WOMEN SING PRAISES TO GOD:

THE SONGS OF HANNAH, DEBORAH, & MIRIAM

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my parents

JUDITH ANN ALLEN ALFI (ז"ל)

(1939-1974)

and

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(1932-1974)

"...and in their death they were not divided;
they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions."

(II Samuel 1:23)

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INTRODUCTION

Sing to Adonai a song of praise: chant a hymn with a lyre to our God . . .

(Psalm 147:7)

Nearly every religion considers prayer to be a necessary act for the human spirit.[1] E.B. Tyler wrote about the psychological and spiritual aspects of prayer in his anthropological study Primitive Culture (1873). He called prayer, "the soul's sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed," and "the address of personal spirit to personal spirit."[2] Fredrich Heiler summarized prayer in A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion (1932), using Hannah's prayer as a basis for his description. He called prayer "a pouring out of the heart before God."[3] In both of these descriptions, prayer is seen as heartfelt and spontaneous acts of devotion and communication between the human world and the Divine. Both descriptions capture the essence of the personal prayers cited in the Tanach.

For Rabbinic Judaism, prayer is a more complex act than a simple "pouring out of the heart." The early Rabbis made distinctions among the different types of prayer; benediction, dedication, invocation, supplication, intercessionary, confessional, petitionary, thanksgiving, and penitential. They crafted prayer

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[1]Sam D. Gill, "Prayer," The Encyclopedia of Religion, edited by Mircea Eliade, vol. 11, p. 489.
[2]*Ibid.*
[3]*Ibid.*

services that combined these forms of prayer, using them to create *kavanah* in worship.

Both prayer and sacrifice are ancient modes of worship in the Jewish tradition. However, during the First and Second Temple, sacrificial worship played the dominant role. The complete shift from a sacrificial cult to a liturgically based system did not occur until the *Horban*.[4] During the Second Temple period a formal public liturgy developed and found wide acceptance, and prayer became an established and integral aspect of the religious life of the community. After the destruction of the Second Temple, prayer filled the void caused by the annihilation of the Temple cult.[5]

Religious assemblies had taken on importance during the Babylonian exile. Since Jews lacked a common center, their assemblies helped preserve their national and religious identity, connected the people with their past, and provided hope for the future.[6] This style of worship continued after the establishment of the Second Temple; after the exile, cultic-sacrifice was no longer enough. The people desired something that demanded personal piety and participation, "the service of the heart."[7] This eventually led to the introduction of the *ma'amadot*.

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[4]The *Horban* is the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70 CE.
[5]Leila Bronner, From Eve to Esther: Rabbinic Reconstructions of Biblical Women, p. 89.
[6]Ismar Elbogan, Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History, translated by: Raymond P. Scheindlin, p. 189
[7]*Ibid.*, p. 190

The *ma'amadot* were created during the Second Jewish Commonwealth in order to make the masses active participants in the Temple ritual. Israel was divided into 24 districts, each of which would send representatives to Jerusalem for one week, every six months. While the representatives would participate in the sacrificial service at the Temple, four corresponding prayer services (morning, *musaf*, afternoon, and the Closing of the Gates) would be held in the home community. This is the first example of prayer services conducted on a regular basis throughout the land of Israel.[8] The *ma'amadot* helped establish daily worship, outside of Jerusalem, as a fixed institution available to the common person. This decentralization of prayer led to the need to promote uniformity in ritual, as a means of guaranteeing spiritual unity.[9]

Jewish prayer continued to evolve and change (while based on certain standardized guidelines) until the invention of the printing press. While modern Jewish liturgy was essentially the creation of Rabbinic Judaism, the Rabbis looked to the Tanach as well as the Temple cult for inspiration when crafting their prayers. The early liturgical services that took place after the destruction of the Second Temple centered primarily on the reading of *Torah* and its exposition. In time, more prayers were introduced and different liturgies were created for daily, Sabbath, and festival worship.[10]

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[8]*Ibid.*, pp. 190-191
[9]*Ibid.*, pp. 192-193
[10]Leila Bronner, From Eve to Esther: Rabbinic Reconstructions of Biblical Women, p. 90.

Throughout the Tanach, from the patriarchs through the kings, petitionary prayers, songs of thanksgiving, and prayers paying tribute to God's glory are recorded. Four of those prayers are attributed to women; Hannah (I Samuel 1:10-11, and I Samuel 2:1-10), Deborah (Judges 5:1-31), and Miriam (Exodus 15:20-21). While the prayers attributed to each of these women did not become part of the daily liturgy, they are read in the annual *Haftarah* and *Torah* reading cycle, and they helped inform the Rabbinic understanding of prayer.

Sam Gill describes the nature of prayer in the Tanach in this way: "True Israelite worship is dominated by enthusiasm for God. Thus Israel's worship is performed, not merely that she may thereby set an example to other nations, and not merely that she may derive blessing or welfare from this worship, but that she may glorify God."[11] While the prayers attributed to Hannah, Deborah, and Miriam, may not have been unique in Biblical times, or even original compositions, still they shed light upon worship in ancient Israel. Through them, modern Jews can better understand how God was worshipped by our early ancestors, as how the Rabbis borrowed their words to serve as models for new liturgies.

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[11]C. C. Richardson, "Worship in the Old Testament," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Volume 4. Editor: George Arthur Buttrick, p. 883.

HANNAH'S PRAYER

"And Hannah prayed . . ." (I Samuel 2:1)

The Book of Samuel begins with the story of Samuel's mother, Hannah. While the Bible is usually known for its paucity of details, the story of Hannah paints a vivid picture of her family life, her desires and disappointment, as well as her piety. Both a prayer (I Samuel 1:10-11) and a song of praise (I Samuel 2:1-10) are attributed to Hannah.

The literary style, as well as the names and titles used for God, indicate to scholars that the song attributed to Hannah can most likely be dated to the 11th or 10th century BCE.[12] The closest parallel to the Song of Hannah in the Tanach is the Song of David (II Samuel 22).[13] Both are songs of praise and thanksgiving to a God who has delivered a faithful servant from persecution. The language and style of the two songs have striking similarities. Both use "horn" as a metaphor for strength, speak of God giving power to "his king," exult God for providing deliverance from an enemy, and refer to God as the "Rock."[14] The Song of Hannah and the Song of David serve as twin tributes to the Redeeming God, bracketing the First and Second Books of Samuel.

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[12]Ronald Youngblood, "Hannah," Anchor Bible Dictionary, Vol. 3, p. 51.
[13]*Ibid.*
[14]*Ibid.*

Hannah's actions, prayer and song are interpreted at length in the Talmud.[15] While prayer is an ancient form of worship, fixed prayer did not gain importance until the Tannaitic period, with the destruction of the Second Temple and the establishment of the synagogue as the focal point for liturgy, religious thought and practice.[16]

Innovation is not a value in and of itself in Rabbinic Judaism. Anything new has generally had to be cloaked in the familiar, or rooted in the ancient, in order to find ready acceptance. The Rabbis use the Tanach in a way similar to the way that a quilter uses a bag of fabric scraps. The original intention or use of the fabric is secondary to its new use in a quilt. While the quilt is a new product that does not resemble the dresses, coats, or shirts from which the bits of fabric may have come, the quilt has increased (sentimental) value precisely because it is made up of older, familiar garments. Rather than to create something entirely new, like daily fixed prayer, the Rabbis take bits and scraps of the tradition and sew them together through *midrash*, so what is actually "innovation" appears to be something old and familiar.[17] Within this system of appropriating the old to serve a new purpose, Hannah's prayer becomes valuable material to draw upon

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[15]Berachot 10a, 29a, 30b, 31a, 31b, 44a; Rosh HaShanah 10b, 11a, 17a; Yoma 73a; Ta'anit 23b; Megillah 10b, 14a, 31a; Chagigah 6a; Yevamot 64b; and Ketubot 65a [Unless otherwise noted, all references are to the Babylonian Talmud.]

[16]Ismar Elbogen, Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History, translated by Raymond Scheindlin, 1993, p. 199.

[17]Of course, unlike the scraps in a quilt, the "bits and pieces" the Rabbis use to construct prayer and midrashim, Biblical quotes do have merit in their own right, separate from the prayers constructed from them.

when teaching about a "new" prayer, such as the *Amidah*.[18] Hannah provides a clear model for the rabbis as they develop a system of daily prayer.

The Book of Samuel begins by introducing the reader to its characters; Elkanah, an Ephraimite, is married to Hannah and also to Peninnah. Similar to other "barren-women" stories in the Bible, Hannah, the infertile wife, is Elkanah's favorite, and Peninnah, the fertile wife, is jealous and taunts Hannah mercilessly about her "closed womb." While the family is in Shiloh on their annual pilgrimage, Peninnah antagonizes Hannah, making her to weep and to refrain from eating. Elkanah, distressed by his wife's pain, tries to comfort her: "Hannah, why do you weep? And why won't you eat? And why does your heart grieve? Am I not better to you than ten sons?"[19] While Elkanah's words are touching and heartfelt, they do not erase Hannah's anguish. After their meal, Hannah goes up to the temple of God and there with a "bitter soul, she prayed to Adonai, and wept copiously."[20]

> 11. And she made this vow: O Lord of Hosts, if You will look upon the suffering of Your maidservant, and will remember me and not forget Your maidservant, and if You will grant Your maidservant a male child, I will dedicate him to Adonai for all the days of his life, and no razor shall ever touch his head. 12. As she kept on praying before Adonai, Eli watched her mouth. 13. Now Hannah was praying in her heart, only her lips moved, but her voice could not be heard. So Eli thought she was drunk. 14. Eli said to her: "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself?

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[18]Tradition teaches that the basic formula for the *Amidah* was composed by the Men of the Great Assembly in the fifth century BCE. However, the Talmud records that it was in the beginning of the first century CE that Rabban Gamaliel (Meg. 17b; Ber. 28b) commissioned Simon Ha-Pakuli to write the *Amidah*. (Haim Halevy Donin, To Pray As A Jew, p. 69)

[19]I Samuel 1:8

[20]I Samuel 1:10

Sober up!" 15. And Hannah replied, and said: "Oh no, my lord! I am a woman of sorrowful spirit, I have drunk no wine or other strong drink, but I have been pouring out my heart to Adonai. 16. Do not take your maidservant for a wicked woman, I have only been speaking all this time out of my great anguish and distress." 17. "Then go in peace," said Eli, "and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of Him. (I Samuel 1:11-17)[21]

Hannah addresses her prayer to יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת - the Lord of Hosts. According to Berachot 31b, this is the first use of this particular name for God in a prayer, and it is also the first use of this title for God in the entire Tanach. *"And she vowed a vow and said, O Lord of Tzeva'ot [Hosts]. R. Eleazar said: From the day that God created His world, there was no man [who] called the Holy One, blessed be He, Tzeva'ot [hosts] until Hannah came and called Him Tzeva'ot."*[22] It is a form of tribute to Hannah for the Rabbis to credit her with being the source for an expression that is later used in the prayer service.[23] The commentary continues: *"Hannah said before the Holy One, blessed be He: Sovereign of the Universe, of all the hosts and hosts that You have created in Your world, is it so difficult in Your eyes to give me one son? A parable: To what is this matter like? To a king who made a feast for his servants, and a poor man came and stood by the door and said to them, "Give me a morsel." And no one paid attention to him, so he forced his way into the presence of the king and said to him, "Your majesty, out of all the feast which you have made, is it so hard in your eyes to give me one bite?* (Ber. 31b)" In this commentary, Rabbi Eleazar vividly depicts Hannah's pain and sorrow as she

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[21]Unless otherwise specified, all translations from the Tanach are based on, and adapted from, the New JPS translation of the Tanakh: A New Translation of The Holy Scriptures, According to the Traditional Hebrew Text (1985).

