritual of Jewish life and prayer it is helpful to explore the passages as they appear within the biblical context. I have highlighted some of the important phrases and words that will be featured in the discussion that follows.

Exodus 13:1-16

1 וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר׃2 קַדֶּשׁ־לִי
כָּל־בְּכוֹר פֶּטֶר כָּל־רֶחֶם בִּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּאָדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה לִי
הוּא׃
3 וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָעָם [redacted] אֶת־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר יְצָאתֶם
מִמִּצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים כִּי בְּחֹזֶק יָד הוֹצִיא יְהוָה אֶתְכֶם
מְזֶה וְלֹא יֵאָכֵל חָמֵץ׃
4 הַיּוֹם אַתֶּם יֹצְאִים בְּחֹדֶשׁ הָאָבִיב׃
5 וְהָיָה כִּי־יְבִיאֲךָ יְהוָה אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי וְהַחִתִּי וְהָאֱמֹרִי
וְהַחִוִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לַאֲבֹתֶיךָ לָתֶת לְךָ אֶרֶץ זָבַת
חָלָב וּדְבָשׁ וְעָבַדְתָּ אֶת־הָעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה׃
6 שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תֹּאכַל מַצּוֹת וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי חַג לַיהוָה׃
7 מַצּוֹת יֵאָכֵל אֶת שִׁבְעַת הַיָּמִים וְלֹא־יֵרָאֶה לְךָ חָמֵץ
וְלֹא־יֵרָאֶה לְךָ שְׂאֹר בְּכָל־גְּבֻלֶךָ׃
8 [redacted] בַּעֲבוּר זֶה עָשָׂה יְהוָה לִי
בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם׃
9 וְהָיָה לְךָ לְאוֹת עַל־יָדְךָ [redacted] [redacted] לְמַעַן תִּהְיֶה
תּוֹרַת יְהוָה בְּפִיךָ כִּי בְיָד חֲזָקָה הוֹצִאֲךָ יְהוָה מִמִּצְרָיִם׃
10 וְשָׁמַרְתָּ אֶת־הַחֻקָּה הַזֹּאת לְמוֹעֲדָהּ מִיָּמִים יָמִימָה׃ ס

This is where the break is made in writing the *k'laf* for traditional tefillin *shel rosh*.

11 וְהָיָה כִּי־יְבִאֲךָ יְהוָה אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי כַּאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְךָ
וְלַאֲבֹתֶיךָ וְנָתָנָהּ לָךְ׃
12 וְהַעֲבַרְתָּ כָל־פֶּטֶר־רֶחֶם לַיהוָה וְכָל־פֶּטֶר שֶׁגֶר בְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר
יִהְיֶה לְךָ הַזְּכָרִים לַיהוָה׃
13 וְכָל־פֶּטֶר חֲמֹר תִּפְדֶּה בְשֶׂה וְאִם־לֹא תִפְדֶּה וַעֲרַפְתּוֹ וְכֹל

בְּכוֹר אָדָם בְּבָנֶיךָ תִּפְדֶּה:
14 [redacted] מָחָר לֵאמֹר מַה־זֹּאת וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו
בְּחֹזֶק יָד הוֹצִיאָנוּ יְהוָה מִמִּצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים:
15 וַיְהִי כִּי־הִקְשָׁה פַּרְעֹה לְשַׁלְּחֵנוּ וַיַּהֲרֹג יְהוָה כָּל־בְּכוֹר
בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבְכֹר אָדָם וְעַד־בְּכוֹר בְּהֵמָה עַל־כֵּן אֲנִי
זֹבֵחַ לַיהוָה כָּל־פֶּטֶר רֶחֶם הַזְּכָרִים וְכָל־בְּכוֹר בָּנַי אֶפְדֶּה:
16 וְהָיָה לְאוֹת עַל־יָדְכָה וּלְטוֹטָפֹת [redacted] כִּי בְּחֹזֶק יָד
הוֹצִיאָנוּ יְהוָה מִמִּצְרָיִם: ס

At first reading it is not necessarily obvious how this passage relates to tefillin. The primary concern of the passage is remembering the part played by God in the Exodus from Egypt. The passage raises the idea of marking the recollection by not eating leavened bread. It makes clear that this recollection will be ongoing through the generations. If these verses are to be connected to rabbinic observances, the celebration of Passover is more easily discerned than that of tefillin. Nonetheless the particular language and themes raised in the passage begin to set the ground for rabbinic tefillin.

The זכר root appears twice in the first half of the passage. זכר first appears in the Bible as God is remembering Noah and the animals who have been in the ark from the beginning of the rain.

Genesis 8:1 וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נֹחַ וְאֵת כָּל־הַחַיָּה
וְאֶת־כָּל־הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ בַּתֵּבָה וַיַּעֲבֵר אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ
עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַיָּשֹׁכּוּ הַמָּיִם:

As a result of the remembering, God takes action and quiets the wind and the waters abate. God's similar remembering of Abraham in Genesis 19:29 leads God to send Lot away from the destruction that is about to be sent down on Sodom and Gemorrah. In

Genesis 30:22, a parallel is set up between God's remembering Rachel and her ability to conceive.

וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־רָחֵל וַיִּשְׁמַע אֵלֶיהָ אֱלֹהִים
וַיִּפְתַּח אֶת־רַחְמָהּ׃

The same grammatical form, qal waw consec imperfect 3rd person masculine singular, is used for both זכר and פתח, leaving no question that it is an accident that Rachel conceives, but rather it is a direct result of God's remembering and then taking action. In each of these cases, remembering leads to action.

Remembering is also strongly tied to the idea of *b'rit*. Returning again to the earliest uses of זכר in the Bible, we find ourselves again in the Noah story. In the next perkeq, once Noah has left the ark, זכר appears again. Emerging from the ark, Noah brings a sacrifice to God. God finds the odor pleasing and God makes a rainbow in the sky as a sign of the *b'rit* with Noah that there will never again be a flood. The rainbow becomes the means by which memory of the *b'rit* will endure into the future.

Genesis 9:1 וְזָכַרְתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין
כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה בְּכָל־בָּשָׂר וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה עוֹד הַמַּיִם לְמַבּוּל
לְשַׁחֵת כָּל־בָּשָׂר׃

God will create a rainbow as a symbol that the remembering has occurred and the divine covenant with all living creatures not to destroy all flesh by flood has been upheld. But the remembering is not only for God:

Genesis 9:16 וְהָיְתָה הַקֶּשֶׁת בֶּעָנָן וּרְאִיתִיהָ לִזְכֹּר בְּרִית
עוֹלָם בֵּין אֱלֹהִים וּבֵין כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה בְּכָל־בָּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר
עַל־הָאָרֶץ׃

The rainbow will also be the means by which humans are called to remember the *b'rit* that exists between God and all living souls. It is not enough to make a covenant; a covenant must be remembered. *B'rit* in this context demands action, or more specifically the ability to refrain from action, on God's part. The *b'rit* is a commitment on the part of God to the human race.

Before long we have a new protagonist and a new idea of *b'rit*. Abraham becomes the one with whom God continues to make covenants. Noah took action on his own accord to bring a sacrifice, and then and only then did God make a promise. Making a sacrifice was a natural outpouring of gratitude for what had already happened. Noah was not commanded to make the *b'rit*; he entered into the covenant of his own accord. With Abraham there is no major miracle prompting him to action. There is only the promise for the future. Confronted with the divine pledge that his offspring will possess the land, Abraham is somewhat perplexed. He asks God how he will know which land will be his. In answer God commands Abraham to bring sacrifices (Genesis 15:8-9). Unlike Noah, Abraham waits until he is commanded to act.[3] It is the combination of that action together with the promise that makes up the covenants between Abraham and God. In Genesis 15, God proclaims a future for Abraham's offspring that will include four hundred years of being enslaved in a strange land but will end with wealth and freedom. Abraham for his part passes a torch

[3] I want to thank Nancy Wiener for sharpening my thinking about the voluntary/commanded nature of Noah and Abraham with regard to sacrifice and entering into *b'rit*.

through a line of animal pieces after which the Bible tells us that a *b'rit* between God and Abraham was forged.

The concept of *b'rit* appears once again in Genesis 15. This time Abraham affirms his commitment to God by way of circumcision, an act that will be taken throughout the generations in recognition of this *b'rit*.

Genesis 15:18 בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא כָּרַת יְהוָה אֶת־אַבְרָם בְּרִית
לֵאמֹר לְזַרְעֲךָ נָתַתִּי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת מִנְּהַר מִצְרַיִם
עַד־הַנָּהָר הַגָּדֹל נְהַר־פְּרָת:

Noah and God are not disconnected one from the other. Each is reacting to the actions of the other. But the covenant is not based on a mutual conversation. Noah was undoubtedly reassured to know that there was not going to be another flood. But there is nothing to indicate that his bringing a sacrifice was a request for such a promise. But Abraham comes to learn that his own actions will affect God's actions. Abraham chooses to act knowing what will happen if he does act. These covenants are mutual agreements with the terms laid out for Abraham before he moves forward.

Our verses in Exodus do not engage the term *b'rit,* but the concept of a covenant based on adhering to God's commandments is implied. Much of the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 15 has come to pass by this point in the Exodus narrative. The offspring of Abraham have been slaves in a strange land and now they have been freed. In verse three Moses tells the people that they must remember that God took them out of Egypt. The idea of memory is not unique to this particular passage of the Bible. But here the root זכר makes its first biblical appearance in the qal infinitive absolute form. In this form it is God commanding Israel to זכר . This is

not just remembering for the sake of remembering. This is not–as in the case of the rainbow–remembering for the sake of reassurance. This is remembering that will lead to action. In remembering, no leavened bread will be consumed and the story will be told to the next generation וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ. If this remembering takes place then God will bring you into the land of milk and honey. The language of *b'rit* is replaced here by a sense of commandment which if implied by the verbal form is unmistakable in *pasuq* 10 with the use of the word הַחֻקָּה which means statute. Here it is made clear that, as with Abraham and circumcision, this commandment applies not to one generation but perpetually.

It is worth looking at the other places where זכר appears in the qal infinitive absolute form. After our passage the verb appears in this form only three more times in the Bible. While it is difficult to draw large conclusions from such a small sample, it is notable that each use picks up different aspects of the themes in our passage. In Exodus 20:8 as part of the ten commandments, the people of Israel are told :

זָכוֹר אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ ,

Remember Shabbat to sanctify it. זָכוֹר is again being used in a command form to demand a particular act of remembering. It demands a particular set of actions—the observance of Shabbat—that do not happen passively. Similarly, when the word appears in Deuteronomy 25:17, remembering is a special commandment; the people must remember what Amalek did to the nation as it left Egypt:

17 זָכוֹר אֵת אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה לְךָ עֲמָלֵק בַּדֶּרֶךְ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם:

Again this is not a passive intellectual act of remembering but one that requires action, for in verse 15:19 the nation is told to actively erase the memory of Amalek from under the heavens תִּמְחֶה אֶת־זֵכֶר עֲמָלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמָיִם. Strengthening the idea of active remembering the *pasuq* ends with the rejoinder "Do not forget," לֹא תִשְׁכָּח raising the possibility that one could forget if one did not actively remember.

The final use of this grammatical form comes in the first chapter of Joshua. Joshua has only just taken over the leadership of the people from Moses. The people have been wandering in the dessert for forty years. They have been under the care and protection of God. Now they will enter the land and will have to wage an offensive war against those who dwell in the land. In the first opening verses, God assures Joshua that he need not be terrified and that he will succeed. Next we find Joshua issuing the battle instructions and trying to rouse his troops to the task ahead.

1:13 זָכוֹר אֶת־הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֶתְכֶם מֹשֶׁה
עֶבֶד־יְהוָה לֵאמֹר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם מֵנִיחַ לָכֶם וְנָתַן לָכֶם
אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת:

Here the commanding voice comes from Joshua, not from God. Joshua commands them to remember what Moses had told them: God would give them *this* land. The reference to the land provides another echo to our passage where remembering the Exodus will be rewarded by entry into the land and triumph over those who dwell there.

For the traditional rabbis, verses nine and sixteen are the most critical verses in shifting the recollection of the Exodus from the context of Passover to the everyday

action of tefillin. The rabbis make a connection between *pasuqim* 9 and 16 and the placement of the tefillin on the head and hand. But before we join the traditional rabbis in making the leap between Passover and tefillin, it is important to understand these verses within the biblical context. Let us compare the two critical verses:

9 [redacted] לְךָ לְאוֹת עַל־יָדֶךָ וּלְזִכָּרוֹן [redacted] לְמַעַן תִּהְיֶה
תּוֹרַת יְהוָה בְּפִיךָ [redacted] הוֹצִאֲךָ יְהוָה מִמִּצְרַיִם׃

16 [redacted] לְאוֹת עַל־יָדֶךָ וְלְטוֹטָפֹת [redacted] [redacted]
הוֹצִיאָנוּ יְהוָה מִמִּצְרָיִם׃ ס

Even without the rabbinic interest in these verses, the repetitions and subtle differences in these verses demand attention. I have used color to highlight the strong parallel in the two verses in content and meaning. In both there will be a sign on your arm and between your eyes so that you recall that God took you out of Egypt with a strong arm.

The word יָד repeats four times, twice as a reference to the people who will bear the sign and twice in connection with God. These are not the first use of this word. It comes in *pasuq* three and appears again in *pasuq* fourteen, both times as part of a phrase in reference to the strength of God's hand that brought the people out of Israel. In total this phrase appears six times, making it one of the central themes of the passage. It is an often-used phrase with regards to the Exodus beyond this particular passage. To then employ this same word with regard to the people and their memory of the Exodus is to open the possibility of a connection being drawn between the people and God. In both verses nine and sixteen a direct connection is made between wearing the sign and God's strong arm. The Israelites are directed to wear a sign on

their arm and between their eyes *because God took you out of Egypt with a strong arm*. By constructing the phrases as the Bible has, there is a parallel being drawn between the divine physique and the human form. The human arm with a sign upon it is a link, if only linguistically, with the power and strength of the Godly hand that was able to bring about the Exodus.

If the vision of the strength of God's hand is a clear one, the meaning of the sign on "your hand" is much less clear. Though the phrase אוֹת עַל־יָדֶךָ repeats twice here, the nature of the sign is not obvious from this passage. More than once the word appears elsewhere in the Bible in connection to the idea of *b'rit*. We return to the Noah story to find the first connection of *b'rit* with אוֹת. In reference to the rainbow in the sky God says:

Genesis 9:12 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים זֹאת אוֹת־[redacted] אֲשֶׁר־אֲנִי נֹתֵן
בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה אֲשֶׁר אִתְּכֶם לְדֹרֹת עוֹלָם:
Genesis 9:13 אֶת־קַשְׁתִּי נָתַתִּי בֶּעָנָן וְהָיְתָה לְאוֹת [redacted]
בֵּינִי וּבֵין הָאָרֶץ:

God tells Noah that the rainbow will be an אוֹת of the *b'rit* between God and the people and between God and the land. Circumcision too can be an אוֹת. Once again we find ourselves looking at the *b'rit* made between God and Abraham and affirmed through the generations. In commanding Abraham to circumcise himself, God tells him that it will be an אוֹת for the generations (Genesis 17:11).

There are also numerous examples of signs that are not directly connected to covenant such as the burning bush in Exodus 3:11, the plagues in Exodus chapters 4-

10 and the blood on the doorposts in Exodus 12. Based on this evidence it is difficult to come to a conclusive understanding of what the nature of the אוֹת on your arms and between your eyes should be.

The matter of the nature of the sign is still further complicated by the use of the word וּלְזִכָּרוֹן in *pasuq* nine. The two verses from Exodus 13 are so similar that the use of the word וּלְזִכָּרוֹן in *pasuq* nine and not in 16 is striking. The root זכר returns here but in a very different grammatical form and with a different meaning. Instead of an active command to remember, here the root comes as a participle. Instead of actively having to remember, the sign will be a reminder. And if the Bible tells us twice that there will be signs on both the arm and between the eyes, the idea that the sign will be a reminder occurs only once, and then only in regard to the sign between the eyes.

This passage in Exodus raises many interesting themes and motifs. It highlights the idea of actively remembering the Exodus and hints at the idea of covenant. It tells us that memory is not just an abstract concept but one that is meant to be made concrete in the form of abstaining from eating leavened products at a particular time of year and also by a set of signs on your arm and between your eyes.

The second set of biblical passages picks up many of the same themes and motifs but also differs significantly from the passages in Exodus. As with the first passage, understanding these passages as they stand on their own without rabbinic interpretation will help us later as we attempt to build a new narrative and understanding of tefillin. By virtue of their use in the daily liturgy and to a lesser

degree because they make up the contents of a mezuzah, these passages are among the most recognized verses in the Bible. Given this centrality within liturgy and ritual, these passages deserve attention on their own merit. But these passages again deal with many of the same themes and ideas that we have already discussed and even employ some of the same words and phrases with which we have become familiar. (I have used the same highlighting and underlining to mark those particular parallels.) And when we read these passages from Deuteronomy together with the piece from Exodus our understanding of the biblical sources for tefillin are greatly enriched.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

4 שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה׀ אֶחָד׃5 וְאָהַבְתָּ אֵת יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל־לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל־מְאֹדֶךָ׃
6 וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם עַל־לְבָבֶךָ׃
7 [redacted] וְדִבַּרְתָּ בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתֶךָ וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ
וּבְשָׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמֶךָ׃
8 וּקְשַׁרְתָּם לְאוֹת עַל־יָדֶךָ וְהָיוּ לְטֹטָפֹת [redacted]
9 וּכְתַבְתָּם עַל־מְזוּזֹת בֵּיתֶךָ וּבִשְׁעָרֶיךָ׃ ס

Deuteronomy 11:12-21

12 אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ דֹּרֵשׁ אֹתָהּ תָּמִיד עֵינֵי יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֶיךָ בָּהּ מֵרֵשִׁית הַשָּׁנָה וְעַד אַחֲרִית שָׁנָה׃ ס
13 וְהָיָה אִם־שָׁמֹעַ תִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶל־מִצְוֹתַי אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם
הַיּוֹם לְאַהֲבָה אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּלְעָבְדוֹ בְּכָל־לְבַבְכֶם
וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁכֶם׃
14 וְנָתַתִּי מְטַר־אַרְצְכֶם בְּעִתּוֹ יוֹרֶה וּמַלְקוֹשׁ וְאָסַפְתָּ דְגָנֶךָ
וְתִירֹשְׁךָ וְיִצְהָרֶךָ׃
15 וְנָתַתִּי עֵשֶׂב בְּשָׂדְךָ לִבְהֶמְתֶּךָ וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבָעְתָּ׃
16 הִשָּׁמְרוּ לָכֶם פֶּן יִפְתֶּה לִבַבְכֶם וְסַרְתֶּם וַעֲבַדְתֶּם אֱלֹהִים
אֲחֵרִים וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם לָהֶם׃
17 וְחָרָה אַף־יְהוָה בָּכֶם וְעָצַר אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה מָטָר
וְהָאֲדָמָה לֹא תִתֵּן אֶת־יְבוּלָהּ וַאֲבַדְתֶּם מְהֵרָה מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ
הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה נֹתֵן לָכֶם׃

18 וְשַׂמְתֶּם אֶת־דְּבָרַי אֵלֶּה עַל־לְבַבְכֶם וְעַל־נַפְשְׁכֶם וּקְשַׁרְתֶּם
אֹתָם לְאוֹת עַל־יֶדְכֶם וְהָיוּ לְטוֹטָפֹת [redacted]
19 [redacted] לְדַבֵּר בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתֶךָ
וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשָׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמֶךָ:
20 וּכְתַבְתָּם עַל־מְזוּזוֹת בֵּיתֶךָ וּבִשְׁעָרֶיךָ:
21 לְמַעַן יִרְבּוּ יְמֵיכֶם וִימֵי [redacted] עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע
יְהוָה לַאֲבֹתֵיכֶם לָתֵת לָהֶם כִּימֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם עַל־הָאָרֶץ: ס

The focus in these Deuteronomic passages shifts to God. Verse 6:4 is perhaps the best known of all biblical verses. It declares to all of Israel that there is only one God. In the liturgical context, this verse is known as the Sh'ma and taken to be a Jewish statement of faith. Yet within a biblical framework, there is nothing to suggest that this is a prayer or should be central theologically.[4] The formulation שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל is not unique to this *pasuq*. It appears a total of five times in Deuteronomy each time being used to introduce a sermon.[5] Here the exhaultation to listen prepares the listener for the two central points that are to follow, the first being that "Adonai is our God" and the second that "You shall love Adonai.[6]"

The love being discussed is not an abstract emotional love but one that finds concrete expression through the upholding of the law. Biblical scholar Marc Brettler draws our attention to the facts that *b'rit* can mean not only covenant but also treaty, and that treaties in the Biblical era often employed the term love when discussing the relationship between vassals and lords. According to Brettler, ""Love" here is

[4] Adele Berlin and Mark Zvi Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). 381.
[5] Other occurrences of this phrase include Deuteronomy 5:1, 9:1, 20:3 and 27:9. Mark Zvi Brettler, "Untitled Commentary," in *The Sh'ma and Its Blessings*, ed. Lawrence A. Hoffman, *My People's Prayer Book* (Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997). 86-88.
[6] Ibid. 88.

therefore a technical term for acceptance of treaty obligations. In the case of Deuteronomy 15, the expected love is quite extreme. We are to "love" God with all our "mind, body and strength."[7] The theme of hearing, obedience and love as linked makes a return appearance in 11:13 where in poetic terms the people are again told to listen (the root appearing twice) and love God. In this context, this passage strengthens the idea of covenant and defines our relationship with God as one of servant towards master.

In the liturgical context, The Sh'ma is seen as a strong declaration of monotheism, affirming the oneness of God. The centrality of the Sh'ma in a liturgical context has given primacy to the idea of the oneness of God. But the oneness of God is not nearly as clear in the biblical context. Not only is *Adonai* plural but how do we account for the use of *Shekhinah*? *Elohim*? The oneness of the divine must be understood in the context of a divine being that is described in many, many different ways throughout the Bible. The nature of this oneness is by no means obvious within the Bible.

