

The *Ideal* Israelite Woman:
A Model From Early Antiquity
With Reflections For Modernity

MARE Capstone Curriculum
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**denotes full lesson plan

Acknowledgments

It is a wonderful feeling to know that I have completed this MARE Capstone Curriculum and that I will receive my Master of Arts in Religious Education. I know, with certainty, that I have not reached this point on my own. I am filled with much gratitude and love for those who have traveled this long journey with me: G-d, the Source of my strength, inspiration and courage; my supportive thesis advisor and Director of the New York School of Education, Jo Kay, who has guided my steps from the time I arrived at the School of Education at HUC-JIR, N.Y.; the members of my congregation, Temple Shalom in Wheeling, W.V., who have been supportive of my efforts; my friends who have encouraged me along the way, especially Kate, Marina and Sherry; my family, who has believed in me and my abilities, especially my Mom and my Aunt Edie; my daughter Noa, who teaches me each day how to be a better teacher; and my wonderful husband, Lee, who would love me with or without this degree. To each of you I humbly say, thank you – *todah rabah!*

Curriculum Rationale

Jewish women today are pulled in many directions at once. We are called upon to be daughters, wives, mothers, friends, employees, carpoolers and spiritual seekers, to name just a few roles. We are expected to maintain our households while being gainfully employed. We experience challenges and difficult moments. We are called upon to solve problems and multi-task at the same time. Sometimes life can feel overwhelming and too challenging. We need a place to go for guidance and strength.

One place to look for such answers is the Hebrew Bible, for it contains a wealth of knowledge and provides positive Jewish female role models – role models with which some modern Jewish women are unfamiliar. By looking at our wisdom literature – namely *Eishet Chayil* – A Woman of Valor - and other proverbs, by studying our four matriarchs, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, and by focusing on Ruth and Naomi, Jewish women will find strong women who can serve as a source of inspiration and strength, a source of encouragement and pride. By studying the female Israelite women mentioned above, American Reform Jewish women will become empowered and realize that they are not alone with their struggles. They will realize that their ancestors also had burdens, and overcame them, offering hope that they will, too.

In addition, the Jewish women who participate in this *rosh chodesh* study group will understand that their biblical ancestors – like they – played a major role in their society. They will understand that biblical women were empowered in their personal lives – they were loved and respected by their husbands and children, oversaw their households, were in charge of workers, and contributed significantly to the welfare of their family through agrarian endeavors, manufacturing and trade.

By studying Israelite women, modern Reform Jewish women will see that their predecessors were part of the public sphere, were respected by their community, had power over others, and even inherited and owned property. Biblical women were empowered to make decisions, take initiative, be assertive and they showed great courage.

In addition, the members of the *rosh chodesh* group will learn that their ancestors were physically strong, physically beautiful and exhibited great strength of character. Through the texts, they will see that Adonai noticed women and intervened on their behalf.

Through the eight study sessions of this curriculum, American Reform Jewish women will be able to debunk the myth that biblical women played a minor role in society, had little control over their own lives, and were merely subordinate to men. Rather, they will understand that biblical women were vital to society.

By studying the women mentioned above, learners will also see that the biblical women studied – despite their importance and significance - were nonetheless imperfect, flawed people. Recognizing this will help modern women relieve some of the pressure they feel to be perfect people.

As descendants of the women of the Hebrew Bible, it is important that we gather together to study and analyze biblical women – not only in order to attain a greater understanding of the important role women played in biblical society – but also to connect with them and be strengthened and empowered by them. We will find ourselves in the texts, thus increasing our own connection to Judaism as 21st century American Reform Jewish women.

As we come together for eight learning sessions, the women of the *rosh chodesh* group will not only learn about their biblical ancestors; they will also come together and create their own community - a safe space where they can freely explore and express their thoughts and

emotions. When reading about Israelite women, a wide range of thoughts and emotions will emerge as they relate the biblical narratives to their own lives. This community of learners - with shared values, traditions and a collective historical past – will be supportive and allow each woman the opportunity to relate to the texts in her own unique way.

By coming together as a cohort, the women will have the opportunity to explore and grow as individuals and as a group. They will support and nurture each other's journey as they find themselves in the biblical texts. Being part of this *rosh chodesh* group will strengthen the participants' self-esteem, self-respect, her connection with her biblical predecessors and Judaism, in general.

Enduring Understandings

1. Israelite women had important roles in biblical society.
2. G-d spoke to Israelite women and intervened on their behalf.
3. Israelite women were intelligent, competent, respected, and also had character flaws.

Essential Questions

1. How did Israelite women spend their time?
2. What contribution did they make to their families and Israelite society?
3. What was the nature of the Israelite husband/wife relationship?
4. What role did Israelite women play in the lives of their children?
5. Did *Adonai* notice or intervene on behalf of Israelite women?
6. What do we know about the physical attributes of Israelite women?
7. Why would a 21st century American Reform Jewish woman be interested in her biblical ancestors?
8. How does the life of a 21st century American Reform Jewish woman compare with that of an Israelite woman? Are there similarities? Differences?

Goals

The women who participate in this *rosh chodesh* study group will understand that Israelite women played important roles in Israelite society. More specifically, they will:

- a. Understand that Proverb 31:10-31 (*Eishet Chayil* – A Woman of Valor) is one of the most complimentary passages to women in the Hebrew Bible;
- b. Understand that many proverbs praise women and show respect for mothers and wives;
- c. Be familiar with the biblical narratives found in the book of Genesis that discuss the four matriarchs, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, and understand the significant roles they played in their marriages, families and society, as a whole;
- d. Understand that Ruth and Naomi were brave and courageous women who modeled kindness, faith and loyalty;
- e. Discuss their concepts of the *ideal* American Reform Jewish woman and see how they compare with the *ideal* Israelite women studied during the course.

Letter To The Teacher

Shalom,

I am pleased that you have chosen this curriculum. I hope you and your students will not only learn together, but that your lives will be enriched and strengthened by its contents.

I have designed this course for women, particularly for a women's *rosh chodesh* group comprised of American Reform Jewish women. This said, you should feel free to use the curriculum in other settings, as well.

This course focuses on women of the Hebrew Bible and highlights their many contributions to Israelite society. It recognizes the important and varied roles women played and it debunks the myth that women in Israelite society were invisible, impotent and insignificant figures. It is my hope that by the end of this course, you, and the women who study with you, will not only understand and appreciate the vital role women played in Israelite society, but that **you** will feel empowered and strengthened, too.

The course begins by looking at texts from the book of Proverbs, beginning with *Eishet Chayil* – A Woman of Valor. It then moves onto other proverbs, some portraying women positively and others, not so much. From there, the direction shifts to the Genesis narratives, focusing on our four matriarchs — Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah. The lives of Ruth and Naomi, as described in the book of Ruth, are then explored. Finally, the curriculum seeks to help students draw connections between the *ideal* ancient Israelite woman and the *ideal* American Reform Jewish woman.

I firmly believe that by studying the biblical women listed above, you and your students will understand that biblical women were empowered in their personal lives, contributed to the welfare of their families, and were respected by members of the larger community. I trust that

you will recognize the power women had and appreciate their decision-making abilities. I also hope that you will recognize the significance of Adonai intervening on behalf of women. As you move through this curriculum, you and your students will not only see the assets (and liabilities) of the women mentioned above, but you will also find yourselves in the text. And when you do, you will be strengthened, encouraged and motivated by your biblical ancestors.

In this course, I envision the students studying biblical texts, breaking into discussion (*chevruta*) groups and keeping a journal. It is my hope that as the instructor, you will continually help the women draw connections between themselves and their biblical predecessors. By doing so, you will not only help bring the texts to life, but you will strengthen the connection your students have with Judaism.

Finally, it is important that you cultivate a positive group experience. By creating a safe space for your students to freely explore and express their thoughts and emotions, you will enhance their experience. This, in turn, will deepen the level of learning, strengthen the participants' self-esteem and self-respect, and nurture the relationships the women form with each other.

As Rabbi Tarfon said in *Pirkei Avot*, “The day is short, the task is great . . .” and yet, **you can do it** — you can have a positive impact on the lives of Jewish women.

I wish you every success! *B'hatzlacha!*

Rabbi Beth Jacowitz Chottiner

Lesson 1: *Eishet Chayil* – A Woman of Valor

Introduction

The book of Proverbs contains much female imagery – some negative, some positive. The most extensive description of the *ideal* Israelite woman in the book of Proverbs is found in vv. 31:10-31, with the description of the *Eishet Chayil*.

These twenty-two verses have come to be known as *A Woman of Valor*. In some Jewish homes, it is customary for a husband to recite this laudatory poem to his wife on Friday nights, prior to the Sabbath meal.

This acrostic poem is quite complimentary of women and sets a high standard for a wives and mothers. Some biblical scholars see this literary piece as the prescribed goal toward which wives are to strive (Keil and Delitzsch, *COT*, 326), setting a high standard that was a reality in many Jewish homes (Cohen, *PROVAC*, 211; Oesterley, *TBOP*, 287). Others believe it was part of a training manual used to educate young women, regarding the proper way to conduct themselves when married (Crook, *MM*, 139). And still others do not believe this *perfect* woman ever existed.

While it is not possible to move beyond speculation and theory and arrive at a definitive answer as to the origin and intent of this passage, it is possible to use these biblical verses to understand the traits and attributes that were deemed desirable and admirable for women in ancient Israelite society. This is particularly true given the placement in the Hebrew Bible, for Proverbs is filled with advice, suggestions and guidelines for *correct* living.

One point that scholars and laity can agree upon is that this poem depicts the Israelite woman in a positive light. It extols the virtues of the *Eishet Chayil*, while enumerating the many activities in which she is engaged: it speaks of the way she tends to her family and contributes to the well being of her household; it describes her business ventures and financial gains; it also provides an insight into her relationship with her husband, children, and workers. There is no doubt that the *Eishet Chayil* has a great deal of responsibility and keeps long hours. And through it all, she helps those in need, treats others with respect, and remains loyal to Adonai.

Whether one concludes that this complimentary poem describes a woman who was real or imagined, the words of one scholar are worth noting: “It has been truly said, ‘Nothing in ancient literature equals this remarkable attestation to the dignity and individuality of woman’” (Cohen, *PROVAC*, 211).

There is value in starting your first *rosh chodesh* session with this text. It portrays an Israelite woman in very positive terms, women will be able to relate to her as a multi-tasker, and they will feel empowered by such a laudatory description of a biblical woman.

Enduring Understandings

- *The *Eishet Chayil* is a complimentary description of a woman in the Hebrew Bible.
- *Israelite women had power in their marriages and in their households.
- *Israelite women were involved in business dealings and land ownership.
- *Israelite women were wise, kind, physically strong, and respected Adonai.

Essential Questions

- *What are the strengths and characteristics of the *Eishet Chayil*?
- *What contributions does the *Eishet Chayil* make to her household and Israelite society?
- *What does the *Eishet Chayil* poem say about the value of Israelite women?

Questions To Be Addressed

- *Are you surprised that the *Eishet Chayil* had so much responsibility and played such a vital role in her family's structure?
- *Of the many responsibilities of the *Eishet Chayil*, which one challenges your preconceived notion of the Israelite woman the most?
- *In what ways do you relate to the *Eishet Chayil*?
- *Is the *Eishet Chayil* a role model, or paradigm, for today's modern American Reform Jewish woman? Why? Why not?
- *Would you like your significant other to read the *Eishet Chayil* passage to you on Friday night? Why? Why not?

Evidence of Understanding

- *The women in the group will be able to discuss the *Eishet Chayil*, her many roles, and the contributions she made to her family and Israelite society.
- *The women in the group will be able to discuss the various attributes of the *Eishet Chayil* and indicate the ways in which they, as American Reform Jewish women, do, or do not, relate to her.
- *The women in the group will be able to write a journal entry that speaks to the impact this study session had on their lives, self-image, psyche, or understanding of women in biblical history.

Materials Needed

- *For use by instructor: Detailed Textual Notes on *Eishet Chayil* (pp. 14-36 of this document)
- *Handout for students: Linear Translation of Proverbs 31:10-31 (pp. 37-38 of this document)
- *Flip chart and markers
- *List of "Questions To Be Addressed"
- *Journal (each woman will supply her own)
- *Paper, in case someone forgets her journal
- *Pens and pencils

Timeline (1 ½ hours)

- 7:00-7:10 Welcome and Course Introduction
The instructor will introduce herself and share some information about herself, her Jewish background and her own Jewish journey, thus helping to create a safe, trusting and open environment.
- She will then introduce this eight-week curriculum, explaining why she thinks the group will enjoy studying this topic. She will encourage the *rosh chodesh* group members to see if they can “find themselves” in the texts, and explain that journaling will be part of each class.
- 7:10-7:20 Group Member Introductions
In order to help create a cohort of American Reform Jewish female learners, the instructor will ask each group member to introduce herself, indicate what she hopes to get out of the *rosh chodesh* group, tell one thing about her own Jewish journey, and indicate one belief she has about biblical women.
- 7:20-7:40 *Chevruta* Study
*Hand out copies of *Eishet Chayil* to everyone
*Ask the women to break into groups of two (three if necessary)
*Instruct the students to read through the text, interpret it, and discuss
- 7:40-8:15 Group Discussion
*The instructor will facilitate this portion of the session by:
a) asking one member from each *chevruta* to summarize their thoughts on the text; instructor will write answers on flip chart
b) furthering the group discussion by asking the women the “Questions to be Addressed”; answers to these questions will also be written on the flip chart
c) entertaining other questions that arise during the discussion
- 8:15-8:25 Journaling
*Ask each member to reflect on what she has learned, how she feels at this moment, and/or the impact tonight’s text study had on her identity as an American Reform Jewish woman.
- 8:25-8:30 Concluding Remarks
*This is an opportunity for anyone in the group, including the instructor, to share any last minute thoughts or feelings about the class or material covered. The instructor can also use this time to convey to the students the topic for the next class.