[22]All translations from the Talmud are based on, and adapted from, the Soncino Talmud.

[23]"יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת" is found in the *Geulah*.

prayed for a child; having a son was as essential to her life as food is to a starving man. Like the beggar at the banquet, Hannah feels herself neglected and forgotten by her God. Her prayer is so stirring because it resonates with every one who has ever known sorrow or deep desire. While the specifics in petitionary prayers may change from person to person, every person can identify with Hannah's sentiments. Who in times of desperation or depression has not cried out to God to be remembered? Who at times has not felt invisible? Who has not tried to strike a bargain with God in order to obtain that for which they long?

Perhaps it is because it is so easy to identify with her prayer that the Rabbis quoted in the Talmud link Hannah's prayer with the *Amidah*.[24] The *Amidah* was put in its final form under the leadership of Rabban Gamaliel II after the *Horban*, about 100 CE.[25] The *Amidah* is one of the major rubrics of prayers in the liturgy. In the *Musaf* service on *Rosh HaShanah*, the *Amidah* includes the *Shofar* ritual. While the early Rabbis regard Hannah's prayer as a pattern for petitionary prayer, later rabbis rule that women are exempt from participating in *Shacharit, Mincha, and Aravit*. According to the Magen Avraham,[26] women fulfill their scriptural obligation to pray simply by making a personal address to God at the beginning of the day.

Berachot 30b-31b cites Hannah's prayer as a model of the style and intention for which an individual should assume when reciting the *Tefillah*. The comparison begins with the *Gemara's* response to the *Mishnah's* statement: *"One*

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[24]In this paper, "*Amidah*" and "*Tefillah*" are used interchangeably.
[25]Meg. 17b and Ber. 28b
[26]Rachel Biale, Women and Jewish Law, pp. 19-20.

should not stand up to say [the] Tefillah, save in a reverent frame of mind."[27] The *Gemara* questions the origin of this statement. A possible answer is offered by R. Eleazar: *"What is the [Scriptural] source for this rule? R. Eleazar says, 'And she was in bitterness of soul.' (I Samuel 1:10)" But how can you learn from this? Perhaps Hannah was different because she was exceptionally bitter at heart!"*[28] For R. Eleazar, Hannah is the exception to the rule. While one should be in a reverential mood when praying, because Hannah was so distressed, so beyond the norm, her prayer was acceptable.

Later in the *Gemara*, other Rabbis investigate how the *Amidah* is to be prayed. R. Hiyya b. Abba observes: *"I might say that he should let his voice be heard in praying? It has already been clearly stated by Hannah, as it is said, 'But her voice could not be heard.' "R. Hamnuna said: How many [of] the most important laws can be learnt from these verses relating to Hannah! Now Hannah, 'she spoke in her heart.' From this we learn that one who prays must frame the words distinctly with [his] lips. 'But her voice could not be heard.' From this, [we learn that] it is forbidden to raise one's voice in the Tefillah* (Ber. 31b)." According to R. Hiyya b. Abba and R. Hamnuna, the tradition to recite the *Amidah* in an undertone comes from the scriptural description of Hannah in her first prayer. Not only do we learn that the *Amidah* is to be prayed *sotto voce*, but we should "speak in our heart." From this teaching, we learn about both *keva* and *kavannah*.

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[27]Ber. 30b
[28]*Ibid.*

Again, in Ber. 31b it is written: *"I am the woman that stood by you here.' (I Samuel 1:26) R. Joshua b. Levi said: From this we learn that it is forbidden to sit within four cubits of one saying [the] Tefillah. . . .'Now Hannah spoke in her heart.' R. Eleazar said in the name of R. Jose b. Zimra: She spoke concerning her heart."* From this teaching by R. Joshua b. Levi one might understand that is necessary to respect an individual's "personal space" while reciting the *Tefilla*. In other words, it is rude to interrupt someone else's *kavannah* while the other is praying.

In Yoma 73a yet more is derived from Hannah's prayer. *"One does not inquire in a loud voice, as it is said: 'Who shall inquire for him (Numbers 27:21),' neither shall one but think thereof in one's heart,*[29] *as it is said: 'Who shall inquire for him,' but rather in the manner in which Hannah spoke in her prayer, as it is said: 'Now Hannah, she spoke in her heart (I Samuel 1:13).'"* In order for God to hear human prayers, one only needs to express those desires in one's heart, or mind, with deep concentration. This can be understood from Hannah's model of praying in (and from) her heart. Hannah's prayer is, for the rabbis, the epitome of "the service of the heart." We know she was "heard" because her prayer was "answered." However, this point of view has dangerous theological implications and could inflict emotional harm on an individual. This perspective might prompt one to ask: "What is wrong with my prayer, or with me, if God did not answer my prayer?" This is a particularly sensitive concept for the infertile woman who prays for a child, and her prayers are not "answered" in the affirmative.

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[29]The "heart" in the Bible is like the "mind" to us. To pray in one's "heart" is simply saying the prayer in one's mind.

The Jerusalem Talmud also teaches that one can learn about prayer from Hannah.

> One might think that he must raise his voice and pray. [On the contrary, for] it was stated concerning Hannah, "Hannah was speaking in her heart." One might think that he may just meditate [during Prayer].[30] [On the contrary] Scripture states, "Only her lips moved." What does that mean? That she spoke with her lips. . . .Said R. Yose bar Haninah, "From this verse you learn four things. (a) "Hannah was speaking in her heart": from this you learn that Prayer requires concentration. (b) "only her lips moved": from this you learn that one must mouth the Prayer with one's lips. (c) "And her voice was not heard: from this you learn that one may not raise his voice and pray. (d) "And Eli took her to be a drunken woman": from this you learn a drunken person is forbidden to pray. (Jerusalem Talmud, Ber. 4:1, 7a)[31]

The Rabbis of the Jerusalem Talmud thus define four principles of prayer: to pray in a low voice, with lips moving, with concentration, and when sober.[32] The Jerusalem Talmud also comments on the silence of Hannah's prayer.

> See how high the Holy One, blessed be He, is above His world. Yet a person can enter a synagogue, stand behind a pillar, and pray in an undertone, and the Holy One, blessed be He, hears his prayers. As it says, "Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard" (I Samuel 1:13). Yet the Holy One, blessed be He, heard her prayer. (Jerusalem Talmud, Ber. 9:1, 13a)[33]

God is not so distant that even the most private of prayers can not be heard.

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[30]"Prayer" in this commentary means a specific prayer, the *Amidah*.
[31]Translation by Tzvee Zahavy, Talmud of the Land of Israel, Volume 1, *Berachot*. Editor: Jacob Neusner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).
[32]Leila Bronner, From Eve to Esther: Rabbinic Reconstructions of Biblical Women, p. 95.
[33]Translation by Tzvee Zahavy, Talmud of the Land of Israel, Volume 1, *Berachot*. Editor: Jacob Neusner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

The *Gemara* in Berachot 31b, in the Babylonian Talmud, also describes Hannah's actions as model behavior between individuals.

> *"'Therefore Eli thought she was drunk,' from this [we learn] that a drunken person is forbidden to say the Tefillah. 'And Eli said unto her, How long will you be drunk...?' R. Eleazar said: From this we learn that one who sees in his neighbor something unseemly must reprove him. And Hannah answered and said 'No, sir.' Ulla, or as some say R. Jose b. Hanina, said: She said to him: 'You are no lord in this matter, nor does the Holy Spirit rest on you, for you suspected me of this thing.' Some say, 'She said to him: You are no lord, [meaning] the Shechinah and the Holy Spirit is not with you in that you have judged me in the scale of guilt and not of merit. Do you not know that I am a woman of sorrowful spirit: I have not drunk wine nor strong drink.' R. Eleazar said: From this we learn that one who is suspected wrongfully must clear himself. 'Count not your handmaid for a daughter of Belial;*[34] *a man who says the Tefillah when drunk is like one who serves idols. It is written here, 'Count not your handmaid for a daughter of Belial,' and it is written elsewhere, 'Certain sons of Belial have gone forth from the midst of you (Deut. 13:14).' Just as there the term is used in connection with idolatry, so here* (Ber. 31b)."

Hannah is an exemplar of piety both in prayer and in action. When she is rebuked by Eli, she teaches him, and in turn us, a lesson about righteous action. Eli responds to her comments favorably by blessing her, and asking for her prayer to be granted. *"Then Eli answered and said 'Go in peace.' R. Eleazar said: From this we learn that one who suspects his neighbor of a fault which he has not committed must beg his pardon; no, more, he must bless him, as it says, 'And may the God of Israel grant your petition.* (Ber. 31b)" Perhaps, it is not only Hannah's prayer, but her pious actions that cause her prayer to be answered. For it is because of her actions that Eli is prompted to bless Hannah and to offer an intercessionary prayer on her behalf: "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant your petition."

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[34]"A daughter of Belial" is also translated as a "wicked woman."

Hannah, however, does not escape without criticism from the Rabbis. *"R. Eleazar also said: Hannah spoke insolently toward heaven, as it says, 'And Hannah prayed unto*[35] *Adonai (I Samuel 1:10).' This teaches that she spoke insolently toward heaven* (Ber. 31b)." This shows that the tone in which we pray to God is important. It is not appropriate to petition God in an angry or "insolent" manner. This belief is reflected in the *Tefillah* itself. The first three sections (*Avot, Gevurot,* and *Kedushat HaShem*) speak to God reverently. Before any petitions are made, the hierarchical nature of humanity's relationship with God is made clear. God is the Supreme Being; the only merit we claim for ourselves is that we are descended from people that the Supreme Being cared about. As it says in Deuteronomy 10:15; *"Only Adonai took delight in your ancestors to love them, and he chose their seed after them, you above all people, as it is this day."* It is not our worth that merits God's attention, but rather it is *zechut avot.* In addition, this reverential attitude is reflected not only in spoken language but also in body language. An individual shuffles forward and backwards in deference, as though to a king, stands with feet together, and bows before the presence of the Eternal as a sign of subservience and humility.

Hannah's second prayer, I Samuel 2:1-10, is also linked to the *Amidah*.

> 1. And Hannah prayed: "My heart rejoices in Adonai, my horn is exalted[36] in Adonai; my mouth is wide over my enemies; I rejoice in Your deliverance. 2. There is no holy one like Adonai; truly there is none beside You; there is no rock like our God. 3. Talk no more with lofty pride, let no arrogance cross your lips! For Adonai is an all-knowing God; by Him actions are measured. 4. The bows of the mighty are broken, And the faltering are girded with strength. 5. Those who were full have hired

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[35]"Unto" can also be understood as: "upon" or "against."
[36]Literally: "My horn is high."

themselves out for bread; and those who were hungry ceased to hunger; while the barren woman bears seven; the mother of many is forlorn. 6. Adonai deals death and gives life; casts down into Sheol, and raises up. 7. Adonai makes poor, and makes rich; He casts down, and He also lifts high. 8. He raises the poor from the dust, lifts up the needy from the dunghill, setting them with nobles, granting them seats of honor. For the pillars of the earth are Adonai's, He has set the world upon them. 9. He guards the steps of His faithful, but the wicked shall perish in darkness -- For not by strength shall man prevail. 10. The adversaries of Adonai shall be shattered; from heaven shall he thunder against them; Adonai will judge the ends of the earth; He will give power to His king, and exalt the horn of his anointed one. (I Samuel 2:1-10)

In Berachot 29a the Rabbis inquire about the origin of the tradition to say a different number of benedictions for the *Amidah* for *Shabbat, Rosh HaShanah*, and fast days.