Deuteronomy 6 discusses the covenant in general terms but Deuteronomy 11 goes into detail about the benefits of listening and serving one God. The rest of these Deuteronomic passages go on to explicate the nature of this covenant. If the people uphold the covenant, then God will grant rain in the proper season (11:14) and make grass grow in the field (11:15). As with the passage in Exodus, once again upholding the covenant is strongly tied to the land. But there is also an additional element here. In Deuteronomy 11:21 we learn that if you uphold the covenant both you and your

[7] Ibid. 101.

children will prosper. Making this direct connection between the covenant and the children adds to our understanding of why the people should tell the story of the Exodus to the children (literally the sons) in Exodus13:8 and why it is imperative to teach God's words to "your sons" (Deuteronomy 11:9) If the covenant is upheld both you and your children will prosper. This is an agreement that can be upheld across the generations.

The children as students make two further appearances in these passages from Deuteronomy. Pesuquim 4:7 and 11:19 are almost direct parallels of each other. I have used formatting to highlight the strong overlap.

7 וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם [redacted] וְדִבַּרְתָּ בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתֶךָ וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ

19 וְלִמַּדְתֶּם [redacted] לְדַבֵּר בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתֶךָ
וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ

With the exception of the first words, these verses are almost identical. Again we are not served well by the common translation which would have these phrases both translated as you will teach your sons and teach then to your children respectively. While teaching is a reasonable translation of וְלִמַּדְתֶּם it is not precise enough for וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם which is not easily defined. According to Hebrew scholar Dr. Joel Hoffman, the word comes from the Hebrew word for teeth.[8] It is a poetic turn of phrase when read together with the words that follow: וְדִבַּרְתָּ בָּם literally, "speak of them." By

[8] Joel M. Hoffman, "Untitled Commentary," in *The Sh'ma and Its Blessings*, ed. Lawrence A. Hoffman, *My People's Prayer Book* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997).

talking about God's law, you will literally put them in your children's mouths. If an atmosphere is created whereby you speak of the law, then it will be on the tip of your child's tongue. By contrast, the less poetic וְלִמַּדְתֶּם seems to point at a more deliberate attempt to educate your children in the ways of God's law so they will in turn be able to לְדַבֵּר בָּם. In either case, you will speak of them to use the language of both verses "when you stay at home, when you go on your way, when you lie down, and when you get up." As with the phrase, "with all your heart and soul," the formulation here directs beyond the literal reading to imply that the law should be spoken of in one's totality of activities. And while the repetition of nearly the exact phrase in such close proximity one to the other might suggest scribal error, from a literary perspective this repetition only serves to underscore that this idea, that the law will be part of every aspect of daily life, deserves particular attention. And if the law is upheld in this form, as we saw in Deuteronomy 11:21, the blessing of many days and good years on the land will be extended not only to you but also to you *children*.

Of particular interest to the student of tefillin is Deuteronomy 11:12. This *pasuq* alone, among those from Deuteronomy included in the traditional tefillin, is not included in either the mezuzah or the recitation of the Sh'ma during prayer. In its entirety, chapter 11 deals with the subject of loyalty to the covenant as the means for preserving Jewish life.[9] The chapter opens with the demand of fidelity in keeping God's law:

וְאָהַבְתָּ אֵת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְשָׁמַרְתָּ

[9]Berlin and Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible*. 398

מִשְׁמַרְתּוֹ וְחֻקֹּתָיו וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו וּמִצְוֹתָיו כָּל־הַיָּמִים׃

Love, therefore, the LORD your God, and keep his charge, his statutes, his ordinances, and his commandments always.

The fourfold use of synonyms for law amplifies the centrality of law in the passage that follows and from which our pesuqim are taken. In verses 2-11 we return to the theme of the Exodus that we discussed above and even employ the familiar language of the אות and God's strong arm:

2 וִידַעְתֶּם הַיּוֹם כִּי לֹא אֶת־בְּנֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדְעוּ וַאֲשֶׁר
לֹא־רָאוּ אֶת־מוּסַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֶת־גָּדְלוֹ אֶת־יָדוֹ הַחֲזָקָה
וּזְרֹעוֹ הַנְּטוּיָה׃
3 וְאֶת־אֹתֹתָיו וְאֶת־מַעֲשָׂיו אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה בְּתוֹךְ מִצְרַיִם לְפַרְעֹה
מֶלֶךְ־מִצְרַיִם וּלְכָל־אַרְצוֹ׃

The Israelites are meant to recall the Exodus and God's strong arm that brought the signs–the plagues–upon the Egyptians. Keeping this in mind, the Israelites are enjoined to keep God's law. If they do so, they will enter the land and work the land so it will prosper. It is here in the midst of the discussion of the law as the basis for success in the land that the verses that appear in the tefillin begin, continuing the discussion of the land the excerpt in the tefillin begins with *pasuq* 12.

The excerpts in the Tefillin begin with verse 12 which serves as a reminder of the connection with the land. It also serves to connect this passage in the tefillin with one of the key themes of the verses from Exodus, creating more thematic unity among the passages. The Sh'ma and the mezuzah texts begin with verse 13, thereby breaking with the discussion of the land. This choice returns the focus to the issue of fidelity to the commandments. In contrast the passages in the tefillin specifically go out of their

way to connect fidelity to the law with the historical narrative of the Exodus and with the covenant that is fulfilled in the land.

The connection between this passage and the idea of mezuzah is made explicitly in 11:20 וּכְתַבְתָּם עַל־מְזוּזוֹת בֵּיתֶךָ וּבִשְׁעָרֶיךָ: "You will write them on the doorposts of your house and your gates." God is providing clear instruction to write the laws and place the writings on the mezuzot of homes. There is not a large jump between what is written in the Bible to the rabbinic form of the mitzvah of mezuzot. The connection between the biblical passage and the rabbinic tefillin however is not as obvious. Once again the word אוֹת becomes important in these passages. As in Exodus 13:9 and 13:16, אוֹת is twice linked with the arm and hand (6:8 and 11:18). This unusual combination of a sign for both the arm and hand is the glue that links these passages together and cements the importance of אוֹת to our exploration. Additionally, the fact that the same vision of an אוֹת on the arm means that we should read these verses together to help ferret out the meaning of this specific type of אוֹת. In Deuteronomy 11:18 we find an addition that helps guide us in our understanding. For the first time we have the word וּקְשַׁרְתָּם, and you shall tie them, a word which gives us new insight into the nature of the sign. With Abraham, the אוֹת was literally cut into the flesh (Genesis 17:11). Here the sign is not *cut into* the flesh but *tied onto* the flesh. And the fact that the verb קְשַׁרְתָּם takes a plural object

suggests that the אוֹת under consideration is not just the אוֹת of the hand but also that between the eyes.

In thinking about tying the sign to your arm and between your eyes the rabbis fixed upon the phrase בְּכָל־לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל־נַפְשֶׁךָ in verse 6:4 and which appears again in verse 11:13 וּלְעָבְדוֹ בְּכָל־לְבַבְכֶם וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁכֶם. For the rabbis these words become the source for some of the theological and mechanical basis of rabbinic tefillin. The key words for the rabbis, לֵבָב and נֶפֶשׁ are easily understood in modern Hebrew to mean heart and soul. And this is the way both the JPS Tanakh and the New Revised Standard translations of the Bible translate these words. Yet two recent translations of The Five Books of Moses translate נֶפֶשׁ as "with all your being.[10]" The discrepancy is small but it points to the complicated meaning of terms. For us heart and soul indicates emotion and spirituality, not necessarily the case for the ancients. We learn from Hebrew scholar Joel Hoffman, that the phrase וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁכֶם בְּכָל־לְבַבְכֶם helps us to see a biblical vision of human-ness different than that which we see today. According to Hoffman,

> We divide ourselves into "mind," "body" and (perhaps) "soul," representing respectively, our cognitive capacity, our physical matter and our holy essence. We also distinguish between thought (cognition) and feeling (emotion). The Bible, however, groups thought and feelings together under *levav*; soul and body together under *nefesh*; and perhaps physical strength or endurance under *m'od*. ... Furthermore, *nefesh* and *levav* together form an idiom in biblical Hebrew (here [Deut 6:4], Deut.

[10] Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004). p937. Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses, The Schocken Bible: Volume One* (New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1995). 900.

> 11:13; 11:18; and 13:4; Josh 22:5 and Josh. 23:14 etc.), probably used to represent the entirety of human existence, much the way we use mind and body," or sometimes "body and soul" depending on the context, but always in order to mean "the whole person."[11]

The rabbis who were intimately familiar with biblical language were familiar with the this way of thinking of self and took it into account. It is important for us as moderns to keep this in mind not only as we read the rabbinic interpretations but also as we seek to form our own understanding of וּלְעָבְדוֹ בְּכָל־לְבַבְכֶם וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁכֶם.

The biblical passages contained in tefillin serve to focus attention on several key themes. These are not merely narrative passages with moral teachings. These are passages that directly engage with the idea of the divine and the nature of our relationship to the divine. They focus our attention on covenant and on the relationship of the people of Israel to God. They highlight the historic relationship of the people of Israel with God as formed in the process of the Exodus. They presume a relationship with the divine that is tied to the land of Israel and a relationship in which God has the ability and the will to punish for disobedience. The need for signs of this relationship is reinforced by the repeated focus on terms that refer to signs and the need for those signs to be affixed bodily. Furthermore these passages leave little question that these signs of God are directly tied to our responsibility to pass on our understanding of covenant one generation to the next. A modern reworking of tefillin needs to address these themes. Yet if the need for signs is clear, the nature of those signs is distinctly vague. If we were to look only to the Bible for guidance on the shape or form of tefillin, we would largely be left to our devices.

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[11] Hoffman, "Untitled Commentary." 100 and 102.

Chapter Two

The Traditional Rabbinic Vision of Tefillin

The rabbinic sources that discuss tefillin are primarily Halakhah. There is discussion of the mechanics of when, where, and how one should put on tefillin. During what point in the day and prayer service should one put on tefillin? Should one put them on at home or in the synagogue? When should one take them off? There is yet another category that concerns the care and storage of tefillin and a final piece of the discussion that considers who can don tefillin. And there is a large and important category of laws that focus on the construction of tefillin, both materials and form. There is, however, comparatively little material on the meaning of tefillin.

The rabbinic framework allows for the malleability of meaning. If I wanted only to reinterpret the meaning of tefillin from a feminist perspective, this would not in and of itself pose a challenge to traditional rabbinic thinking about this ritual. Form and custom are less easily changed. And because my revisioning of tefillin imagines not only changing meaning but also the form of tefillin, this chapter will focus on traditional rabbinic sources specifically as they relate to the construction of tefillin. [12]

If there is nothing in the content of the biblical passages contained in tefillin that would discount innovating the form of tefillin, the traditional rabbinical material by contrast has a very rigid vision of the form of tefillin. The rabbinic vision of tefillin

[12] Rabbi Karen Gluckstern-Reiss is currently working on a *teshuvah* about tefillin from a Conservative framework. She is looking at it from a feminist perspective but within a halakhic framework and not focusing on changing the form or content. In conversation with the author December 17, 2005. *Teshuvah* forthcoming.

is only loosely connected to the biblical text. In discussing tefillin, the Talmud cites tefillin as a prime example of a law whose basis is not firmly rooted in the biblical text. [13] Tefillin belong to the category of laws that were revealed at Sinai, but not committed to paper (or tablet as the case may be) in the form of the written Torah. The written law was given a concrete shape in the form of the five books of Moses and the oral law was passed on to Moses who passed it on to Joshua who passed it on to the elders and down through the generations eventually to the rabbis where it became the basis for rabbinic authority as arbiters of law.[14] Rabbis determine most oral law by discerning meanings from within the complexity of the written Torah. The oral Torah reads case law into the written text to discern standards and application.

Given the discursive form of the oral law, the uniformity of the Halakhah with regard to tefillin is striking. Two of the most authoritative medieval codes of Jewish law identify ten distinct features relating to tefillin–all of them unchangeable. The *Yad Hazakah*, otherwise known as the *Mishneh Torah*, was a code of law written by Maimonides in the 12th century. The *Sefer HaChinukh* was written in the 13th century in Spain and is a comprehensive description of the commandments found in the Torah. Its author is unknown. On the topic of tefillin these two codes are noticeably similar in content and form.

The list of requirements for tefillin is broken into two sections in the *Mishneh Torah*. I have preserved this separation by dividing the translation accordingly.

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[13] Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 88b.
[14] The reference here is to Misha Avot 1:1.

רמב"ם הלכות תפילין ומזוזה וספר תורה פרק א הלכה ג

עשרה דברים יש בתפילין כולן **הלכה למשה מסיני** וכולן מעכבין, לפיכך אם שינה באחת מהן הרי התפילין פסולות, שנים הן בכתיבתן ושמנה בחפויין וקשירת רצועותיהן, ואלו הן השנים שבכתיבתן: שכותבין אותן בדיו ושיהיו נכתבין על הקלף.

Mishneh Torah Laws of Tefillin, Mezuzah, and Torah Scrolls 1:3

There are ten elements concerning tefillin and all of them are ***Halakhah l'Moshe miSinai*** and all of them are absolutely necessary, therefore, if one made a change in even one of them, the tefillin would be unkosher. Two of the elements concern the writing and eight concern the covering and the typing of the straps. These are the two that are connected with the writing: that you write them with ink and that they be written on parchment.

רמב"ם הלכות תפילין ומזוזה וספר תורה פרק ג הלכה א

שמונה הלכות יש במעשה התפילין כולן הלכה למשה מסיני ולפיכך כולן מעכבות ואם שינה באחת מהן פסל, ואלו הם: שיהיו מרובעות, וכן תפירתן ברבוע, ואלכסונן ברבוע עד שיהיה להן ארבע זויות שוות, ושיהיה בעור של ראש צורת שי"ן מימין ומשמאל, ושיכרוך הפרשיות במטלית, ושיכרוך אותן בשיער מעל המטלית, ואחר כך מכניסן בבתיהן, ושיהיו תופרין אותן בגידין, ושעושין להן מעבורת מעור החפוי שתכנס בה הרצועה עד שתהא עוברת והולכת בתוך תובר שלה, ושיהיו הרצועות שחורות, ושיהיה הקשר שלהן קשר ידוע כצורת דל"ת.

Mishneh Torah Laws of Tefillin, Mezuzah, and Torah Scrolls 3:1

There are eight laws with regards to the making of tefillin and all of them are ***Halakhah l'Moshe miSinai*** and therefore all of them are absolutely necessary and if you change one of them [the tefillin are] not kosher and they are: That they be square, therefore there stitching must

> be square. Their cross section must be square so that they will have four equal angles. There should be in the leather of the [tefillin] of the head the shape of [the letter] Shin, from right to left. The verses should be wrapped in cloth; that they should be tied with hair over the cloth. Then they should be put in their cases (literally their houses) which should be tied with sinews and you make for them a hollow cross-piece from the leather of the casing, into which the strap will enter and pass into its compartment. The straps must be black and the knot must be in the recognized shape of the [letter] Dalet.[15]

A similar list of requirements can be found in the *Sefer HaKhinukh* although in this code all the laws are grouped together in one section.

Sefer HaKhinukh 421:

ספר החינוך מצוה תכא

מדיני המצוה מה שאמרו זכרונם לברכה שעשרה דברים יש בתפילין בין של ראש ובין של יד כולן **הלכה למשה מסיני**, והמשנה באחת מכולן הרי התפילין פסולות. שנים מהן בכתיבתם, ושמונה בחפוין וקשירת רצועותיהן. ואלו הן השנים שבכתיבתן, שכותבין אותם בדיו ושיהיו נכתבות על הקלף. ואלו הן שמונה שבחפוין, א. שיהיו מרובעות, וכן תפירתן בריבוע, ואלכסונן בריבוע, עד שיהיה להן ארבע זויות שוות. ב. ושיהיה בעור של ראש צורת שי"ן מימין ומשמאל. ג. ושיכרוך הפרשיות במטלית. ד. ושיכרוך אותן בשער של בהמה או חיה טהורה על המטלית ואחר כך מכניסן בבתיהן של עור. ה. ושיהיו תופרין [אותן] בגידין. ו. ושעושין להן מעבורת מעור החפוי שתכנס בה הרצועה עד שתהא עוברת והולכת בתוך תיבה שלה. ז. ושיהיו הרצועות שחורות. ח. ושיהיה הקשר שלהן ידוע בצורת ד'.

[15] Translation for Mishneh Torah and Sefer HaKhinukh by author. Bold and underline by author.

> From among the laws of the commandment that our [rabbis] of [blessed memory] told, there are ten elements about tefillin, including both head and arm, all of which are ***Halakhah l'Moshe mi'Sinai,*** and if you change one from among them, the tefillin are unkosher. Two of them concern the writing and eight with the casing and with the tying of the straps. These are the two that deal with writing: that you write them with ink and that they need to be written on parchment. And these are the eight that concern the casing. A) That they should be square and their stitching should be square and the diagonal should be even so that they have four equal angles. B) On the tefillin of the head there should be the shape [of the letter] shin from right to left. C) The *parshiot* (biblical verses) must be covered in a white cloth. D) They should be tied with the hair of a pure beast or animal over the white cloth and afterwards be placed in *batim* (literally houses, or casings) of leather. E) They should be sewn with sinews. F) You make for them a hollow cross-piece from the leather of the casing, into which the strap will enter and pass into its compartment. G) The straps must be black H) The knot must be in the shape of a [letter] *dalet.*

What is particularly noticeable for our purposes is the fact that both sources see ten fundamental *unchangeable* elements of tefillin, all relating to construction. In translating both sources from the Hebrew, I have deliberately left the phrase *Halakhah l'Moshe MiSinai* untranslated. The phrase literally means "laws [given] to Moses at Sinai." This term is pregnant with meaning. Implied in the phrase is the idea that these particular laws were given by *God* to Moses. Laws that are *Halakhah l'Moshe MiSinai* stands in the middle between the oral and written Torah. Laws that were given to Moses at Sinai are not explicitly written in the five books of Moses yet they were explicitly given *orally* to Moses at Sinai. Because they were given at Sinai directly as law and are not part of the general wisdom which guides the interpretation of law from which oral law is derived, laws given to Moses at Sinai are given more weight than other laws. Laws that were given explicitly to Moses at Sinai are not open to debate

and discussion in the same way other elements of the Oral Torah are. There is no questioning the divine providence of Laws that are *Halakhah l'Moshe MiSinai* and therefore they are more authoritative than other elements of oral tradition. This is a point reinforced by both the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Sefer HaChinuch*, which both state that there are ten laws concerning tefillin that fall in the category of Torah *l'Moshe miSinai* and therefore cannot be challenged at all. The halakhic system usually allows for a certain latitude and elasticity. But, given that these laws are directly from Moses, changing these elements of tefillin is any way is such a severe violation that it would immediately render the tefillin unkosher.

The phrase *Halakhah l'Moshe miSinai* is not one that is often invoked by rabbinic authorities. This makes its use in connection with tefillin all the more notable. In comparison with other mitzvot, details of tefillin are disproportionately assumed to be *Halakhah l'Moshe miSinai*. Six out of the 34 uses of the phrase in the *Mishnhe Torah* are directly connected with tefillin. In the *Shulkhan Arukh* the connection of the term with the tefillin is even more striking. The phrase *Halakhah l'Moshe miSinai* appears only twelve times in the *Shulkhan Arukh*. Eight of the twelve mentions, however, concern tefillin.[16] The multiple use of the phrase in connection to laws of tefillin is all the more striking when we consider that in the remaining four cases the term is used only once in connection to any given mitzvah.[17] The use of the term in

[16] *Halakhah l'Moshe miSinai* in connection to tefillin in *Shulkhan Arukh*, *Orech Hayim* 32:7, 39, 42, 44 (3 times), 49; 33:3.
[17] The other uses of the term occur in the *Shulkhan Arukh Oreh Hayim* 341:8 in connection with Torah reading, 632:1 in connection to the placement of *skhakh* on a sukkah, *Yoreh Deah* 294:8 in connection to the laws of *orlah* and when they apply outside of Israel, *Hoshen Mishpat* 390:3 in connection with damages.

connection to tefillin goes back all the way to the Jerusalem Talmud (Yerushalmi, Megillah 1:9) And the phrase still carries weight today. As recently as 1975, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, a modern Orthodox rabbinic scholar, used the phrase when introducing the laws of tefillin in his populist guide to tefillin observance, a book that serves to this day as a handbook on the topic for traditional laity.[18] Clearly, the strict rabbinic rulings on the unchangeable elements of tefillin are very far from the vague hints found in the biblical form. Yet while the rabbis of the Talmudic era might have felt that the tefillin were the perfect example of Oral Law, by invoking the phrase *Halakhah l'Moshe miSinai* traditional rabbinic authorities from the Talmudic period onwards gave serious weight to the prohibition against innovation with regard to the form of tefillin.

Taken at face value, the commitment of traditional rabbinic opinions to *Halakhah l'Moshe miSinai* would seem to force one to either forgo innovation or alternatively forgo connection with rabbinic vision. Yet a closer look at the use of *Halakhah l'Moshe miSinai* suggests that we need not be so quick to accept this dichotomy. The use of *Halakhah l'Moshe miSinai* itself undermines a singular authoritative vision of law. If the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Sefer haChinuch* identify ten distinct elements that are immutable because they come from Sinai, the much earlier Talmudic citation only identifies the color of the straps as being so critically labeled. And while the *Shulkhan Arukh* repeatedly invokes the phrase with connection to tefillin, it does not do so in the exact same manner that the early medieval sources do. Aryeh Kaplan cites both *Sefer HaChinuch* and the *Yad HaHazakah* as the sources for

[18] Aryeh Kaplan, *Tefillin* (New York: OU/NCSY Publications, 1975). p15-16.

claiming that there are ten laws connected to tefillin that fall into the category of *Halakhah l'Moshe MiSinai.* Yet he then goes on to explain that despite the fact that these two sources see among those ten the need to wrap the parchments in a piece of cloth, contemporary practice differs in that it follows the opinion of the Rosh "who states that this is not necessary."[19] The laws of tefillin might have been given directly by God to Moses at Sinai and as a result cannot be changed but even this does not cut off disagreement and discussion or variations in practice.