**Detailed Textual Notes On *Eishet Chayil*
For Use By Instructor
To Lead Group Discussion During Class**

31:10: “A capable wife, who can find? Her purchase price is far above pearls of coral.”

A capable wife can also be translated as *a woman of valor*, *a woman of strength*, *a valiant woman*, *a worthy wife*, and *a powerful wife*.¹ The use of the word חַיִּל, in this verse, is notable, for in other biblical passages, it is used in a military context.² A. Wolters comments on this, writing, “*eshet chayil* . . . in this context should probably be understood as the female counterpart of the *gibbor hayil*, the title given to the ‘mighty men of valour’ which are often named in David’s age. The person who is celebrated in this song is a ‘mighty woman of valour.’”³ I like the analysis that Wolters presents of this biblical woman, for it is positive, empowering, and helps debunk the myth that Israelite women were subservient beings subjected to their dominant male counterparts. The woman who is celebrated in this proverb is a woman of strength; this characteristic is noted elsewhere in the poem, and will be discussed below. Fox, too, comments on the use of the word חַיִּל: it “refers to strength of all sorts, whether in physical or military prowess, in social influence, in wealth, or in personal ethical and intellectual powers, as here. Beneath all this woman’s virtues and talents lies a deep and solid strength of character.”⁴

The second part of the *A clause*⁵ מִי יִמְצָא, “Who can find her?” can be understood in two different ways: as an exclamation of value and as an indication of rarity.⁶ Fox understands it

¹ The term אִשֶּׁת-חַיִּל is also found in Prov 12:4: “A capable wife is a crown for her husband.” The thrust of this statement is that a strong, capable and competent woman is valued, and a true treasure to her husband.

² See Deut 3:18; Josh 6:2, 8:3.

³ Wolters, *SVW*, 9.

⁴ Fox, “Proverbs” in *JSB*, 1497-8.

⁵ The *A clause* refers to the first half of a biblical verse.

as the former, as supported by Prov 18:22: “He who finds a wife has found happiness.”⁷ A. Cohen agrees with this, too: “The Hebrew is incorrectly construed as a question, as though the writer’s intention was ‘a good wife is not easily found, but when she is found, she is of inestimable value.’ The sense is whoever has married such a woman knows from his experience how priceless is her worth.”⁸ I support the ideas of these scholars, for such a reading of the text affirms that Israelite women were valued in their society; it is consistent with the other positive comments about women, found in Proverbs (as noted above); and it also dispels the idea that worthy and capable women were rarely found in antiquity.

The second half of v. 10, called the *B clause*, says: וְרוּחַק מִפְּנִינִים מְכָרָה, “Her purchase price is far above pearls of coral.” This phrase further attests to the great worth of the אִשֶּׁת-חַיִּל, for she is deemed more valuable than מִפְּנִינִים,⁹ the precious *pearls of coral* that were obtained (most likely) from the Red Sea and India.¹⁰ While this verse does not explicitly indicate the reasons why this woman is valued so highly, they unfold as the poem progresses.

31:11: “The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain (i.e. property and wealth).”

Verse 11 introduces another important aspect of the אִשֶּׁת-חַיִּל. To understand this verse, it is important to begin with the Hebrew word שָׁלַל, meaning *gain*. In the Hebrew Bible, this

⁶ Fox, “Proverbs” in *JSB*, 1497.

⁷ Fox, “Proverbs” in *JSB*, 1497.

⁸ Cohen, *PROVAC*, 211. W.O.E. Oesterley writes: this is “a rhetorical way of expressing admiration.” Oesterley, *TBOP*, 283.

⁹ Other common translations for פְּנִינִים include rubies, pearls, and jewels. Also, in Job 28:18, Prov 3:15 and 8:11, פְּנִינִים are compared with *wisdom*. Perhaps the implication is that the אִשֶּׁת-חַיִּל is valued like wisdom.

¹⁰ Cohen, *PROVAC*, 16.

term is often associated with the spoils of war, or booty, that one obtains through combat. While this text is not implying that the *Eishet Chayil* goes off to war, it is indicating that she, through her own efforts, provides for her husband; because of her, he does not lack materially or financially. She does this through the various business ventures in which she is involved (see below). Citing E.B. Ehrlich, Cohen writes, “Ehrlich suggests that it [שלל] connotes an increase of wealth which does not result from one’s personal labours, and is therefore selected here because it is wealth which accrues to the man from his wife’s enterprise.”¹¹ S. R. Hirsch makes a similar comment. He writes, שלל “implies a gain to which one had no claim and which he thus never expected”¹² The main thrust of v.11 is that the אשת-חיל is a breadwinner who is engaged in profitable endeavors that extend beyond her household. Stevenson supports this, writing, “Through her work, she earns enough so that she can materially assist her husband.”¹³

The A clause of this verse, בטח בה לב בעלה, sheds light on the character of the *Eishet Chayil*. By indicating that her husband puts his trust in her, we learn not only that she is a trustworthy individual, but we gain insight into their personal relationship, as well. In other words, this verse strongly suggests that the husband of the אשת-חיל has faith in her judgment and trusts her decisions; he relies on her to make choices that will be in his best interest, as well as in hers. This conjures up an image of a marital partnership that includes trust and respect. McKane adds to this interpretation: “Her husband relies on her and has complete confidence in

¹¹ Cohen, *PROVAC*, 211.

¹² Samson Raphael Hirsch, *WOM* (trans. Karen Paritzky-Joshua; Jerusalem: Feldheim, 1976), 247.

¹³ Stevenson, *COP*, 442.

her abilities and judgement [*sic*], nor has he ever any reason to change his mind on these matters, for she is a model of benevolent constancy and brings him nothing but good and gain.”¹⁴

31:12: “She does him good and not evil, all the days of her life.”

This verse builds on the previous one and explains why her husband trusts in her: she treats him well, looks out for him, and does not intentionally hurt or wrong him. In other words, “She fully justifies the confidence he places in her.”¹⁵ The אשת-חיל does right by her husband, both in their personal relationship and in her business dealings, which have an impact upon him. This sounds like a wonderful example of the עזר כנגדו, *helpmate*, referred to in Gen 2:18.¹⁶

While some scholars say this verse refers only to the way she handles her business dealings, I do not believe there is reason to limit its reading in this way. Stevenson confirms this, saying, “The woman’s husband is the object of the verb. She shows her love for him by positive actions. No specific description of these actions limits them to any one area of the husband-wife relationship. The thought is general, indicating that the godly wife cares for her husband in a variety of ways, all of which receive the characterization ‘good.’”¹⁷

While I believe it fair to surmise that the אשת-חיל was a considerate, trustworthy, and loving wife, I think it is also reasonable to assume that at times, she acted in ways that were less than ideal. This is part of the human condition. Hirsh, however, has a different view on this, based on this verse: “A person can do another much good, and still cause him moments of chagrin and hurt by personal whims and caprices, and by the manner in which he acts toward

¹⁴ McKane, *PNA*, 666. See also Cohen, *PROVAC*, 211.

¹⁵ Cohen, *PROVAC*, 211.

¹⁶ Gen 2:18 reads, “The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a helpmate for him.’”

¹⁷ Stevenson, *COP*, 442.

him. But the woman to whom this hymn¹⁸ is dedicated gives her husband nothing but happiness and never even a moment of grief all the days of her life.”¹⁹ This notion is not realistic for it is difficult to accept that a wife will *never* hurt her husband in any way, albeit unintentionally. By speaking of the אשת-חיל in this way, Hirsch reduces her to an imaginary, idyllic figure, thereby devaluing Israelite women, in general. If, however, one takes the position, as I do, that the אשת-חיל represents the idealized version of an imperfect woman who, nonetheless, possesses many fine attributes, characteristics, and skills, then the value and worth of the Israelite woman is held intact.

31:13: “She searches for wool and flax (as material for clothing), and she actively labors with her eager hands.”

One of the activities in which the אשת-חיל engages is making clothing for her household (discussed in greater detail, below). In order to do this, she must first acquire the needed raw materials. This is implied by the presence of the Hebrew verb דרשה, meaning *search* or *look for*. It is reasonable to assume, then, that wool and flax were not readily accessible. Rather, the אשת-חיל needed to make a concerted effort to seek them out. Cohen suggests this too: “She concerns herself to see that there is an ample supply of material from which to make the

¹⁸ Wolters argues that Prov 31:10-31 “displays most of the formal characteristics of the hymnic genre (p. 4). Wolters goes on to say “the hymnic form in Israel is not strictly tied either to the praise of God or to the temple liturgy. The acrostic poem in Proverbs, if its hymnic character is recognized, provides us with a unique perspective on the possible early history and function of the hymn in Israel—a perspective quite different from that afforded by the liturgical hymns.” Wolters, *SVW*, 8.

¹⁹ Hirsch, *WOM*, 247.

necessary clothing.”²⁰ From the A clause of v. 13, I deduce that the אשת-חיל was concerned with her household and took the necessary steps to provide for them.

When the אשת-חיל works with her hands, be it to make clothing, plant a vineyard or engage in a host of other activities, she does so with enthusiasm. This is suggested by the Hebrew words בחפץ כפיה, *with her eager hands*, found in the B clause of v. 13. Others interpretations of this phrase include, “. . . she takes personal pleasure in her work,”²¹ she derives pleasure “from her unfettered artistic freedom as the possessor of a pair of skillful hands . . .”²² and “her hands could not bear to be idle, and even if her palms were folded at rest, they were ‘willing’ and anxious to work.”²³ In other words, the אשת-חיל is a creative woman, a hard worker, and anything but lazy.

31:14: “She is like trading vessels, bringing her bread from afar.”

The hymn of the אשת-חיל continues by comparing her with a merchant ship. The plain meaning of this text is: she acquires food to feed her household. However, a broader reading is required, for there is more information about the אשת-חיל contained in this verse.

This is the first indication that the אשת-חיל is a woman of means. She has the financial resources to purchase imported (and more expensive) products from traveling merchants who

²⁰ Cohen, *PROVAC*, 211.

²¹ Stevenson, *COP*, 443.

²² McKane, *PNA*, 667.

²³ Hirsch, *WOM*, 248.

bring goods from afar. Wanting only the best for her family, she seeks out the choicest supplies that are available.²⁴

Inherent in this point is the idea that the אשת-חיל, herself, traded with the traveling merchants. This might come as a surprise to one who believed that only Israelite men engaged in such activity. This verse further debunks the myth that biblical women were kept within the confines of their homes, hidden away from view. Stevenson supports this view, writing, “The wife gathers the needed household materials, both for the daily routine and for the diverse economic enterprises of the home. She trades with traveling merchants as they pass by.”²⁵

Trading with merchants implies a two-way transaction: not only does the אשת-חיל acquire goods, but she sells items, as well.²⁶ This supports the idea (noted above in the discussion of v. 11) that the אשת-חיל contributed to the economic well being of her family through her business activities. It is possible that part of her inventory included the garments she made with the wool and flax mentioned above, in v. 13. McKane adds to the idea that the אשת-חיל traded with merchants:

. . . the words ‘she brings her bread from afar’ indicate that she explores and exploits the further possibilities of producing wealth on the basis of the husbandry of her household. Her husband is a farmer and she manufactures and trades in the produce of fields and animals. In becoming a secondary producer and trader, she can be likened to merchant ships; she explores beyond the immediate domestic, wealth-producing context to bring bread from afar.²⁷

²⁴ See Cohen, *PROVAC*, 212; Aitken, *PROV*, 157.

²⁵ Stevenson, *COP*, 443.

²⁶ “Palestine was at the crossroads of the Asia-Africa-Europe trading routes of the ancient world. For most periods of antiquity, the ruined cities show clear signs of a role in international commerce.” Meyers, *EVE*, 144.

²⁷ McKane, *PNA*, 667.

31:15: “She rises while it is still night and gives food to her household, and prescribes tasks for her attendants.”

Verse 15 sheds more light on activities of the אשת-חיל and her contribution to her household. She proves herself to be a concerned and loving mother/wife by rising before her household to prepare their food.²⁸ However, much more than this is implied in this verse. In antiquity, food preparation was a time-consuming and physically demanding endeavor, for it required the conversion of raw materials into consumable food.²⁹ It also required the necessary knowledge that allowed for the successful production of edible food. Since women possessed this knowledge, they were valuable, and valued members of society. Additionally, since women were largely responsible for food production, they were in control of the allocation of the resources used for making food. Thus, in a very real way, “. . . female control of food consumption would have contributed substantially to her domestic power and status.”³⁰ Additionally, archaeological remains indicate bread making was done in households: grinding-stones for transforming grain into loaves of bread and baking ovens (called *tabuns*) were found in virtually all households of the Iron Age.³¹

Verse 15 also speaks to the work ethic of the אשת-חיל. She rises early, even before the sun, indicating that she is not a lazy woman. She is a woman who has responsibility, for she manages her household while overseeing and directing those who work for her. Commentators

²⁸ The Hebrew word *הָרָעָה*, used in this verse, is commonly understood to mean torn meat, forbidden meat or animal prey. However, according to Cohen, when used in a poetic way, it refers to food that is consumable by humans; Cohen, *PROVAC*, 212; Also see Ps 111:5.