"To what do the seven blessings said on Shabbat correspond? R. Halafta b. Saul said: To the seven voices mentioned by David [beginning with] 'on the waters.' (Psalm 29:3) To what do the nine said on New Year [Musaf Amidah] correspond? Isaac from Kartignin [Carthage, Spain] said: To the nine times that Hannah mentioned the Divine Name in her prayer.[37] For a Master has said: On New Year Sarah, Rachel, and Hannah were visited. To what do the twenty-four said on a fast day correspond? R. Helbo said: To the twenty-four times that Solomon used the expression 'prayer' etc. on the occasion when he brought the ark into the Holy of Holies.[38]"

The Rabbis feel compelled to explain why the *Amidah* has a different number of benedictions for different occasions. Similar to their explanations of the origins of the three daily services,[39] the Rabbis attribute the different number of blessings to

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[37]I Samuel 2:1-10

[38]I Kings 8:23-53

[39]While the daily *Shacharit* and *Mincha Amidah* correspond to sacrifices in the Temple cult, in Bereshit 26b the Rabbis credit the origins of saying the *Amidah* three times a day to the Patriarchs; Abraham instituted *Shacharit* (Genesis 22:3), Isaac introduced *Mincha* (Genesis 24:63), and Jacob was the first to *daven Ma'ariv* (Genesis 28:11).

different Biblical characters. Connecting Hannah and Sarah to the High Holiday *Amidah* is a natural link, because the *Torah* and *Haftarah* readings for the first day of *Rosh HaShanah* are Genesis 21:1-24 and I Samuel 1:1-2:10.

The *Amidah* is considered the example par excellence of petitionary prayer. Currently, there is no way to know of how many benedictions it originally consisted, or whether or not it was of uniform composition. It is known that by the second century CE its text closely resembled that which we have today. The beginning section is hymnic, the middle section is petitionary, and the closing section contain prayers of thanksgiving as well as two petitions[40] that are remnants of the liturgy performed in the Temple by the Priests.[41] The petitions combine prayers of nationalistic nature and for messianic salvation.[42]

Ideas expressed in Hannah's second prayer are suggestive of themes in the intermediary prayers of the *Tefillah*. In his work Netiv Binah,[43] Yissachar Jacobson quotes the Yalkut Shime'oni, (Book of Samuel, section 80) when citing Hannah's prayer as providing the original essence of the *Tefillah*.

> "We find indications of the *Shemoneh Esrei* from Hannah's prayer, and this is the midrashic interpretation: "And Hannah prayed"[sic] -- from here we learn that women are obligated to pray the Tefillah, for Hannah was praying the eighteen benedictions. "My horn is exalted in Adonai" -- this is the *Magen Avraham (Avot)*. "Adonai kills and restores life" -- resurrection of the dead (*Gevurot*). "There is none holy as Adonai" -- the Holy God (*Kedushat HaShem*). "For Adonai is a God of knowledge" -- You favor humans with knowledge (*Binah*). "They that stumbled are girded

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[40]The Priestly Benediction and the *Avodah*.
[41]Ismar Elbogan, Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History, p. 197.
[42]*Ibid.*
[43]Yissachar Jacobson, Netiv Binah, vol. 1, p. 264.

with strength" -- Who desires repentance (*Teshuvah*). "He brings down to the grave and brings up" -- The One who forgives abundantly (*Selichah*). "I rejoice in Your salvation" -- Redeemer of Israel (*Ge'ulah*). "He raises up the poor from the dust" -- the Healer of the sick (*Refuah*). "They that were full have hired themselves out for bread" -- *Birkat HaShanim*. "He will keep the feet of his pious ones" -- The One who gathers together the dispersed people Israel (*Kibbutz Galuyot*). "Adonai shall judge the ends of the earth" -- The One who loves righteousness and judgment (*Birkat HaMishpat*). "And the wicked will be silent in darkness" -- He subdues the malicious (*Birkat HaMinim*). "The bows of the mighty men" -- The security of the righteous (*Birkat HaTzadikim*). "And He shall give strength to His king" -- Builder of Jerusalem (*Birkat Yerushalayim*). "And exalt the horn of his anointed" -- The offspring of David (*Birkat David*). "There is no rock like our God" -- Hear our prayer (*Tefillah*). "Do not talk any more so very proudly" -- You we will worship in awe (*Avodah*). [This original closing line is only recited during the Musaf service when the Priestly Benediction is said.]. . . "Do not let arrogance come out of your mouth" -- Whose Name is Goodness; It is pleasing to give thanks to You (*Birkat Ho'da'ah*). "He gives strength" -- The maker of peace (*Birkat Shalom*)."[44]

Although it is difficult for liturgists to maintain that Hannah's prayer provides the pattern for the *Tefillah*, that is not the important lesson for Liberal Jews. What can be learned is the need our ancestors felt to validate the new by reference to the ancient. In Judaism, antiquity generally has authority over the innovative. Therefore, the way to authenticate the modern is to link it with established precedents.

Words, not merely sacrifices, offer humans a way to gain access to God. It is Hannah's words, rather than the sacrifices that she made at Shiloh, that cause God to take notice of, or "remember," Hannah. It is because God remembered Hannah's prayer that the traditional *Haftarah* reading for the first day of *Rosh HaShanah* became I Samuel 1:1-2:10. This follows the Torah reading of Genesis

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[44]Translation by Mona Alfi

21:1-24. Both stories tell of a barren woman who is taken notice of, and remembered by, God.

> On New Year Sarah, Rachel and Hannah were visited." From where do we know this? R. Eliezer said: We learn it from the two occurrences of the word "visiting" [פקידה], and the two occurrences of the word "remembering" [זכירה]. It is written concerning Rachel, "And God remembered Rachel," (Genesis 30:22) and it is written concerning Hannah, "And God remembered her," (I Samuel 1:19) and there is an analogous mention of "remembering" in connection with Rosh HaShanah, as it is written, "a solemn rest, a remembering of the blast of the trumpet." (Leviticus 23:24) The double mention of visiting [is as follows]. It is written concerning Hannah, "For God had visited Hannah," (I Samuel 2:21)[45] and it is written concerning Sarah, "And God visited Sarah" (Genesis 21:1). (Rosh HaShanah 11a)

Of these three women, Hannah is the only one who is both "remembered" and "visited" by God.[46] And, unlike Sarah and Rachel, she responds to her great fortune by offering a prayer of thanksgiving.

Praise for Hannah's prayer is also found outside the Talmud. In the Zohar it is written:

> There were two women in the world who composed praises to God such as men never equaled; namely, Hannah and Deborah. Hannah opened the gate of faith to the world in the words, 'He raises up the poor from the dust, etc.' (I Samuel 2:8) 'To make them sit with princes': to wit, in the place where the princes, that is the patriarchs, sit above. (Zohar, Vayikra 19b)

Just as Hannah's words "opened the gate of faith to the world" in ancient days, when we read her prayers of petition and thanksgiving on *Rosh HaShanah*, we are hopeful that her words will once again open the gate of faith for us today.

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[45]It should be noted that this verse is not included in the *Haftarah* reading.
[46]Rabbi Lisa Edwards, CCAR Journal - Summer 1997, p. 24.

Hannah's second prayer is framed by the enigmatic word קרן[47] -- "horn": "And Hannah prayed, and said: My heart rejoices in Adonai, my horn is exalted in Adonai..." (I Samuel 2:1) and "...Adonai shall judge the ends of the earth; and He shall give strength to His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed (I Samuel 2:10)." Rabbi Lisa Edwards writes that in the context of the *Rosh HaShanah* service, the use of the word "horn" in I Samuel 2:1, 10 is reminiscent of the *shofar*.[48] She also points out that קרן is the same word used for the ram's horn in the *Akedah*. The blast of the shofar, like Hannah's prayer in the *Haftarah* reading for *Rosh HaShanah*, so our ancestors believed, would cause the Gates of Heaven to open, and hasten redemption.

In the 8th century *midrashic* compilation known as the Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer a connection is made between the ram which is sacrificed in the *Akedah* and the Messianic Age. "*R. Hanina ben Dosa said: The ram that was created at twilight on the sixth day of creation -- not a part of it was without purpose. . . its two horns were made into shofars -- the left horn is the one the Holy One blew on Mount Sinai; and the right horn, larger than the left one, the Holy One will blow in the time-to-come, as it is said: 'And it shall come to pass on that day, that a large horn shall be blown' (Isaiah 27:13)*"[49]

The word קרן also has messianic implications because of its connections with the rule of David. "*Seven prophetesses . . . 'And Hannah prayed and said: my heart exults in Adonai, my horn is exalted.' [She said], 'my horn is exalted', but not*

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[47]"קרן" can also be understood to mean strength or power.
[48]Rabbi Lisa Edwards, CCAR Journal - Summer 1997, p. 24.
[49]Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer 31, translation by William Braude, The Book of Legends.

'my jar[50] *is exalted,' thus implying that the royalty of [the house] of David and Solomon, who were anointed from a horn,*[51] *would be prolonged,*[52] *but the royalty of the [house of] Saul and Jehu*[53] *who were anointed from a jar, would not be prolonged."*[54] The rabbis understand the "horn" as signifying the eternal rule of the house of David, similar to the idea of a "horn-of-plenty." On the other hand, a jar, or pitcher, holds a limited supply of oil; so the House of Saul would reign for a limited period, and would be replaced by the "prolonged" rule of the House of David.

Hannah is connected to David not only through *midrash*, but through the Book of Samuel as well. The purpose of the Book of Samuel is to establish the Divine authority given to David's rule. David is anointed by Samuel, the priest, prophet, and judge who was born because of Divine intervention. The story of Samuel's birth is important because he is the prophet who anoints first Saul, and then David as king of Israel. David's power and the eternal legitimacy of his house come from God. As noted earlier, the Song of Hannah and the Song of David share more than linguistic similarities, they also contain compatible messages. Hannah is called a "prophetess," because at the time of her song, there is no king of Israel, yet she sings: ". . . Adonai shall judge the ends of the earth; and He shall give strength to His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed." (I Samuel 2:1-10) According to the *midrash* in Meg. 14a and Yoma 73a, Hannah's

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[50]"קַנְקַנּ" can be translated as "jar," "pitcher," or "vial."
[51]David: I Samuel 16:13; Solomon I Kings 1:39
[52]As is symbolized with a horn, because a horn extends, unlike a jar.
[53]Saul: I Samuel 10:1; Jehu: II Kings 9:1
[54]Meg. 14a and Yoma 73a

prayer has a prophetic element; she is prophesying the rule of David. For the later rabbis the house of David had deeper meaning: Hannah's prayer has messianic implications. The house of David will enjoy prolonged rule, and the *mashiach ben David* will come back to restore Israel's sovereignty once again.

The "barren women" motif appears several times in the Tanach. However, Hannah's story stands out from the others because of her two prayers. What makes Hannah remarkable is not her first prayer, but her second. Hannah's moving emotional prayer in I Samuel 1:10-11 is not surprising. Of course she would beseech God for a child. What is striking is the song of thanksgiving (I Samuel 2:1-10) that she offers when she goes to Shiloh to fulfill her vow and to leave her son with Eli the Priest.