If the phrase *Halakhah l'Moshe MiSinai* does not then provide us with a definitively agreed upon set of laws pertaining to all aspects of tefillin, we must look for other ways to account for its use in connection to tefillin. Professor Alyssa Gray posits that perhaps the disproportionate use of the concept of *Halakhah L'Moshe MiSinai* in connection to tefillin derives from the fact that there were in ancient times many forms of tefillin. From a historical perspective the practice of wearing tefillin derived from a broadly observed practice of wearing amulets as protection. Even among Jews there was diversity in defining and enacting the practice of wearing "signs between your eyes and on your arm" as loosely defined by the Bible. Amidst the diversity of approaches, Gray suggests that perhaps the rabbis invoked the concept of *Halakhah l'Moshe miSinai* to give more weight and authority to their own version of signs.[20] Such retrofitting specific practice with traditional terminology, traditional rabbis were able to shore up their own vision of Judaism.[21]

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[19] Ibid. 91.
[20] Alyssa Gray in personal correspondence dated 12/23/2005.
[21] Another example of retrofitting can be seen in the use of the term *k'dat Moshe weYisrael* in the wedding ceremony. According to Eugene Mihaly, "It is ..likely that

What then are we to make of the endurance of *Halakhah l'Moshe miSinai* in connection to tefillin, long after other competitor tefillin disappeared from the landscape? In addition to its historical origins, *Halakhah l'Moshe miSinai* frames the traditional understanding of tefillin. Perhaps tefillin are disproportionately considered *Halakhah l'Moshe miSinai* because they, more than most mitzvot, are not clearly defined by written law. Maybe rabbis concerned that their rulings stood on shaky textual grounds were attempting to shore up support for their vision. Certainly, evoking *Halakhah l'Moshe miSinai* heightens the importance of tefillin within the hierarchy of ritual observances. Most laws are important but are open for discussion; framed this way these laws become so holy that they cannot be debated or changed without risk of moving beyond the pale.

Placing tefillin in the context of the entire halakhic system further adds to our understanding. According to Tikva Frymer-Kensky, the halakhic system cannot be separated from the narrative that tells the story of the people of Israel.[22] The traditional rabbinic narrative takes a mythic form. Frymer-Kensky retells it as follows:

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the phrase was introduced as an attempt to assert rabbinic authority and control" over the marriage ceremony in the 12-13th centuries. This pronouncement was not cited in halakhic codes regarding the wedding ceremony until the 16th century when Rabbi Moses Isserles wrote of it in his gloss to the *Shulkhan Arukh*. Eugene Mihaly, *Responsa on Jewish Marriage* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1985). 18.

[22] The idea of laws that are imbedded in a larger social-historical narrative is not Tikva Frymer-Kensky's own. In developing the idea of halakhah as imbedded in a larger social-historical narrative, Frymer-Kensky builds on the work of legal theorist Robert Cover. Cover argued that all law is "really a concretization of the narrative in which it is imbedded," by looking at case law with regards to racial matters as decided by the Supreme Court of the United States.Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *The Feminist Challenge to Halakhah* (Harvard Law School, 1994 [cited November 3 2005]); available from http://www.law.harvard.edu/programs/Gruss/frymer.html.

> Once upon a time, 5700 some odd years ago, God created the world. Later, God chose a people to bond with, the people of Israel. God rescued them from slavery so they could become God's people and established the covenant with Sinai in which God expressed desires in the form of laws. Israel accepted the covenant and agreed to obey these laws. These laws are eternal and unchanging and in order to insure their applicability, God also revealed at Sinai the elaborations of these laws in the oral Torah and the ways in which the laws can be elaborated. The Sages who lived after the destruction of the second Temple applied these divine instructions to the written Torah and thereby constructed the rabbinic halakhah as the divinely ordained extension of the Sinai tradition. Rabbis have continued to study and codify these laws and to respond to questions about halakhah so that Jews would know the proper way to achieve the will of God and could rest assured that their obedience to the halakhah would fulfill God's will and bring blessings. In this way we know God's wishes and are obligated to them.[23]

This narrative, which predates modern scientific and archeological developments, underlies the entire traditional rabbinic system and even today is largely accepted as the foundational narrative by Orthodox communities. Framing tefillin as *Halakhah l'Moshe miSinai* endorses this broader narrative within the context of a specific mitzvah. The category of *Halakhah l'Moshe miSinai* sanctifies and preserves rabbinic authority as coming unequivocally from God. Tefillin come to embody a specific vision of law as coming directly from God. This narrative reading is further reinforced by the meanings the traditional commentators gave to other elements of tefillin. Given the biblical texts that are placed in tefillin, tefillin are not abstract signs of God. They specifically focus attention on the idea of covenant and law. The wearing of these verses is a sign of commitment to that covenant and law. Moreover, by binding the tefillin to the arm, the wearer affirms that he is bound to observe the laws as given to Moses at Sinai. *Halakhah l'Moshe miSinai* shapes the

[23] Ibid.([cited).

way of thinking about tefillin while tefillin simultaneously exemplify God's revelation of law to the people by way of Moses. The narrative together with the traditional discussions about the mitzvah and the tefillin themselves present a clear vision of God as singularly commanding and obligating from on high. While this clarity is in and of itself powerful, it was this very vision of God that my original vision of reworked tefillin hoped to avoid.

Chapter Three

Making a Clean Break and Other Alternatives

The traditional rabbinic position on the make up of tefillin is clear. There is little room for innovation and attempts at changing tefillin put one outside the boundaries of Judaism as portrayed by the traditionalist narrative of the Jewish people. But there was nothing to stop me in practical terms from creating the tefillin I envisioned. If the rabbinic vision of tefillin was unacceptable to me as both a feminist and a Reform Jew, I was of course welcome to divorce my tefillin from the traditional rabbinic framework. This is a strategy supported by Dr. Eugene Borowitz's critique of Rachel Adler's reworking of the traditional *ketubbah*.[24] Adler's book *Engendering Judaism* is subtitled "An Inclusive Theology and Ethics." The book, while broad in its approach and consideration of Judaism with a feminist perspective, focuses significantly of the issue of the *ketubbah*, the traditional rabbinic marriage contract which is symptomatic as well of emblematic of some of the key difficulties seen by Adler in traditional Judaism.[25] In its traditional form, the *ketubbah* poses several problems for feminists because it is based on an understanding of marriage as exclusively between a man and a woman and presupposes that the women is chattel to be acquired by the man through marriage.

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[24] Eugene B. Borowitz, *Studies in the Meaning of Judaism* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 2002). P424-Borowitz, *Studies in the Meaning of Judaism*.p424-426.
[25] Rachel Adler, *Engendering Judaism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991).

Borowitz agrees with Adler's general evaluation of the *ketubbah,* as he relates her argument:

> ...the *ketubbah* is fundamentally a sexist document and one based on the law for the acquisition of chattel. A generation that understands the Jewish story to be essentially concerned with justice for everyone and the creation of loving relationships surely demands some radical action be taken. So Adler, with admirable learning and imagination, creates one based on the halakhic instruments of establishing a partnership, thus incidentally illustrating how, in her sense of praxis, a conservative social tendency operates in dialectic with its radical thrust.[26]

But he takes her to task for engaging with the traditional form:

> Why then doesn't Adler follow traditional Reform praxis of radically abandoning unethical Jewish laws, in this case, the *ketubbah*, and, if the couple desires a wedding document, create one, with or without a halakhic base, that they will find meaningful?[27]

Bringing together Reform community and feminist sensibilities, Borowitz seems to be saying, the best approach when confronted with truly problematic elements of Halakhah would be to distance oneself from Halakhah and the traditional rabbinic sensibility.

This was certainly an option, but I was loath to do this. On some level, the idea of creating new tefillin that were disconnected completely from rabbinic tradition felt a little like walking away from Judaism. To be sure, there are many Jews who walk away from everything that is traditionally Jewish. While some walk away from simple disinterest, I suspect that there are those for whom elements of the tradition are offensive or problematic to such a degree that they see no redemption for the entire system. I too sometimes wonder if the tradition can be rescued from the sexism,

[26] Borowitz, *Studies in the Meaning of Judaism*. 425.
[27] Ibid. 426.

heterosexism and hierarchical assumptions that are intertwined at many levels. Yet when one walks away completely from Judaism then what is left is devoid of Jewish content. Creating tefillin that were disassociated and disconnected from the traditional form of the mitzvah is certainly not as extreme as completely walking away from *all* of Judaism. Nonetheless, so much of Judaism and Jewish experience in its traditional forms have been based in or engaged with the traditional rabbinic sources and frameworks that we must ask if it is possible to move away from the framework entirely and still remain in the Jewish conversation. Moreover, as Judith Plaskow points out, moving away from Judaism, and by corollary, moving away from a specific aspect of Judaism, does not assure that we will escape patriarchal and heterosexist assumptions. Such assumptions, Plaskow notes, are fundamental to *all* culture and cannot be easily escaped but rather need to be confronted.[28]

More importantly, working to create tefillin outside the halakhic framework, as Borowitz suggests, creates new problems for both Jewish feminists and Reform Jews. If those who endorse the traditional rabbinic narrative are the *only* ones engaged directly with Halakhah, then they will retain the ability to define Halakhah definitively. If their vision of Halakhah remains the primary operative vision of Halakhah then the hierarchical, sexist, and hetrosexist assumptions implicit in the traditional rabbinic vision of the system will remain unchallenged. Those who critique the traditional narrative and its assumptions must engage halakhic categories and frameworks. By engaging and reinterpreting rather than abandoning elements of Halakhah that are "unethical," there is an opportunity not only to offer a critique of the

[28] Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1991). xi.

problematic elements of the traditional rabbinic system but to question the entire system.

Ironically, creating ritual outside the traditional rabbinic framework is not necessarily problematic from the traditional rabbinic point of view. While traditional rabbinic Judaism allows for only limited innovation of existing structures, there is space within the traditional rabbinic framework for innovation that does not take away or disturb existing structures but instead adds to what is already there. Jewish feminists have excelled at innovations that add but do not diminish. In the last thirty years individuals and small groups have created a panoply of new ceremonies and rituals to mark different aspects of Jewish life. In the last thirty years Jewish women have created rituals and ceremonies that leave the traditional rabbinic structure far behind. There are books and websites that give directions for celebrating the onset of menstruation or the reaching of menopause. There are rituals for healing after an abortion and for menopaus. These ceremonies have been created to directly address female needs that the traditional rabbinical vision of Judaism ignored. These rituals draw on elements of Jewish tradition by using the Hebrew language, images drawn from tradition, language used in tradition and even whole pieces of text. These rituals indirectly offer a critique of traditional rabbinic Judaism by highlighting places where traditional rabbinic Judaism failed to address women's needs. But because they do not supercede or supplant existing traditional rabbinic rituals these innovations do not necessarily aim to fundamentally transform or directly confront the assumptions of existing Jewish practice.

Ultimately, most of Jewish feminist innovations in the realm of ritual have been limited in their appeal. While the individual women who participate in Aunt Flo's "coming to wisdom ceremony" may well find the experience spiritually meaningful and Jewishly enriching, rarely have the experiences transferred to others for use in other contexts. The idiosyncratic nature of the innovation has meant that overwhelmingly, innovations in Jewish feminist ritual have not been accepted more broadly. Most Jewish feminist rituals remain as ephemeral as the myriad of contributions women have made to Jewish life throughout the ages.

Two critical exceptions are the creation of *Rosh Hodesh* celebrations, which mark the beginning of the new moon and Women's Seders. The widespread success and appeal of these two innovations of the last thirty years is notable in light of the limited success of other rituals creations. There are many reasons why these particular rituals, as opposed to others, have flourished across the Jewish world. Undoubtedly, one of the key reasons for their success comes from the fact these particular innovations are deeply rooted in Jewish language and symbols and build on existing traditional structures. In ancient times, the sighting of the new moon was critical for setting the calendar. Long after the calendar was fixed *Rosh Hodesh* remained a minor holy day celebrated with special prayers of praise in the context of morning prayers said in synagogue. In the Talmud *Rosh Hodesh* was identified as a women's holiday during which women were excused from half a days work.[29] This association with women was largely forgotten by modern times but in reclaiming *Rosh Hodesh* for women, Jewish feminists were clearly building on established rabbinic precedent.

[29] Megillah 22b.

Women's Seders similarly built on established norms. While no precedent exists in traditional rabbinic literature for Women's Seders, the Seder as a form had a history of lending itself to innovation. The best known Seder is clearly the Passover Seder but in the Talmud the rabbis also instituted a Seder for Rosh Hashana and Kabbalists created a Seder for Tu B'shvat. Even the traditional Passover Seder is a fairly flexible form. The traditional haggadah is actually a compilation of a variety of rabbinic musing on the theme of telling the story of the Exodus. Each generation of rabbis added their own view and interpretation. In the modern era, Jews created Passover haggadot to reflect contemporary experiences and issues such as the Holocaust[30] or the oppression of Jews in the Soviet Union[31], so that their Passover Seders changed accordingly. Women's Seders which focused on women's struggles for liberation and gave liturgical voice to women's struggles for equality built on this pattern of innovation within the malleable Seder framework.

Both *Rosh Hodesh* groups and Women's Seders were clearly Jewish. They picked up on Jewish themes and were rooted in tradition. The vocabulary of these innovations was easily understood across segments of the community. No doubt their appeal across denominational lines comes in no small part from the fact that they do not intrinsically contradict traditional rabbinic views of innovation or accepted social standards. Even Orthodox women who accept traditional rabbinic strictures on innovation can comfortably participate in *Rosh Hodesh* celebrations or Women's

[30] Yosef Dov Sheinson, *A Survivors' Haggadah*, trans. Yaron Peleg, Robert Szulkin, and Marc Samuels, Revised Edition ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2000).
[31] Mark Podwal, *Let My People Go, a Haggadah* (New York: Darien House, Inc, 1972).

Seders without fear that they are challenging the existing structure. The fact that women celebrate *Rosh Hodesh* does not take away in any form from the male rabbinic marking of the new moon in the synagogue with the traditional male-written liturgy. Women can gather for a Women's Seder, a month or three weeks before Passover, precisely because it does not in the least threaten the validity or sanctity of the traditional rabbinic Seder that is the *real* means of marking the holiday.

Building on existing Jewish structures has aided in the success of these innovations but such a strategy is not enough to challenge the inequalities of the traditional rabbinic framework. Some limited element from Women's Seders have made inroads into the mainstream. It is increasingly common to have a Miriam's cup on the Passover table and the idea of having an orange on the Seder plate (as a symbol of women/GBLTs/ general diversity) is also gaining ground. Though there are exceptions, such as the newest Reform Haggadah,[32] overwehlmingly, the liturgy of the Seder has remained largely unchanged by the questions and challenges raised by Women's Seders. Nor have women's *Rosh Hodesh* groups really changed what occurs in the main sanctuary on *Rosh Hodesh*. These women's ritual innovations have allowed traditional practice to stand apart from the questions raised by innovation.

Even more problematic is the way in which these innovations have inadvertently reinforced the traditional gendered assumptions of Judaism. Traditional rabbinic Judaism assumed separate gendered religious spheres. By working in parallel to the established frameworks as opposed to directly confronting those frameworks,

[32] Sue Levi Elwell, *The Open Door: A Passover Haggadah* (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2002). Levi Elwell includes mention of the orange as a suggestion in the introduction, xviii. For a discussion of Miriam's cup see page 12.

these feminist rituals are generally seen as **women's** rituals. *Rosh Hodesh* groups are run and populated by women. While some limited number of men may participate, Women's Seders are generally for women. The end result is that the vision of Judaism that emerges in these settings is normatively female. Moreover, because very little of what has developed in the rich and creative field of Jewish women's ritual has made its way into the sanctuary or the prayer books, it remains on the whole separate from the normative historically male Jewish expression. The irony here lies in the fact that while the physical *mechitza* between women and men within the mainstream of Judaism has disappeared, women's rituals have reasserted the division between men and women. Instead of challenging the male vision of Judaism to be more inclusive of the variety of gendered experiences, these women's rituals have unintentionally allowed for the a continued division within Judaism based on gender.

Building on tradition while simultaneously subverting the problematic assumptions of the traditional rabbinic understanding of Halakhah is possible. According to Tikva Frymer-Kensky and Rachel Adler, transformation is achievable when we look beyond the technicalities and particulars of Halakhah and return our focus to the concept of narrative.[33] Both women build on the theories of American legal theorist Robert Cover to suggest that we need to supplant the old narrative its problematic assumptions with one feminist narrative of Halakhah. By supplanting the traditional rabbinic narrative of Halakhah we are not only challenging traditional

[33] It is notable that both women build strongly on Cover's work on race and case law as decided by the American Supreme Court. Frymer-Kensky uses the term narrative to describe his approach as she applies it. Adler uses the term *nomos* in place of the term narrative. For simplicity's sake I have chosen to use narrative. Adler, *Engendering Judaism*. 34 Frymer-Kensky, *The Feminist Challenge to Halakhah* ([cited).

rabbinic assumptions but discrediting their validity as the only authentic understanding of Judaism. Adler's vision for creating an "inclusive theology and ethics" of Judaism builds on the idea that a new narrative will be formed from praxis while Frymer-Kensky suggests that the narrative serve as the starting point for envisioning transformation.

As Frymer-Kensky points out, feminists are not alone in attempting to create a new narrative that would serve as the foundational myth of Judaism. Other than the traditional rabbinic narrative, Frymer-Kensky identifies distinct narratives that are associated with the Conservative and Reconstructionist movements as well as one attributed to David Weiss Halivni, the renown Talmudist. Reform Judaism has long embraced the idea of narrative. Early reformers saw in rabbinic Judaism a corruption of the true meaning of Judaism. They sought to purge the Judaism of their day from the backward and distorting rituals and observances so that the true message of Judaism could once again rise to the fore. Their reforms were no random innovations but a set of deliberate acts meant to restore what they viewed as the original message of Judaism. What they were doing, whether explicitly or implicitly, without the advantage of Cover's framework, was creating an alternative to the traditional narrative that provided the framework for their reforms.[34]

Adler believes that praxis will lead to the creation of a new narrative for Judaism that makes room for the evolution of a Judaism that is theologically inclusive and ethically sensitive. She does not present a singular narrative but rather shows

[34] For a comprehensive history of the Reform Movement see Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, ed. Jehuda Reinharz, *Studies in Jewish History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

through example. She takes us through the process by which praxis is the basis for the development of a new *nomos*, and that new *nomos* is then be applied not only to rabbinic sources but also to practice and ritual. Frymer-Kensky cannot do in the space of a short article what Adler does in 260 pages. After detailing the traditional and non-traditional narratives of Judaism, she goes on to explain that a specifically feminist narrative of Judaism is an essential first step in confronting the problems of the halakhic system. Her thinking on the need for narrative captures the essential tension posed by innovating in the context of established tradition. According to her,

> ...if you want to have a foundational myth that will incorporate both the current aspirations and the actual particulars of the law and provide halakhah guidance, you have to develop a new narrative. This narrative draws to some extent on the mystical tradition of Judaism but is at the same time a complete rephrasing of how we think the law got to be where it is and how we make halakhic decisions.[35]

She then goes on to explain that such a "foundation myth has to be developed by a community." Nevertheless, she is bold enough to offer her own draft vision of what that myth might look like.

There is much about Adler's vision and Frymer-Kensky's narrative that is compelling. Adler provides a wealth of analytical tools that are essential for raising and confronting the difficulties posed by serious gender analysis. Frymer-Kensky's foundation myth provides a means for placing the Jewish feminist discussion on a level with the other discursive frameworks of Judaism. Yet I am no more sure that we can arrive at ***a feminist*** narrative of Judaism any more than we can agree upon *a* narrative of Judaism.

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[35] Frymer-Kensky, *The Feminist Challenge to Halakhah* ([cited).

One of the critical problems faced by Jewish feminists no less than any other group of feminists is the difficulty of essentializing the female experience. To suppose that Jewish feminists could agree on a single Jewish feminist narrative suggests that there might be one particular way to be a Jewish feminist. Early on in the development of the Jewish feminist movement, there were those who did believe that there might be *a* set of issues and concerns that *all* Jewish women would share and rally around. But in reality there was never *a* Jewish feminist agenda.[36] Today, more than ever, there is a true diversity of approaches to Jewish feminism. For Orthodox feminists, issues like women's prayer groups and the terrible plight of the *agunah* are urgent and significant concerns because women cannot lead public prayer or initiate divorce. While feminists who identify with the more liberal Jewish movements might sympathize with their Orthodox sisters, these are not issues in their own religious lives. The sociological realities and theological frameworks of the more liberal branches of Judaism have addressed many of the overt elements of gender discrimination either intentionally or by default. For feminists operating within Reform Judaism there are no gender-based technical barriers to participating fully in prayer and as there is no *get* there are no *agunot*. To suggest that it might be possible, or if not truly possible at least desirable,

[36] At the First National Jewish Women's Conference held in 1973, there was one prayer service planned. The women of Ezrat Nashim, who largely identified as Conservative Jews and who had recently called on the Conservative movement to count women in the minyanim were charged with planning the service. They went forward and planned a service led exclusively by women but that followed the traditional format. They were surprised to find, once they got to the conference, that there were many women who strongly objected to the plan. A large group of women spent much of the night arguing about the form the service should take. For many this was the first time that they realized that not all Jewish women experienced the gender bias of traditional rabbinic Judaism in the same way. Ruth Magder, "The First National Jewish Women's Conference" (Barnard, 1991). 31

to create *a* feminist narrative of Judaism, is to overlook the importance to individual feminists of existing narratives and frameworks. Instead of *a* feminist narrative of Judaism we need feminist *narratives* of Judaism. In an era where there is no singular vision of Judaism or feminism we need multiple narratives which can help Jews frame the choices they make within the context of a particular reading of the story of the Jewish people.

The danger in creating multiple narratives of Judaism is that the concept of peoplehood, which those narratives are meant to support, will cease to exist if narratives multiply to such an extent as to become individualized rather than communal in nature. In other words, if we create as many narratives as there are individual Jews, what will connect one narrative to the other so that communities of Jews and not Jewish individuals will continue to exist? If it is desirable to have multiple feminist narratives of Judaism, is it possible to limit the number or scope of those narratives so that value of community and peoplehood, long central to Judaism, are not destroyed in the process?