²⁹ Meyers, *EVE*, 145.

³⁰ Meyers, *EVE*, 147.

³¹ Meyers, *MRSR*, 430-31. Biblical references to women making bread are Lev 26:26; 1 Sam 8:13, 28:24; Jer 7:18; and Gen 18:6.

compliment the אשת-חיל, suggesting she uses her time wisely, is organized, and is the one who sets her household in motion at the start of each day.³²

31:16: “She ponders a field and acquires it, with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.”

In addition to producing food for her family, running her household, making clothing, and trading with merchants, the אשת-חיל also purchases land. This verse suggests that she makes, and acts, on her own decisions. This supports the idea that I put forth with regard to v. 11: the husband of the אשת-חיל trusts in her decision-making ability. Cohen agrees that she acts alone, writing, “She examines the value of a piece of land which is for sale and, being satisfied with it, adds it to the family estate.”³³ This statement implies that the אשת-חיל is bright, knowledgeable, and a savvy businesswoman.

The B clause speaks of her planting a vineyard. It is very probable that she, herself, did the planting.³⁴ Meyers supports this, writing, “Although they did not primarily work in growing field crops, women in early Israel probably did contribute substantially to the hoeing and weeding, and the planting and picking, that vegetable gardens, orchards, and vineyards required.”³⁵ Stevenson accepts this view, too, citing biblical passages as proof:

There is abundant evidence in the OT to show that women were involved with agricultural and pastoral duties. They tended the flocks (Gen. 29:6; Exod. 2:16) and watered the camels (Gen. 24:19-20). They worked with raw materials from the fields (Josh. 2:6), kept the vineyards (Song of Sol. 1:6; 8:12), and gleaned in the fields . . .

³² See Stevenson, *COP*, 443; McKane, *PNA*, 668.

³³ Cohen, *PROVAC*, 212.

³⁴ Contra Cohen, who understands this metaphorically. He compares it with 1Kgs 8:44, suggesting that just as Solomon, himself, did not build the Temple, neither did the אשת-חיל, herself, plant the vineyard. Cohen, *PROVAC*, 212.

³⁵ Meyers, *EVE*, 146.

They directed servants (I Sam. 2 5:18-19). The OT does not give us a complete description of the woman's role. There is enough information, however, to show that they were involved with a broad range of activities.³⁶

Verse 16 affirms the contribution of the אשת-חיל to her household, reinforces the idea that she and her husband are truly partners, and shows that she engages in physical labor.

31:17: “She girds herself (her hips and loins) with strength, and strengthens her arms.”

This verse paints a picture of a physically strong woman—one who is accustomed to engaging in physical activities. While she has workers who assist her and do her bidding, she also labors in the field, takes care of the flocks, draws water, and the like. These are typical activities of an Israelite woman. Stevenson interprets “girds her loins” as “tying up her robe to keep it from interfering with her labors. This pictures her readiness to begin her work. Further, she ‘strengtheneth her arms.’ This idiom pictures her power to perform the tasks at hand.”³⁷ The אשת-חיל is a diligent worker whose strength increases through her laborious efforts.³⁸

W.G. Plaut, however, suggests this verse is speaking of spiritual strength, rather than physical prowess. He writes, “She is always ready, for her strength is spiritual (see II Kings 4:29).”³⁹ While I believe the אשת-חיל is a woman who possesses spiritual strength (see discussion of v. 30, below), I do not agree with Plaut's assessment of this verse; I think it does address her physical condition.⁴⁰

³⁶ Stevenson, *COP*, 444.

³⁷ Stevenson, *COP*, 444.

³⁸ See Hirsch, *WOM*, 249.

³⁹ Plaut, *BOP*, 314.

⁴⁰ See also 2 Sam 2:8; I Kgs 2:5, 20:32; Jer 1:17 for other biblical references that connect girding one's loins and physical strength.

31:18: “She perceives⁴¹ that her trading profit is good, her oil lamp⁴² does not go out at night.”

Two characteristics of the אשת-חיל that are brought forth in this verse are her success as a businesswoman and her strong work ethic—two attributes that often go hand-in-hand. Through her successful trading, the אשת-חיל brings income to her household and helps support her family. She is a motivated, conscientious woman who works long hours—rises early (v. 15) and does not retire until her various duties and responsibilities are complete.

According to one scholar, a lit lamp is indicative of a prosperous household.⁴³ Given that the אשת-חיל is a successful businesswoman, it makes sense to presume that her household is prosperous.

Meyers offers a different interpretation for this verse, one that suggests she keeps the lamp burning all night to protect her children (“apotropaic purposes”). Meyers supports her idea with biblical passages where “lamp imagery” is connected with protection (Prov 6:20-23; Job 18:56, 29:3; 2 Kgs 8:19).⁴⁴

31:19: “Her hands are cast/placed on the spindle,⁴⁵ and her palms hold the spindle.”

⁴¹ The Hebrew word used for *perceives* is טעמה, which literally means *tastes*. See Ps 34:9 for another example where טעמה is used in this same way.

⁴² Light, small clay lamp filled with oil, usually with only one spout for the wick. See Keil and Baumgartner, *HAL*, 723.

⁴³ McKane, *PNA*, 668.

⁴⁴ Meyers, *HH*, 41. See also Cohen, *PROVAC*, 213.

⁴⁵ My translation is based mainly on the work of Wolters, who conducted research on the history of handspinning and the literary structure of v. 19. He concludes that the translation cited by numerous scholars, for this verse, is inaccurate. Other scholars translate the disputed word, כישור, as *distaff*. Wolters informs, however, that this is not an accurate translation since “the evidence for the use of the distaff in the ancient Near East (at least until the impact of Greco-Roman culture in Hellenistic times) is non-existent.” Wolters supports his theory by quoting French archeologist A.G. Barrois, who writes, “The valiant woman of Proverbs puts her hands to the *kishor*, which is not the distaff, since the spinning women of the East do not use it at all.” Wolters goes on to explain that *kishor* refers to a large-sized spindle—the type used in “grasped spindle” spinning—that was held and rotated by two hands. Wolters, *SVW*, 50-55.

Verse 19 speaks of the handiwork performed by the אשת-חיל, and is consistent with v.

13: “She searches for wool and flax (as material for clothing), and she actively labors with her eager hands.” It is also consistent with archaeological findings that have revealed “. . . the almost ubiquitous use of needles, spindle whorls, and other clothing-related tools in domestic contexts.”⁴⁶

31:20: “She opens her hand to the poor, and her hands are sent to the needy.”⁴⁷

This verse reveals other attributes of the אשת-חיל—she is charitable, generous, and is concerned with the welfare of others.⁴⁸ In today’s world, we would liken her to one who gives צדקה, and engages in acts of תיקון עולם, repairing the world. This verse speaks to her moral and ethical nature.

31:21: “She is not afraid of the snow for her household, for all of her family is clothed in crimson.”⁴⁹

The אשת-חיל provides for her family by making clothing. It is believed that women were responsible for the production of cloth and clothing in antiquity.⁵⁰ The references to snow and crimson garments might be understood in the following way: “The association [of שנים] with the king and with the tabernacle suggests that this was high-quality material. This is probably the sense in which it occurs here, clothing of such quality and weight that it warms the

⁴⁶ Meyers, *EVE*, 147.

⁴⁷ It is also worth noting the grammatical structure of this verse. The A and B clauses are repetitive: ידֶיהָ and כַּפֶּיהָ are similar terms, referring to her hands; פִּרְשָׁהּ and שִׁלְחָהּ are parallel terms that mean *to spread out* or *to cast out*; and עֲנִי and אֲבִיִן are synonymous words for *poor* or *needy*. This type of parallelism is a very common feature in biblical poetry.

⁴⁸ See McKane, *PNA*, 668.

⁴⁹ שָׁנִים is often translated as *scarlet*.

⁵⁰ Meyers, *MRSR*, 433. Unlike the plain white Egyptian dress, Canaanite garments, as evidenced by wall paintings of the 18th-20th Egyptian dynasties, were colorful. Sheffer, *NS*, 537.

wearers.”⁵¹ This interpretation reinforces the notion that the household of the אשת-חיל is well provided for.

Another reading of this verse is different, yet equally flattering to the אשת-חיל.

Stevenson writes: “The future holds no fear for this woman, for she has wisely anticipated the needs of her household. The ‘snow’ here represents many such needs that might be set forth as examples.”⁵² In other words, the אשת-חיל is a responsible, organized, and well thought-out woman who has the ability to look ahead to the future and plan accordingly.

31:22: “She makes for herself coverings, she wears linen and purple garments.”

This verse speaks of the clothing that the אשת-חיל makes for herself. She wears garments made from expensive fabrics, befitting a woman of means. Linen was more costly than other fabrics, such as wool, for it was imported from places like Phoenicia and Egypt.⁵³ Purple clothing was also costly, and worn by those of distinction and wealth,⁵⁴ for the purple dye came from the secretion of mollusks and Murex snails⁵⁵ found in the eastern parts of the Mediterranean Sea.⁵⁶ This dye was in demand (as were indigo blue and kermes red dyes), yet difficult and costly to prepare.⁵⁷ It is reasonable to suggest that the אשת-חיל acquired her linen fabric and purple dye when she traded with traveling merchants (v. 14).

⁵¹ Stevenson, *COP*, 445-46.

⁵² Stevenson, *COP*, 445.

⁵³ Wolters, *SVW*, 11.

⁵⁴ Aitken, *PROV*, 157. See also Judg 8:26; Jer 4:30 and 10:9.

⁵⁵ “Murex and purpura snails were harvested off the coast of eastern Crete and the Levant, where shell heaps attest to their use from 2000 BCE onward. The Phoenicians were particularly famous for the ‘Tyrian’ purple dye they produced.” Peskowitz, *TEX*, 192.

⁵⁶ See Stevenson, *COP*, 446. “Evidence for dyes begins before 3000 BCE in Europe, Egypt, and perhaps the Levant.” Peskowitz, *TEX*, 192.

⁵⁷ Peskowitz, *TEX*, 192.

31:23: “Her husband is known in the gates, where he sits among the elders (a special class).”

This verse provides information about the husband of the אשת-חיל. Until this point in the poem, all that is known about this unnamed spouse is that he trusts his wife and gains materially from being married to this successful businesswoman. Verse 23 speaks about the place of honor that he holds within the community.

In the ancient Near East, it was common for elders, counselors and prominent men of the city to gather at the city’s entrance (near the gates) “to adjudicate and discuss local affairs.”⁵⁸ Some scholars believe the husband is welcomed into this honorific group because of the virtues of his wife. Hirsch is one of them: “When her husband sat in the councils of the city or the nation, he was pointed out as the husband of the valiant woman whose moral and spiritual influence was discernible in the words and actions of the man in public life. Thus through the voice of her husband, the fine example she set and her prudent, wise counsel became a beneficial force in the affairs of the community.”⁵⁹ In other words the husband enjoys stature in the community because of the notable character of the אשת-חיל.⁶⁰

Stevenson agrees that the husband’s position of responsibility is attributed to his wife—but offers a different reason: “The context suggests that his ability to devote himself to these matters rests upon his knowledge that his wife carefully oversees the household. He is able to devote himself to community matters outside of the family.”⁶¹ McKane shares this view, writing, “Such a woman makes a notable contribution to her husband’s success in public life, for he has no domestic worries and can build his reputation on the basis of an honourable and prosperous

⁵⁸ Cohen, *PROVAC*, 6.

⁵⁹ Hirsch, *WOM*, 250.

⁶⁰ Aitken, *PROV*, 158.

⁶¹ Stevenson, *COP*, 446.

household. By virtue of her character and genius for sound management he is well set to exert his influence on the life of the community and make a name for himself as a counselor and man of weight.”⁶²

Whether it is because of her virtues as a moral, ethical and/or spiritual woman, or her managerial skills, what seems clear is that the husband of the אשת-חיל has the privilege of being a member of the town’s assembly, and hence the opportunity to discuss and deliberate over matters both legal and political, because of his wife. This is quite significant, for it indicates that the אשת-חיל had a great deal of responsibility, which she carried out successfully, and that members of the community recognized her efforts.

31:24: “She makes and sells clothing, and gives⁶³ a girdle to the tradesman.”

Verse 24 reverts to discussing the business and trading activities of the אשת-חיל. This depiction of an Israelite woman, who produces and sells clothing, is supported by archaeological findings: “The evidence of textile production in households for household use and perhaps also for tribute, trade, or communal use, is substantial.”⁶⁴ Additionally, “Textile production, especially in terms of the expertise required, was a quasi-professional enterprise involving knowledge of techniques, substances, equipment, guidelines, and other production factors.”⁶⁵

The סדין and חגור, two garments made by the אשת-חיל, were part of the basic garb during the Israelite period. The סדין was an outer linen wrap worn by both men and women

⁶² McKane, *PNA*, 669.

⁶³ Also translated as “trades”, see Ezek 27:12.

⁶⁴ Meyers, *MRSR*, 433.

⁶⁵ Meyers, *MSRS*, 436.