Hannah's first and second prayers can be compared to saying a blessing before eating and the *Birkat HaMazon* afterwards. While the sages instituted the practice of reciting blessings before eating, the greater obligation is the Biblical commandment to recite the *Birkat HaMazon*. Haim Halevy Donin writes that this is perhaps because ". . .*when people are sated, they are more likely to forget Him who is the source of their nourishment. It is easier to think of God and be grateful to Him when the food is still before us and we are hungry. It often happens that when people are able comfortably to meet their basic needs, they turn away from God...The after-meal grace was meant to help one resist just such tendencies. It was meant to instill, and help a person maintain, a measure of humility.*"[55] As the *midrash* in Berachot 31b relates, Hannah is like a beggar at a banquet. When she prays her

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[55]Haim Halevy Donin, To Pray As A Jew, p. 287.

first prayer, she is hungry for a child. She looks at the bounty of children that Peninnah has borne, and she craves children of her own. Her first prayer, like the blessing over bread, is brief, to the point. She speaks from her heart, and perhaps in her pain cannot offer any more than the simple plea for a child. Hannah's second prayer is different: it is an extended song of praise and thanksgiving, acknowledging the supreme power of the Deity over all who dwell below, and it is infused with humility in the face of a Supreme God.

Hannah's prayer is layered with meaning for the Rabbis. The story of Hannah is the fitting selection for the *Haftarah* of the first day of *Rosh HaShanah* for several reasons. Just as God remembered Hannah and answered her prayer, we hope that God will also remember us. In addition, Hannah's prayer speaks of Divine redemption and is a prophetic call for the messiah, themes that permeate the High Holidays. Her prayer is also connected to *Rosh HaShanah* by Isaac of Kartignin (Berachot 29a) where he cites her mentioning the Divine Name nine times in her prayer as being the reason for the nine benedictions in the *Rosh HaShanah Amidah.*

Berachot 29a is just one of several references in the Talmud that connect Hannah's prayers with the *Amidah*. The Rabbis see Hannah as modeling piety and *kavannah* in prayer. At first, it might seem surprising that Hannah's prayer is made the model for the *Tefilla*. She is a barren woman, and as such, holds a very tenuous role in the community. However, in the face of adversity, and persecution from her rival, she continues to have faith, and her faith is rewarded. She is rewarded not only with a child, but with Samuel, the man who will be responsible for establishing the house of David.

Hannah can be understood as a metaphor for the Jewish people. The Rabbis lived in a time of foreign oppression, and as persecuted people, Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving offered them words of hope and inspiration. As Scripture says: "*Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread; and those who were hungry ceased to hunger; the barren has borne seven; and she who has many children has become wretched. Adonai kills, and returns to life; He brings down to Sheol, and brings up.* (I Samuel 2:5-6)" Thus the Rabbis understood that God will right wrongs, enemies will be punished, and God will re-establish Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel. Hannah's prayer is an expression of faith that in the end, God will remember Israel, and Israel will not be "barren" forever, and the time will come when Israel will enjoy the bounty of God's gifts. What might at first glance seem like a personal prayer of thanksgiving is actually a nationalist prayer, a prayer about prosperity and redemption, and God's divine intervention for the whole people through the establishment of Davidic rule.

THE SONG OF DEBORAH

"Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day. . . "
(Judges 5:1)

Songs of thanksgiving are found throughout the Tanach praising God, miraculous events, and military victories. The Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael and the Yalkut Shime'oni name ten songs in particular.[56]

> Ten songs are mentioned in Scripture. The first, which was sung in Egypt: "You shall have a song, as in the night [of the first Passover] when a feast was hallowed" (Isaiah 30:29). The second, which was sung at the Red Sea: "Then sang Moses" (Exodus 15:1). The third, which was chanted at the well: "Then sang Israel" (Numbers 21:17). The fourth, which Moses uttered: "So Moses wrote this song" (Deuteronmy 31:22). The fifth, which Joshua recited: "Then spoke Joshua to the Lord" (Joshua 10:12). The sixth, which Deborah and Barak uttered: "Then sang Deborah and Barak, the son of Abinoam" (Judges 5:1). The seventh, which David recited: "And David spoke unto the Lord the words of this song" (II Samuel 22:1). The eighth, which Solomon recited: "Then spoke Solomon" (II Chronicles 6:1). The ninth, which Jehoshaphat uttered: "And when he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed them that should sing unto the Lord, and praise to the beauty of holiness, etc." (II Chronicles 20:21). The tenth song will be recited in the time-to-come: "Sing unto the Lord a new song, and His praise from the end of the earth" (Isaiah 42:10).[57]

The songs are listed in a chronological order[58] recording ten moments of redemption for the people of Israel. Of the ten songs cited, the most common

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[56]*Mekhilta, Be-shallach, Shirata 1,* and *Yalkut Shime'oni, Be-Shallach,* 242
[57]Translation by William Braude, The Book of Legends, p. 482.
[58]While the songs are listed in chronological order according to the Rabbinic understanding of Jewish history, the songs are not listed in chronological order according to the Tanach.

theme is redemption from a military foe; the second (Exodus 15:1), fifth (Joshua 10:12), sixth (Judges 5:1), seventh (II Samuel 22:1), and ninth (II Chronicles 20:21) songs are about redemption in a military setting. The first (Isaiah 30:29) and eighth (II Chronicles 6:1) songs are examples of Divine redemption through religious ritual. The third song is about physical redemption from possible death in the desert (Numbers 21:17). The fourth song extols the possibility of redemption through *mitzvot* (Deuteronmy 31:22). And the tenth is the song of the final redemption at the end of time (Isaiah 42:10). While each song has a different context, they all have a shared message. No matter if the setting is military, liturgical, or messianic, the songs all proclaim that the ultimate source of redemption is God. Furthermore, they are not about personal redemption, or personal victory, but redemption for the entire Israelite community. Each of these songs reflects on a particular event in light of the effect the event will have on the larger community. These songs of thanksgiving commemorate moments of redemption, or hoped for redemption, for the entire Jewish people.

Of these ten songs, only one is attributed to a woman: *"Deborah, a woman, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth,*[59] *she judged Israel at that time. She used to sit under Deborah's Palm, between Ramah and Beit El, in the hills of Ephraim, when the people of Israel came to her for decisions."* (Judges 4:4-5) The Book of Judges describes Deborah as a prophet, a judge, a military advisor, and as the composer of a song of exceptional merit. The story of Deborah (Judges 4:4-5:31) consists of three basic parts: *1)* an introduction (Judges 4:4-5), *2)* a description of the battle, and preceding events, with King Jabin of Hazor (Judges 4:6-24), and *3)* the Song

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[59]*"Eshet Lappidoth"* can also be translated as: "women of flames."

of Deborah (5:1-31). Of the three, the Song of Deborah is considered to be the oldest section because of its archaic language and poetic structure.[60] Biblical scholars consider the victory song in Judges 5 to be comparable to the victory hymns of Egyptian and Assyrian kings. Archaeological investigations of Megiddo and Taanach[61] suggest that the setting for the Deborah story was around the mid-12th century BCE .[62]

Hallel is the name given to Psalms 113-118, which are recited as a liturgical unit on the Festivals (except for *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*) and on *Hanukkah* and *Rosh Chodesh*. Psalms of praise are recited in the daily liturgy, including Psalms 145-150, but they are not called "*Hallel*." According to Pesachim 118a, *Hallel* alludes to five different themes: the exodus from Egypt, the crossing of the *Yam Suf*, the giving of the Torah, eternal life, and the coming of the Messiah. The singing of *Hallel* is of Rabbinic origin, and the Talmud attributes various origins to the practice. Just as with the *Tefillah*, Rabbinic tradition ascribes *Hallel* to antiquity, in order for it to gain acceptance. They required its recitation after the *Shacharit Amidah* on *Pesach*, *Shavuot*, *Sukkot*, *Hanukkah* and *Rosh Chodesh*.[63] While Jewish tradition ascribes King David with authorship of Psalms 113-118, the Rabbis recognize that other Biblical worthies could have

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[60]Robert Boling, *"Deborah,"* Anchor Bible Dictionary, Vol. 2, p. 113.
[61]Both Megiddo and Taanach are mentioned in the song of Deborah: "*Kings came and fought, the kings of Canaan fought: in Taanach, by Megiddo's waters -- yet won no spoil or silver there.*" (Judges 5:19)
[62]Robert Boling, *"Deborah,"* Anchor Bible Dictionary, Vol. 2, p. 113.
[63]Hallel is recited in the evening only on the first two nights of *Pesach* as part of the *Seder*, and in the synagogue at *Ma'ariv* in Sephardic and Israeli congregations (but without the traditional blessings). (Haim Halevy Donin, To Pray As A Jew, p. 267)

uttered them just as appropriately as David. By finding Biblical examples of the singing of *Hallel*, the Rabbis find a precedent for including Psalms 113-118 in the holiday liturgy.

> "Our Rabbis taught: Who uttered this *Hallel*? R. Eleazar said: Moses and Israel uttered it when they stood by the [Red] Sea. They exclaimed, 'Not unto us [etc.],'[64] and the Holy Spirit responded. 'For Mine own sake, for Mine own sake, will I do it.'[65] R. Judah said: Joshua and Israel uttered it when the kings of Canaan attacked them. They exclaimed, 'Not unto us [etc.],' and the Holy Spirit responded, etc. R. Eleazar the Modiite said: Deborah and Barak uttered it when Sisera attacked them. They exclaimed 'Not unto us [etc.],' and the Holy Spirit responded; 'For Mine own sake, for Mine own sake, will I do it.' R. Eleazar b. Azariah said: Hezekiah and his companions uttered it when Sennacherib attacked them. They exclaimed, 'Not unto us [etc.],' and the Holy Spirit responded, etc. R. Akiba said: Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah uttered it when the wicked Nebuchadnezzar rose against them. They exclaimed, 'Not unto us [etc.],' and the Holy Spirit responded, etc. R. Jose the Galilean said: Mordecai and Esther uttered it when the wicked Haman rose against them. They supplicated, 'Not unto us [etc.],' and the Holy Spirit responded, etc. But the Sages maintain: The prophets among them enacted that the Israelites should recite [*Hallel*] at every epoch and at every trouble -- may it not come to them! – and when they are redeemed, they recite it [in thankfulness] for their delivery." (Pesachim 117a)

Each example offered in the midrash is an illustration of an Israelite victory over a foreign power in situations the Rabbis believed to be historical events. This commentary also serves as an explanation as to why *Hallel* is recited on holidays that commemorate historical events (like *Pesach* and *Hanukkah*)[66] and not on

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[64]Psalms 115:1
[65]Isaiah 48:11
[66]*Rosh Chodesh* might be understood to be included in the list of "historical" holidays because in many communities *Rosh Chodesh* had special significance as a commemoration of the Israelite women's refusal to participate in the building of the Golden Calf (Jerusalem Talmud Pesachim 4:1 30d)

Rosh HaShanah and *Yom Kippur*.[67] Hallel is recited as a commemoration of a historical event, and *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur* are not historical holidays, but rather are holy-days. However, there are exceptions to this "rule" of *Hallel* being sung on historically oriented holidays. While *Hallel* is sung during *Hanukkah*, it is not on *Purim*. Three reasons are given for this; *1)* Hallel is not said for miracles that occur outside the land of Israel, and Purim commemorates an event that occurred in Persia.[68] *2)* The reading of *Megillat Esther* is considered to be the equivalent to *Hallel* in praising God (Maimonides, Hilchot Hanukkah 3:6). *3)* Purim was only a partial victory, because while the Jews were saved from being slaughtered, they continued to live under foreign rule (Arakhin 10b). The first explanation offers a flawed rationale, because *Pesach, Shavuot* and *Sukkot* all commemorate events that took place outside the land of Israel, and *Hallel* is sung during the three Pilgrimage festivals. The second and third explanations are more plausible.