The challenge of navigating the balance between individualism and community is at the heart of modern Reform Judaism. In 1999, the Reform Movement issued the *Principles for Reform Judaism* which committed the movement to the idea of mitzvot as sacred obligations with particular attention to Torah, God, and the State of Israel. Apart from abstract terms of the position paper, individual Reform Jews are free to choose which mitzvot they will observe. While free to do so, most Reform Jews do not hold themselves to the 613 mitzvot, which according to some traditional rabbinic sources are the number of mitzvot to which Jews are obligated. From the outside there

are those who might claim that the result is anarchy: Judaism that is so individualized that it has been rendered merely personal expression rather that part of a larger narrative.

From the inside the picture is quite different. There *is* a wide variety of observance among Reform Jews but there are limitations and expectations. Those limitations and expectations are set not by individuals but by communities. In the real world of congregations, youth groups, and camps, there are agreed upon frameworks that limit innovation and personal expression. There are set times for prayers, holidays that are observed, and endorsed practices. Community is the glue that bridges the gaps between personal visions. Writing specifically about creativity in synagogues, Rabbi Lawrence Kushner observes,

> The price of congregational vitality is the frequent appearance of confusion and even anarchy... There can never be too many people trying too many things. If it's a good idea, people will keep coming. If it's not so good, no one will come.[37]

Individuals might choose to push the limits of established Jewish custom by suggesting innovations but the community serves as the ultimate judge as to whether or not any particular innovation should be integrated into a larger vision of Judaism.

There is something very democratic about the power of the community within Reform Judaism that lends itself nicely to Jewish feminists' critiques of the hierarchical power of rabbis. In accepting or rejecting changes, Reform communities have often been indifferent to the source of innovation. Prominent rabbis have at various points in the history of Reform Judaism proposed moving the main weekly

[37] Lawrence Kushner, "The Tent-Peg Business: Some Truths About Congregations," *New Traditions: Explorations in Judaism*, no. Priemieer (1984).

worship service from Saturday to Sunday. They based their arguments for change on well reasoned theology and sociology. Nonetheless, a primary Sunday service never became widespread. Reform Jews as a community were not willing to accept such a change as Jewish.[38] Community stands not only as a foil to unbridled individualism, but also challenges a vision of Judaism as dominated top down by a male rabbinic hierarchy.

Community has also proved an essential element to the gains that Jewish feminists have made. The ordination of women is often cited as the most significant Jewish feminist achievement. The ordination of women came about entirely within the context of specific communities. In 1971 Ezrat Nashim issued its call for equal access for women at the annual meeting of the Rabbinical Assembly of the Conservative movement. This was no abstract call for change but one that situated the need for change within a particular community and its structures. The women of Ezrat Nashim were calling on the Conservative Movement as a community to make changes in its practice. The same call would have seemed absurd had it been made without reference to a particular community. For by 1971, Sally Preisand was just one year away from being ordained as a rabbi in the Reform Movement and the Reconstructionist

[38] The idea of moving the main weekly service from Saturday to Sunday was proposed by several prominent Reform thinkers in Europe in the nineteenth century including Samuel Holdheim (Germany) 83, Oly Terquem (France) 165, Ignaz Einhorn (Hungary) 163. While their own congregations usually followed along with this innovation it never became the norm in Europe. In the United States, where there was not so much a move to move the Sabbath but to make the main preaching day Sunday, the success of such endevours was strongly linked to the individual rabbi's skill as an orator. "The great majority of American Reform congregation did not conduct Sunday services despite all of the pressure to do so."291 The laity overruled the rabbinic vision for change. Meyer, *Response to Modernity*.

Movement was on it way to ordaining Sandy Eisenberg Sasso in 1974. Within an Orthodox Jewish context calls for women's equality would have seemed absurd given the lack of rabbinic and sociological potential support for the idea. The movements of Judaism were the communal frameworks which set the guidelines that barred women's participation and they were also the ones that were able to change them. The concerns of the Reform Movement were different from those of Reconstructionist, Conservative or Orthodox Judaism. Each movement dealt in its own distinct way with the issue of women's ordination because of each movement's unique assumptions.

We do not often equate movements with community. The word community conjures up cozy intimate images of small groups, whereas movements are large sweeping association. Yet for Jews the lines between the small intimate vision of community and the large abstract group are not so clear. Historically and even today, individual Jews have seen themselves in relation to the greater peoplehood. Phrases such as "Kol Yisrael Aravim Zeh l'Zeh," and "We are One," pave over the complicated tensions that exist within "The People" but highlight just how salient the concept of peoplehood is. For modern Jews movements are a way of defining community within the greater peoplehood. Movements identify groups of people who identify with specific values and goals within the context of the larger peoplehood. Those groups then form subgroups of loosely connected communities. Affiliation with a movement–even the most recent transdenominational movement–helps to signal the boundaries and understanding of the Jewish community in which individual Jews operate. Additionally, the Conservative and Reform, and to a lesser degree the

Orthodox and Reconstructionist movements, all have institutional structures that maintain and define the boundaries of their particular vision of Judaism.

As critical as the structures of community are for providing a counterbalance to individualism and a means for advancing elements of the Jewish feminist agenda, the structures of communities can also preserve the status quo and strongly resist transformation. According to Orthodox feminist Tamar Ross, the practical changes in ritual and Halakhahic status are directly tied to theoretical and theological understandings of Judaism.

> Changing the fundamental halakhic status of women has profound implication for the entire system. In effect, it constitutes a major upheaval of some of the very foundations of Jewish tradition, as we have known it for centuries. For this reason, it inevitably leads to a cluster of broader second-order theological issues concerning the relationship between religious law and the values or ideals that it may be understood to embody.[39]

I believe that from a theoretical perspective Ross is correct.[40] The inclusion of women on the bimah has the *potential* to radically transform Judaism. The idea that women are fully human is so foreign to traditional rabbinic culture that serious attempts to embrace women's full humanity do hold the potential to transform traditional categories.

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[39] Tamar Ross, *Expanding the Palace of Torah* (Waltham: Brandeis University, 2004).
[40] In Ross's opinion, it is an intuitive grasp of this interconnection that strikes fear into the hearts of many Jews. Ross, herself Orthodox, speaks particularly to those in the Orthodox community but this concern cuts across the spectrum of Jewish life where quietly and not so quietly people have wondered whether women on the bimah would destroy Jewish life. I will not address this fear within the context of this project but it is my belief that a concern that this might indeed be so has in many ways limited the scope and activism of even strongly feminist Jews.

Yet, in reality, the inclusion of women and the addition of women's rituals has not extended to the radical challenging of the established frameworks of Torah, theology, and prayer. The fact that women are now rabbis in several of the movements has not fundamentally changed the way these movements make decisions about law or standards. The fact that women now pray alongside men or in women-only settings has little impact on the content of the prayers being said in all but a few communities. The fact that Jewish women rival men in levels of Jewish education has changed only slightly the content of what Jews actually learn or consider worth learning. The practical gains made by Jewish feminists in the last forty years have without a doubt changed the Jewish landscape, but ironically, in many ways these practical gains have also reinforced the androcentricism and gendered nature of Judaism. Jewish communities have admitted women into their structures but they have not changed those structures. Those structures reflect a male vision of Judaism. Women's full participation in those structures and their modes of Jewish expression reinforces the idea that this male vision of Judaism is both normative and desirable. Community is a fundamental component of Jewish life. And just as feminists must address the underlying assumptions of halakhic Judaism, Jewish feminists cannot only deal with feminist transformation in abstract terms but must address transformation within the context of specific communities.

Feminist narratives of Judaism must therefore be created in and addressed to specific communities. Not only would the framework of community provide a natural balance between the innovation and existing standards but feminist narratives that were located within the context of specific communities would have a greater potential

to work towards the transformation of those communities. Ideally, then, my work on tefillin should be located within the framework of a Reform-feminist narrative of Judaism.

Chapter Four

The Framework for a New Narrative of Tefillin

Ideally there should already be a feminist-Reform narrative of Judaism in which to situate my revisioning of tefillin; a narrative that would guide and shape the way I form and understand my tefillin just as the traditional rabbinic narrative provides a framework for the actual artifact and practice of rabbinic tefillin. Unfortunately, no such feminist-Reform narrative exists. And while I strongly believe in the need for such a large scale visioning of Judaism, creating such a narrative is beyond the scope of a rabbinic thesis. Barring the existence of a large framework, it is still, however, possible to use the concept of narrative more limitedly to create narrative of specific observances. By creating a feminist-Reform narrative of tefillin, I would be able to shape a vision for innovative tefillin in engaged dialogue with the traditional rabbinic sources as well as a feminist-Reform vision of Judaism.

On one level, it seems strange to start working with the concept of new feminist narratives of Judaism by focusing specifically on tefillin from a feminist-Reform perspective. Traditional tefillin pose specific problems for both feminists and Reform Jews. For Jewish feminists the very first difficulty with tefillin is the exclusion of women from wearing tefillin which some traditional rabbis view even more strongly as a prohibition against women wrapping tefillin. One cannot truly engage with traditional tefillin without confronting the sexist nature of traditional rabbinic

Judaism. To be certain there are Jewish women who wrap tefillin.[41] While the rationale behind such an act differs widely, the very act of donning tefillin as part of morning prayers suggest a rejection to lesser or greater degrees of the traditional rabbinical understanding of Halakhah.[42] Additionally, other women face challenges specifically with the form of tefillin. The idea of wrapping oneself in leather poses problems for some women. Over the years I have spoken to many women who are uncomfortable with the form of tefillin. For some this discomfort seems connected to a discomfort with wearing animal skin so close to the body. It seems a contradiction to kill an animal to raise the holiness of a human. Another strain of discomfort comes from the strong sexual connotation of being bound in leather straps. For some women this conjures up images of sadomasochistic practice.[43] It is notable that most of these

[41] It is assumed that all women studying for rabbinical ordination at the Jewish Theological Seminary will, like all men, wrap tefillin every day. "The mitzvot should guide the lives of all candidates for acceptance into The Rabbinical School on a consistent basis: these mitzvot include, but are not limited to: traditional observance of Shabbat and festivals, regular daily prayer with tallit and tefillin, Kasruth (dietary laws), Talmud torah, and acts of *gemilut hasadim*. Women candidates are required to accept equality of obligation for the mitzvot for which women have been traditionally exempted, including tallit, tefillin and daily tefilah." JTS, *Rabbinical School Registrar Bulletin* [Web] (Jewish Theological Seminary, 2006 [cited February 16 2006]); available from http://www.jtsa.edu/campus/registrar/bulletin/rabbinical.pdf.

[42] While Conservative and some Orthodox rabbis have ruled that it is possible within the framework of halakhah for women to wear tefillin, this approach is by no means the obvious one in light of the halakhic and sociological tendencies to strictly limit women's involvement with public elements of ritual more generally and with tefillin more specifically. For a Conservative opinion on the matter see David Golinkin, "May Women Wear Tefillin?." *Conservative Judaism* Fall (1997). For a discussion of the various Orthodox opinions on the matter including some Orthodox opinions in support and against women's wearing tefillin see Aliza Berger, "Wrapped Attention: May Women Wear Tefillin?," in *Jewish Legal Writings by Women*, ed. Micha Halpern and Chana Safrai (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 1998). 114.

[43] Perhaps it is this discomfort that propelled artist Anya Freidman to change both the material and the color of the *bayit* and the straps as she created more feminine tefillin.

women consider themselves feminists and are generally vocal about their discomfort with elements of rabbinic Judaism. Yet, they remain reticent to give public voice to their discomfort.

For Reform Judaism, the difficulties with traditional tefillin have little to do with gender. Historically, tefillin were discarded as an anachronistic remnant; today there is nothing in principle that places tefillin outside the purview of Reform Judaism. Ritual garb, such as kippah and tallit, historically eschewed by Reform Jews, has in recent years become increasingly acceptable. Tefillin by contrast remains largely irrelevant for most Reform Jews. Doubtlessly, the traditional custom of wrapping tefillin only on weekdays during the morning prayers plays a large role in the lack of popularity of tefillin, given that most Reform Jews are not in the habit of daily morning prayer. Nonetheless, even in the sanctuary at the Hebrew Union College only a handful of individuals wrap tefillin. Overwhelmingly, in its current form tefillin has not bridged the divide between traditional but irrelevant mitzvot and traditional but worthy religious endeavors.

Yet it is precisely these challenges that make tefillin a good place to begin working towards the creation of a feminist-Reform narrative. Not only is there no existing Reform narrative that would need to be supplanted, but also a new narrative of tefillin would provide the opportunity to address the difficulties Jewish women and Reform Jews have with tefillin. Tefillin emerging from a feminist-Reform narrative would make an external statement as well. In some quarters of the Orthodox world

tefillin are equated with the Torah.[44] The connection of tefillin with Torah signals how central tefillin are in an Orthodox context. They are a very visible sign of a particular approach to observance. When we create a new narrative of tefillin we are not only addressing feminist and Reform considerations and concerns about ritual but also directly confronting assumptions about how Jews define Judaism.

Engaging with traditional tefillin allows for engagement with some of the central themes of Judaism. The biblical references regarding tefillin are vague. The traditional rabbis, nonetheless, chose these biblical verses because they contained references to the idea of wearing signs. The traditional rabbis also chose not to limit the verses included in tefillin to the specific verses that spoke about signs and wrapping them but to include the narrative elements that spoke in greater depth about the nature of the covenant, the relationship to God and the relationship to land. These themes are stressed through repetition of specific language and by reiteration of these ideas in a variety of forms and fashions. Torah together with God, and Israel form the triad upon which the world of Reform Judaism sits. As we saw in our discussion of the biblical material, God and Israel are also central in the tefillin texts. Thus working with tefillin allows for engaging the three central elements of Reform Judaism, elements that must also be addressed from a feminist perspective.

Ideally a new narrative of tefillin would emerge, as Rachel Adler suggests, from the world of praxis. Given the lack of involvement with tefillin within the community of Reform, feminist or otherwise, it is impossible to wait for a narrative to

[44]Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Ten Mitzvah Campaign* (Chabad, 2004 [cited February 19 2006]); available from http://www.chabad.org/multimedia/livingtorah.asp?AID=130772.

emerge from practice. In place of a communally arrived upon and agreed upon narrative, I offer my own. It is my hope that this narrative might serve as a starting point to spark both commentary and practice from which a communal narrative might eventually emerge.

Building forward and back: Commentary Before Narrative

Of course it is not enough to have a narrative. In Judaism, the story is just the beginning. Each element of the narrative must be explained, argued, and examined. In part this explanation is necessary because no story is complete on its own. It is itself a framework in which individuals can see themselves and other. In order to make place for individuals within the narrative, there must be unanswered questions. Ancient Jewish narratives have been modified, clarified and refined over time through commentary and discussion among traditional rabbis. Commentators added insights to answer the questions and concerns of their own time and place. A body of exegesis proved the strength and the status of the original narrative.

Modern narratives, no less than ancient ones, demand commentary and explanation. But whereas ancient narratives were the starting point upon which subsequent generations added their own views, modern narratives must be both a starting point and a point of connection. Feminist-Reform narratives must provide a foundation upon which individuals and communities of contemporary Jews will be able to build meaningful Jewish lives. They must also serve as the means by which modern Jews connect with the conversations of the past. New Jewish narratives must link to the past in order to remain Jewish and enunciate the places where today Jews

uphold and continue the traditions of our people. No less critically, modern Jewish narratives must link to the past to articulate clearly the places where we, in claiming our own holiness, renounce elements of the heritage put forward by our ancestors.

The feminist-Reform narrative of tefillin needs to provide a framework through which to connect the needs and visions of modern Jews with the visions of covenant, God, and Israel that have been part of the Jewish conversation through the centuries. By expanding on these central themes, I hope to lay bare some of the considerations and process by which I eventually came to envision the narrative that follows. In doing so, I hope to show how the narrative might be relevant to a broader community of feminist-Reform Jews and not merely an expression of my personal theology. I do not expect my explanations to be definitive or exhaustive. If we are meant to share narrative as a community then no single individual can offer *the* narrative nor *the* definitive explanation of the narrative. The explanations that follow then should be read as only a beginning of a discussion, which is in and of itself an endorsement of the process by which community and not authority can speak for God and Israel.

One God

Sh'ma Yisrael Adonai Elohainu, Adonai Ehad. For Jews there is no biblical and liturgical passage that is more recognized or better known. It is part of the formal prayer service. It is meant to be the bookends to your day, to be said upon rising and before going to sleep. Within tefillin, these six words are set into the context of other biblical verses. Within the liturgy these six words are set into a framework of blessings

which when read together make up what Lawrence Hoffman calls the "creed of Judaism."[45] But most Jews do not know the surrounding verses. They know primarily these six words. If Jews know one thing about the Jewish understanding of God it is the Sh'ma. If then just by liturgical and social standards, the Sh'ma is the closest thing that most Jews know as a Jewish statement of belief.

What then does the Sh'ma mean? According to Alan Mintz, "The last phrase, *Adonai ehad,* is understood by some interpreters to stress the exclusivity of the choosing of God (reading *ehad* as "alone"; "The Lord our God, the Lord *alone)* and by others to introduce a further concept: the oneness of God."[46] Mintz goes on to write that,

> Exclusive fidelity to God and God's unity are the two major concepts of the Shema. The first demands that no system of value--not just another religion but an ideology, art, success, or personal happiness--be allowed to replace God as the *ultimate* ground of meaning.[47]

This makes sense if we understand *ehad* as "alone" but what of the idea of God as one? What do we mean by the oneness of God? After all the Bible does not present one image of God. God as depicted in the Bible is not known by one but rather many names and sometimes by names that imply multiple meanings. This seems to counter the monotheistic claim. Mintz sees no contradiction. "God's unity, conversely, asserts that all experienced moments of beauty, good, love, and holiness are not in and of

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[45] Lawrence A. Hoffman, *The Way into Jewish Prayer*, ed. Lawrence A. Hoffman (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000). 22.
[46] Alan Mintz, "Prayer and the Prayerbook," in *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts*, ed. Barry W. Holtz (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986).
[47] Ibid.

themselves; they are disparate and scattered signals of the presence of the one God."[48] One God, according to this approach, is not so much a number but an affirmation of unity.

Judith Plaskow pushes this idea still further. In discussing the Sh'ma from a feminist perspective she writes that even if we take the oneness of God as a given, the concept of one God is open to interpretation.

> "{The Sh'ma}defines "one" in opposition to "many," but it never really specifies what it means to say that God/Adonai/the One who is and will be is one. Is God's oneness mere numerical singularity? ...A simple numerical definition of oneness is compatible with idolatry... We can of course, say that we associate numerical uniqueness with our particular God, Adonai, affirming here both 1) that there is only one God, and 2) that Adonai is his (sic) name. On this view, however, attempts to name God in new ways or to broaden the range of imagery used for God are experienced as assaults on monotheism. ...There is another way to understand oneness, however, and that is as inclusiveness. In Marcia Falk's words, "The authentic expression of an authentic monotheism is not singularity of image but an embracing unity of a multiplicity of images." Rather than being the chief-diety in the pantheon, god includes the qualities and characteristics of the whole pantheon, with nothing remaining outside. God is all in all.[49]

If this is the case, our understanding of the oneness of God has the potential to be quite flexible indeed.

This flexibility is essential for a feminist-Reform narrative of tefillin. To read the Bible, or Mintz's or Plaskow's writings, it would seem as if diverse visions of the divine are plentiful and readily accepted in Judaism. Yet if we turn to the liturgy, which as Lawrence Hoffman points out is best known of all the classical (and in my

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[48] Ibid.
[49] Judith Plaskow, "Untitled Commentary," in *The Sh'ma and Its Blessings*, ed. Lawrence A. Hoffman, *My People's Prayer Book* (Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997). 99-99.

opinion modern as well) Jewish texts,[50] we find a strong propensity to define God in terms that suggest a rather narrow understanding of the divine. God of the prayer book has many attributes but is not the unity of everything; God of the prayer book is exclusively male. God is King, Ruler of the World. These images of God are highly problematic on many levels, as Plaskow point out, "the male images Jews use in speaking to and about God emerge out of and maintain a religious system in which men are normative Jews and women are perceived as Other."[51]

Plaskow and other Jewish feminists have written at great length about the impact of God language that is so dominated by hierarchy, power, and male privilege.[52] The Reform movement has been sensitive to some degree to these critiques. Modern translations of traditional rabbinic prayers have moved within the Reform movement towards translations that challenge the maleness of God by replacing masculine pronouns with gender neutral terms and replacing "Lord" with God. But there have been serious limits to these changes. Though feminist liturgists like Marcia Falk have introduced alternative Hebrew terms and phrases that suggest alternatives to Lord King of the Universe, the Hebrew prayers, even within the Reform movement, remain overwhelmingly unchanged.

While I feel certain that to some degree the lack of change within communal prayer suggests the extent to which these hierarchical, male centered images remain

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[50] Lawrence A. Hoffman, "Introductory Essay to Minhag Ami," in *The Sh'ma and Its Blessings*, ed. Lawrence A. Hoffman, *My People's Prayer Book* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997). 1.
[51] Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai*. 125.
[52] For a more extensive discussion on this topic see Ibid., chapter 4, God: Reimaging the Unimaginable.

perniciously salient within the framework of Judaism, there seems to be particular resistance to replacing traditional rabbinic language with less gendered or hierarchical imagery. Nonetheless, it seems that there are also other mechanisms at work. Modern Jewish philosophers like Buber and Heschel do not define God in terms that conjure a vision of God as a King sitting in judgment on a throne. In conversations, classrooms, and workshops, at HUC and in Reform contexts it is clear that individual Reform Jews do not generally subscribe to a vision of God as Lord, King of the World active in controlling our daily lives. There are Reform Jews for whom the male image of a powerful divinity is meaningful and central but there is certainly no uniformity on this topic. Individual Reform Jews are skeptical of such a vision of the divine if not for specifically feminist reasons than because it does not come close to describing their individual understanding of the divine.