(Judg 14:12-13; Isa 3:23).⁶⁶ “The [*hagor*, or] *hagora* was a long, folded cloth of wool or linen, wound around the waist over the tunic, similar to a cummerbund or sash. Its folds could accommodate weapons and other items” (I Sam 18:4; Isa 3:24; 2 Sam 20:8).⁶⁷ This is supported by a painted sherd, found in modern day Israel, depicting a male figure wearing a “garment over which is a red mantle held at the waist by a belt.”⁶⁸

This verse implies, more strongly than others in the poem, that the אשת-חיל interacts with non-Israelite men. This runs contrary to the stereotypical image of the Israelite woman who is locked away in her home, doing little more than tending to the basic needs of her children.

31:25: “Strength and splendor are her clothing, and she laughs at the future.”

Verse 25 uses the metaphor of clothing to convey attributes of the אשת-חיל. In other words, she is *wrapped* in strength and splendor, two of her many positive attributes. Plaut interprets this verse as: “Inner qualities are her real garments: she possesses optimism and faces life with confidence.”⁶⁹ The אשת-חיל is a strong, confident woman who does not look to the future with fear. Rather, she is able to have a positive outlook on life because she trusts that her abilities, skills and positive attributes will see her through the uncertainty of life. Her conscientiousness and kindness are two qualities referred to by עז וחדר.⁷⁰

This phrase, עז וחדר, is very similar to another phrase, found in Ps 104:1: הוד וחדר (majesty and splendor). The latter is a reference to Adonai: “Adonai, my G-d, You are very

⁶⁶ Stevenson, *COP*, 447.

⁶⁷ King and Stager, *LBI*, 267-68. See also Cohen, *PROVAC*, 213.

⁶⁸ Sheffer, *NS*, 545.

⁶⁹ Plaut, *BOP*, 315.

⁷⁰ Hirsch, *WOM*, 251.

great, clothed in majesty and splendor.” The close parallel between the two verses is notable and significant, suggesting that the author purposely chose to praise the אשת-חיל with divine attributes.

Other scholars interpret this verse quite differently, believing it speaks to the financial security of the אשת-חיל. For example, McKane writes, “She can laugh at the uncertainty of the future because she has built up ample reserves and is confident that no tide of adversity will be able to swamp and undermine her prosperity.”⁷¹ Stevenson adds, “Through her many accomplishments, this woman covers herself with ‘strength and honour.’ This alludes to the financial stability of the household under her leadership. For this reason, she faces the future with confidence.”⁷² A final interpretation that supports this understanding comes from Cohen: “The future causes her no anxiety because of her secure financial position.”⁷³

Either of these explanations could have been the actual intent of the author. Enough has been said about the successful business acumen of the אשת-חיל to accept that this verse speaks of the strength of her financial security. However, it is also plausible to understand this verse as a reference to her strong and splendid character—one that allows her to move through life with confidence, self-reliance, and a positive outlook.

31:26: “Her mouth opens with wisdom, and kind teaching is on her tongue.”

This verse focuses attention on the intellect of the אשת-חיל. Depending on how one translates and understands תורת-חסד, this verse will or will not have a religious connotation.

⁷¹ McKane, *PNA*, 669.

⁷² Stevenson, *COP*, 447.

⁷³ Cohen, *PROVAC*, 214. Oesterley notes that v. 25 speaks to her *social* strength, while v. 17 refers to her physical strength. Toy, *CEC*, 547.

According to Koehler-Baumgartner, תורת-חסד means *kind teaching*. This definition, by itself, does not necessarily invoke Torah or religion.

McKane understands this verse in a secular way: “She [the אשת-חיל] is equally adept at instruction and management. Alert and energetic, she has her finger on the pulse of her household and nothing escapes her scrutiny and control. Whatever she has to say ranks as wisdom and reliable advice.”⁷⁴ Cohen also subscribes to an interpretation that refers to her overall intelligence and ability to communicate with others in a kind fashion: “When she speaks, her words are distinguished by good sense and discretion She gives her directions to children and servants in sympathetic language and not in a domineering tone of voice.”⁷⁵ C.H. Toy agrees, writing: “Though firm in her administration, as becomes a business woman, she is not domineering or harsh.”⁷⁶ Each of these scholars lauds the אשת-חיל for being an effective manager who is bright, effective, and has the ability to direct others with respect and kindness.

Stevenson, however, reads a more religious and spiritual tone into this verse. He translates v. 26 as, “She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.”⁷⁷ His comments on this verse accordingly: “As she instructs her family, the godly wife carries out her responsibilities in ‘wisdom’ . . . and in ‘kindness’ This moral example in her instruction likely makes more of an impact on the children than the formal teaching that she gives them. It is important that godly character shine forth in every situation. This woman has a consistent example before her family.”⁷⁸

⁷⁴ McKane, *PNA*, 670.

⁷⁵ Cohen, *PROVAC*, 214.

⁷⁶ Toy, *CEC*, 547.

⁷⁷ Stevenson, *COP*, 447.

⁷⁸ Stevenson, *COP*, 447.

In this verse, I do not believe תורת-חסד has a religious implication. Like many of the verses in Prov 31:10-31, the meaning is more or less straightforward. For this reason, I am inclined to agree with the scholars who suggest v. 26 praises the אשת-חיל for being a wise and intelligent woman who knows how to share her knowledge, guidance and instruction in a manner that is received well by others.

31:27: “She examines the doings of her household, and the bread of sluggishness she does not eat.”

This verse touches on a characteristic of the אשת-חיל that has already been referred to (rises early and retires late), but which is now stated directly: her diligent work ethic. Verse 27 not only indicates that she manages her household and staff, but it also credits her with being a conscientious worker. The use of the Hebrew word ביתה, *her house*, is notable, for it implies that she, too, is responsible for the activities that take place within, and around, her household.⁷⁹

This is supported by Meyers, who writes:

. . . the female’s role in the household production system was no less important than the male’s. Women participated in agricultural tasks, were responsible for the processing of crops into comestibles, made most of the clothing and probably also the baskets and the ceramic vessels, managed the activities of children and grandchildren (and of servants, hired workers, sojourners and the like, if present), to say nothing of their role as progenitors. In such situations, households are typically characterized by internal gender balance rather than gender hierarchy.⁸⁰

Stevenson also views the אשת-חיל as a diligent woman who remains quite busy: “She does not eat “the bread of idleness” through indolence. Rather, she works long hours in order to

⁷⁹ See also Prov 31:21; Gen 24:28; Ruth 1:8; Song 3:4, 8:2.

⁸⁰ Meyers, *RH*, 98-9.

establish the well-being of the home.”⁸¹ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch comment similarly: “Her eyes are turned everywhere; she is at one time here, at another there, to look after all with her own eyes; she does not suffer the day’s work, according to the instructions given, to be left undone, while she folds her own hands on her bosom; but she works, keeping an oversight on all sides, and does not eat the idleness . . . but bread well deserved . . .”⁸²

31:28-29: “Her children⁸³ rise up and call her happy, her husband praises her, too [saying] ‘Many daughters⁸⁴ have proven themselves capable⁸⁵, but you surpass all of them.’”

While Prov 31:10-31 pays tribute to the אשת-חיל by describing and applauding her various actions, activities, strengths, and characteristics, vv. 28 and 29 praise her abilities as a mother and wife. The husband and children of the אשת-חיל recognize and appreciate what she does for them, be it educating, clothing, feeding, and/or working to insure their financial security. These verses suggest that appreciation and gratitude are expressed; the אשת-חיל is not taken her for granted.⁸⁶

31:30: “Grace is deceitful/false and beauty is vain, [but] a woman who fears/respects Adonai will be praised.”

While vv.10-29 discuss tangible matters as they relate to the אשת-חיל, such as spinning, trading, planting, manufacturing, and managing, v. 30 deals with more ethereal topics—one’s relationship with G-d and the nature of beauty. Since the content of this verse differs so greatly from the previous ones—particularly with regard to religion—some scholars believe an

⁸¹ Stevenson, *COP*, 447.

⁸² Keil and Delitzsch, *COT*, 339.

⁸³ The Hebrew word בָּנִים can refer to sons, or to a combination of both sons and daughters.

⁸⁴ Some suggest *daughter* is a poetic synonym for *women*. See Plaut, *BOP*, 315; Cohen, *PROVAC*, 215.

⁸⁵ חֵל can also be translated as *valiantly*, *virtuously*, and *bravely*.

⁸⁶ “Her husband and sons sing her praises and testify to her superlative worth.” McKane, *PNA*, 670.

emendation was made to the original text. Toy writes, “[the reference to Adonai] may be the correction of a scribe who thought a poem describing the ideal woman should not fail to mention piety as an element of her character.”⁸⁷ Crook has a similar, yet somewhat different view: The *אשת-חיל* is “sufficiently colored by Israelite religion to bring her recognizably into the community of Israel.”⁸⁸ Other than the comment in v.30 that says the *אשת-חיל* respects Adonai, there is nothing in this hymn that indicates she actually worshipped Adonai. There is no indication that she offered sacrifices or engaged in other *Yahwistic* cultic rituals. Likewise, nothing is said that speaks of her ideological or theological beliefs. Inclusion of such information would lend credence to the idea that she truly was a religious woman.

While the suggestion, that a textual gloss was made to v.30, is plausible, albeit conjectural, there are other scholars who think piety is the culminating virtue of the *Eishet Chayil* and the source of her “industry, business acumen, reliability and kindness.”⁸⁹ Plaut perceives her to be a God-fearing woman and suggests it is her piety, more so than her other qualities, that makes her “valorous.”⁹⁰

While this is the main topic of v. 30, the concept of beauty is also raised in this verse. The A clause, “grace is deceitful/false and beauty is vain” distinguishes between fleeting, false, physical beauty and true, enduring, inner beauty. The text is not denouncing beauty. Rather, it is implying that one’s inner beauty, as defined by character and action, are more important than one’s physical beauty. This is particularly true with the *אשת-חיל*, for nothing is known of her

⁸⁷ Toy, *CEC*, 549. See also Oesterley, *TBOP*, 287.

⁸⁸ Crook, *MM*, 137.

⁸⁹ Aitken, *PROV*, 158; Fox, “Proverbs” in *JSB*, 1498. See also Prov 1:7, 2:5, and 9:10.

⁹⁰ Plaut, *BOP*, 315.

physical appearance. However, her behavior, attributes and piety have won her great favor in the eyes of her family and community.⁹¹

31:31: “Give her from the fruit of her hands, and let her deeds praise her in the gates.”

This concluding verse acknowledges and confirms that the אשת-חיל deserves praise for all that she does. The difference in opinion between scholars is how literally to interpret “praise her in the gates.” McKane, Keil and Delitzsch understand the verse literally: her achievements and accomplishments have led her to be praised publicly, “in the gates,” where people congregate and assemble, for she enjoys a favorable reputation and has a high standing in the community.⁹²

Oesterley, on the other hand, refutes this literal interpretation, saying, “. . . women’s domestic virtues were not the kind of things which were discussed in public assemblies; nevertheless, the exaggeration is natural and pardonable.”⁹³

Stevenson, refuting Oesterley directly, in his work, writes:

This conclusion ignores the fact that the gates of a city served as the center of a wide variety of activities in the OT. Not only were they the place for legal actions (Deut. 21:19-20; 25:7) and prophetic oracles (Jer. 17:19-20; Amos 5:10), but they also served as places for the gathering of news (II Sam. 15:2) and gossip (Ps. 69:12). Ruth received praise in the gates and the people pronounced a blessing upon her there (Ruth 4:11-12). Since the passage poetically describes the ideal woman, the ‘gates’ may well be meant metaphorically, signifying public praise. A literal understanding of the word, however, fits well with the use of the word elsewhere.⁹⁴

⁹¹ See Isaacs, *EPG*, 72.

⁹² See McKane, *PNA*, 670; Keil and Delitzsch, *COT*, 342.

⁹³ Oesterley, *TBOP*, 287.

⁹⁴ Stevenson, *COP*, 449.

Stevenson supports his position well, especially by citing the public praise of Ruth (see below).

The אשת-חיל, being the idealized and near perfect version of the Israelite woman, certainly deserved to be praised publicly, whether she actually was, or not. Regardless of how she was praised—either publicly or in the privacy of her own home—what remains unchanged is that she was worthy and deserving of praise. The אשת-חיל made major contributions to both her family and society. She was a dynamic, bright and hard working mother, wife, businesswoman and boss, who not only took care of her family, but was able to hold her own in a man's world.

Perhaps Fontaine best encapsulates the essence and value of the אשת-חיל when she says,

. . . [The] (*eshet hayil*) indicates a woman of power and valor or a woman who produces prosperity. In the Bible, the term *wife* encodes a set of productive and managerial tasks that, along with a woman's reproductive role, were essential to the existence of the Israelite household. There is no equivalent understanding of 'wife' as a social category in the modern West, where women's household work does not usually contribute to the family economy and tends to be ignored, trivialized, minimized, or otherwise degraded. The often insulting idea of 'just a wife and mother' would have had no meaning in the biblical world.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Fontaine in *WIS*, Meyers, 303.