The midrash in Pesachim 117a concludes: "*But the Sages maintain: The prophets among them enacted that the Israelites should recite [Hallel] at every epoch and at every trouble -- may it not come to them! -- and when they are redeemed, they recite it [in thankfulness] for their delivery.*" The holidays are not only to be commemorated, but dramatically to be relived. Booths are built and dwelt in during *Sukkot*. Symbols of redemption and slavery are displayed on the *seder* plate as the individuals around the *Pesach* table retell the story of servitude as if

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[67]Elsewhere in the Talmud (Arakhin 10b) the explanation for the absence of Hallel in the High Holiday liturgy is as follows: "*Is it seemly for the King to be sitting on His throne of judgment with the Books of Life and of Death open before Him and for the people to sing joyful praises to Him?.*"
[68]Haim Halevy Donin, To Pray as a Jew, p. 265.

they personally had lived in Egypt. On *Erev Shavuot* Jews study all night, so as to make sure that they will be awake at the time their ancestors experienced revelation at Sinai. When standing in synagogue and singing *Hallel,* modern Jews are reenacting the ancient practice of publicly praising God for having delivered them from their enemies. The concept that "*the Israelites should recite [Hallel] at every epoch and at every trouble -- may it not come to them! -- and when they are redeemed, they recite it [in thankfulness] for their delivery,*" is the basis for the Israeli Chief Rabbinate's having instituted the practice of reciting *Hallel* on the modern holidays of *Yom Atzmaut* and *Yom Yerushalayim.*[69]

The Rabbis also find Deborah's song to be infused with the prophetic spirit. In her book From Eve to Esther, Leila Bronner describes the Rabbinic view of prophecy in the following way: *"Prophecy was comprised of religious instruction and occasional predictions. The earliest individuals who were called prophets in ancient times were persons endowed with the gift of song; in later times, such individuals were consulted to discern the word of God. Although the talmudic scholars do not divide the prophetesses into two types in this way, their understanding of the nature of prophecy is implicitly informed by both of these meanings."*[70] Deborah fits into both definitions of the prophet. Leila Bronner also writes: *"The primary attribute of a prophet in the Jewish tradition is to serve as a channel of communication between the human and the divine worlds."*[71] The Song of Deborah does exactly that. Her song of praise and thanksgiving is infused with

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[69]Ibid.
[70]Leila Bronner, From Eve to Esther: Rabbinic Reconstructions of Biblical Women, p. 180.
[71]Ibid., pp. 163-164

the prophetic word of God. However, the Rabbis are troubled by the notion of a female judge and prophet. They need to find fault in her character in order to discredit her, and to deter people from seeing her as a precedent for women in leadership positions.

A midrash in the Zohar compliments Deborah while chastising her.

> "There were two women in the world who composed praises to God such as the men never equaled; namely, Hannah and Deborah . . . Deborah likewise praised the Holy King, as it is written: 'Adonai, when You went forth out of Seir, when You marched out of the field of Edom' (Judges 5:1) -- speaking in the mystery of wisdom until she began to praise herself, saying: 'Until that I Deborah arose, that I arose, a mother in Israel.' Then the spirit of prophecy left her, so that she had to say to herself, "Awake, awake, Deborah, awake, awake, utter a song' (Judges 5:12). All this happened when the men were sinful and not worthy that the spirit of prophecy should rest upon them." (Zohar, Vayikra 19b)

The Zohar explains the lack of worthy men as being the reason the prophetic spirit rested upon a woman and not a man, and maintains that women's ruling over men is a punishment for men that originates from the Garden of Eden.

> "Now on that day they were commanded concerning a certain tree and disobeyed the command. And because the woman sinned first, it was decreed that the husband should rule over her. And from that time, whenever men sin before God, those women from the side of severe judgment are charged to rule over them -- those who are called "the flame of the revolving sword[72] (Genesis 3:24), which takes the shape sometimes of males and sometimes of females, as elsewhere stated. Alas for the world when those women have sway!" (Zohar, Vayikra 19b)

However, the Zohar is not alone in criticizing Deborah in her role as prophet. The Rabbis of the Talmud also find fault with her and accuse her of *hubris*.

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[72]There is a linguistic connection with this midrash and Deborah, as noted previously, *"'Eshet Lappidoth"* can also be translated as "women of flames."

> "Rab Judah said in Rav's name: Whoever is boastful, if he is a Sage, his wisdom departs from him; if he is a prophet, his prophecy departs from him. If he is a Sage, his wisdom departs from him; [this is learned] from Hillel. For the Master said, 'He began rebuking them with words,' and he said to them 'I have heard this halachah, but have forgotten it.' If he is a prophet, his prophecy departs from him: [this is learned] from Deborah. As it is written: 'The rulers ceased in Israel, they ceased, until you rose up, Deborah, you arose a mother in Israel,' (Judges 5:7) and it is written 'Awake! Awake! Deborah, awake and sing a song!' (Judges 5:12)" (Pesachim 66b)

Two lessons can be derived from this commentary. First, Deborah *was* filled with the prophetic spirit when she sang her song of praise. And second, *hubris* can cause the prophetic spirit to depart.

The Rabbis interpret Judges 5:7 and 5:12 as meaning that the prophetic spirit left Deborah *because* she boasted about being a "mother in Israel." This suggests what is appropriate in creative or spontaneous prayers of thanksgiving. The source for all blessings is God, not the individual. While humans act in partnership with God, and can serve as a conduit for sacred work to be done on earth, ultimately, God is the source of blessing, and therefore God should be the object of praise in prayer. As was stated in the section on Hannah, prayer is hierarchical by nature. Through prayer, humans assert a relationship with God where God is acknowledged as being the Supreme Power of the universe. When prayers are recited, or *Hallel* is sung, the object is to exalt God and God's works. The problem with Judges 5:7 is that in the middle of a song of thanksgiving for God's actions, Deborah praises herself. What congregant would not feel uncomfortable if in the middle of a benediction, the rabbi praised himself for delivering a brilliant sermon or performing an act of *gemilut hasidim*? There are appropriate venues for acknowledging one's own actions; this midrash teaches that prayer is not one of them.

A more liberal stand is taken towards Deborah's leadership by the later midrash, Tanna Debei Eliyahu.

> What was the special character of Deborah that she, too, judged Israel and prophesied . . . ? In regard to her deed, I call heaven and earth to witness that whether it be a heathen or a Jew, whether it be a man or a woman, a manservant or a maidservant, the holy spirit will suffuse each of them in keeping with the deed he or she performs. (Midrash Eliahu Rabbah, chap. (9)10, p. 152)[73]

This midrash indicates that gender and social status are irrelevant in determining whether or not the Holy Spirit rests on an individual. Rather, it is the merit of one's deeds that is the determining factor.

The song of Deborah is connected to another biblical song associated with a female leader: *Shirat HaYam*. Judges 4:4-5:31 is the *Haftarah* for *Parashat Beshallach* (Exodus 13:17 - 17:16). The *Shabbat* on which *Beshallach* is read is also known as "*Shabbat Shirah*" or "*Shirah*" because the *Torah* portion contains *Shirat ha-Yam* - the "Song at the Sea." The Song of the Sea is led first by Moses, and then by Miriam. Both songs extol God for redeeming Israel and bringing defeat and devastation on a foreign enemy.

Judges 5:1-11 is an ode to the glory of the God of Israel. Judges 5:12-23 details the contribution of various tribes. Judges 5:24-31 retells the story of Yael and Sisera. The first two sections refer to the wilderness experience: in verse five the song makes a reference to the revelation at Sinai, verse eight speaks of the "forty thousand in Israel," the number of men assembled at Sinai. In verse

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[73]Translation by: Leila Leah Bronner, From Eve to Esther: Rabbinic Reconstructions of Biblical Women, p. 173.

fourteen reference is made to Amalek, Israel's foe after the crossing of the Red Sea.

> 1. On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang: 2. Praise you Adonai for the avenging of Israel, when people dedicate themselves. 3. Hear, O kings; give ear, O potentates! I will sing, will sing to Adonai; I will chant praise to Adonai, the God of Israel. 4. O Adonai, when you came forth from Seir, Advanced from the country of Edom. The earth trembled; the heavens dripped water. 5. The mountains quaked before Adonai, the God of Sinai, before Adonai, the God of Israel.
>
> 6. In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Yael, caravans ceased, and wayfarers went by roundabout paths. 7. Deliverance ceased, ceased in Israel, Till you arose, O Deborah,[74] arose, O mother, in Israel. 8. When they chose new gods; no shield or spear was seen among forty thousand in Israel!
>
> 9. My heart is with Israel's leaders, with the dedicated of the people -- Bless Adonai. 10. You riders on tawny she-asses, you who sit on saddle rugs, and you wayfarers, declare it! 11. Louder than the voice of the archers there among the watering places, let them chant the gracious acts of Adonai, his gracious deliverance of Israel. Then did the people of Adonai march down to the gates!

Verses 1-11 set the stage for the battle. The people Israel are in danger, and need a hero. The important characters are introduced, the most important being Adonai, the God of Israel. This song depicts the God of Sinai as intervening on Israel's behalf.

> 12. Awake, awake, O Deborah; awake, awake, strike up the chant! Arise, O Barak; take your captives, O son of Abinoam. 13. Then was the remnant made victor over the mighty, Adonai's people won my victory over the warriors.

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[74]Translations differ on whether this line should be translated in the second person or in the first person. The UAHC Haftarah Commentary translates Judges 5:7 in the second person feminine, but Gunther Plaut writes: "An antique poetic form of the verb. But most traditional interpreters understood: 'I rose, a Mother in Israel.'" (Gunther Plaut, The Haftarah Commentary, p. 156.)

14. From Ephraim came they whose roots are in Amalek; after you, your kin Benjamin; From Machir came down leaders, From Zebulun such as hold the marshal's staff. 15. And Issachar's chiefs were with Deborah; As Barak, so was Issachar -- Rushing after him into the valley. Among the clans of Reuben were great decisions of heart. 16. Why then did you stay among the sheepfolds? And listen as they pipe for the flocks? Among the clans of Reuben were great searchings of heart. 17. Gilead tarried beyond the Jordan; And Dan -- why did he linger by the ships? Asher remained at the seacoast, and tarried at his landings. 18. Zebulun is a people that mocked at death, and Naphtali -- on the open heights.

Deborah and Barak rise to the challenge to lead the tribes into battle. Of the twelve tribes, only nine are mentioned by name, the most notable absences being the tribes of Judah and Levi. In contrast, the prose version of the story refers to only Naphtali and Zebulun by name.

The song of Deborah is further connected to the Song of the Sea in its written style. In Sofrim, chapter 12, *halacha* 9, Rabbi Ze'iri b. Hinna, a third century Babylonian *Amora*, taught in the name of Rav that the Song of the Sea and Deborah's song are written in a similar fashion. The Masoretic tradition writes both songs in what is known as "brick on brick." For example, in the Masoretic tradition[75] Judges 5:1-5 would be written like this:

On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang:

Praise you Adonai for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves.

Hear, O kings; give ear, O potentates;

I will sing to Adonai; I will chant praise to Adonai, the God of Israel.

Adonai, when you came forth from Seir, Advanced from the country of Edom,

the earth trembled, and the heavens dripped, the clouds dropped water.

The mountains quaked before Adonai, the One of Sinai before Adonai the God of Israel.

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[75]Aron Dotan, "Masorah," The Encyclopedia Judaica, vol. 11, p. 1406.

The songs are not only aural poems, but visual poems as well.

Biblical songs of thanksgiving offer a model for today. In ancient Israel religion and politics were intertwined, the First and Second Commonwealths were kingdoms infused with a religious purpose and a Divine calling. When the priesthood or monarchy went astray, the prophetic voice would remind the people, and their rulers, of Israel's mission to be a light among the nations. And, in times of deliverance, the same voices would cry out in praise to the Redeemer.