While Reform Jews might not buy into the vision of God portrayed overwhelmingly in the traditional liturgy, change brings with it its own problems. Liturgy functions on many levels. It certainly speaks to our image of God but it also creates the possibility of community. When Jews pray together, they pray not only with those assembled in the room but also with those who stand and have stood in countless other prayer spaces throughout time and across the globe. The words of prayer no less than the tunes and the physical movement of prayer connect Jews to their personal and communal past. Prayer speaks not only to our intellectual image of God but also to our emotional relationship with the divine. So while the specific images of God might be intellectually at odds with an individual's personal theology, they may relate to prayer on any one of another myriad of levels. Changing the words

of the liturgy might satisfy them on one level but such a change would bring about other disappointments and disconnections. Even as individuals might personally find fault with a narrow hierarchical vision of God, for many people the traditional language of the liturgy is an authentic voice, if not *the* authentic way, in which to pray as a Jew.

Additionally, even if a community were to reject the idea of a singular vision of God as Lord King of the Universe and to come to agreement that there are multiple images of the divine, which alternative image would they adopt? To some degree, Reform and Reconstructionist prayer books have begun to address this diversity. The hierarchical male language of the traditional Hebrew has been neutered in the translations to English. There is even some variation in the Hebrew terms used. Nonetheless, even as we challenge the primacy of God as Lord King of the Universe, or the *Melekh HaOlam*, we should be aware that such changes also raise difficulties. A community cannot accommodate the full multiplicity of divine images at one time. No doubt some in the congregation are happy with Marcia Falk's set of phrases and terms: God as source of life, a spring, that may be reflexively blessed. But what then of the congregant for whom God the merciful father is a source of comfort in face of the abusive man she knows in her own life? What then of people who need not a source of life but a clearly higher power, so that they are able let go of the full control of their addiction? Even as we make changes and attempt to widen the possibilities we must recognize that the potential visions of God are as manifold as the reflections of God found in the pews and no single communal liturgy could possibly address them all.

Nonetheless, feminist concerns about the male imagery of god and individual struggles with reconciling their own personal vision of the divine with that that they find in the liturgy are far too serious to be easily absorbed by interpretations like that of Mintz which remind us that the God-King found in the Sh'ma can be read in an inclusive manner. At present, there is no ritual mechanism for critique of the images found in the Siddur, and so overwhelmingly those images remain uncriticized and unexamined outside the context of academic discourse or theological debate. Tefillin can serve as a means whereby individual visions of the divine find expression in a ritual form.

To some degree modern *taleisim* already serve this purpose.[53] The traditional halakhic requirements for *talit* focus primarily on the *tzitzit* of the *talit*. There is little concern among the traditional rabbis about the material or form of the *talit* itself.[54] The most common form of *talit* within Orthodox and traditional circles is a white cloth edged with black stripes or sometimes blue or even occasionally gold stripes. In recent years, this traditional model has been expanded (in reaction to women's donning *taleisim*, perhaps?) so that there is an ever growing movement to create artistic or personalized *taleisim*. Additionally it is more and more common to find that the *atarah* on a *tallit* has been chosen because of an individual's connection to a specific verse. Artistic or individualized *talasim* give voice to personal expressions of taste of the person wearing the *talit* even as they pray the same liturgy as those around them.

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[53] My thanks to Rabbi Karen Gluckstern-Reiss for bringing this similarity to my attention.
[54] Isaac Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1979). 4.

But as beautiful or as meaningful as these *talasim* are, rarely do they directly engage the image of the divine.

Lawrence Hoffman teaches that ritual serves as a bridge between theology and lived experience. Tefillin, more so than *talit*, is meant to give concrete form to our abstract ideas of God. Both the form and the contents of tefillin are themselves supposed to be signs. While the traditional rabbinic tefillin are fairly fixed both in form and content the meanings ascribed to tefillin speak to the multiplicity of ways that Judaism views our relationship with God. The traditional tefillin speak in part to a vision of the world in which human will is subjugated to the divine vision. According to the biblical texts placed inside traditional rabbinic tefillin, Israel must do God's will lest the people be punished. The divine is an all-powerful force and Israel are mere humans meant to follow God's laws. Moreover, in the Talmud there is a specific link made between the wearing of tefillin and a sign of accepting God's law. Rabbi Yochanan explained that the proper wearing of tefillin, along with saying the Sh'ma is equivalent to having accepted the full yoke of heaven.[55]

At the same time, there is a strong element within the traditional sources that sees humanity as not lesser than God but created in the image of God. This strain of thinking builds on the telling of the creation story in Genesis 1:27: "God created Adam in his image, male and female he created them." The mystical, kabbalistic *Tikuney Zohar* elaborates on this verse and directly connects it to tefillin:

> Perceive this. When a man wears Tefillin, a voice proclaims to all the angels of the Chariot who watch over prayer, "Give honor to the image of the King, the man who is wearing Tefillin." The Torah says of this

[55] Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 14b-15a.

> man, "God created man in His image." For this man is wearing the same Tefillin as the Master of the world.[56]

The idea that God wears tefillin predates the kabbalists. In the tractate *Berachot* Rabbi Avin bar Rav Ada raises the question in the name of Rabbi Yitzkhak, "Where do we learn that the Holy One, blessed be he, wears tefillin?" Several sources are cited in which God's strength is equated with tefillin proving by Talmudic logic that God does indeed wear tefillin.[57]

A few pages later, the Talmud returns to the topic of tefillin as it discusses what Moses saw when God placed Moses in the cleft of a rock and passed by so that Moses could see only God's back. Rabbi Khana bar Biznah says, in the name of Rabbi Shimon Chasidai, that when God passed by Moses, Moses saw the knot in the back of God's tefillin. The image is compelling. It elevates tefillin to an entirely new level. We are created in the image of God and we pray as God prays. Tefillin, by this way of thinking, offer us an opportunity to reflect our vision of the divine even as we ourselves reflect the divine. And if the entire diversity of humankind, male and female, is created in God's image then can we expect our tefillin to be no less diverse? Tefillin, by this way of thinking, offer us an opportunity to reflect our vision of the divine even as we ourselves reflect the divine.

One God, Many Texts

> Rabbi Nachman bar Yitzchok asked Rabbi Chiyah bar Avin, "And what is written in the Tefillin of the Master of the world?" He replied that it contains the verse (1Chr. 17:21), "Who is like Your people

[56] *Tikuney Zohar* 47, 83b as quoted in Kaplan, *Tefillin*. 40.
[57] The entire discussion can be found in the Bablyonian Talmud, Berachot 6a. The biblical verses cited are Deuteronomy 33:2, Psalm 29:11, Deuteronomy 28:10.

> Israel, a nation one on earth, whom God went to redeem for Himself for a people, to make Himself a name, by great and tremendous things."[58]

According to this Talmudic teaching, God's tefillin have a different text than that designated by the traditional rabbis to be placed in human tefillin. This means that while tefillin are meant to allow humans to imitate the divine, there is also a way in which human tefillin are very different from the divine tefillin, namely in the text. In this rabbinic vision, the text of God's tefillin are a praise of Israel and a statement of God's relationship to the people of Israel. Through text then, tefillin become a means for God and the people to converse.

Within the traditional rabbinic halakhic framework replacing the text inside tefillin would be unthinkinkable, but working within a feminist-Reform narrative where tefillin are meant to be an expression of our multiple understandings of the divine and an opportunity to assert the multiplicity of understandings of Torah, opening up the possibility of replacing the text is essential. Reform has historically shown a willingness to confront and replace traditional texts in liturgical contexts. In traditional rabbinic prayer books, Deuteronomy 11:13-21, some of the same verses that are in traditional rabbinic tefillin, are read as part of the rubric following the recitation of the Sh'ma. Reform Siddurim do not include these verses because the message of collective punishment is seen by Reform Jews to be troubling.[59] Within the

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[58] Bablyonian Talmud, Berahot 6a as translated in Kaplan, *Tefillin*. P32.
[59] David Ellenson, "Untitled Commentary," in *The Sh'ma and Its Blessings*, ed. Lawrence A. Hoffman, *My People's Prayer Book* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997). 108 There was however a great deal of discussion about what to do with these verses with regard to *Mishkan Tefillah* and there was thought of reversing the established precedent, it did appear in draft versions but was not reinstated in the final draft.

context of Reform Judaism, then, there exists a precedent for replacing texts chosen by traditional rabbinic authorities.

If one is to allow individuals to remove either part or all of the traditional rabbinical texts the question arises of what to put in its place. Within the liberal movements there have been Siddurim that have suggested Deuteronomy 28:1-6 (Reconstructionist) or Deuteronomy 30:15-20 as alternative readings for the Deuteronomy 11:13-21 (*Ha'avodah Shebalev*) passage in the context of the liturgy.[60] These texts deal with observance but do not focus on consequences in the same way and would be less problematic in many respects. These suggestions, however, should be seen as only one possible alternative. Though a modern choice, Deuteronomy 11:13-21 is nonetheless another biblical text. And though the group of rabbis doing the choosing professes a markedly different vision of Judaism than the rabbis who designated the passages that are placed in traditional rabbinic tefillin, the modern rabbis nonetheless, like their traditional counterparts, represent an educated elite. In this sense, as alternatives, these choices do not really go far enough. In rejecting the traditional rabbinic narrative and the power of traditional rabbis to define for an entire community what a text should be in tefillin, feminist-Reform tefillin must fully embrace the power of individuals to designate for themselves what constitutes an appropriate text.

The next critical step then in creating tefillin is figuring out criteria for choosing texts. Here we can be guided in consultation with the biblical texts that the traditional rabbis designated to be placed in tefillin. Those texts focus on themes of

[60] Ibid. 109

God, Israel and Torah. Those texts also return repeatedly to the theme of the Exodus. These are important issues for Reform Jews who take the idea of informed choice seriously to grapple with. This is an opportunity to give that grappling concrete form. If tefillin are external signs on our arms and between our eyes then in choosing text we have the opportunity to give voice to our personal theologies. To take our direction from the biblical vision, our tefillin should be tools through which we will fulfill the command *v'shinantem l'vnaikhem u'vnotkhem.* We need to consider what understanding of Judaism we want to pass on to future generations of Jews.

The Bible provides an obvious and rich source for finding a text to place inside modern tefillin. God, Israel, and Torah are frequent and repeated topics in the biblical cannon. Without specific guidelines as to length one could borrow the liturgical practice of placing individual verses or groups of verses together to shape new meaning. Alternatively, longer biblical passages that deal with one or several of the themes might be selected. It is not difficult to imagine a person choosing to place part of the story of the Exodus from Egypt in his tefillin as a direct means of telling of the Exodus. Nor should we discount the possibility that after study of the texts placed in traditional tefillin that a person might want to affirm the vision of Judaism that these texts portray by placing the traditional texts in her tefillin. Opening up the possibilities for personal choice with regards to tefillin text means allowing for traditional as well as modern choices to be made.

The Bible, however, should only be the starting point. In traditional Judaism, the Bible is the word of God as it was revealed to Moses at Sinai and written down. In that telling of our story, Moses on the mountain stands as the interpreter of the divine

word. Moreover, according to the biblical narrative, Moses was the interpreter for most of the written Torah but the beginning of the revelation involved the entire congregation of Israel at Sinai. As Gershom Scholem writes: "But what, the question arises, is the truly divine element in this revelation? The question is already discussed in the Talmud [Makkoth 24a] When the children of Israel received the Ten Commandments, what could they actually hear, and what did they hear?"[61] The traditional rabbinic discussion tends to focus on the general concern with the fact that the people as a community were not worthy or capable to hear the entire revelation. According to Maimonides, who distinguished between the people who were educated and therefore closer to God and those who were not educated and therefore not nearly as spiritually developed, the people gathered at Sinai were only able to hear the first utterances. After that, Maimonides explains, Moses had to relay the revelation to them.[62]

The 18th century Hassidic Master Rabbi Mendel of Rymanóv went even further than the Talmudic discussion or even Maimonides. In his view, the people did not even hear the first two Commandments, as Maimonides suggests. Instead all they heard was *aleph*. According to Scholem who commented on Rabbi Mendel in the 20th century, the *aleph* which is the first letter of the alphabet and the first letter of the first utterance is symbolic of all human discourse.

> "To hear the *aleph* is to hear next to nothing; no dominant, specific meaning. Thus with this darling statement that the actual revelation to Israel consisted only off the *aleph*, Rabbi Mendel transformed the

[61] Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1996). P29
[62] Moses Maimonides, Guide To the Perplexed, 2:33.

> revelation on Mount Sinai into a mystical revelation, pregnant with infinite meaning, but without specific meaning."[63]

In discussing revelation from a feminist perspective, contemporary Jewish theologian Judith Plaskow voices a similar vision, "Revelation is the experience of a reality that transcends language, that cannot be captured or possessed in words."[64]

The implications are profound. Once we have put a human face on the divine word, the possibilities begin to open towards the infinite. The Hebrew Bible, no less than other records of that revelation, must be understood as *an* interpretation of that revelation. Through the generations the Bible has gained a particular standing for our community and people because the version of revelation that it presents has become the basic text around which we as a people base our conversation. But there is good reason to treat the Bible with skepticism. Like any other document it reflects the human biases and cultural norms. If the Bible is not *the* absolute word of revelation, we are then able to consider other texts that speak to the interpretations of what we heard at Sinai. The text of tefillin need not be biblical to reflect revelation.

Once we open up the cannon of Torah, we find that Jewish literary voices have been female as well as male, scholarly as well as popular, convoluted as well as simple. Meaningful quotes from famous theologians might be appropriate but so might a piece of wisdom passed down from a favorite great-uncle. A person who connects Judaism with the memory of a grandmother who always made Shabbat dinner might place a recipe for chicken soup as a sign of the sacred teaching that is passed generation to generation. A person for whom music is a spiritual language might

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[63] Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*. 30
[64] Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai*. 20.

choose to select a few bars from a musical score. By creating a designated sacred space in which to place these text in the context of community, tefillin would be a means through which we sanctify the expansion of the Jewish cannon.

As we enlarge our understanding of revelation and God's presence in this world we should acknowledge that much of our experience of the divine defies words. Material objects or non-literary representations should also be considered as potential "texts" for our tefillin. A Jew for whom Martin Buber's philosophy gives voice to his vision of the divine might do well to place pieces of *I and Thou* in his tefillin or alternatively he might choose to place photos of some of those in his life who exemplify this principle as a lived theology. Those who struggle with disease might place in their tefillin a prayer for a cure, but perhaps the sacredness of healing might be honored with a wrapper from the latest prescription. At Sukkot and Havdalah, Jews recognize the sacred as it is manifest in the natural world; why could our tefillin not similarly contain a few shells from the beach or blades of cut grass? Understood this way the plurality of possible texts is as infinite as the understanding of revelation. Nor is it hard to imagine tefillin as a site where we give voice to our frustrations, disappointments and even anger with the divine. Tefillin can and should be a means by which we give concrete expression to our understanding of God. Likewise, in choosing 'texts' to place inside them, they can and should be a means by which our awareness of God is made more concrete.

Similarly, individual Jews should be encouraged to place in their tefillin signs of their own individual vision of the relationship of our people to the Land of Israel. Again one could imagine texts about the land taken from the Bible. But a travelogue

from a medieval traveler might be equally appropriate. Similarly one might choose to place words from an Israeli song or even grains of sand taken from the beach in Tel Aviv. The disappointments and frustrations with regard to Israel, as with regard to the divine, might also find expression in the 'texts' chosen to place inside tefillin. The thought and learning that would have to take place to choose such a text would serve here too to clarify and solidify abstract and sometime unformed understandings of our relationship to Israel.

The historical stress within Judaism on literacy and the written word has been both a tremendous source of security and strength for a largely disempowered people. It has given Jews as a community a transportable body of knowledge that has served as a touch stone as we have wandered through time from country to country. But it has also been a means for consolidating power in the hands of relatively limited elite that was historically exclusively male. Reform Judaism at its inception began to chip away at this historical privilege. But in order to truly expand it so that we create a non-hierarchical community in relation to our understanding of God and the sacred we need to take this further step of expanding our understanding of text. When we honor the material and the non-literary elements of life as sacred we will not only give recognition to them in our own lives but help develop our ability to appreciate the true plurality of texts of Jewish lives past and future.

Instead of looking to the *mezuzah* on the doorpost of our homes for the text to place inside our tefillin, we could look to our homes for signs of the divine. This would serve to reinforce the principle of creating an awareness of the divine that literally frames our lives even as we step across the mundane thresholds of our most

familiar terrain. Tefillin consecrated with personal, chosen texts chosen because of their resonance with personal experience have a great probability of being signs of the divine that individuals will connect to their everyday lives. And once we elevate the awareness of the divine with the lives that Jews live then we also raise the likelihood that they would, to paraphrase Deuteronomy 11:19, keep them in mind and speak of them at home, as they move in the world, when they lay down and when they rise.

The phraseology in Deuteronomy 11:19-20 is meant to portray a picture of the totality of lived experience. The divine should and can be part of our lives from the moment of waking to the moment of sleeping. But even as the same actions and places repeat themselves daily, our experience of those actions changes with time and experience. The metaphoric gates of experience through which we pass can change the way see even the most fixed of doorposts. Tefillin can be a means by which we acknowledge the changes in perspective both of our own lives and of our relationship with the divine. The texts in tefillin can affirm our changing understanding of the divine. The texts need not be fixed over time. By making changes in the tefillin texts, tefillin can help us read the sacred narrative that is the Torah of our lives.

How Do We Bind Ourselves to Covenant?

The question of how to affix tefillin is more than a technical matter. Within the framework of the traditional rabbinic narrative of tefillin, the straps of the tefillin stand, in part, as a sign of Israel being bound to the covenant of law. Being bound to the covenant is a central element of the traditional rabbinic narrative of Judaism. But that vision is not nearly so literal for feminist-Reform Jews. If we are going to be

binding –in the case of tefillin literally- ourselves to the signs of God, we need to address our understanding of those bonds.

If tefillin are themselves to be signs and a reminder of God, then *b'rit* is also a means by which people recall their relationship with God. Remembering, is necessary for going forward and acting. In remembering we are again like God. Remembering Noah and the animals leads God to act and cause the waters recede. God remembers Rebekka and she (finally!) conceives. We too can remember. Tefillin are meant to be a *zikaron* so we will uphold the *khuka* (Exodus 13:9-10). When we don tefillin we enter into a relationship with God, one in which we imitate God and are recalled to *b'rit*.

Noah and Abraham both present us with models of men who connect, through *b'rit*, with God and with remembrance. But with each of these men the nature of the *b'rit* and the *zikaron* is notably different. God remembers Noah and makes the waters recede but it is Noah who then independently acts by bringing a sacrifice for God. The smell of the sacrifice prompts God to action, to make a *b'rit* for all future generations. Like the tefillin, the rainbow will stand as a sign of that covenant. Abraham brings animal sacrifices and makes a *b'rit* only after God has promised that Abraham's offspring will be numerous. The *b'rit* in this case seals the deal. The second covenant is not one of animal sacrifice but of bodily incision. Again Abraham acts not of his own accord but waits for God to instruct, once instructed Abraham does not hesitate to act. For Jews who understand covenant not as an absolute obligation to do God's will but rather as an agreement into which they enter of their free choosing, Noah more than Abraham provides a workable model of *b'rit*. The Noahite story also fits well with the vision of tefillin as being part of a reciprocal relationship with the divine

where both partners are held to the covenant both in the remembering and in the acting.

Eugene Borowitz finds the identification with Noah troubling. He writes that is more comfortable for modern liberal Jews to identify with Noah, not because he is a model of choice but because according to Borowitz, liberal Jews identify with the universal element of the *b'rit* in the Noah story. God's promise to Noah is not limited to a specific group or community. It is a remembrance for all of humankind. While universalism might feel most comfortable in this universalist and acculturated era, particularism is necessary for defining community. Therefore, Borowitz argues, it is the Abrahamic *b'rit* that is particularisticly Jewish. Jews must connect with God through a specifically Jewish *b'rit*.[65] All the people of the world are Noah's children, only the people of Israel are Abraham's children. In order to help define Jewish peoplehood, Jews, according to Borowitz, should look to Abraham, not Noah, for definition of *b'rit*. Tefillin are not meant to be signs for the entire world, they are meant to be signs of a specific covenant between God and the people of Israel. Our tefillin, then, need to look to the particularism of Abraham and his *b'rit* with God.

Yet we need to be wary of equating Abraham's *b'rit* with that of **all** the people of Israel. Abraham's *b'rit* did separate Jews from non-Jews and define the boundaries of community. Abraham's two *b'ritot* set different parameters for inclusion in *b'rit*. The first, the *b'rit bain hab'tarim* involved animal sacrifices and is not apriori exclusive within the context of the Jewish people. The second was *b'rit milah*, male

[65] Eugene B. Borowitz, *Rewnewing the Covenant* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991). 2.

circumcision. It is this second *b'rit* that has endured through the ages and has preserved Jewish particularism. The sign of the Abrahamic *b'rit*, circumcision, is exclusive not to *all* Jews but only to *male* Jews. This model of *b'rit* is so particularistic so as to actively exclude women from membership in the covenant. Tefillin based in a feminist-Reform narrative in which gender is not a category of power cannot endorse a vision of covenant that privileges the male body.

Tefillin, like the Abrahamic *b'rit*, are directly connected to body. Tefillin are signs on the arm and between the eyes. They mark a body as Jewish. But with tefillin we make a critical shift from cutting the *ot* *into* the body to tying the *ot* *onto* the body. Women's bodies as well as male bodies are equipped with arms and eyes upon which tefillin as a sign of *b'rit* can be attached. Tefillin then stand in opposition to the exclusive link between *b'rit* and the male body. Given the traditional rabbinic fear of the female body and its power, it is not surprising then that early halakhic sources while not explicitly forbidding women to don tefillin certainly they did not endorse or encourage such a practice. The exclusion, in traditional Jewish circles, is so strong that tefillin like circumcision are linked exclusively with the male body. Perhaps the traditional rabbis sensed the potential of tefillin to serve as a counter to the male privilege conferred by circumcision. Within a feminist-Reform context, tefillin offer an opportunity to reclaim body as a site for *b'rit* without the focus on gender and the privileges of masculinity.