Handout For Students: Linear Translation of Proverbs 31:10-31
Eishet Chayil – A Woman of Valor

- v. 10 אשת-חיל מי ימצה ורחק מפנינים מכרה
A capable wife, who can find? Her purchase price is far above pearls of coral.
- v. 11 בטח בה לב בעלה ושלל לא יחסר
The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain (i.e. property and wealth).
- v. 12 גמלתהו טוב ולא-רע לכ ימי חייה
She does him good and not evil, all the days of her life.
- v. 13 דרשה צמר ופשתים ותעש בחפץ כפיה
She searches for wool and flax (as material for clothing), and she actively labors with her eager hands.
- v. 14 היתה כאניות סוחר ממרחק תביא לחמה
She is like trading vessels, bringing her bread from afar.
- v. 15 ותקם בעוד לילה ותתן טרף לביתה וחק לנערתי
She rises while it is still night and gives food to her household, and prescribes tasks for her attendants.
- v. 16 זממה שדה ותקחהו מפרי כפיה נטעה כרם
She ponders a field and acquires it, with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.
- v. 17 חגרה בעוז מתניה ותאמץ זרעותיה
She girds herself (her hips and loins) with strength, and strengthens her arms.
- v. 18 טעמה כי-טוב סחורה לא-יכבה בלילה נרה
She perceives that her trading profit is good, her oil lamp does not go out at night.
- v. 19 ידיה שלחה בכישור וכפיה תמכו פלך
Her hands are cast/placed on the spindle, and her palms hold the spindle.
- v. 20 כפה פרשה לעני וידיה שלחה לאבין
She opens her hand to the poor, and her hands are extended to the needy.

- v. 21 לא-תירא לביתה משלג כי כל-ביתה לבש שנים
She is not afraid of the snow for her household, for all of her family is clothed in crimson.
- v. 22 מרבדים עשתה-לה שש וארגמן לבושה
She makes for herself coverings, she wears linen and purple garments.
- v. 23 נודע בשערים בעלה בשבתו עם-זקני-ארץ
Her husband is known in the gates, where he sits among the elders (a special class).
- v. 24 סדין עשתה ותמכר וחגור נתנה לכנעני
She makes and sells clothing, and gives a girdle to the tradesman.
- v. 25 עז-והדר לבושה ותשחק ליום אחרון
Strength and splendor are her clothing, and she laughs at the future.
- v. 26 פיה פתחה בחכמה ותורת-חסד על-לשונה
Her mouth opens with wisdom, and kind teaching is on her tongue.
- v. 27 צופיה הליכות ביתה ולחם עצלות לא תאכל
She examines the doings of her household, and the bread of sluggishness she does not eat.
- v. 28 קמו בניה ויאשרוה בעלה ויהללה
Her children rise up and call her happy, her husband praises her, too [saying],
- v. 29 רבות בנות עשו חיל ואת עלית על-כלנה
"Many daughters have proven themselves capable, but you surpass all of them."
- v. 30 שקר החן והבל היפי אשה יראת-י' היא תתהלל
Grace is deceitful/false and beauty is vain, [but] a woman who fears/respects *Adonai* will be praised.
- v. 31 תנו-לה מפרי ידיה ויהללוה בשערים מעשיה
Give her from the fruit of her hands, and let her deeds praise her in the gates.

Lesson 2: The Women of Proverbs

In this lesson, the focus will be on other proverbs, found in the Hebrew Bible, that specifically discuss and describe women. Comparisons and contrasts can be drawn between the portrayal of women in the texts, the *Eishet Chayil*, and the portrayal of women in today's society.

*The instructor can begin by providing background information about the book of Proverbs:

- The book of Proverbs is found in the third section of the Hebrew Bible, called Writings.
- The wisdom contained in Proverbs is not academic knowledge, but rather, is concerned with practical wisdom, ethics and the morality of daily living.
- The book of Proverbs contains parables, allegories, aphorism, poems and discourses.

*The group will then engage in text study, focusing on proverbs that portray women positively:

- Verses 1:8 and 6:20 speak of mothers as educators, and the responsibility and authority that this role carries.
- Verses 15:20, 23:22, 23:25, 28:24 and 30:17 indicate that Israelite mothers were entitled to respect from their children, equal to that shown to fathers.
- Verses 18:22, 12:4, 14:1, 19:14, 31:10-31 praise wives for being competent, wise, virtuous, capable, and “ . . . an absolute necessity for male participation in the larger community In fact the presence of a prudent, hardworking woman as manager of the household and as contributor to the domestic economy is so important that a man who finds her is said to have obtained a divine blessing (18:22; 19:14).”⁹⁶

*To portray a balanced view of the book of Proverbs, the class will also look at verses that portray women negatively:

- Verses 19:13, 21:9, 21:19, 25:24, 27:15-16 caution against living with a contentious wife.
- Verses 2:16-22, 5:1-23, 6:20-35, 7:1-27 and 23:27 caution men to be wary of women who will purposely try to lure them into inappropriate sexual conduct.

*After the class discusses the texts in both *chevruta* groups and as a whole, there will be time for journaling and concluding remarks.

⁹⁶ Fontaine in *WIS*, Meyers, 303.

Lesson 3: Sarah - Our First Matriarch

Introduction

This is the first lesson of four that will focus on our matriarchs – Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah. Their personalities are developed to varying degrees in the Genesis narratives. Through their experiences, decisions, actions, struggles, and emotional reactions, one is able to gain some insight into the lives of these influential Israelite women. The narratives of Genesis focus on domestic matters and family life in a way that is not found in the other four books of the Torah.⁹⁷

The stories of the matriarchs represent, in an idealized version, the characteristics and attributes of the Israelite woman. While the matriarchs lived a more privileged lifestyle than the average woman, one can still gain insight into the lives of the common Israelite woman by studying their lives, for the stories in Genesis depict the qualities and characteristics that were valued in antiquity. The same holds true today with regard to movies, television shows and magazine pictures: most people do not look like nor live the lifestyle of those shown; however, what is presented nonetheless reflects the values of society, in general. Through the study of the Genesis narratives that include Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah, the characteristics and attributes of the *ideal* Israelite women, with their similarities and differences, will come forth.

Enduring Understandings

- *Sarah is the first matriarch of the Jewish people
- *The role of mother was valued by Israelite society.
- *Adonai took note of Sarah and blessed her.
- *Abraham showed respect for Sarah.

Essential Questions

- *What does the text tell us about fertility and infertility in Israelite society?
- *What does the text tell us about Adonai and his relationship with women?
- *What does the text tell us about the relationship between a husband and wife?
- *What does the text tell us about the portrayal of women in Israelite society?

Questions To Be Addressed

- *Why do we learn, so early on, that Sarah is barren? What does this say about Israelite society's view on fertility? How does this make you feel?
- *Why is it significant that the text tells us that Sarah went with Abraham when he was called forth by Adonai?
- *What do we know about the relationship between Sarah and Abraham? Who holds the power and how do we know this?

⁹⁷ See Meyers, *EVE*, 14.

- *What does Sarah's relationship with Hagar tell us about her *humanness*?
- *What do you admire about Sarah? Which of her qualities are less favorable?
- *Do you find yourself in the text? If so, in what way?
- *How does the portrayal of Sarah compare with the portrayal of the *Eishet Chayil*?

Evidence of Understanding

- * The women in the group will be able to discuss Sarah in relationship to the significance of fertility in Israelite society.
- *The women in the group will be able to debunk the myth that Israelite women were silent and subservient in their marital relationships.
- *The women in the group will recognize the important role Adonai played in Sarah's life.
- *The women in the group will be able to recognize and discuss the complex relationship between Sarah and Hagar.
- *The women in the group will reflect on the impact this study session has had on their lives.

Materials Needed

- *For use by instructor: Detailed Textual Notes On Sarah (pp. 43-55 of this documentary)
- *Handout for students: Hebrew and English verses from Genesis (Plaut Commentary)

11:29-31	Introduction of Sarah and indication of her barrenness (p. 56 of this document)
12:1-5	Sarah goes with Abraham when he is called by Adonai (pp. 57-58 of this document)
12:10-20	Sister-wife motif and Sarah's physical beauty (pp. 59-60 of this document)
16:1-16	Hagar as surrogate for Sarah (pp. 61-64 of this document)
17:15-19	Adonai blesses Sarah and indicates she will give birth to Isaac (pp. 65-66 of this document)
18:1-15	Messengers of Adonai promise fertility to Sarah (pp. 67-69 of this document)
- *Flip chart and markers
- *List of "Questions To Be Addressed"
- *Journal (each women will supply her own)
- *Paper, in case someone forgets her journal
- *Pens and pencils

Timeline (1 ½ hours)

- 7:00-7:10 Welcome and “Check In”
One of the elements that attract adult learners is the social community that is formed by the group. Thus, it is important for the instructor to help foster a positive group experience by checking-in with students to see how they are doing and what has been going on since the last session. One group member, for example, might announce the *bat mitzvah* of a grandchild while another might speak of the loss of a loved one. Allowing time at the beginning of each class for “news of the Jews,” so to speak, can help connect members of the *rosh chodesh* group.
- 7:10-7:25 Reflections From the Last Class
This serves two main purposes:
- a) It provides an opportunity for the instructor to review and highlight the ideas brought forth during the last class, and
 - b) It provides an opportunity for students to ask questions about what they have already studied, discuss their thoughts about what they have learned thus far, and/or share their journal entries with the group
- 7:25-7:45 *Chevruta* Study
*Hand out copies of biblical texts used in this lesson
*Ask the women to break into groups of two (three if necessary)
*Instruct the students to read through the text, interpret it, and discuss
- 7:45-8:15 Group Discussion
*The instructor will facilitate this portion of the session by:
- a) asking one member from each *chevruta* to summarize their thoughts on the text; instructor will write answers on flip chart
 - b) furthering the group discussion by asking the women the “Questions to be Addressed”; answers to these questions will also be written on the flip chart
 - c) entertaining other questions that arise during the discussion
- 8:15-8:25 Journaling
*Ask each member to reflect on what she has learned, how she feels at this moment, and/or the impact tonight’s text study had on her identity as an American Reform Jewish woman.
- 8:25-8:30 Concluding Remarks
*This is an opportunity for anyone in the group, including the instructor, to share any last minute thoughts or feelings about the class or material covered. The instructor can also use this time to convey to the students the topic for the next class.

Detailed Textual Notes On Sarah
For Use By Instructor
To Lead Group Discussion During Class

Sarah, whose name means *princess*,⁹⁸ is the first matriarch mentioned in Genesis. She is introduced in Gen 11:29 as the wife of Abram, אשת-אברם שרי. The next verse reveals an additional detail—she is barren, עקרה, and has no child, אין לה וולד (this is also noted in 16:1).⁹⁹

To my modern-day sensibility, it strikes me as odd that the second detail offered about Sarah is her inability to conceive. How often would we, today, introduce a person in that fashion? Is this the most important detail of a woman’s life? I think not; however, the book of Genesis seems to inform otherwise. During antiquity, the period of the writing of Genesis,¹⁰⁰ a high value was placed on fertility and producing offspring (particularly males). Bearing a male child brought status to a woman, while infertility brought shame and despair, for it was the woman, and not the man, who was regarded as the source of barrenness.¹⁰¹ Childlessness, for a married woman, was understood as “a mark of divine disfavor,”¹⁰² and as “a misfortune of overwhelming proportions.”¹⁰³ The impact of this is reinforced when one considers that Sarah’s first reported speech (16:2), like that of Rachel (30:1),¹⁰⁴ reflects a desire to have children:¹⁰⁵ “And Sarai said to Abram, ‘Look, Adonai has prevented me from giving birth. Come please, to my slave-girl, and

⁹⁸ “If it [the name Sarai] is based on the Akkadian word ‘*sharratu*’ (a term used for the female consort of the moon god Sin, the principal god of Ur), it means ‘queen.’” Potok, *EH*, 62.

⁹⁹ “The sentence in 11:30 . . . together with its parallels in 2 Sam. 6:23; Judg. 13:2f; Is. 45:1, is an important witness for the significance of the narrative motif of the infertility of a wife in a variety of different contexts.” Westermann, *WES1*, 139.

¹⁰⁰ “The oldest extant parchment scroll of Genesis dates from about 600 C. E., which is perhaps as much as 1,500 years later than the likely time of its composition.” Plaut, *GEN*, xxiii.

¹⁰¹ See Sarna, *JPSG*, 119.

¹⁰² Plaut, *GEN*, 148.

¹⁰³ Westermann, *WES2*, 237.

¹⁰⁴ Gen 30:1 says: “Give me children, for if not, I will die.”

¹⁰⁵ See Alter, *FBM*, 77.

maybe I will be built up [have a son] from her.’” She seems to have given up hope that she will be able to give birth to an heir.

Abraham seems to share this conclusion, for he says to Adonai: “Lord Adonai, what can you give me, seeing that I am going to die¹⁰⁶ childless . . . Since you have given me no offspring, my steward will be my heir (15:2-3).¹⁰⁷ Although not stated directly, Abraham appears doubtful that the divine promise of 12:2 [“And I will make of you a great nation,” וַאֲנִי אֶעֱשֶׂה לְךָ גּוֹי גָדוֹל] will come to fruition. It does seem somewhat ironic that this promise from Adonai for offspring comes four lines after the Torah indicates Sarah is incapable of conceiving.¹⁰⁸ With Adonai’s intervention, however, Sarah will eventually give birth to a son (see below).