There are times when "political" or "military" victories need to be put into a religious perspective. Pursuing peace and securing the survival of the Jewish people are intertwined with both religious and nationalistic values. Just as it is appropriate to recite *Hallel* on *Hanukkah*, it is also appropriate to recite it on *Yom Atzmaut* or after Israel's signing of peace treaties, such as the ones in recent years with the P.L.O. or with Jordan. In modern times, during periods of extreme national joy, we sometimes find ourselves lacking words adequate to offer appropriate thanksgiving to the Redeemer. When the Chief Rabbinate of Israel instituted the practice of reciting *Hallel* on *Yom Atzmaut* and *Yom Yerushalayim* it was seeing a military victory through a religious lens. For the Chief Rabbinate it was impossible to see the establishment of the State of Israel or the unification of Jerusalem as purely secular events. For them, and for many other Jews, these were monumental religious events as well.

The Book of Judges introduces Deborah with a brief yet descriptive prologue: *"Deborah, a woman, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, she judged Israel at that time. She used to sit under Deborah's Palm, between Ramah and Beit El, in the*

hills of Ephraim, when the people of Israel came to her for decisions. (Judges 4:4-5)" Deborah is identified as being both a judge and a prophet. She is the only Biblical judge who is female, and is one of only five Biblical women who are specifically called a prophet.[76] According to the Book of Judges she accompanied her general, Barak, into battle. Yet, what distinguishes the story of Deborah from that of the other Biblical Judges is not her sage advice, or heroic deeds on the battlefield. The story of Deborah is best remembered for her ode of thanksgiving to the Redeemer of Israel. Through a song, the story of Deborah transforms a historic military victory into an event with significant religious ramifications for all the people of Israel.

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[76]The four other female prophets are: Miriam (Exodus15:20), the unnamed wife of Isaiah (Isaiah 8:3), Hulda (II Kings 22:14), and Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14).

MIRIAM AND THE WOMEN

Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a drum in her hand; and all the women went out after her with hand-drums, dancing. And Miriam chanted for them: "Sing to Adonai, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has hurled into the sea.

(Exodus 15:20-21)

Like the story of Deborah and Barak's military victory, the story of the parting of the Red Sea is told twice in the Book of Exodus; first, in prose (Exodus 13:5-14:30), then in poetic form (Exodus 15:1-21). Some scholars date Exodus 15 to the twelfth century BCE, in part because of its poetic form,[77] as well as the similarity of some of its phrases with Ugaritic.[78] Ancient cultures are filled with examples of military victory songs that exult in their survival. The narrative prose account followed by a poetic retelling of the story is a literary genre that first emerged in Egypt during the period of the New Kingdom.[79] [80] Two Egyptian examples of this genre are found in the Kadesh Battle inscriptions of Rameses II, and in the Stele of Merneptah, also known as the Israel Stele.[81] [82] What makes the Song of the Sea different from other hymns of triumph, is that the protagonist is God.

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[77]Alice Laffey, An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective, p. 51.
[78]Ugaritic is a Semitic language related to Hebrew, but predates Hebrew by about one thousand years. (*Ibid.*)
[79]Nahum M. Sarna, Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Biblical Israel, p. 114.
[80]The Egyptian "New Kingdom" began around the 15th century BCE. The ending date is unclear.
[81]*Ibid.*
[82]*Ibid.*

Because of the archaic language, scholars generally believe Exodus 15 to be one of the oldest pieces of literature in the Tanach, as well as being an older tradition than the prose version of the story.[83] Exodus 15 contains two versions of the victory song; the first (Exodus 15:1-18) is led by Moses, and the second (Exodus 15:20-21) by Miriam. Literary historians recognize the Miriam version as being the older of the two traditions.[84] Carol Meyers writes: "Miriam, with her chorus of female dancers and drummers, first uttered this *shirah* (song) proclaiming God's redemptive might."[85] Meyers suggests that when Moses and the people recited the *shirah*, the full text of which appears in verses 1-18, they did so in response to Miriam's exhortation 'Sing to the Lord'. Carol Meyers regards the possible reversal of the expected chronological order as an "analepsis" (an intentional but temporary withholding of information until a later point).[86] She writes that this possible reversal is because the Song of the Sea marks the end of the Exodus narrative, and women frame the story. Exodus I begins with the story of the Hebrew midwives, Moses's mother and sister, and Pharaoh's daughter. The Exodus narrative comes to a conclusion in Exodus 15 with the story of Miriam and the women's dancing and praising God's miraculous powers at the shore of the Red Sea.

Carol Meyers supports her claim that the Miriam tradition is older by citing that in many traditions, it is the women who are the singers of poetry of many kinds.[87] This position is supported within the Tanach itself; the Song of Deborah

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[83]Carol Meyers, Learn Torah With..., Volume 2, Number 16, Feb. 3, 1996, p. 1.
[84]*Ibid.*, p. 3.
[85]*Ibid.*
[86]*Ibid.*
[87]*Ibid.*

(Judges 5:1-31); Jephthah's daughter (Judges 11:34); Hannah's prayer (I Samuel 2:1-10); the women singing upon King Saul's return from his victory over the Philistines (I Samuel 15:6-7); and, in Jeremiah's prophetic vision of Israel's restoration (Jeremiah 31:3). These songs of the composition/performance tradition are all part of the victory song genre that falls into the domain of female musicians.[88] This is supported by archaeological discoveries, at sites of the Biblical period, of ceramic statues of women (and not men) playing the hand-drum.[89] The tradition of women's singing victory songs is reinforced by the connection between Exodus 15 and Judges 5 as the *Torah* and *Haftarah* readings for *Shabbat Shirah*.

Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, is mentioned by name[90] in seven different places in the Tanach; *1)* "And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron...(Exodus 15:20-21)," *2)* "And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses... (Numbers 12:1-15)," *3)* "...and the people resided in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there (Numbers 20:1)," *4)* ". . .and she bore to Amram: Aaron and Moses, and Miriam their sister (Numbers 26:59)," *5)* "Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam by the way, after you came out of Egypt (Deuteronomy 24:9)," *6)* "For I brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and

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[88]Carol Meyers, Learn Torah With..., Volume 2, Number 16, Feb. 3, 1996, p. 3, and Alice Laffey, An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective, p. 52.

[89]Carol Meyers, Learn Torah With..., Volume 2, Number 16, Feb. 3, 1996, p. 3, and Nahum Sarna, The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus, p. 83.

[90]While the text does not name the sister of Moses in Exodus 2:4, Jewish tradition understands this as being Miriam.

Miriam (Micah 6:4)," and 7) "And the children of Amram: Aaron, and Moses, and Miriam (I Chronicles 5:29)." Except for Numbers 20 and Deuteronomy 24, Miriam is always seen, and understood, in relation to her brothers.

Exodus 15:20 identifies Miriam as both a prophet and as the sister of Aaron. Rashbam's commentary[91] on this verse points out that there is a Biblical practice of daughters' being identified as the sister of the first-born male. Three genealogies in Genesis identify women as the sister of the oldest brother: "And Zillah, she also bore Tubal-Cain, forger of every sharp instrument in bronze and iron; and the sister of Tubal-Cain was Naamah (Genesis 4:22)," "Then Esau went to Ishmael, and took, besides the wives he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth, to be his wife (Genesis 28:9)," and "And the children of Lotan were Hori and Hemam; and Lotan's sister was Timna (Genesis 36:22)." Nahum Sarna writes, "Behind this phenomenon may lie the well-documented Near Eastern social institution known as fratriarchy, in which, in certain circumstances, authority is invested in the eldest brother."[92] This understanding of the text would explain why Miriam is identified as "the sister of Aaron" and not "the sister of Moses," or "the sister of Moses and Aaron."

Rabbinic commentaries also question why Miriam is identified with Aaron and not Moses. Because Miriam's song follows Moses' song, it would seem proper to identify Miriam as the sister of Moses. However, biblical commentators make a connection between the title "prophet" and Miriam's identification as the sister of

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[91]Rashbam, Torat Chaim, commentary on Exodus 15:20.
[92]Nahum Sarna, The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus, p. 83.

Aaron. Rashi cites one explanation for the connection, as well as an explanation why Miriam is called the sister of Aaron, and not the sister of Moses.[93] Because the Bible does not give an example of Miriam's functioning as a prophet, Rashi asks when did Miriam prophesy. The question is answered in Sotah 12b and Megillah 14a. According to these texts, Miriam is called a prophet because she prophesied before Moses's birth: "When she was the sister of Aaron alone -- before Moses was born, she said, "My mother will at some time bear a son who will deliver Israel, etc." Rashi also cites Mechilta, Beshallach 10: "Because (Aaron) jeopardized his life for her by entreating on her behalf and by doing so, possibly incurring God's displeasure when she was stricken with leprosy, she is called by his name." Another association between Aaron and Miriam is that only the two of them receive the title "prophet" in the Exodus narrative (Exodus 7:1 and 15:20).[94]

Both the Tanach and Rabbinic tradition see Moses, Aaron and Miriam as a triarchy, jointly leading the Israelites through the Exodus experience. While the Levitical genealogies of Numbers 26:59 and I Chronicles 5:29 refer to Moses, Aaron and Miriam as siblings, modern scholarship suggests that Biblical genealogies are more a reflection of functional relationships than actual biological connections.[95] Biblical scholars generally believe Exodus 15:20-21 to be the earliest account of the celebration at the sea, predating the Moses version of the song in Exodus 15:1-19.[96] In both Exodus 15:20 and Numbers 12:1-15, Miriam

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[93]A.M. Silbermann, Editor, Chumash with Rashi's Commentary, volume 2, p. 79, commentary on Exodus 15:20.
[94]Moses is not called a prophet until Deuteronomy 34:10: "*And there has not arisen since in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom Adonai knew face to face.*"
[95]Rita Burns, *"Miriam,"* Anchor Bible Dictionary, vol. 4, p. 870.
[96]*Ibid.*

and Aaron are seen as a unit with power separate from, or challenging, Moses. The priestly genealogies, Numbers 26:59 and I Chronicles 5:29, create the perception that Moses, Aaron and Miriam are from the same tradition and are united in leadership.[97]

It is important to note that women were rarely named in the genealogies, that Miriam is included in the various genealogies is a testimonial to her importance in communities of the text's authors.[98] Both the genealogies and the way their deaths were recorded[99] indicate that the three were of comparable importance and stature in the Israelite tradition.[100] Midrash writes that like the patriarchs, Moses, Miriam and Aaron were all honored by dying by the kiss of God, and their corpses were not "exposed to ravage" (a sign of God's favor).[101]

Micah 6:4[102] adds divine meaning and authority to their leadership: "For I brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam." Rabbinic tradition further harmonizes the different leadership roles of the three by crediting each one as the ancestor of one of the three Israelite power structures -- prophecy, priesthood, and monarchy -- in the First and Second Commonwealths. From

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[97]*Ibid.*
[98]Alice Laffey, An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective, p. 53.
[99]Miriam - Numbers 20:1; Aaron - Numbers 20:29; Moses - Deuteronomy 34:5-12.
[100]Alice Laffey, An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective, p. 55.
[101]Moed Katan 28a
[102]The Book of Micah was written no earlier than the eighth century BCE. (Alice Laffey, An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective, p. 53)

Moses comes the tradition of the prophets, from Aaron the priesthood, and from Miriam, the Davidic dynasty.[103] It is fitting that the Rabbis would declare Miriam, who led the women in song and dance, to be the ancestor of the preeminent Biblical poet and musician, King David.

Life, like the Exodus story, is filled with years of wandering through the mundane, punctuated by moments of transcendence. Prayer and music help us to relive and reexperience those moments during our own modern day wanderings. In the Bible, songs are used as a form of tribute to God, a thanksgiving offering. Music, in Biblical times as well as in modern liturgy, is used to uplift and move the spirit out of the ordinary and into the sacred. Music is a way of "connecting" with the Creator.