Unlike *b'rit milah*, tefillin locates *b'rit* in two separate locations on the body, between the eyes and on the arm. These specific sites, like the penis of *b'rit milah*, are deliberate choices. The tefillin of the arm are meant to replicate God's *khozek yad* with

which God took the people of Israel out of Egypt. This is another way in which tefillin allow us to imitate the divine form. The tefillin of the arm are generally worn on the arm of the dominant hand.[66] This signifies the link between our personal power and the power of God and Torah. But the *batim* of the tefillin *shel yad* are meant to face towards the heart. Within the biblical and traditional rabbinic context the head was the seat of emotion and heart was the seat of intellect. Today the inverse might be said to be true. Metaphorically, we hold that the head is the seat of the intellect and the heart is the seat of emotion. Either way, the two tefillin are strategically placed to create a merism. To mix our metaphors, located on the arm and head tefillin signify our connection to God "heart and soul." Thus placed, tefillin sanctify not a single body part but the entirety of the human experience, the physical, emotional and the spiritual.

Even as tefillin hold the potential to challenge the maleness of Abraham's *b'rit milah,* the Jewish particularism of the Abrahamic *b'rit* is preserved by tefillin. No less than circumcision, tefillin are signs of Jewishness. Unlike the amulets of old, tefillin are a ritual framed by Jewish ritual and context. Tefillin are worn exclusively by Jews. A Jewish blessing is made when donning tefillin. According to traditional rabbinic Halakhah, tefillin should be wrapped as part of the morning prayers.[67] Even if individual Jews see their vision of God in a manner that melds with a universal vision of the world and give expression to that universalism through the texts that they

[66] Shulkhan Arukh, Orekh Hayim 27.
[67] I have not dealt in the context of this project with the halakhah of when and how to don tefillin. Until such time as the matter can be examined at greater length, the established norms are the fallback position for framing my thinking.

choose to put into tefillin, the specific context of tefillin provides a Jewish *bayit* in which to contain that universalism.

The Jewish particularism of tefillin counters the universalism of the Noahite model of *b'rit*, but we should not dismiss the element of independent action that is suggested by the Noah story. Sociologically and theologically, choice is critical for modern Reform Jews. Today, each Jew who affiliates with the Jewish community does so by choice. Nor can we theologically sustain a vision of mandatory obligation to law in face of the policy of informed choice which affirms the autonomy of the individual within the context of communal covenant in Reform Judaism. Even as we assert particularism, choice is essential to our vision of Judaism. The traditional rabbinic view of particularism was narrowly defined and directly connected to an understanding of *b'rit* as a mandatory obligation. Nonetheless, the verses traditionally recited while wrapping the tefillin of the arm provide a means by which tefillin can tie together Jewish particularism together with choice.

According to traditional rabbinic practice, the verses when winding the straps of tefillin *shel yad*, one should recite the following verses from Hosea:

Hosea 2:21-22

וְאֵרַשְׂתִּיךְ לִי לְעוֹלָם וְאֵרַשְׂתִּיךְ לִי בְּצֶדֶק וּבְמִשְׁפָּט 21
וּבְחֶסֶד וּבְרַחֲמִים׃
וְאֵרַשְׂתִּיךְ לִי בֶּאֱמוּנָה וְיָדַעַתְּ אֶת־יְהוָה׃ ס 22

Hosea 2:21-22 And I will espouse you forever: I will espouse you with righteousness and justice, And with goodness and mercy, 22 And I will espouse you with faithfulness; Then you shall be devoted to the LORD.

In their original biblical context these verses are very troubling because they draw a parallel between the behaviors of an unfaithful wife to that of Israel's betrayal of the

covenant with God. The language of punishment in the face of this unfaithfulness is tremendously disturbing and speaks to a culture in which women's powerlessness was reinforced by legal and theological structures.[68] But the passage in Hosea also speaks to way in the Bible the "predominant metaphor for the covenant is not vassalage or master-slave relation, but marriage."[69] In the context of tefillin this metaphor is reinforced by the way in which the wrapping of the straps around the middle finger is understood to represent a wedding ring.[70]

The verses from Hosea connect us back to the biblical vision of marriage and by extention to the rabbinic vision of marriage as contract. This is understandable from the framework of the traditional rabbinic narrative in which the binding is meant to be a sign of covenant with God. In that vision of covenant we the people, like the woman in a rabbinic marriage, are subservient to a higher power. Nonetheless as Rachel Adler argues, even those with an egalitarian vision of the world can gain from these verses in Hosea. [71] The traditional rabbinic model of marriage fails humans because it does not go far enough towards recognizing the mutuality between partners that enter into a life commitment one with the other nor the possibility that both partner share the same gender identity. If we push beyond the rabbinic vision of marriage and instead accept the idea of marriage as entered into freely, equally we have a new metaphor for covenant. There is tremendous value in focusing attention in

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[68] Naomi Graetz, "The Haftarah Tradition and the Metapohoric Battering of Hosea's Wife," *Conservative Judaism* 45 (1992).
[69] Adler, *Engendering Judaism*. 156.
[70] Kaplan, *Tefillin*. 28.
[71] For an extensive discussion of the complicated issues of marriage from a Jewish feminist perspective see Adler, *Engendering Judaism*. Chapter four deal at length with the metaphor of covenant in Hosea.

שמע ישראל לר"ה ויו"כ

Nº 145.

Sopr. Aeolisch. SOLI. *rall.*

Alto.

sch' ma jis_ro el edo_noj elo_he_nu edo_noj e_chod.

Andante.

Ten. Solo. Uralte Melodie. Aeolisch. *rall.*

Sch' ma jis_ro el edo_noj e lo he_nu edo_noj e_chod.

Ten.

Basso.

FMA.: i i i VII6/5 III III VI iv i

CORO. *rall.*

Sch' ma jis_ro el edo_noj e_lo he_nu e_do_noj e_chod.

VII III VI iv i

SOLI. *rall.*

e_chod elo_he_nu go_dol edo_ne_nu kodosch w'no_ro sch' mo

Ten. Solo. *rall.*

E_chod e_lo_he_nu go_dol e_do_ne_nu ko_dosch w' no_ro sch' mo

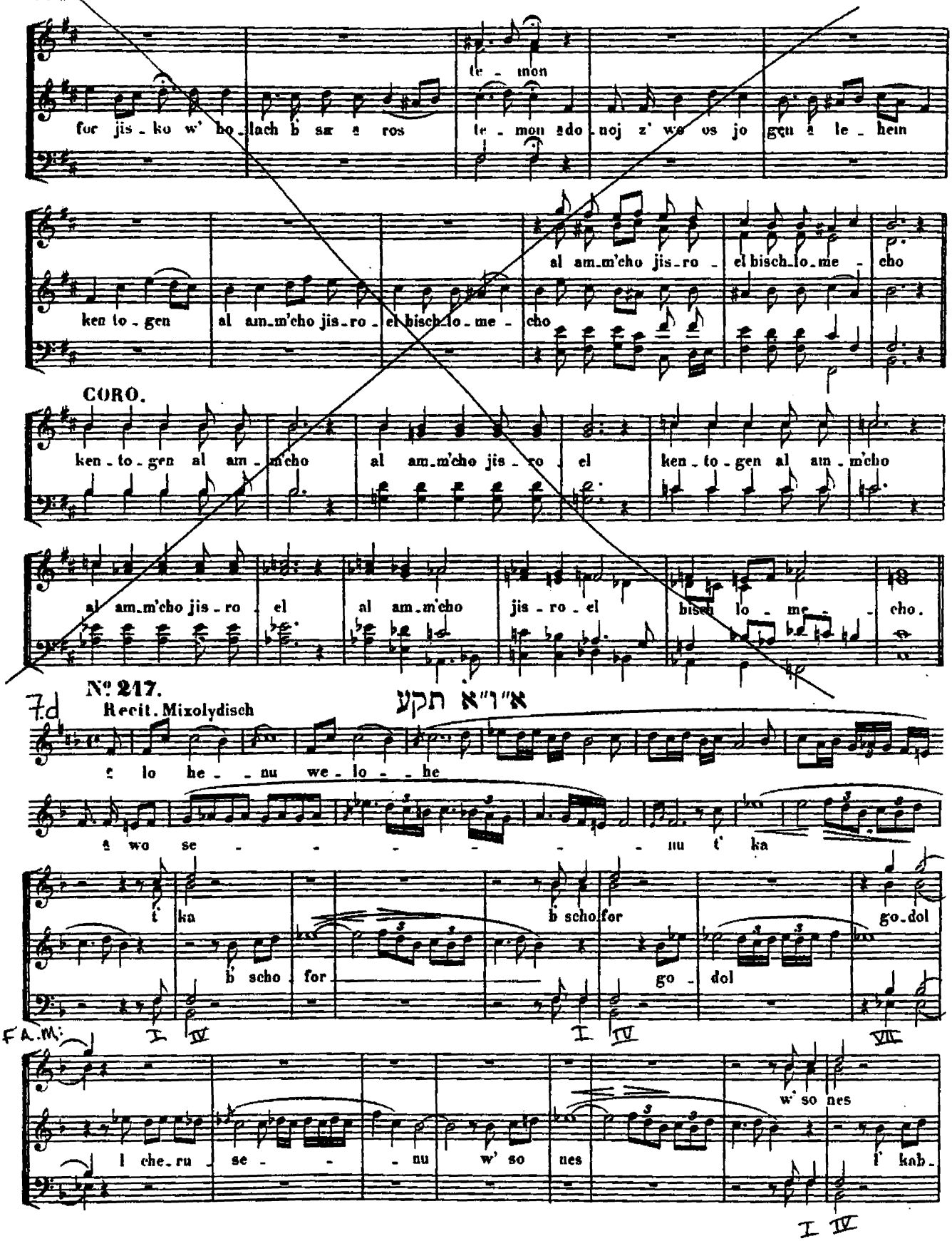
VII6/5 III III VII6/5 III IV i VI iv i iv V

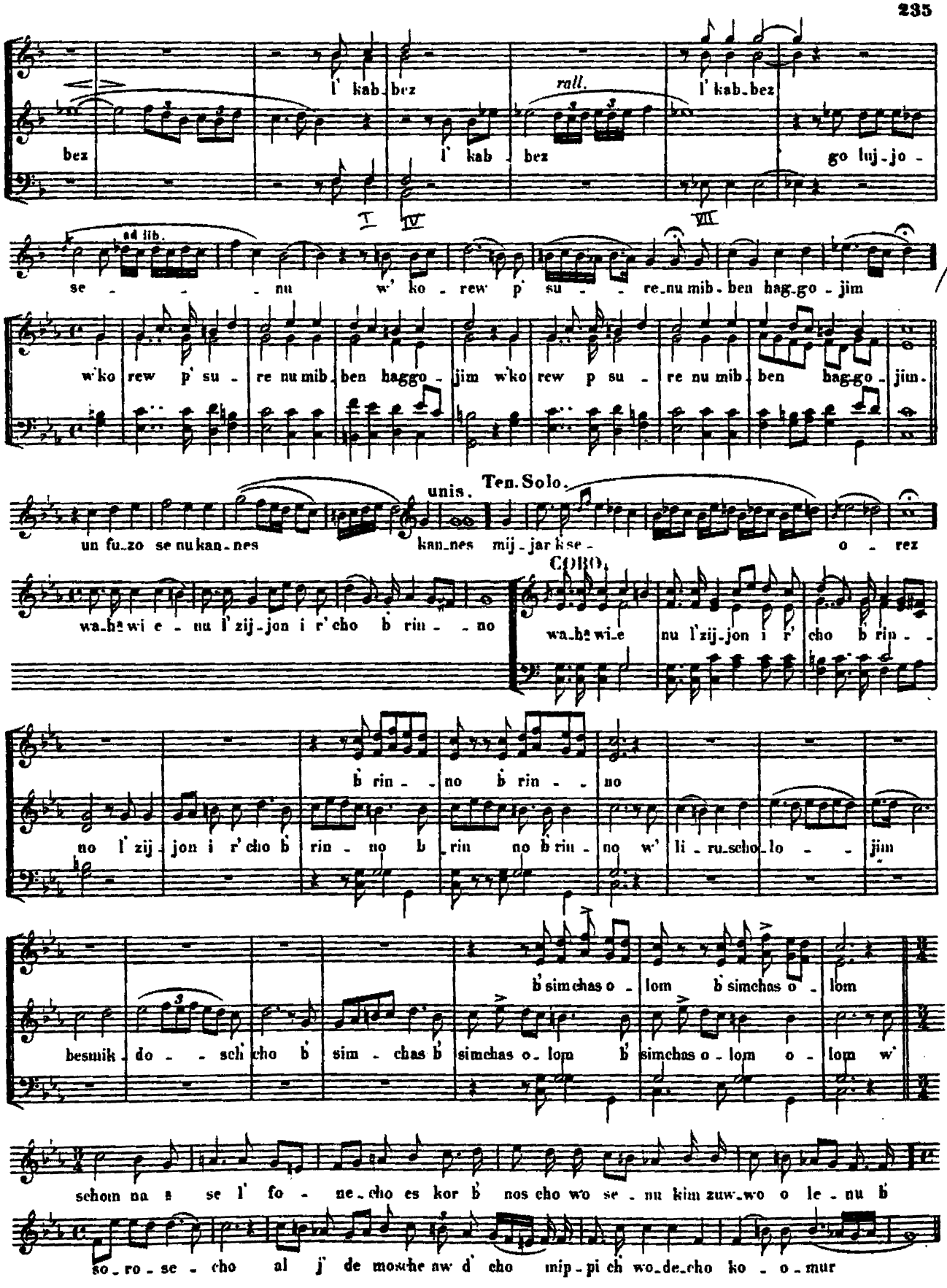
CORO. *rall.*

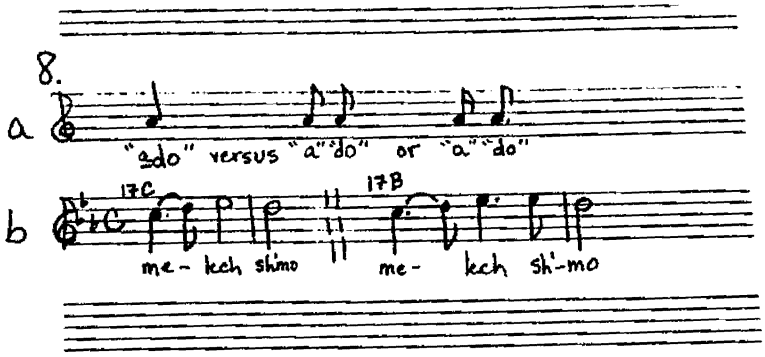
E_chod e_lo_he_nu go_dol e_do_ne_nu ko dosch w' no_ro sch' mo

i VII6/5 III VII6/5 III VI III VII6/5 III i VI i iv V

81.


te - mon
for jis - ko w' ho - lach b sa - ros te - mon adonoj z' wa os jo gen a le - hein
ken to - gen al am-m'cho jis-ro - el bisch-lo-me - cho
al am-m'cho jis-ro - el bisch-lo-me - cho
CORO.
ken - to - gen al am - m'cho al am-m'cho jis - ro - el ken - to - gen al am - m'cho
al am-m'cho jis - ro - el al am-m'cho jis - ro - el bisch lo - me - - cho.
№ 217.
Recit. Mixolydisch
א"ו"א תקע
7.d
e lo he - - nu we - lo - - he
a wo se - - - - - - nu t' ka
t' ka b scho for go-dol
b' scho for go - dol
F.A.M.
I IV I IV VII
l' che-ru se - - - nu w' so nes
w' so nes l' kab-
I IV


l' kab_bez
rall.
l' kab_bez
bez
l' kab_bez
go luj_jo_
I
IV
VII
ad lib.
se_nu w' ko_rew p' su_re_nu mib_ben hag_go_jim
w'ko rew p' su_re nu mib_ben haggo_jim w'ko rew p su_re nu mib_ben hag_go_jim.
unis.
Ten. Solo.
un fu_zo se nu kan_nes
kan_nes mij_jar kse_
o_rez
CORO.
wa_hawi e_nu l'zij_jon i r'cho b rin_no
wa_hawi_e nu l'zij_jon i r' cho b rin_
b rin_no b rin_no
no l'zij_jon i r'cho b rin_no b_rin no b rin_no w' li_ru_scho_lo_jim
b'simchas o_lom b'simchas o_lom
besmik_do_sch'cho b' sim_chas b' simchas o_lom b' simchas o_lom o_lom w'
schom na s se l' fo_ne_cho es kor b' nos cho wo se_nu kim zuw_wo o le_nu b'
so_ro_se_cho al j' de mosche aw d' cho mip_pi ch' wo_de_cho ko_o_mur



Nº 65.

9. **Maestoso.** (♩ = 84.)

CORO.

אין כמוך

Een ko-mocho wo-lo-him-do-noj w' en k' ma-se-cho mal chus' cho mal

CM: am: i V CM: I⁶₄

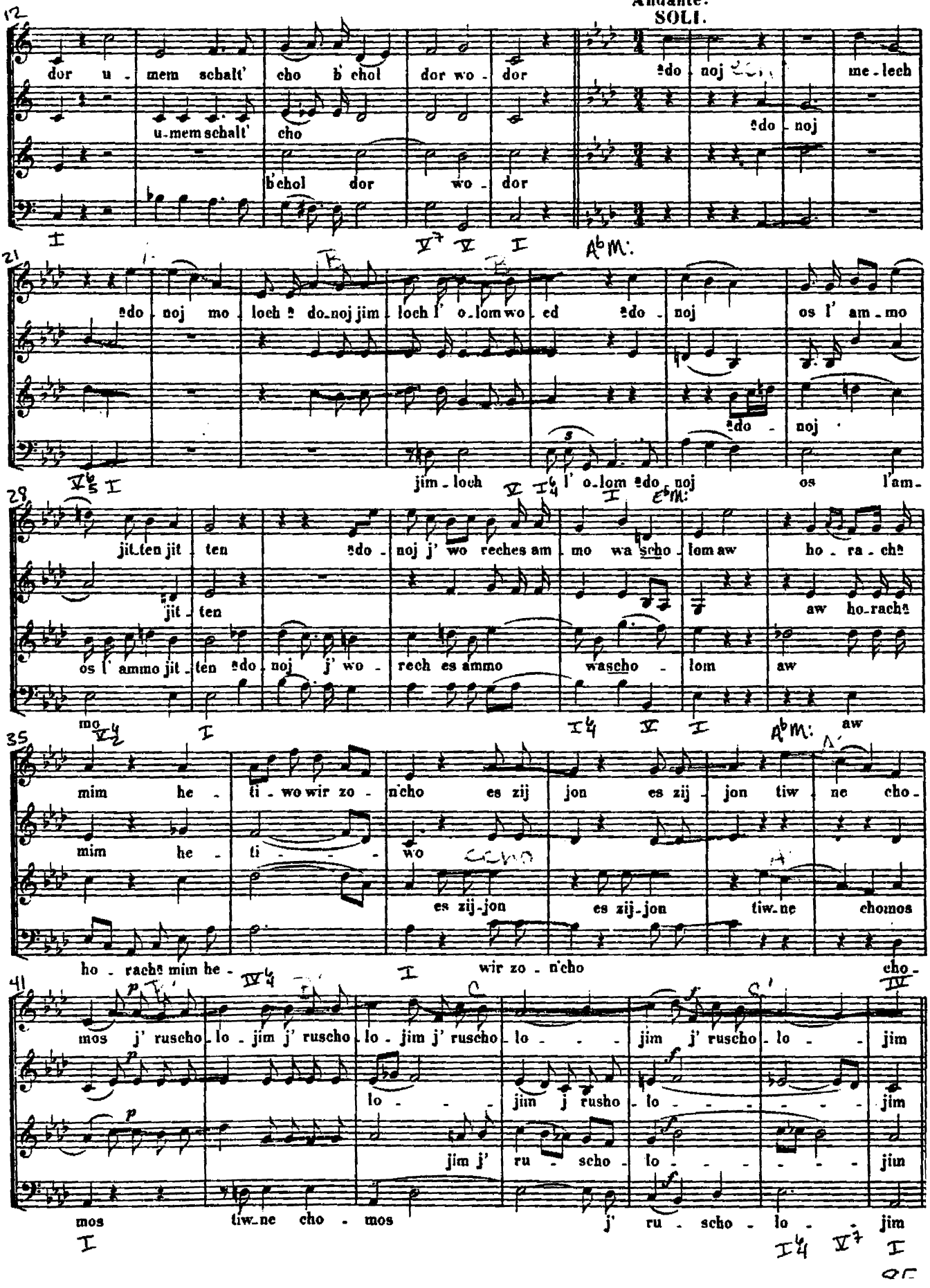
chus kol o-lo-mim kol o-lo-mim u-mem schal t' cho b' chol dor dor wo-

u-mem schal t' cho b' chol dor

IV I fm: German Aug. 6th CM: I⁶₄V⁷

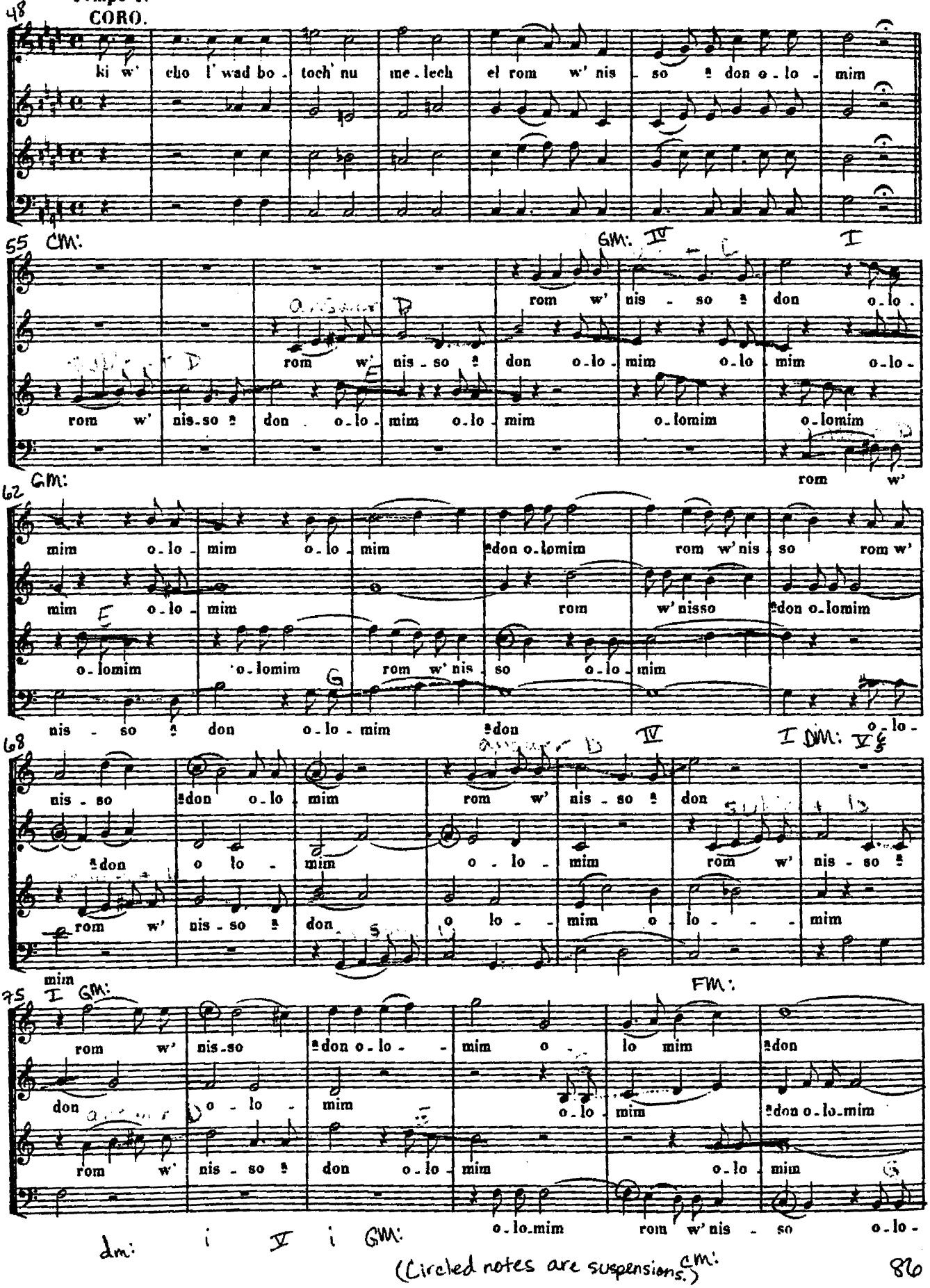
Andante.