Prior to this happening, however, Sarah—desperate for a child—gives her maidservant, Hagar, to Abraham in order to become a mother through surrogacy. Understanding that her status in the community is at stake, Sarah hopes to build herself up,¹⁰⁹ both figuratively and literally, אֲנִי אֶבְנֶה מִמֶּנָּה, by having a child through Hagar (16:2). Westermann understands Sarah’s action as more of a *necessity* than a desire: “The life of a woman is an integral whole . . . only when she is a member of a family in which she presents her husband with children. In the patriarchal period there was no other way for a woman to be a member of society. It is only in this environment that the solution that Sarah adopts is comprehensible. It is a question of the

¹⁰⁶ “The Hebrew says simply ‘I am going,’ but elsewhere ‘to go’ is sometimes used as a euphemism for dying, and, as several analysts have argued, the context here makes that a likely meaning.” Alter, *FBM*, 73.

¹⁰⁷ “God remains impassively silent in the face of Abram’s brief initial complaint, forcing him to continue and spell out the reason for his skepticism about the divine promise.” Alter, *FBM*, 73. Also, “In the ancient Near East, a servant who performed filial duties for a childless couple—paying them proper respect, maintaining their household, taking care of their physical needs and comforts in their old age—could become their adopted heir.” Potok, *EH*, 83.

¹⁰⁸ See also Gen 17:2,4.

¹⁰⁹ The Hebrew word אֶבְנֶה, meaning *I will be built up* is also understood to be a wordplay on בן (son) and בָּנָה (build up).

very meaning of her life; she knows no other.”¹¹⁰ While this might sound harsh, unreasonable, or even irrational by 21st century Western values, the role of mother was valued most by, and for, Israelite women. Motherhood surpassed the other contributions women made to their households, such as food and clothing production, tending to livestock, and assisting with agricultural activities.

The practice of enlisting a surrogate mother is well attested to in ancient Near Eastern legal documents,¹¹¹ but this does not mean the process was free from problems. Genesis 16:4 indicates that after Abraham impregnates Hagar, “her mistress [i.e. Sarah] was insignificant in her eyes,” ותקל גברתה בעיניה [also translated as “was lessened in her eyes,” or “lost caste in her eyes.”] Hagar exhibits a sense of superiority over Sarah after conceiving. This is not an isolated occurrence, according to N. Sarna: “This is a natural consequence of a situation in which barrenness is regarded as a disgrace. Ancient law codes reflect the diminished social position of the barren wife.”¹¹²

When Sarah, herself, finally conceives, it is only because of divine intervention, (as mentioned above). While Abraham is the ultimate benefactor of Sarah’s pregnancy, I suggest

¹¹⁰ Westermann, *WES*2, 239.

¹¹¹ Alter, *FBM*, 77. According to N. Sarna in *JPSG*, 119, “The custom of an infertile wife providing her husband with a concubine in order to bear children is well documented in the ancient Near East. The laws of Lipit-Ishtar (early 19th cent. B.C.E.) deal with the case of a harlot who produces children for the husband of a barren wife; these become his heirs. An Old Assyrian marriage contract (19th cent. B.C.E.) stipulates that if the wife does not provide him with offspring within two years she must purchase a slave woman for the purpose. The provision of a concubine slave for bearing children is taken for granted in the laws of Hammurabi in the specific case of a wife who is priestess and is thus barred from giving birth. In Sarai’s case, it is unclear whether she had fully despaired of ever having children of her own or whether her action reflects the widespread popular belief that a woman who is unable to conceive may become fertile by adopting a child.”

¹¹² Sarna, *JPSG*, 119. “The laws of Ur-Nammu [2112-2095 B. C. E.] prescribe that the insolent concubine-slave have ‘her mouth scoured with one quart of salt’” Sarna, *JPSG*, 120. Potok writes: “The Laws of Hammurabi (numbers 146-147) deal with the problem of the female slave-concubine who bears children and claims equality with her mistress. They prescribe that the insolent concubine be reduced to slave status and again bear the slave mark.” Potok, *EH*, 87. Levenson writes: “Given the high estimation of motherhood in biblical culture, the status of Sarai and Hagar now reverses. Among the four things at which ‘the earth shudders,’ according to the book of Proverbs, is ‘a slave-girl who supplants her mistress’ (Prov. 30:23).” Levinson, “Genesis” in *JSB*, 36.

that Sarah is neither irrelevant nor invisible in the sight of Adonai in this regard. There are several textual references that show God takes notice of Sarah, causes her to become pregnant, and give birth to Isaac: 1) When Abraham tells Adonai that his servant will become his heir, Adonai responds, saying, “This one will not be your heir, but the one that comes forth from you—he will be your heir” (15:4). While Adonai is clearly stating that Abraham will become a biological father, it also becomes clear, as the narrative unfolds, that Hagar will not be the mother of the son with whom Adonai establishes a Covenant.

2) When Adonai changes Sarai’s name to Sarah, Adonai says, “And I will bless her and I will also give you a son from her; I will bless her and she will become nations, kings of peoples will issue from her.” Again, Adonai is indicating that Sarah will become a biological mother, that *she*, too, will be blessed, and that nations will come from *her*. Upon hearing this news, Abraham is skeptical, for he is already one hundred years old and Sarah is ninety (17:17).¹¹³ Adonai reiterates the point, stating further that Sarah will give birth to a son named Isaac, that the Covenant will be established with him, and that Isaac will be born “at this season, in another year,” למועד הזה בשנה האחרת¹¹⁴ (17:19, 21).¹¹⁵

3) Later, when the three visitors (understood as messengers of Adonai)¹¹⁶ arrive at Abraham’s tent, they ask for Sarah by name: “Where is your wife Sarah?”¹¹⁷ איה שרה אשתך. After Abraham responds that she is in the tent, one messenger says, “I will return to you next year, and your wife Sarah will have a son” (18:9-10). The messenger does not tell Abraham that

¹¹³ “In the very moment of prostration, he [Abraham] laughs, wondering whether God is not playing a cruel joke on him in these repeated promises of fertility as time passes and he and his wife approach fabulous old age. He would be content, he goes on to say, to have Ishmael carry on his line with God’s blessing.” Alter, *FBM*, 84.

¹¹⁴ בשנה האחרת is commonly translated as next year.

¹¹⁵ “Isaac’s birth represents the triumph of God over the limitations of nature.” Potok, *EH*, 92.

¹¹⁶ See Potok, *EH*, 101; Plaut, *GEN*, 170.

¹¹⁷ “The fact that the visitors know her name without prompting is the first indication to Abraham (unless one assumes a narrative ellipsis) that they are not ordinary humans.” Alter, *FBM*, 86.

he will have a son, but rather, he indicates that *Sarah* will have a son. Upon overhearing this news, Sarah laughs. Adonai hears her laughter, and says to Abraham, “Why is this, that Sarah laughed, saying, ‘Shall I in fact give birth, being that I am old?’ Is this too difficult for Adonai? I will return to you at this season, in about a year’s time, and Sarah will have a son” (18:9). Again, even though the comment is directed towards Abraham, the spoken words are, “Sarah will have a son,” and not, “You, Abraham, will have a son.” This is the second time that this is stated. Scholars indicate that repetition in the Hebrew Bible is significant. I suggest one possible interpretation for this phrase: Adonai has decided that Sarah will become the first matriarch of the Israelite people, and to this end, Adonai blesses her with a son. While one could argue that Sarah has a son so that the divine promise can come true, I do not think this purpose negates my interpretation. In other words, while I fully recognize and accept that Adonai gives Abraham a son so that he can become the father of many, I also assert that Adonai takes an interest in Sarah, as well. Divine intervention, as I will show in this paper, is not limited exclusively to males.

4) The final indication that Adonai intervenes in Sarah’s life is found in 21:1-2: “Adonai took note of Sarah as He said, and Adonai did for Sarah according to what He spoke.”¹¹⁸ Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the specified time that *Elohim* had spoken.”¹¹⁹ This verse makes it rather clear that Sarah became pregnant, and bore a son, because Adonai deemed it would happen, and then made it happen. God’s intervention allowed the promise of posterity to be fulfilled, as well providing the answer to Sarah’s prayers for motherhood.

¹¹⁸ This is a reference to Gen 17:16.

¹¹⁹ “The Hebrew stem *p-k-d* [used in this verse] connotes the direct involvement or intervention of God in human affairs.” Sarna, *JPSG*, 145.

The episodes surrounding Sarah's barrenness and fertility shed light on other aspects of her personality, as well as on her relationship with Abraham. When Sarah decides that she wants Abraham to lie with Hagar, she informs him of her decision. She does not consult with him or ask his opinion; rather, she takes charge of the situation. Abraham, as the text informs, "heeded the voice of Sarai," *ישמע אברם לקול שרי* (16:2). In other words, Sarah is a decision-maker in her marital relationship; she is an active participant, a partner, who possesses real power within her marriage. This contradicts the stereotypical belief that Israelite women were passive and impotent women. B. Greenberg furthers this point: "There is a striking contrast between biblical law and biblical narrative, however. The law presupposes a passive woman whose destiny was controlled by men, but the narrative portrays matriarchs as powerful figures."¹²⁰

Another example that shows Sarah's empowerment comes after Hagar gives birth to Ishmael. Hagar's air of superiority leads Sarah to become enraged. Sarah blames Abraham for her loss of status in the eyes of Hagar (16:5). When Sarah finishes chastising Abraham, he responds in a way that affirms not only Sarah's power over Hagar, but her ability to make decisions that affect the household: "Here, your slave-girl is in your hands. Do to her what pleases you." Clearly, it is Sarah, not Abraham, who decides what is to become of Hagar.

One might argue that Sarah has the ability to decide how to handle Hagar because Sarah is Hagar's owner, *וליה שפחה מצרית ושמה הגר* (16:1). Hagar belongs to Sarah, not to Abraham. Alter confirms this as he defines the Hebrew word *שפחה*: "The tradition of English versions that render this [*שפחה*] as 'maid' or 'handmaiden' imposes a misleading sense of European

¹²⁰ Greenberg, *OWJ*, 59.

gentility on the sociology of the story. The point is that Hagar belongs to Sarah as property, and the ensuing complications of their relationship build on that fundamental fact.”¹²¹ Sarna reinforces this view by focusing on the meaning of וְלָהּ (*and she had*): “Hebrew *ve-lah* emphasizes Sarah’s proprietary rights. The maid attended primarily to the personal needs of her mistress and apparently was not the common property of husband and wife.”¹²² Both of these comments speak to Sarah’s authority and status. She is allowed to own property (albeit human property) and be a master. Sarah’s ownership is affirmed in 16:7, when an angel of Adonai calls out to Hagar saying, שַׁפְּחַת שָׂרָי, “slave-girl of Sarah.”

A third episode that affirms Sarah status within her household takes place when Sarah sees Isaac and Ishmael together (21:9). She is disturbed by this sight and says to Abraham, “Expel this slave-girl and her son, because this slave-girl’s son will not inherit with my son, with Isaac,” (21:10). Abraham is distressed by Sarah’s directive. God says to Abraham, “Do not let this seem evil in your eyes on account of the boy and your slave-girl. All that Sarah says to you, listen to her voice, because with Isaac, your descendants will be called,”¹²³ (21:12). Abraham heeds Sarah’s command, rises early the next morning, gives bread and water to Hagar, and sends her away with Ishmael (21:14). The significance of these verses is two-fold: First they show Sarah is respected and her opinion matters. She is not an irrelevant, invisible or silent woman. Second, it adds credence to a point made earlier, that Adonai pays attention to Sarah, and hears her voice.

¹²¹ Alter, *FBM*, 77.

¹²² Sarna, *JPSG*, 119.

¹²³ This is an indication that Abraham’s lineage will descend through Isaac.

By extension of thought, it can be inferred that God tells Abraham, “Listen to her voice,” שמע בקלה, because Sarah is an intelligent, insightful woman.¹²⁴

A final passage that reflects the respectful treatment Sarah receives from her husband begins with Gen12:5. When Abraham leaves Haran for Canaan, Sarah goes with him. This seemingly minor detail, noted in the text, is anything but minor. The inclusion of Sarah’s name is meaningful, for it implies that she is a significant person, both to the narrative and to Abraham. Lot is the only other person, who left with Abraham who is mentioned by name.¹²⁵ When Abraham and Sarah travel to Egypt, due to a famine in Canaan, Abraham makes a request of Sarah: “Here now, please! I know that you are a woman who is beautiful in appearance. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘She is his wife.’ They will kill me, and you, they will let live. Now please say that you are my sister,¹²⁶ so that it will be good for me on account of you, and I will be able to live—because of you,” (12:11-13). The two most significant words in these three verses (for the purpose of this paper) are *Please say*, אמרי-נא, for they clearly indicate that Abraham is making a request of Sarah. He is not demanding or commanding her into action. Rather, he is asking her to assist him. Sarna holds this opinion too: “This [Please say] is not an order but a respectful plea.”¹²⁷ R. Friedman comments, regarding the usage of נא, “Abraham’s words to Sarah contain the first two occurrences of the Hebrew word *na’*. . . . It is an untranslatable particle that is a sign of polite speech.”¹²⁸ These commentators support the idea that Sarah’s relationship with Abraham is one in which she is treated respectfully. This portrayal

¹²⁴ Alter indicates that *listen to her voice* is a Hebrew idiom meaning “to obey.” Alter, *FBM*, 104.

¹²⁵ References to Sarah traveling with Abraham are also made in Gen 12:20 and 13:1.

¹²⁶ The sister-wife motif refers to an attempt by a husband to pass his wife off as his sister. This occurs three times in the Torah—twice with Abraham and Sarah (Gen 12:13; 20:2) and once with Isaac and Rebekah (Gen 26:7).

¹²⁷ Sarna, *JPSG*, 94.