As has been noted, both Miriam and Moses are linked by name to the Exodus chapter 15 accounts of the Israelite celebration through song after the crossing of the Red Sea. The first version is led by Moses:

> 1. Then sang Moses, and the people of Israel, this song to Adonai, and they spoke, saying: "I will sing to Adonai, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has hurled into the sea.
>
> 2. Adonai is my strength and song, he has become my salvation; he is my God, and I will praise him; the God of my father, and I will exalt him. 3. Adonai is a man of war; Adonai is his name. 4. Pharaoh's chariots and his army he has cast into the sea; and the pick of his officers are drowned in the Sea of Reeds. 5. The deeps covered them; they went down into the depths like a stone. 6. Your right hand, O Adonai, glorious in power; your right hand, O Adonai, shatters the foe. 7. In Your great triumph You break Your opponents; You sent forth your fury, it consumes them like straw. 8. At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up, the floods stood

[103]Sifre Numbers 78 and Exodus Rabbah 48:3-4.

up like a wall; the deeps froze in the heart of the sea. 9. The enemy said: "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; My desire shall have its fill of them. I will bare my sword, My hand shall subdue them." 10. You made Your wind blow, the sea covered them; They sank like lead in the majestic waters.

11. Who is like You, O Adonai, among the celestials? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendor, working wonders? 12. You stretched out your right hand, the earth swallowed them. 13. In Your love You lead the people You redeemed; In Your strength you guide them to Your holy abode.

14. The peoples hear, they tremble; Agony grips the dwellers of Philistia. 15. Now are the clans of Edom dismayed; The tribes of Moab -- trembling grips them; All the inhabitants of Canaan are aghast. 16. Terror and dread descend upon them; Through the might of Your arm they are as still as stone; till Your people cross over, O Adonai, till Your people cross, whom You have redeemed.

17. You shall bring them, and plant them in Your own mountain, the place You made to dwell in, O Adonai, the sanctuary, O Adonai, which Your hands established. 18. Adonai will reign forever and ever.

19. For the horse of Pharaoh, with his chariots and horsemen went into the sea, and Adonai turned back on them the waters of the sea; but the Israelites marched on dry ground in the midst of the sea (Exodus 15:1-19)."

Like the Song of Deborah, Exodus 15:1-19 is written in the "brick-on-brick" style, giving a visual impression of the parting of the sea. The version attributed to Moses has similarities and differences with the abbreviated version of the victory song attributed to Miriam:

20. Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a hand-drum[104] in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels,

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[104]A "תף" is sometimes translated as tambourine, or a timbrel. However, Carol Meyers writes that tambourines and timbrels were not yet in use in biblical times. (Carol Meyers, Learn Torah With..., Volume 2, Number 16, Feb. 3, 1996, p. 3) Nahum Sarna writes that a "תף" was used exclusively by a special class of female

dancing. 21. And Miriam chanted[105] for them: "Sing to Adonai, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has hurled into the sea. (Exodus 15:20-21)

Both versions depict an individual's leading the masses in song. In both versions there are verb-noun inconsistencies that lead to speculation about how the song was sung. The first version has the verb "שיר" in the third person masculine singular imperfect, and ambiguously includes "the children of Israel":

אָז יָשִׁיר־מֹשֶׁה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת .

For the Rabbinic commentators, the text seems to contradict itself. The word אז infers the event has already occurred, while ישיר is in the future, meaning the act had not yet happened. Targum Onqelos removes the problem by translating the verse: "Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song of praise before the Lord..."[106] Onqelos, a disciple of Rabbis Eliezer and Joshua (who were two of the teachers of Rabbi Akiba[107]),[108] dismisses the inconsistency by putting the entire

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musicians. (Nahum Sarna, The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus, p. 83)

[105]"ותען להם מרים" can also be translated as "Miriam answered them."

[106]Translation by Bernard Grossfeld, The Targum Onqelos to Exodus, volume 7, p. 41.

[107]There are variant transliterations for עקיבא in English, the most common is "Akiba", but some academics use "Akiba."

[108]Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus lived sometime between the middle of the first and second centuries, and was from Lydda where he established an academy. (Yitzhak Dov Gilat, Encyclopedia Judaica, volume 6, pp. 620-621) He was a contemporary of Joshua b. Hananiah, a Levite, ordained before the destruction of the second Temple. Joshua b. Hananiah eventually settled in Peki'in, a town between Yavneh and Lydda. He was known as both an *aggadist* and *halakhist*. Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Joshua's disagreements are best illustrated in the Mekilta. (Editorial Staff, Encyclopedia Judaica, volume 10, pp. 279-280) Rabbi Akiba (c. 50-135 CE) was born in Judea, studied at the Academy in Yavne, and established his own school in Bene Berak. (Harry Freedman, Encyclopedia Judaica, volume 2, pp. 488-489)

verse in the third person plural perfect. Rabbi Akiba understands the word "ישיר" as indicating the way the song was sung:

> On that day Rabbi Aquiba expounded: At the time the Israelites ascended from the Yam Suf, they desired to utter a song; and how did they render the song? Like an adult who reads the Hallel (for the congregation) and they respond after him with the leading word (the heads of chapters). (According to this explanation) Moses said: "I will sing unto the Lord," and they responded, "For he has triumphed gloriously"; Moses said: "For He has triumphed gloriously," and they responded, "I will sing unto the Lord." (Sotah 30b)[109]

According to this commentary, the future tense of "שיר" indicates the Israelite desire to sing, and the use of the plural in the Targum reflects the way the song was rendered. According to Rabbi Akiba, the Song of the Sea is sung in the same manner as Hallel.

In contrast, in the second version of the song, even though Miriam is presented as leading the women, the verb "שיר" is in the masculine plural imperative: וְתַעַן לָהֶם מִרְיָם שִׁירוּ לַיהוָה. Here the verb may be addressed to both men and women. If only women were invited to sing, the feminine plural imperative would have been appropriate. This second version also uses the word: וְתַעַן - meaning "responded" or "answered," implying an antiphonal or choral rendering of the song.

Rashi's comments on Exodus 15:20-21 reflect Rabbi Akiba's interpretation of Exodus 15:1-20. However, while Rashi also understands the song as having been sung in a manner similar to Hallel, he writes that it was sung twice, first

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[109]Translation by Bernard Grossfeld, The Targum Onqelos to Exodus, volume 7, p. 41.

with a men's choir led by Moses, and then with a woman's choir led by Miriam: "Moses sang[110] the song for the men, he sang, and they responded after him, and Miriam sang for the women." Rashi's commentary on Exodus 15:21 implies that "Sing to Adonai, for He has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has hurled into the sea" (Exodus 15:21) is only the lead-in to the rest of Miriam's song, and that, only the first line of the song is recorded because her song is identical to the one sung by Moses.

Philo's[111] interpretation of Exodus 15:1-21 differs yet again from Rabbi Akiba's. According to Philo in Moses, 2 (3) .34, the song was chanted by mixed choirs composed of both men and women.[112] Also according to Philo in De Vita Contemplativa, 11, mixed choirs existed among the Essenes.[113] From Sotah 48a, it is known that the Rabbis strongly disapproved of mixed choirs, for they would likely have promoted immodest behavior between men and women. Surprisingly, the Commentaries do not indicate disapproval of Miriam's and the women's singing, and do not consider it immodest or inappropriate. Rather Miriam and the women are praised for their actions.

The song attributed to Miriam differs from the song attributed to Moses in another significant way: Miriam's song includes the use of musical instruments and dance. Rashi questions as why the women had musical instruments with

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[110]Literally: said.
[111]Philo, a Jewish-Hellenistic philosopher, lived in Alexandria, Egypt, from around 20 BCE to 50 CE.
[112]Louis Ginzberg, Legends of the Jews, volume 6, translated by Paul Radin and Henrietta Szold, p. 13.
[113]*Ibid.*

them. After all, when fleeing from slavery through the desert, drums or timbrels would prove an encumbrance. Rashi cites[114] the Mechilta D'Rabbi Ishmael, *Beshalach* 10, in accounting for the timbrels: "The righteous women of that generation were sure that the Holy One would perform miracles for them, and they brought timbrels with them from Egypt." Packing the timbrels was an act of faith. The women were so strong of faith that they expected miracles to occur, and they prepared themselves to praise God with music and song.

The use of instruments and dancing adds a dimension that is lacking in Moses's song. Dancing is a whole body experience. The second image of the victory song in Exodus 15 is not dissimilar to the image of David dancing in victory through the streets of the City of David.

> 5. And David and all the house of Israel played before Adonai on all types of instruments made of cypress wood, on lyres, and on lutes, and on tambourines, and on rattles, and on cymbals . . . 14. And David danced before Adonai with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod. 15. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the Ark of Adonai with shouting, and with the sound of the shofar. (II Samuel 6:5, 14-15)

Exodus 15:20-21 creates a similar impression of Miriam's and the women's celebrating God with wild abandon.

Psalm 149 reinforces the sentiment that it is good to praise God with body and soul:

> 1. Hallelujah! Sing to Adonai a new song, His praise is sounded in the congregation of the pious. 2. Let Israel rejoice in the One who made him;

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[114]A.M. Silbermann, Editor, Chumash with Rashi's Commentary, volume 2, p. 79, commentary on Exodus 15:20-21.

let the children of Zion be joyful in their Sovereign. 3. Let them praise God's name in the dance; let them sing praises to Him with the tambourine and lyre. 4. For Adonai takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation. 5. Let the pious be joyful in glory; let them sing aloud upon their beds. 6. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two edged sword in their hand; 7. To execute vengeance upon the nations, and chastisement upon the peoples; 8. To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; 9. To execute upon them the judgment written; this is an honor to all his pious ones. Hallelujah! (Psalm 149)

Psalm 149 is similar in tone to the Song of the Sea in glorifying God's administering justice upon Israel's enemies. Verse 3 in particular, shows similarities with Exodus 15:20-21 in extolling the use of dance and instrumental music for the praise of the Deity.

Three other Biblical examples reflect the ancient custom of women's publicly performing with music and dance. Judges 11:34[115] and I Samuel 16:6[116] are examples of women's singing and dancing after a military victory, and Jeremiah 31:3[117] offers a prophetic vision anticipating the time of Israel's restoration when the young women will dance and sing with drums once again. These incidents in Exodus 15:20-21, Judges 11:34, and I Samuel 16:6 all occurred after military triumphs. Exodus 15:20-21 is distinguished, however, God is

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[115]"*And Jephthah came to Mizpah to his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with tambourines and with dances; and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter.*" (Judges 11:34)

[116]"*And it came to pass as they came, when David returned from slaying the Philistine, that the women came from all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joyful song, and with lutes.*" (I Samuel 16:6)

[117]"*Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin of Israel; you shall again be adorned with your tambourines, and shall go out dancing with those who make merry.*" (Jeremiah 31:3)

regarded as being the sole author of the victory. Judges 11:34, and I Samuel 16:6 acclaim victories won by flesh and blood.

God is portrayed in Exodus as יְהוָה אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה - Adonai, a man of war, completely in charge and ruling over. Rabbinic tradition supports that perspective, and views Moses, Aaron, and Miriam as having been sent to serve the Israelites as God's personal emissaries. The Rabbis teach that Israel benefited because of the merit of each of the three siblings.