SOLI.

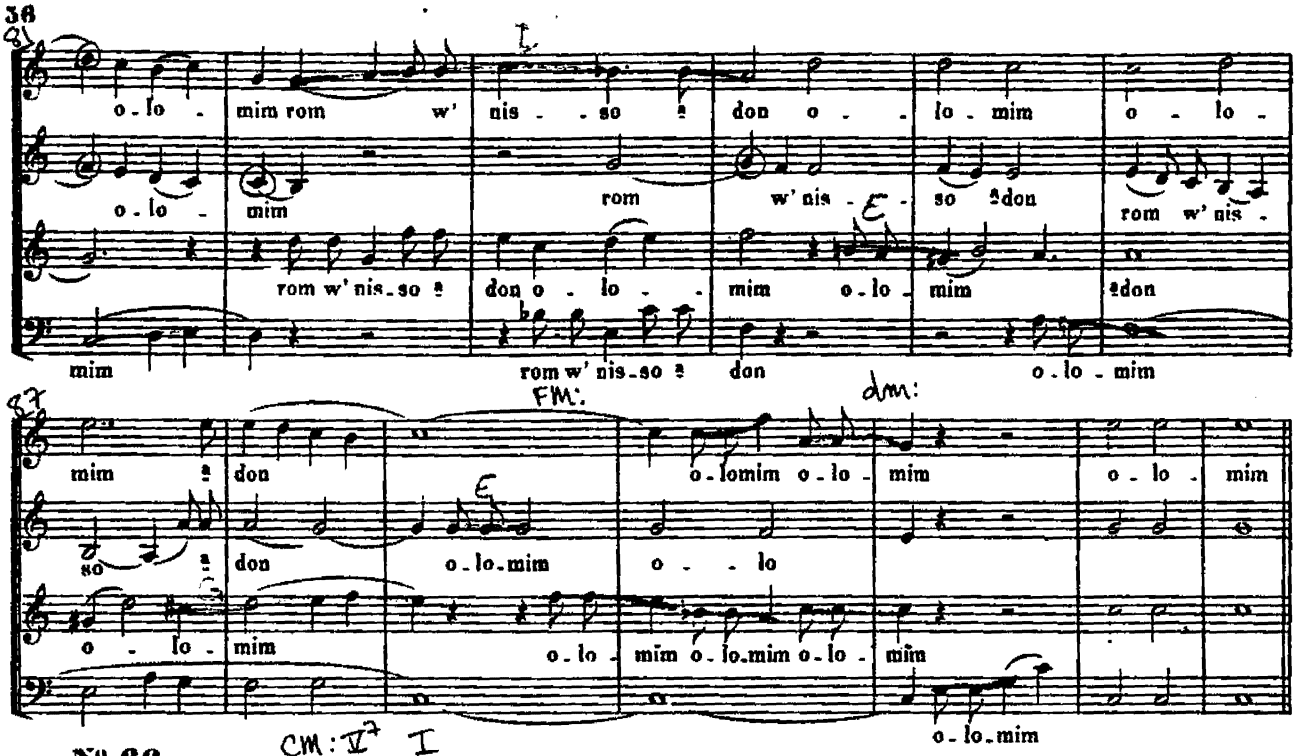


Tempo I?

CORO.



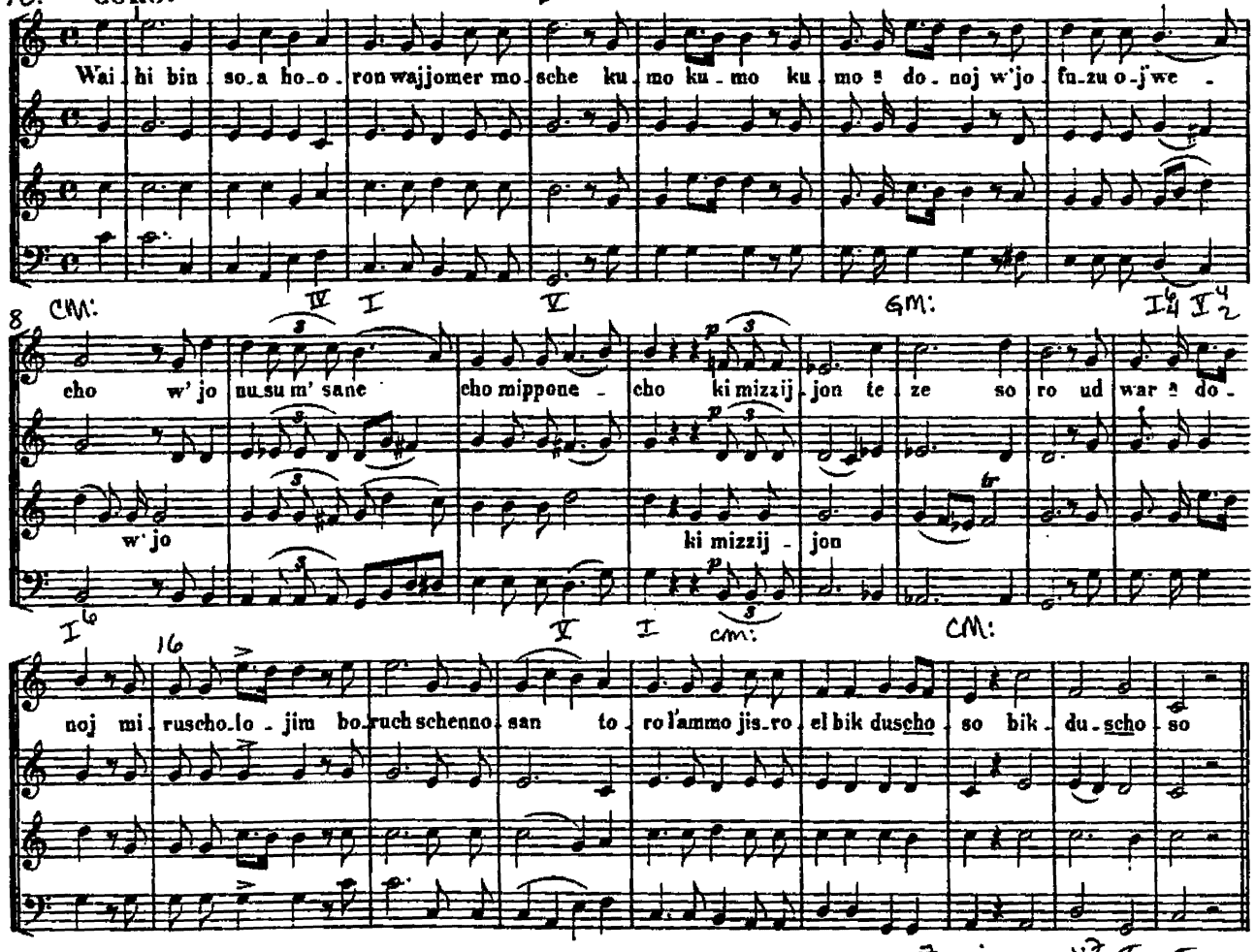
(Circled notes are suspensions.)



Nº 66.

10. **CORO.**

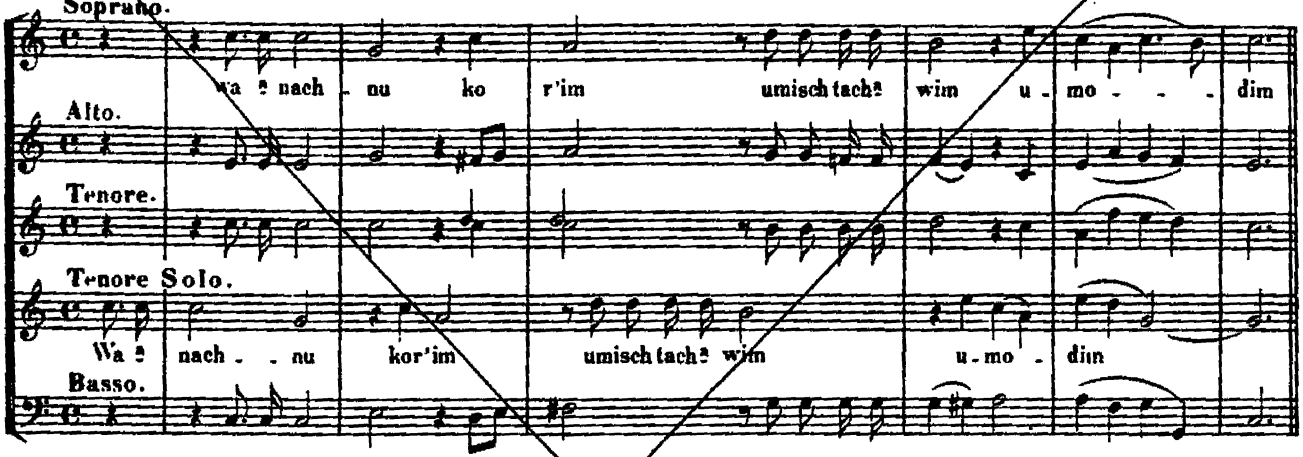
ויהי בנסוע



Nº 29.

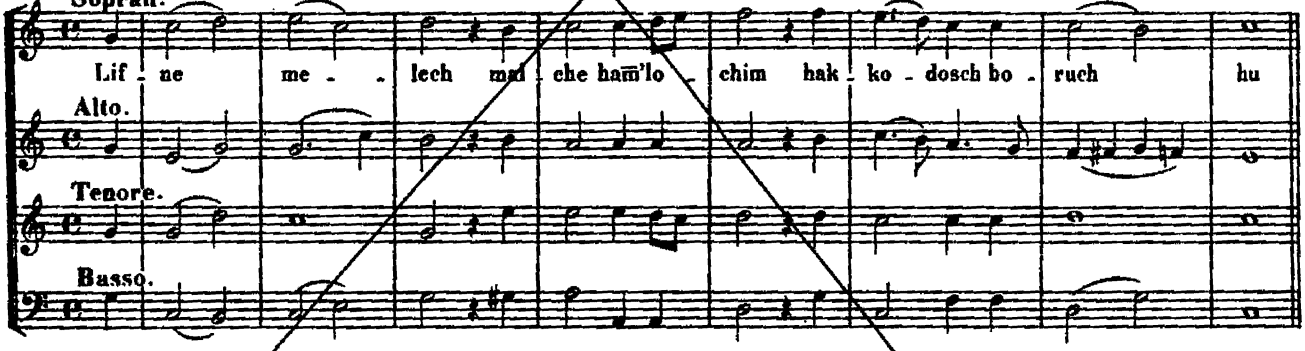
SOLI.

ואנחנו כרעים

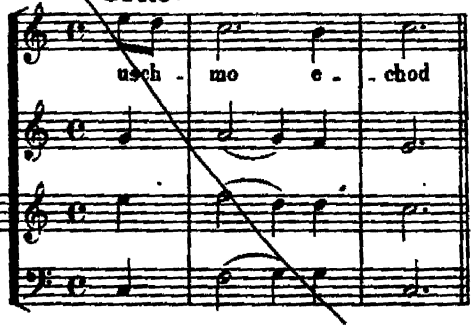


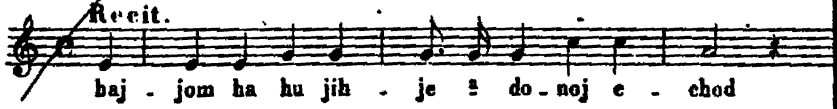
Nº 30.

CORO.



CORO.



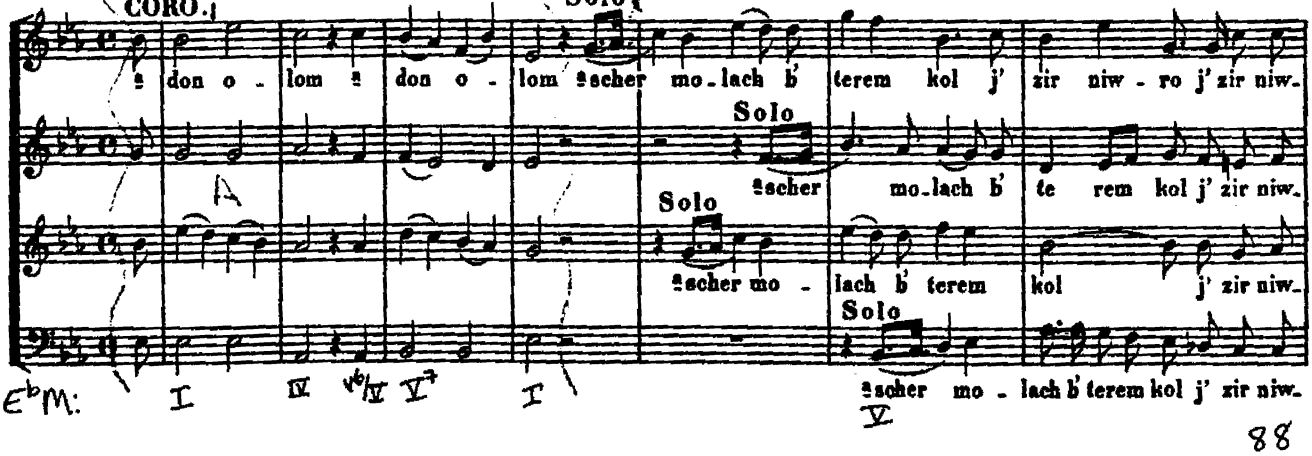


Nº 31.