¹²⁸ Friedman, *FRD*, 52. See also Gen 22:2.

serves to dispel the myth that biblical women, in general, were weak, subservient, and controlled by their husbands. It also contradicts the notion that women of antiquity were physically unattractive. This is particularly notable in Sarah's case, for she is sixty-five years old at the time of this occurrence.¹²⁹

Another aspect of Sarah's personality, revealed during episodes involving Hagar (and mentioned above), is her humanness. Despite being the first Israelite matriarch, Sarah is very much a human being who responds to life in a very human way. Like all people, she expresses emotions, has strengths, weaknesses, flaws, and even makes questionable decisions. Perhaps Friedman expresses this sentiment best; “. . . one of the great qualities of the *Tanakh* is precisely that none of its heroes is perfect.”¹³⁰

This is first seen with Sarah when Hagar becomes pregnant and adopts an attitude of superiority. While this must have been very upsetting for Sarah, she misdirects her anger. She blames Abraham and holds him responsible. To make matters worse, it was Sarah, not Abraham, who suggested that they have sexual relations. Sarah had a right to exercise legal recourse against Hagar (see nn. 8-9), but it was inappropriate and unfair for her to blame Abraham.

Sarah's emotions continue to get the best of her, even after she chides Abraham. One might expect Sarah to punish Hagar in some fashion, but she deals with her so harshly that she flees. Genesis 16:6 states: “Sarai oppressed her [Hagar] and she fled from her.” E. A. Speiser indicates the literal meaning of ותענה is “applied force to her, treated her with violence.”¹³¹ C. Potok echoes this sentiment, writing, “The Hebrew verb used here (*va-t-anneha*) implies that Sarai subjected Hagar to physical and psychological abuse and carries with it the nuance of a negative

¹²⁹ Sarna, *JPSG*, 94. For further references to Sarah's age, see Gen 12:4; 17:17; and 23:1.

¹³⁰ Friedman, *FRD*, 88-9.

¹³¹ Speiser, *ABG*, 118.

judgment of her actions.”¹³² The point of including these commentators is not to condemn Sarah and say that she is a terrible person; rather, it is to convey the notion that although she is a matriarch—the primary matriarch—of the Israelites (and eventually the Jewish people), her emotional composition is no different than others. She is not exempt from making mistakes or overreacting. She is not a perfect woman who is beyond the pale of human experience. Rather, she is a *real* person who experiences real life issues and reacts to them. As Sarna says, “The biblical heroes are not portrayed as demigods or perfect human beings. They are mortals of flesh and blood, subject to the same temptations and possessed of the same frailties as are all other human beings.”¹³³

When Sarah sees Isaac playing with Ishmael, her humanness shines through, as well. When she tells Abraham to expel Hagar and Ishmael, Sarah further insults and degrades them, thereby showing the “depth of her contempt”¹³⁴ by not referring to them by their proper names: “Expel this slave-girl and her son,” גרש האמה הזאת ואת-בנה (21:10). Commentators have tried to understand Sarah’s motivation for having Hagar and Ishmael sent away; however, based on the text, one is hard pressed to find an actual threat posed by Ishmael. Speiser writes, “According to [Gen] xvi 16 combined with vs. [21:] 5 above . . . Ishmael would now be at least fifteen years old. But his ‘playing’ with Isaac need mean no more than that the older boy was trying to amuse his little brother. There is nothing in the text to suggest that he was abusing him, a motive deduced by many troubled readers in their effort to account for Sarah’s anger.”¹³⁵ Alter notes, “Some medieval Hebrew exegetes, trying to find a justification for Sarah’s harsh response, construe the verb [playing] as a reference to homosexual advances, though that seems far-

¹³² Potok, *EH*, 87.

¹³³ Sarna, *JPSG*, 94.

¹³⁴ Levenson, “Genesis” in *JSB*, 44. See also Alter, *FBM*, 103.

¹³⁵ Speiser, *ABG*, 155.

fetches.”¹³⁶ Others suggest that Sarah does not want Isaac to be faced with any competition from his half-brother, Ishmael. She wants to insure that he, and only he, will inherit from Abraham. Additionally, one cannot overlook the fact that by sending them away, not only does Sarah remain the sole wife of Abraham, but also, she no longer has a daily, visible, reminder that her maidservant produced a son for her husband. Given the lack of clear evidence of any wrongdoing by Ishmael, I conclude that Sarah’s decision was based on her emotional state.

The final example that supports the idea that Sarah, too, is a multi-dimensional woman with both assets and shortcomings, occurs when the three visitors come to Mamre. When Sarah hears one of Adonai’s messengers say that she will give birth to a son in the following year (18:10), she laughs (18:12). God hears her laughter, asks Abraham why she laughed, and Sarah responds with a lie: “I did not laugh,” *לֹא צִחַקְתִּי* (18:15). The text indicates Sarah lied because she was afraid, *כִּי יִרְאָה* (18:15). However, Adonai gets the final word, saying: “No, you did laugh,” *לֹא כִּי צִחַקְתְּ* (18:15). A weakness of Sarah is exposed in this exchange. “Sarah is now afraid because she knows that she is face to face with a messenger of God. Her fear expresses itself in her denial that she laughed. . . . It is only now that she is aware of what she has done. . . . Sarah would much prefer to cancel her laughter; but the messenger says: no, the laughter remains a fact.”¹³⁷

This depiction of Sarah is quite human. I’m sure many people can relate to Sarah’s attempt to backtrack, and get out of a lie. It is this human quality of biblical figures that allows

¹³⁶ Alter, *FBM*, 103.

¹³⁷ Westermann, *WES*2, 282.

readers to relate to them, despite the passage of time.¹³⁸ As said by Potok, “The Bible does not gloss over the human failings of Israel’s traditional heroes.”¹³⁹

Despite her shortcomings, Sarah is nonetheless respected during her lifetime as well as in death. Genesis 23:1 notes her passing: “And Sarah’s life, the years of Sarah’s life, were one hundred and twenty-seven years. The inclusion of this information in the Hebrew Bible is significant, for it denotes the importance of Sarah, a woman, in Israelite society.¹⁴⁰ It must also be stated that Sarah is the only matriarch, and the only woman, whose age at death is recorded.¹⁴¹ While this speaks to the special treatment afforded Sarah, it does not diminish the significance of this occurrence, for the lifestyle of the matriarchs set the tone for the *ideal* treatment of women in society, in general. Therefore, one can understand the mentioning of Sarah’s age at the time of her death as a model that attests to the valuation of women in Israelite society. This does not mean that the average Israelite woman was treated as well as Sarah, or was afforded the same privileges as she; however, it does indicate that at least some women in Israelite were treated quite well.

Sarah is then honored further when Abraham mourns her death. Genesis 23:2 reads: “Sarah died in Kiryat Arba—that is Hebron¹⁴²—in the land of Canaan. And Abraham mourned for Sarah and wept for her.” This is the only reference to mourning a woman’s death in the

¹³⁸ “She is depicted as down-to-earth to a fault, with her curiosity, her impulsiveness, and her feeble attempt at deception . . . For all that Sarah knew, the promise of a child was a gesture made by meddlesome travelers; her impetuous reaction was one of derision.” Speiser, *ABG*, 131.

¹³⁹ Potok, *EH*, 101.

¹⁴⁰ “This repetition [Sarah’s life, the years of Sarah’s life] that emphasizes a woman’s age at her death is unique in the Bible. It testifies to Sarah’s importance as the first Matriarch.” Potok, *EH*, 127.

¹⁴¹ “Her age surpasses the ideal 120 with the sacred number of 7.” See Amit, *WC*, 155.

¹⁴² “Hebron, in the hill country of Judah, 20 miles south-southwest of Jerusalem, was also the first seat of David’s kingship (2 Sam. 2.1-4; 5.1-5).” Levenson, “Genesis” in *JSB*, 47. Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Leah are also buried in the Cave of Machpelah. See Gen 23:19; 35:27; 49:29-32; 50:13.

Hebrew Bible.¹⁴³ It is significant, nonetheless, for it serves as a model for how other Israelite women may have been treated when they died. Abraham's mourning and grieving over the loss of Sarah shows how much he valued her, and how painful and difficult it was when she died. I make this deduction because mourning and bewailing—a part of Israelite religious ritual—can also be understood as an act of emotional expression.¹⁴⁴

Once Abraham completes his mourning period, he focuses his attention on burying his deceased wife. He purchases land—the cave of Machpelah—so that he can give Sarah a proper burial. “Sarah's grave is the first permanent, legal presence in the land promised to Abraham and to their descendants.”¹⁴⁵ It is quite notable that an event surrounding a woman (albeit the death of Sarah) brings with it the fulfillment of part of Adonai's Covenant with Abraham—land acquisition (17:8). It is also important to recognize that Sarah's death marks “. . . the first recorded death and burial in the history of the people Israel.”¹⁴⁶ This event clearly shows that Israelite women (at least some of them) were valued in antiquity.

¹⁴³ Amit, *WC*, 156. There are references to mourning the death of men in the Hebrew Bible, such as Gen 50:10 (Joseph mourns the death of his father, Jacob).

¹⁴⁴ See Plaut, *GEN*, 219.

¹⁴⁵ Amit, *WC*, 158.

¹⁴⁶ Potok, *EH*, 127.

בראשית יא כו ואלה תולדת תרח תרח הוליד את־אברם את־
 כז נחור ואת־הרן והרן הוליד את־לוט: וימת הרן על־
 כח פני תרח אביו בארץ מולדתו באור כשדים: ויקח
 אברם ונחור להם נשים שם אשת־אברם שרי ושם
 אשת־נחור מלכה בת־הרן אבי־מלכה ואבי יסכה:
 ל ויהי שרי עקרה אין לה ולד: ויקח תרח את־
 אברם בנו ואת־לוט בן־הרן בן־בנו ואת שרי פלתו
 אשת אברם בנו ויצאו אתם מאור כשדים ללכת
 לב ארצה כנען ויבאו עד־חרן וישבו שם: ויהיו
 ימי־תרח חמש שנים ומאתים שנה וימת תרח
 בחרן:

Genesis 11

27–32

Haftarah Noach, p. 518

27] Now this is the line of Terah: Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begot Lot. 28] Haran died in the lifetime of his father Terah, in his native land, Ur of the Chaldeans. 29] Abram and Nahor took to themselves wives, the name of Abram's wife being Sarai and that of Nahor's wife Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah. 30] Now Sarai was barren, she had no child.

31] Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and they set out together from Ur of the Chaldeans for the land of Canaan; but when they had come as far as Haran, they settled there. 32] The days of Terah came to 205 years; and Terah died in Haran.

11:28] Ur. In southeastern Mesopotamia, near the mouth of the Euphrates at the Persian Gulf.

/Or Ura in northern Syria, which is much closer to Haran [3]./

פ פ פ

א וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם לֵךְ־לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ
 ב וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶה: וְאָעֲשֶׂה לְגוֹי
 ג גָּדוֹל וְאֶבְרַכְךָ וְאֶגְדָּלְךָ שְׁמֹךְ וְהָיָה בְּרָכָה: וְאֶבְרַכְךָ
 ד מְבָרְכֶיךָ וּמְקַלְלֶיךָ אָאֵר וְנִבְרָכוּ בְּךָ כָּל מִשְׁפַּחַת
 הָאֲדָמָה: וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֵלָיו יְהוָה וַיֵּלֶךְ
 וְלוֹט וְאַבְרָם בֶּן־חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה בְּצֵאתוֹ
 וּמְחָרָן: וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם אֶת־שָׂרִי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת־לוֹט בֶּן־
 אָחִיו וְאֶת־כָּל־רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכְשׁוּ וְאֶת־הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר־
 עָשׂוּ בְּחָרָן וַיֵּצְאוּ לָלֶכֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרֶץ

Genesis 12
 1-5

1] The LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2] I will make of you a great nation, / And I will bless you; / I will make your name great, / And you shall be a blessing: / 3] I will bless those who bless you, / And curse him that curses you; / All the families of the earth / Shall bless themselves by you." 4] Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. 5] Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the wealth that they had amassed, and the persons that they had acquired in Haran; and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in the land of

12:1] *Your native land.* However, Ur, not Haran, was Abraham's native place (Gen. 11:26-28). This verse would better be rendered "land of your kindred."

2] *A great nation.* גוי (goy, nation); used in the Bible to refer to the descendants of Abraham as well as to other peoples.

3] *Shall bless themselves.* When they utter a blessing they will invoke Abraham as a model [4] (cf. Gen. 48:20). Others interpret this: "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed," i.e., "you will be the cause of their blessings."

בראשית יב
 כָּנָעַן: וַיַּעֲבֹר אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ עַד מְקוֹם שְׁכֶם עַד
 אֵלּוֹן מוֹרֶה וְהַכְנַעֲנִי אֹו בְּאֶרֶץ: וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה אֶל-
 אַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר לְוָרְעָךָ אֲתָן אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וַיְבִן
 שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה הַנִּרְאָה אֵלָיו: וַיַּעֲתֶק מִשָּׁם הָהָרָה
 מִקְדָּם לְבֵית־אֵל וַיֵּט אֶהְלֵה בֵית־אֵל מִיָּם וְהָעִי
 מִקְדָּם וַיְבַן־שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה:
 Genesis 12
 6-9
 וַיֵּסַע אַבְרָם הַלּוֹךְ וְנֹסֵעַ הַנִּגְבָּה: פ

Canaan, 6] Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, at the terebinth of Moreh. The Canaanites were then in the land.