> Furthermore, did I not assign to you three special tutors, Moses, Aaron, and Miriam? It was due to the merit of Moses that you ate the manna, [a dainty] which the holy patriarchs had never set eyes on; as it is said, 'And He fed you with manna, which you did not know, neither did your fathers know (Deuteronomy 8:3).' Moreover, it was due to the merit of Aaron that I set clouds of glory about you; as it is said: 'He spread a cloud for a covering (Psalm 105:39).' . . . And again, the well[118] was due to the merit of Miriam, who sang by the waters of the Red Sea; as it is said: "And Miriam sang (va-ta'an) unto them: Sing unto Adonai (Exodus 15:21)." And by the waters of the well, then sang this song, "Rise up, O well, sing ('enu) unto it (Numbers 21:17)." (Numbers Rabbah 1.2)[119]

According to this *midrash*, the Israelites are rewarded for Miriam's singing at the shore of the sea by receiving a magical well that traveled with them throughout their wanderings in the desert. The Rabbis find a connection between Miriam and the well in *Parashat Chukat*, Numbers 20-21.

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[118]Throughout Rabbinic tradition, Miriam is associated with water. The well, or "Miriam's well", is traditionally believed to have accompanied the Israelites throughout their wanderings in the desert. (H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, Editors, Midrash Rabbah: Numbers, Volume 1, Translated by: Judah Slotki, pp. 3-4)

[119]Translation adapted from H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, editors, Midrash Rabbah: Numbers, Volume 1, translated by: Judah Slotki, pp. 3-4.

> 1. Then came the people of Israel, the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin in the first month; and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there. 2. And there was no water for the congregation; and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. (Exodus 20:1-2)

Immediately following Miriam's death, the Israelites find themselves without water and rebel against Moses and Aaron. The crisis is eventually handled, and Israel sings a song of thanksgiving.

> 16. And from there they went to Beer; which is the well where Adonai spoke to Moses: 'Gather the people together, and I will give them water.' 17. Then Israel sang this song: 'Spring up, O well; sing ('enu) unto it; 18. The princes dug the well, the nobles of the people excavated, with the scepter, with their poles. And from the wilderness they went to Mattanah; 19. And from Mattanah to Nahaliel; and from Nahaliel to Bamoth; 20. And from Bamoth in the valley that is in the country of Moav, to the top of Pisgah, which looks toward Jeshimon. (Numbers 21:16-20)

The *midrash* from Numbers Rabbah 1.2 draws a connection between a verb that appears in Exodus 15:21 and Numbers 21:17.[120] The midrash is emended according to Radal (David Luria)[121] who makes the point that the words "ותען" (Exodus 15:21) and "ענו" (Numbers 21:17) are analogous because they have the same root. "ענה" can be translated as reply, answer, respond, or sing. In both Exodus 15:21 and Numbers 21:17 "ענה" is translated as "sing" and implies a choral or antiphonal rendering of the song. A form of "ענה" is used as meaning singing, chanting, or singing responsively, twelve times in the Tanach.

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[120]Another connection made between Miriam and the magical well is through a play on the word "מרים" which can mean "Miriam" or "bitter water." The first incident of the Israelites encountering bitter waters immediately follows Miriam's song in Exodus 15:20-21. The second incident marks the establishment of Miriam's Well (Zohar II:190b)

[121]H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, editors, Midrash Rabbah: Numbers, Volume 1, translated by Judah Slotki, footnote 2, p. 4.

1) And he (Moses) said: "It is not the sound of the tune of triumph, or the sound of the tune of defeat; it is the sound of song that I hear." (Exodus 32:18)

2) And Miriam chanted for them: "Sing to Adonai, for He has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider He has hurled into the sea. (Exodus 15:21)

3) Then Israel sang this song: "Spring up, O well; sing to it!" (Numbers 21:17)

4) The women sang as they danced, and they chanted: Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands. (I Samuel 18:7)

5) And the courtiers of Achish said to him: "Why, that's David, the king of the land! That's the one of whom they sing as they dance: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." (I Samuel 21:12)

6) Remember, he is the David of whom they sang as they danced: "Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands." (I Samuel 29:5)

7) In that day they shall sing of it (the earth): "A vineyard of Delight." (Isaiah 27:2)

8) I will give her vineyards from there, and the valley of Achor as a plowland of hope; there she shall respond (sing) as in the days of her youth, when she came up from the land of Egypt. (Hosea 2:17)

9) A Song. A Psalm for the Korahites. For the leader, on mahalath leannoth.[122] A Maskil of Heman the Ezrahite. (Psalm 88:1)

10) My tongue will sing your word; for all your commandments are just. (Psalm 119:172)

11) Sing to Adonai a song of praise; chant a hymn with a lyre to our God, who covers the heavens with clouds, provides rain for the earth, makes mountains put forth grass. (Psalm 147:7)

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[122]The meaning of "*Mahalath Leannoth*" is uncertain; however, there is an association with singing in the context of this verse.

12) They sang responsively in praising and giving thanks to Adonai: For God is good, God's grace for Israel is eternal. And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised Adonai, because the foundation of the house of Adonai has been laid. (Ezra 3:11)

All twelve examples reflect the genre of singing and dancing in praise of God.[123] Examples 4-6 present a picture similar to Exodus 15:20-21, with women serving as the performers of the music and the dance.

The Zohar calls the Song of the Sea the "Song of the Shekinah" (Zohar II:54b) and considers it to be feminine because it called a "שירה" rather than a "שיר."[124] While Exodus 15 describes both men and women participating in the singing of *Shirat HaYam*, the Zohar goes further and includes even infants and embryos as participating.

A baby lay on its mother's knees and an infant suckled at its mother's breast; when they beheld the Shekhinah, the baby raised its neck and the infant released the nipple from its mouth, and they exclaimed, 'This is my God Whom I will glorify.' . . . Even the embryos in their mothers' wombs uttered a song . . . The abdomen became for them a window of light and they could see. (Sotah 30b; Zohar II:55b)

The Mechilta D'Rabbi Ishmael presents a similar image:

R. Meir says: "Even embryos in their mothers' wombs opened up their mouths and recited a song before the Omnipresent: 'Bless God in full assemblies, even the Lord, you who are from the fountain of Israel' (Psalm 68:27). And it was not Israel alone that recited the song before the Omnipresent. Even the ministering angels did so: 'O Lord, our Lord, how glorious is Your name in all the earth, whose majesty is rehearsed above the heavens' (Psalm 8:2) (Mechilta D'Rabbi Ishmael 26:17)[125]

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[123]There is an exception with the first example, which sings praises not to Adonai, but to an idol.

[124]Judith Antonelli, In the Image of God: A Feminist Commentary on the Torah, p. 171.

[125]Translation by Jacob Neusner, Mekhilta According to Rabbi Ishmael: An Analytic Translation, p. 180.

In both accounts, the Song of the Sea is seen as the incomparable song of praise to God.

Exodus 15 offers modern Jews a glorious example from ancient Israel where singing and dancing with musical instruments were used in a way to glorify God. According to *midrash*, not only was the parting of the Red Sea miraculous, but so was the song, in which even infants, embryos and the heavenly angels joined.

CONCLUSION

"Let them praise God's name in the dance:
let them sing praises to God with the tambourine and lyre.
For Adonai takes pleasure in his people:
God will beautify the humble with salvation."

(Psalm 149:3-4)

While most Biblical women are portrayed solely as "wife," "sister," "daughter," or "mother;" Miriam, Deborah, and Hannah are also understood independent of these roles, and are seen by Rabbinic Judaism as women who participate in the public worship of God. The Talmud includes them in the list of female prophets: "Our rabbis taught: Forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses prophesied to Israel. . . Seven prophetesses. Who were these? -- Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah and Esther (Megillah 14b)." According to Leila Bronner, "the primary attribute of a prophet in the Jewish tradition is to serve as a channel of communication between the human and divine worlds. The Hebrew for (male) prophet, *navi'*, means 'to call, announce,' and thus to speak the word of God."[126] The instrument of the prophet in spreading the word of God is his, or her, voice.

For the modern Jew, the Biblical portrayal of women's dancing and singing in public are so striking, in large part, because of the rabbinic injunctions of *Kol Isha*. The Talmud warns that listening to women's voices will lead to sinful thoughts.

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[126]Leah Leila Bronner, From Eve to Esther: Rabbinic Reconstructions of Biblical Women, pp. 163-164.

> Samuel said: A woman's voice is a sexual incitement, as it says: "For sweet is your voice, and your countenance is comely (Song of Songs 2:14)" (Berachot 24a).
>
> 'Thus said Samuel,' he replied, '[To listen to] a woman's voice is indecent.' (Kiddushin 70a).

This prohibition against listening to a woman's voice is understood by the Shulchan Aruch, Orah Hayyim 75:3, as well as by later orthodox rabbis, as the reason why women are forbidden from singing in synagogue choirs, serving as cantors, reading Torah in a mixed setting, and for some extremists, even speaking in a public venue. Yet, as we have seen, the Bible gives examples of women's worshipping in public (I Samuel 2:1-10) as well as singing God's praises (Judges 5:1-31) or performing in, as well as leading, a choir (Exodus 15:20-21).

Important principles of Jewish worship can be derived from each of these Biblical characters. From Hannah one can learn the importance of offering thanks to God, and fulfilling one's vows to the Creator, as well as the importance of piety in both prayer and as a way of life. Hannah also serves as a model for *kavanah* during prayer. We learn from her example that the intention behind one's words can be as important as the words themselves in creating a prayerful environment.

The Song of Deborah also offers many lessons about prayer. From the story of Deborah it can be learned that prayer has the power to transform political and military events into religious wonders. The Song of Deborah is a reminder to us that song is an important device in helping us to retain not only the memory of a battle, but the emotions as well. A modern example of the Song of Deborah can be seen in the song "Yerushalyim Shel Zahav," written by Nomi Shemer. "Yerushalyim Shel Zahav" has essentially become a part of the *Yom Yerushalayim*

liturgy because it so eloquently captures the mood in Israel following the reunification of Jerusalem, as surely as the Song of Deborah captured the spirit of her people following their triumphant victory.

While Miriam's song is discussed in Rabbinic commentaries, the full impact of these two verses are really only being felt since the ordination of women. Miriam's song has taken on mythic proportions in feminist and Jewish renewal circles. Many poems and songs have been written about it, elevating her song to that of Moses' Song of the Sea.

Even so, perhaps one of the greatest messages to be gleaned from Miriam's song can be learned from the Mechilta D'Rabbi Ishmael, *Beshalach* 10, in explaining the presence of the timbrels: "The righteous women of that generation were sure that the Holy One would perform miracles for them, and they brought timbrels with them from Egypt." Miriam and the women had faith in God's ability to deliver them from oppression, and were prepared to praise God when salvation occurred. Faith is oftentimes hard to find in today's rationalist world. People want "proof" before they are willing to believe in God's power, rather than taking a leap of faith, or being willing to be like Nachshon[127] and take the first step into the Sea. Part of the miracle of the Sea was the ability of the people to be open and prepared for the possibility of a miracle to occur.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote in his book Quest for God: Studies in Prayer and Symbolism, "Worship is a way of living, a way of seeing the world in

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[127]Mekhilta, Behallach 5; Sotah 37a

the light of God. To worship is to rise to a higher level of existence, to see the world from the point of view of God. In worship we discover that the ultimate way is not to have a symbol but to be a symbol, to stand for the divine. The ultimate way is to sanctify thoughts, to sanctify time, to consecrate words, to hallow deeds."[128] With the songs of Hannah, Deborah, and Miriam, the Tanach illustrates a way to worship God with a full heart, bringing the Divine closer to the human experience through prayer, music, and song. The Rabbis found inspiration in these prayers and used them as proof-texts when crafting liturgy. Through liturgy, the Rabbis help the Jew sanctify time, words and deeds. What was true for the ancient Israelites, and for the Rabbis of old, is also true for the modern Jew: through prayer the individual can find a way to transcend the ordinary and encounter the Divine.

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[128]Abraham Joshua Heschel, Man's Quest for God: Studies in Prayer and Symbolism, xii (1954).

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