11. **Andante con moto.** ♩ = 84

אדון עולם

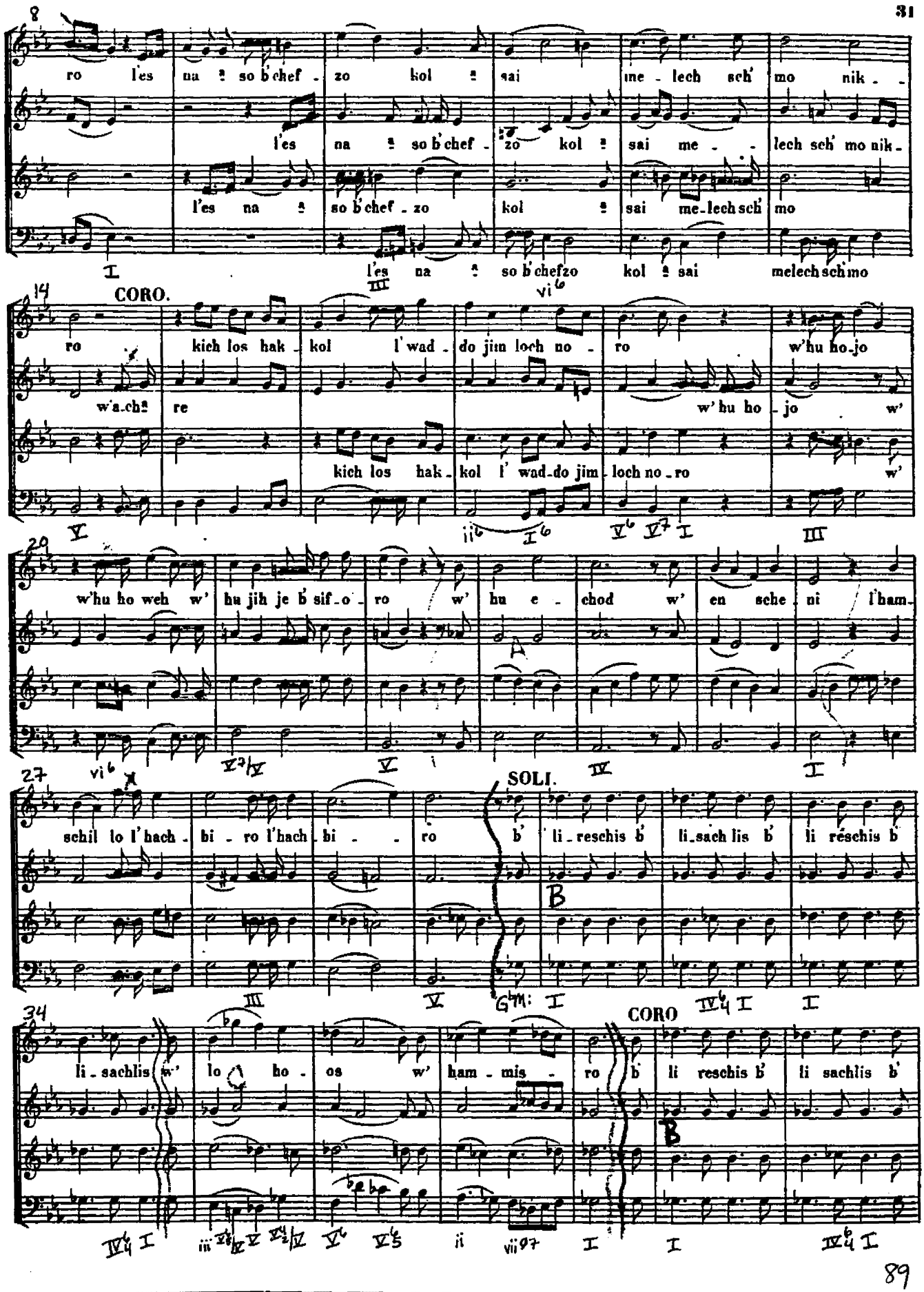
CORO. **Solo**

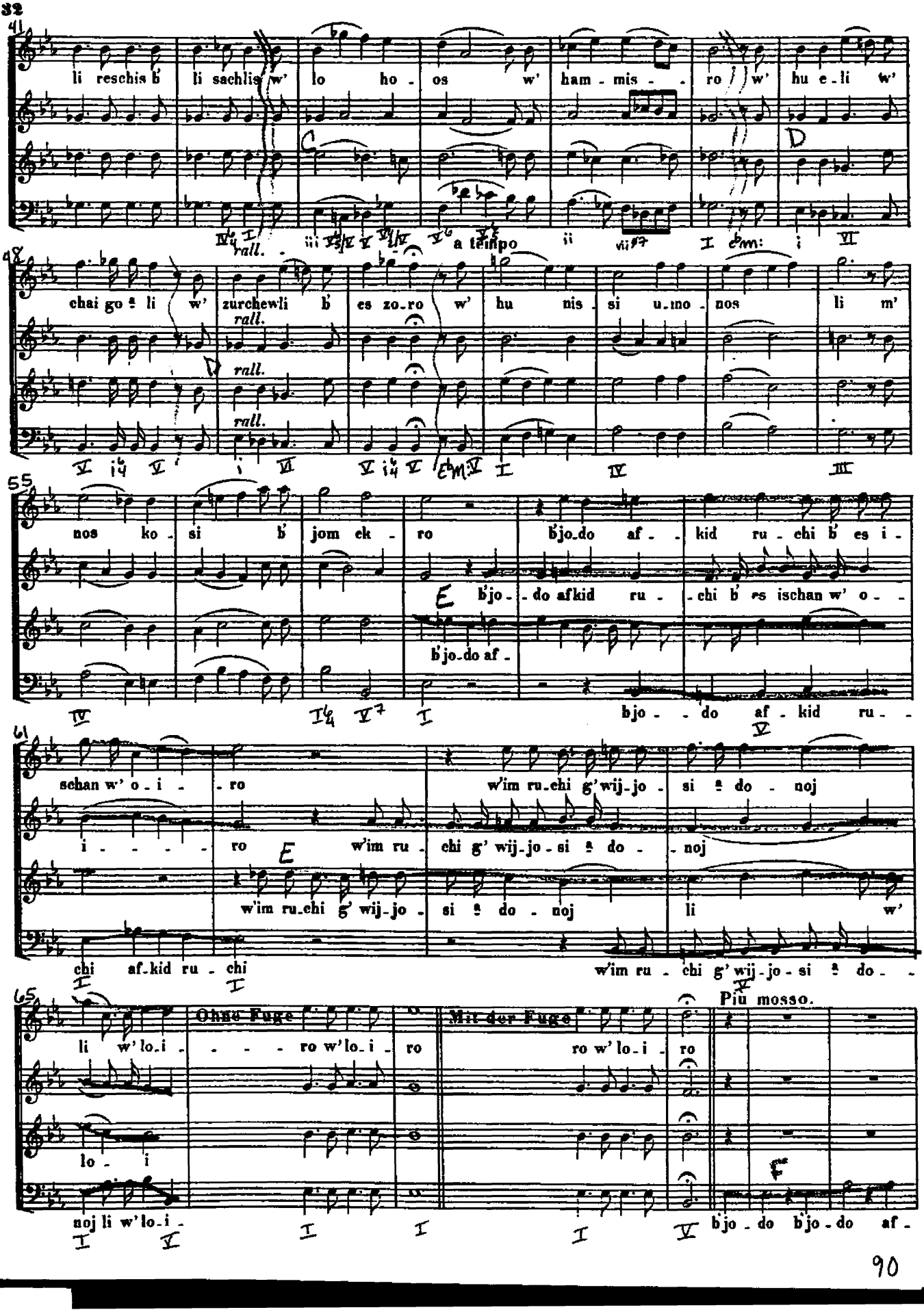


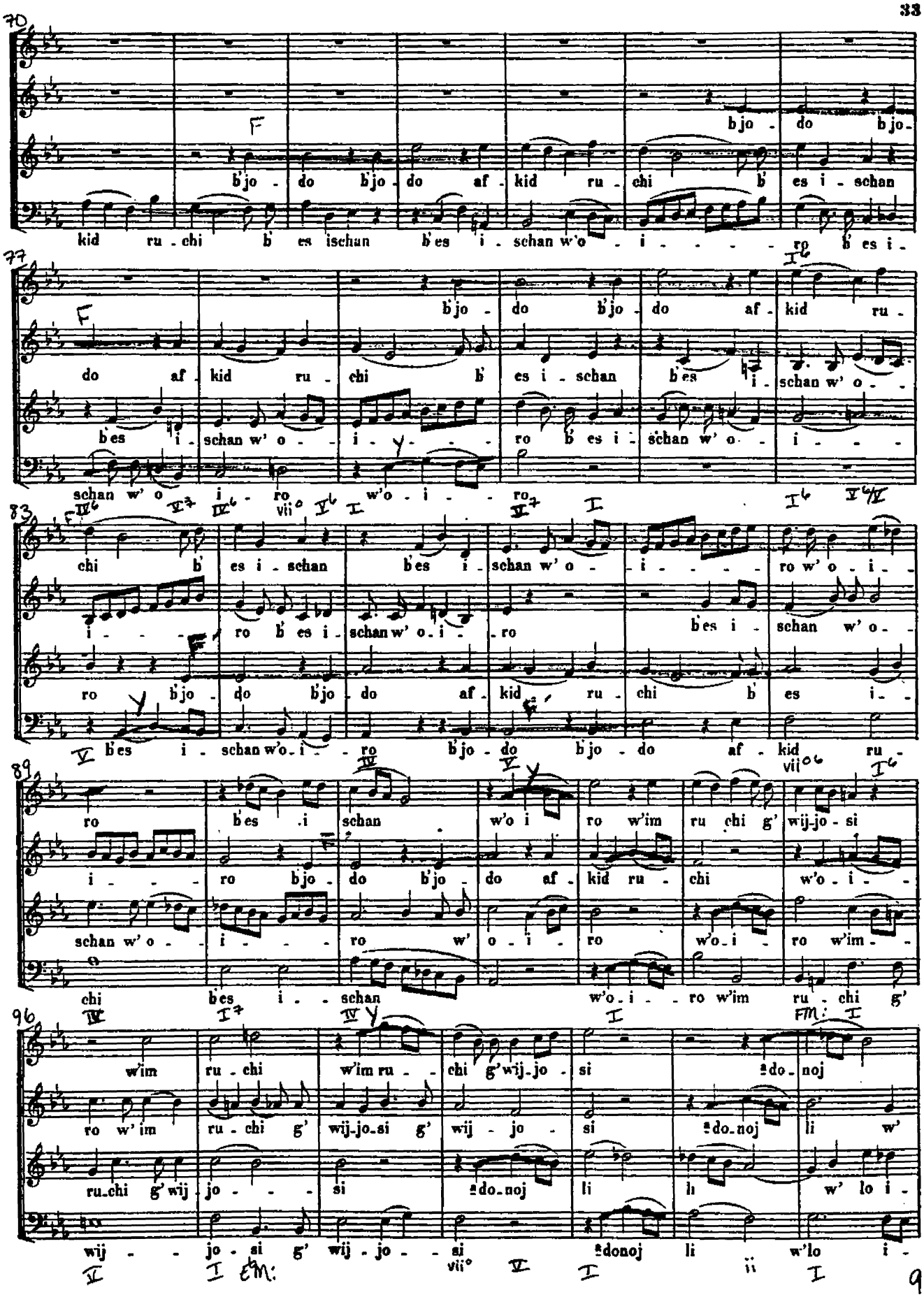
E♭M: I IV ii⁶/V V⁷ I

V

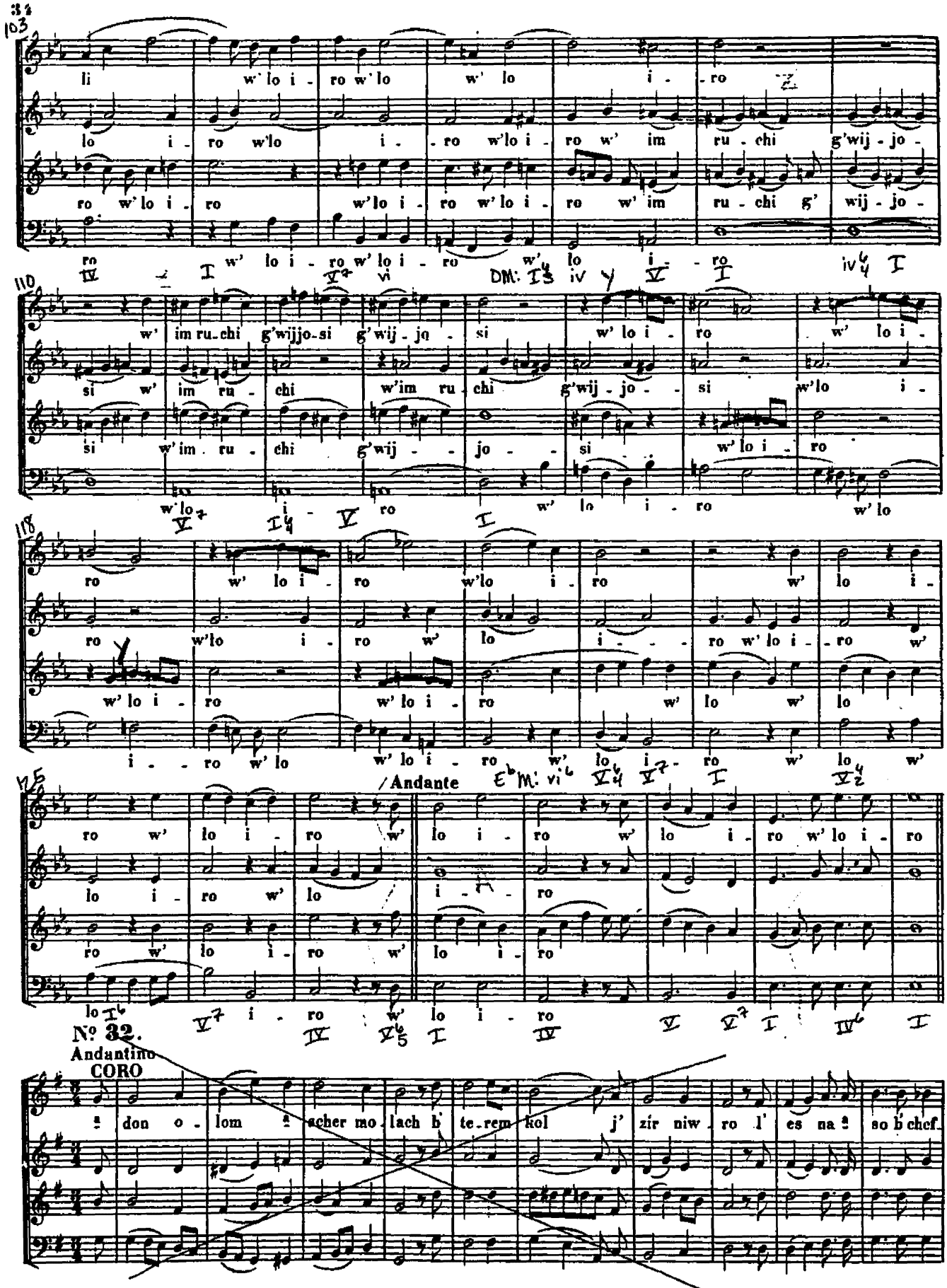
88


8
ro l'es na ♮ so b'chef - zo kol ♮ sai me - lech sch' mo nik -
l'es na ♮ so b'chef - zo kol ♮ sai me - lech sch' mo nik -
l'es na ♮ so b'chef - zo kol ♮ sai me - lech sch' mo
I
l'es na ♮ so b'chefzo kol ♮ sai melechsch'mo
14
CORO.
ro kich los hak - kol l'wad - do jim loch no - ro w'hu ho-jo
wa-ch♮ re
w'hu ho - jo w'
kich los hak - kol l'wad-do jim - loch no - ro w'
V
iii6 I6 V6 V7 I III
20
w'hu ho weh w' hu jih je b'sif - o - ro w' hu e - chod w' en sche - ni l'ham-
vi6 V7/V V I IV I
27
SOLI.
schil lo l'hach - bi - ro l'hach - bi - ro b' li - reschis b' li-sach lis b' li réschis b'
III V G♯m: I IV6/4 I I
34
CORO
li - sachlis w' lo ho - os w' ham - mis - ro b' li reschis b' li sachlis b'
IV6/4 I iii V6/4/V V6/4/V V6/5 ii vii07 I I IV6/4 I


41
li reschis b' li sachlis w' lo ho - os w' ham - mis - ro w' hu e - li w'
rall.
a tempo
48
chai go ♯ li w' zurchewli b' es zo - ro w' hu nis - si u - mo - nos li m'
rall.
55
nos ko - si b' jom ck - ro b'jo - do af - kid ru - chi b' es i -
b'jo - do afkid ru - chi b' es ischan w' o -
b'jo - do af -
bjo - - do af - kid ru -
61
schan w' o - i - - ro w'im ru - chi g' wij - jo - si ♯ do - noj
i - - - - - ro w'im ru - chi g' wij - jo - si ♯ do - noj
w'im ru - chi g' wij - jo - si ♯ do - noj li w'
chi af - kid ru - chi w'im ru - chi g' wij - jo - si ♯ do - -
65
Piu mosso.
Ohne Fuge
Mit der Fuge
li w' lo - i - - - - ro w' lo - i - ro ro w' lo - i - ro
lo - i
noj li w' lo - i - bjo - do bjo - do af -


70
F
b'jo - do b'jo - do af - kid ru - chi b' es i - schan
kid ru - chi b' es ischan b'es i - schan w'o - i - - - - ro b' es i -
77
F
b'jo - do b'jo - do af - kid ru -
do af - kid ru - chi b' es i - schan b'es i - schan w' o - -
b'es i - schan w' o - - i - - - ro b' es i - schan w' o - i - - -
schan w' o i - ro w'o - i - - ro
83
chi b' es i - schan b'es i - schan w' o - - i - - - ro w' o - i -
i - - - ro b' es i - schan w' o - i - - ro b'es i - schan w' o -
ro b'jo - do b'jo - do af - kid ru - chi b' es i -
b'es i - schan w'o - i - - ro b'jo - do b'jo - do af - kid ru -
89
ro b'es .i schan w'o i ro w'im ru chi g' wij - jo - si
i - - - ro b'jo - do b'jo - do af - kid ru - chi w'o - i -
schan w' o - - i - - - ro w' o - i - ro w'o - i - ro w'im - -
chi b'es i - - schan w'o - i - - ro w'im ru - chi g'
96
w'im ru - chi w'im ru - - chi g' wij - jo - si ♯do - noj
ro w' im ru - chi g' wij - jo - si g' wij - jo - si ♯do - noj li w'
ru - chi g' wij - jo - - - si ♯do - noj li li w' lo i -
wij - - jo - si g' wij - jo - - si ♯donoj li w'lo i -

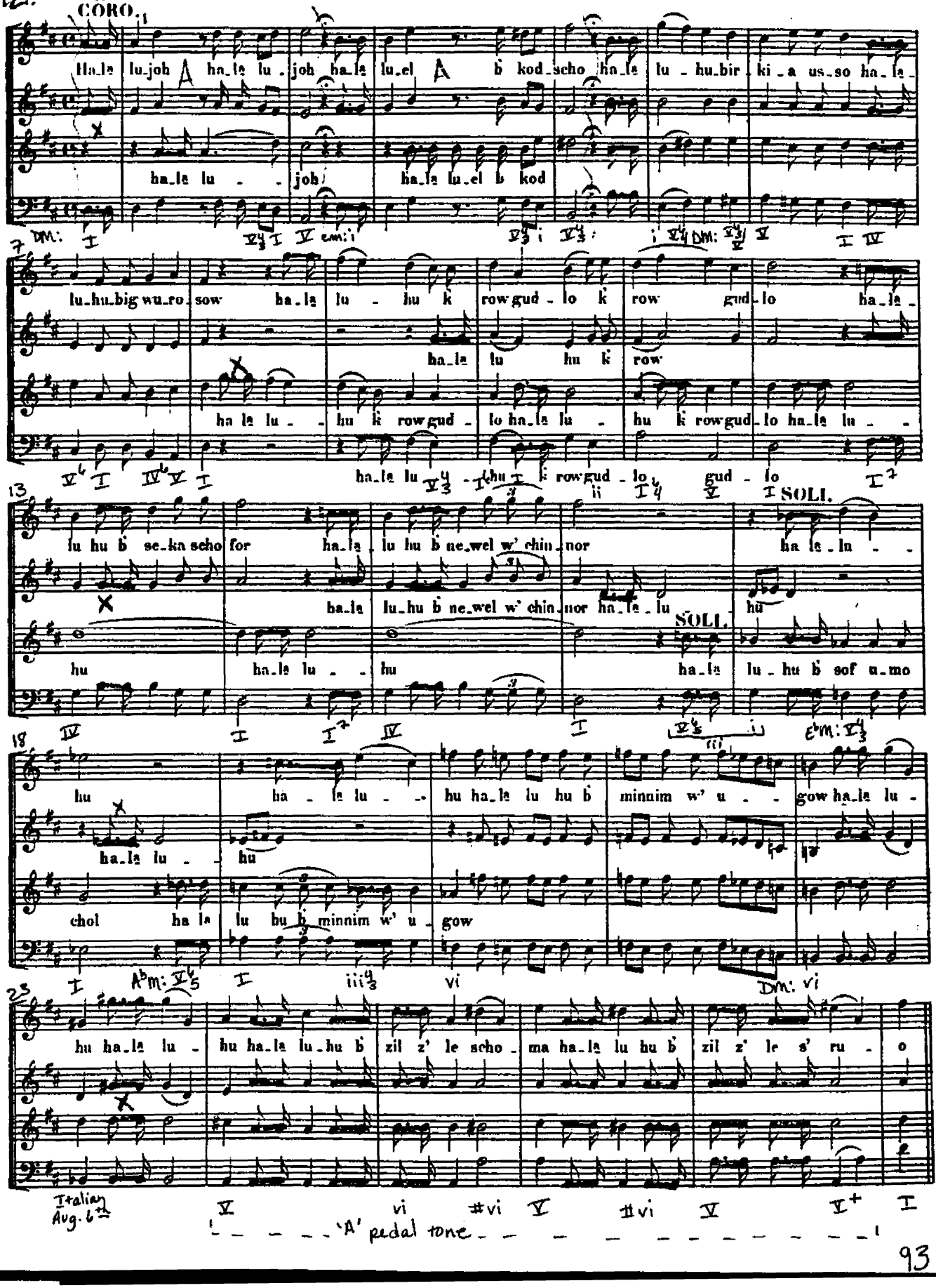
91

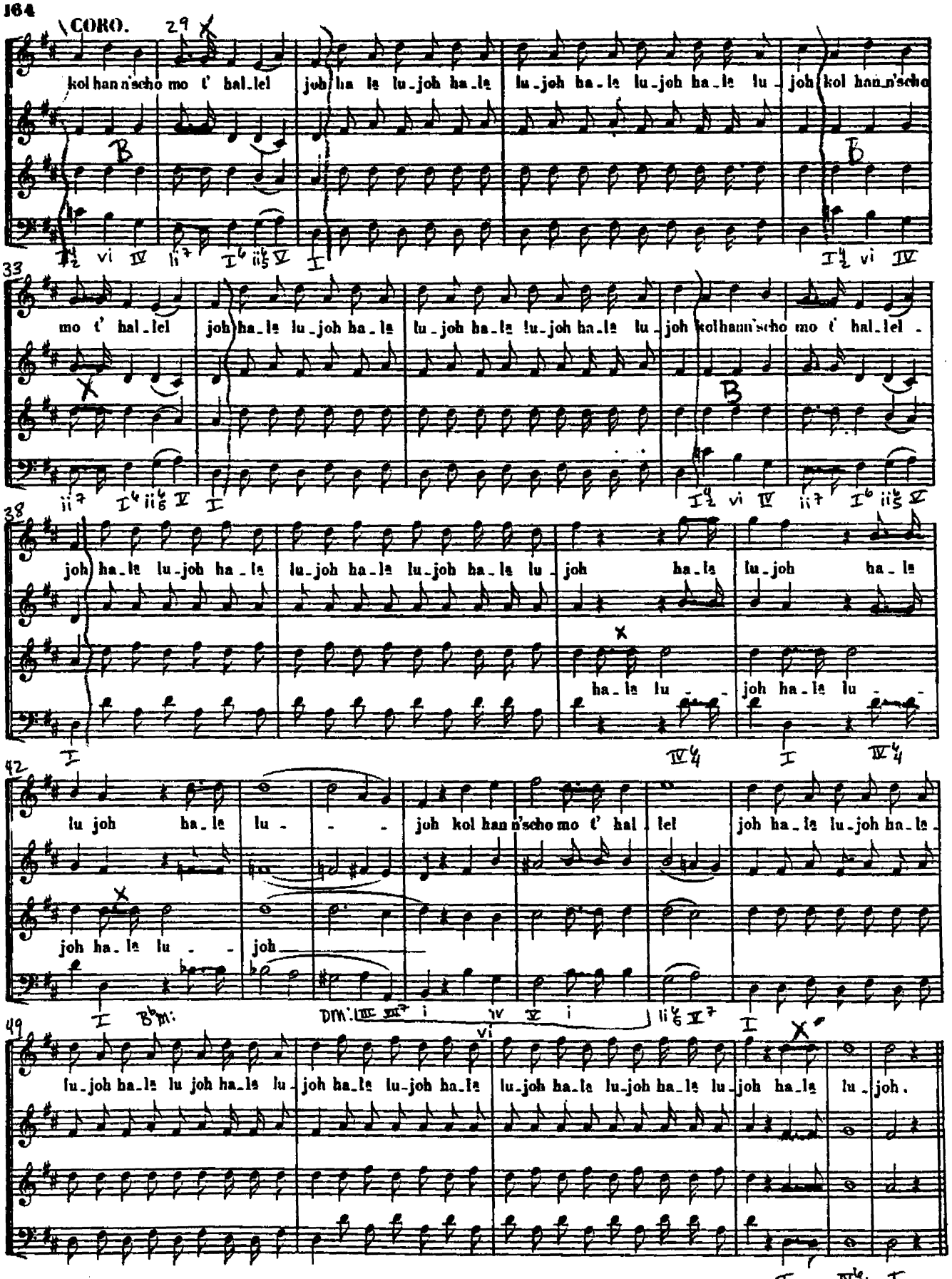

li w' lo i - ro w' lo w' lo i - ro
lo i - ro w'lo i - ro w'lo i - ro w' im ru - chi g'wij - jo -
ro w' lo i - ro w'lo i - ro w' lo i - ro w' im ru - chi g' wij - jo -
ro w' lo i - ro w' lo i - ro w' lo i - ro
w' im ru-chi g'wijjo-si g'wij - jo - si w' lo i - ro w' lo i -
si w' im ru - chi w'im ru - chi g'wij - jo - si w'lo i -
si w'im ru - chi g'wij - jo - si w' lo i - ro
w'lo i - ro w' lo i - ro w' lo
ro w' lo i - ro w'lo i - ro w' lo i -
ro w'lo i - ro w' lo i - ro w' lo i - ro w'
w' lo i - ro w' lo i - ro w' lo w' lo
i - - ro w' lo w' lo i - ro w' lo i - ro w'
/Andante
ro w' lo i - ro w' lo i - ro w' lo i - ro w' lo i - ro
lo i - ro w' lo i - - ro
ro w' lo i - ro w' lo i - ro
lo i - ro w' lo i - ro
No. 32.
Andantino
CORO
! don o - lom ! acher mo - lach b' te-rem kol j' zir niw - ro l' es na ! so b'chef

Nº 164. Psalm 150.
Allegro. ♩ = 104

הללויה

12. CORO.




CORO.
kol han n'scho mo t' hal_lel joh ha_le lu_joh ha_le lu_joh ha_le lu_joh ha_le lu_joh kol han n'scho
mo t' hal_lel joh ha_le lu_joh ha_le lu_joh ha_le lu_joh ha_le lu_joh kol han n'scho mo t' hal_lel
joh ha_le lu_joh ha_le lu_joh ha_le lu_joh ha_le lu_joh ha_le lu_joh ha_le
ha_le lu_ joh ha_le lu_
lu joh ha_le lu_ joh kol han n'scho mo t' hal_lel joh ha_le lu_joh ha_le
joh ha_le lu_ joh
lu_joh ha_le lu joh ha_le lu_joh ha_le lu_joh ha_le lu_joh ha_le lu_joh ha_le lu_joh ha_le lu_joh ha_le lu_joh.

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