7] The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your offspring." And he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him. 8] From there he moved on to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and he built there an altar to the LORD and invoked the LORD by name. 9] Then Abram journeyed by stages toward the Negeb.

6] Shechem. Near Nablus, north of Jerusalem.

The terebinth of Moreh. מוֹרֶה (moreh, teaching, informing), a large tree famed as a site of oracles. Trees played an important role in ancient religions (see Deut. 12:2; Isa. 1:29).

/Hence some render elon moreh as "oracle tree" [5]. The Septuagint mentions its height [6]. Note also the "terebinths of Mamre" in Gen. 18:1./

The Canaanites were then in the land. This passage has been a problem to those who believe that the Torah was written by Moses. For in his

age the Canaanites were indeed living in the land while the expression "then" (but not now) appears to deny it.

/Rashi substitutes "already" for "then" (אָז); Ibn Ezra hints that tradition here faces an insurmountable difficulty; and Spinoza pursues this further [7]./

7] I will give this land. This promise is to be repeated again and again to Abraham and his descendants.

8] Bethel... Ai. Located north of Jerusalem, about a third of the way to Shechem.

9] Negeb. Or Negev, the south land.

בראשית יב

י וַיְהִי רָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ נִינְוֶה אַבְרָם מִצְרִימָה לְגֹור שָׁם
 יא כִּי־כָבֵד הָרָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ: וַיְהִי כֹאֲשֶׁר הִקְרִיב לְבֹא
 מִצְרִימָה וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־שָׂרִי אִשְׁתּוֹ הִנֵּה־נָא יָדַעְתִּי כִּי
 יב אִשָּׁה יִפְתֹּמְרָאָה אֶת: וְהָיָה כִּי־יֵרְאוּ אֹתְךָ הַמִּצְרִיִּם
 יג וַאֲמָרוּ אִשְׁתּוֹ זֹאת וְהָרְגוּ אֹתִי וְאַתָּה יָחִיו: אֲמָר־נָא
 יד אֲחֹתִי אֶת לְמַעַן יִטְבִּילִי בְּעַבְדֶּךָ וְחַיְתָּה נַפְשִׁי
 טו אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה כִּי־יִפָּהּ הוּא מָאֹד: וַיֵּרְאוּ אֹתָהּ שָׂרִי
 פֶּרְעָה וַיְהִלְלוּ אֹתָהּ אֶל־פְּרָעָה וַתִּקַּח הָאִשָּׁה בֵּית
 פֶּרְעָה: וּלְאַבְרָם הֵיטִיב בְּעַבְדֶּרְהָ וַיְהִי־לּוֹ צֹאן
 וּבָקָר וְחֲמֹרִים וְעֶבְדִּים וְשֹׁפְחֹת וְאֹתָנוֹת וְגַמְלִים:
 ו זִנְנָה יְהוָה אֶת־פְּרָעָה נְנָעִים גְּדָלִים וְאֶת־בֵּיתוֹ עַל־

Genesis 12

10-17

10] There was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. 11] As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I am well aware that you are a beautiful woman. 12] When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'She is his wife,' and they will kill me, but let you live. 13] Say then that you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may remain alive thanks to you."

14] When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw how very beautiful the woman was. 15] Pharaoh's courtiers saw her and praised her to Pharaoh, and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's palace. 16] And because of her, it went well with Abram; he acquired sheep, oxen, asses, male and female slaves, she-asses, and camels.

17] But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his household with mighty plagues on

12:10] *There was a famine in the land.* Canaan depended on rainfall, which was often insufficient, while Egypt, with its Nile waters, at times served as the bread basket of the area.

11] *A beautiful woman.* This story is told again with slight variations in chapter 20 and then a third time in chapter 26, where Isaac and Rebekah play the main roles. The tale here sees Sarah as young

יח דִּבֶּר שָׂרִי אִשְׁתֹּ אַבְרָם: וַיִּקְרָא פַרְעֹה לְאַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרֹאשִׁית יֵב; יג
 מִה־זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ לִּי לָמָּה לֹא־הִגַּדְתָּ לִּי כִּי אִשְׁתְּךָ הִוא: יח-כ; א-ו
 יט לָמָּה אָמַרְתָּ אֲחֹתִי הִוא וְאַקַּח אֹתָהּ לִי לְאִשָּׁה וְעַתָּה
 כ הִנֵּה אִשְׁתְּךָ קִח וְלֵךְ: וַיֵּצֵאוּ עָלָיו פַּרְעֹה אֲנָשִׁים
 וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ אוֹתוֹ וְאֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ:
 א וַיַּעַל אַבְרָם מִמִּצְרַיִם הִוא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וְלוֹט
 ב עִמּוֹ הַנֶּגֶבָה: וְאַבְרָם כָּבֵד מְאֹד בַּמִּקְנֶה בַּכֶּסֶף
 ג וּבִזְהָב: וַיֵּלֶךְ לְמִסְעָיו מִנֶּגֶב וְעַד־בֵּית־אֵל עַד־הַמָּקוֹם
 ד אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה שָׁם אֱהֱלָה בְּתַחֲלָה בֵּין בֵּית־אֵל וּבֵין הָעֵי:
 ה שָׁם אַבְרָם בָּשָׂם יְהוָה: וְגַם־לָלוֹט הֵלֵךְ אֶת־אַבְרָם
 ו הָיָה צֹאן וּבָקָר וְאֵהָלִים: וְלֹא־נָשָׂא אֹתָם הָאָרֶץ

Genesis 12; 13
 18-20; 1-6

account of Sarai, the wife of Abram. 18] Pharaoh sent for Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me! Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? 19] Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her as my wife? Now, here is your wife; take her and be gone!" 20] And Pharaoh put men in charge of him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he possessed.

1] From Egypt, Abram went up into the Negeb, with his wife and all that he possessed, together with Lot. 2] Now Abram was very rich in cattle, silver, and gold. 3] And he proceeded by stages from the Negeb as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been formerly, between Bethel and Ai, 4] the site of the altar which he had built there at first; and there Abram invoked the LORD by name.

5] Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, 6] so that

enough to attract the Egyptians, whereas in Gen. 12:4 we are told that Abraham was seventy-five years old, which would make Sarah (who was ten years younger, according to Gen. 17:17) sixty-five.

ט' מִצְרִים עַד־הַנָּהָר הַגָּדֹל נְהַר־פָּרָת: אֶת־הַקְנִיזִי וְאֶת־בְּרֵאשִׁית טו; טז
 כ' הַקְנִיזִי וְאֶת הַקַּדְמוֹנִי: וְאֶת־הַחִתִּי וְאֶת־הַפְּרִזִּי וְאֶת־ יט-כא; א-ג
 כא הָרַפְאִים: וְאֶת־הָאֱמֹרִי וְאֶת־הַכְּנֻעִי וְאֶת־הַגִּרְגָּשִׁי
 וְאֶת־הַיְבוּסִי: ס
 א וְשָׂרִי אִשְׁתְּ אַבְרָם לֹא יָלְדָה לוֹ וְלֹה שִׁפְחָה מִצְרִית
 ב וְשָׁמָּה הָגָר: וַתֹּאמֶר שָׂרִי אֶל־אַבְרָם הִנֵּה־נָא עֲצֹרֵנִי
 יְהוָה מִלְּדֹת בָּאֵנָּה אֶל־שִׁפְחָתִי אוֹלִי אֲבָנָה מִמֶּנָּה
 ג וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם לְקוֹל שָׂרִי: וַתִּקַּח שָׂרִי אִשְׁת־אַבְרָם
 Genesis 15; 16 אֶת־הָגָר הַמִּצְרִית שִׁפְחָתָהּ מִמֶּנָּה עָשָׂר שָׁנִים לְשִׁבְתָּהּ
 19-21; 1-3

river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates: 19] the Kenites, the Kenizites, the Kadmonites, 20] the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, 21] the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”

1] Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. She had an Egyptian maid-servant whose name was Hagar. 2] And Sarai said to Abram, “See, the LORD has kept me from bearing. Consort with my maid; perhaps I shall have a son through her.” And Abram heeded Sarai’s request. 3] So Sarai, Abram’s wife, took her maid, Hagar the Egyptian—after Abram had dwelt in the land of Canaan ten years—and

19] *The Kenites*. Kenites and Kenizzites lived in the Negev; Kadmonites means “easterners” or “ancients.” On Perizzites, see Gen. 13:7; on Rephaim, Gen. 14:5; Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites are mentioned in chapter 10.

16:2] *The Lord has kept me from bearing*. Childlessness is considered a mark of divine disfavor. The Bible relates several instances of barrenness, induced and then eliminated by God’s will (e.g., Rachel, Hannah). This theme makes the late appearance of a first child (always a son) especially important.

/Compare the proverb: “One without a child is as dead and razed to the ground” [5]. See also Gen. 30:1./

Have a son. Literally, “be built up,” a word play on בֵּן (*ben*, son) and בָּנָה (*banah*, build up).

3] *Concubine*. The Hebrew word אִשָּׁה (*ishah*) is also the term used for wife. Hagar becomes Abraham’s אִשָּׁה, but she remains Sarai’s servant. The Code of Hammurabi warns expressly that a slave girl elevated by her mistress should not and could not claim equality [6]. A Nuzi contract

בראשית טו אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַתֵּתֶנּוּ אֹתָהּ לְאִבְרָם אִשָּׁה לוֹ
ד-ח לְאִשָּׁה: וַיָּבֹא אֶל־הָגָר וַתְּהַר וַתֵּרָא כִּי הָרְתָה וַתִּקַּל
ה גְּבֻרָתָהּ בְּעֵינֶיהָ: וַתֹּאמֶר שָׂרִי אֶל־אַבְרָם חֲמָסִי עָלַי
אֲנֹכִי נָתַתִּי שְׂפָחָתִי בְּחִיקָךְ וַתֵּרָא כִּי הָרְתָה וַאֲקַל
ו בְּעֵינֶיהָ יִשְׁפֹּט יְהוָה בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶיךָ: וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם אֶל־
שָׂרִי הִנֵּה הִנָּה שְׂפָחָתְךָ בְּיָדֶךָ עֲשִׂילָהּ הַטּוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ
וַתַּעֲנֶה שָׂרִי וַתְּבָרַח מִפָּנֶיהָ: וַיִּמְצָאָהּ מֶלֶאךָ יְהוָה
ח עַל־עֵין הַמַּיִם בְּמִדְבָּר עַל־הָעֵין בְּדֶרֶךְ שׁוּר: וַיֹּאמֶר
Genesis 16
4-8 הָגָר שְׂפָחַת שָׂרִי אֵימָזָה בָּאת וְאָנָּה תִּלְכִּי וַתֹּאמֶר

* ה נקוד על י' בחרא.

gave her to her husband Abram as concubine. 4] And he cohabited with Hagar and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was lowered in her esteem. 5] And Sarai said to Abram, "The wrong done me is your fault! I myself gave my maid into your bosom; now that she sees that she is pregnant, I am lowered in her esteem. The LORD decide between you and me!" 6] Abram said to Sarai, "Your maid is in your hands. Deal with her as you think right." Then Sarai treated her harshly, and she ran away from her.

7] The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the road to Shur, 8] and said, "Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" And she said, "I am running away from my mistress Sarai."

provided: "If Gillimninu bears children, Shennima shall not take another wife. But if Gillimninu fails to bear children, she shall get for him a slave girl as concubine. In that case, Gillimninu herself shall have authority over the offspring" [7].

6] *Sarai treated her harshly.* Since in her position Hagar could no longer be sold or expelled [8], Sarah abuses her maid, thereby causing her to leave of her own accord (cf. Deut. 21:14).

7] *Angel.* See p. 170.

בראשית טז

ט-טו

ט מפני שרי גברתי אנכי ברחתי: ויאמר לה מלאך

י יהנה שובי אלי-גברתך והתעני תחת ידיה: ויאמר

לה מלאך יהנה הרבה ארבה את-זרעך ולא

יא יספר מרב: ויאמר לה מלאך יהנה הנך הרה

וילדת בן וקראת שמו ישמעאל כי-שמע יהנה אל-

יב עניך: והוא יהיה פרא אדם ידו בכל ויד כל בו

יג ועל-פני כל-אחיו ישכן: ותקרא שם-יהנה הדבר

אלהיה אתה אל ראי כי אמרה הגם הלם ראיתי

ד אחר ראי: על-כן קרא לבאר באר לחי ראי הנה

9-15

טו בין-קדש ובין ברד: ותלד הגר לאברהם בן ויקרא

9] And the angel of the LORD said to her, "Go back to your mistress, and submit to her harsh treatment." 10] And the angel of the LORD said to her, "I will greatly increase your offspring, / And they shall be too many to count." 11] The angel of the LORD said to her further, "Behold, you are with child / And shall bear a son; / You shall call him Ishmael, / For the LORD has paid heed to your suffering. / 12] He shall be a wild ass of a man; / His hand against everyone, / And everyone's hand against him; / And in defiance of all his kinsmen he shall camp." 13] And she called the LORD who spoke to her, "You Are El-roi," by which she meant, "Have I not gone on seeing after He saw me!" 14] Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; t is between Kadesh and Bered. 15] And Hagar bore a son to Abram,

11] Ishmael. ישמעאל means God heeds.

12] A wild ass of a man. A reference to the character of the Bedouin, who, like the wild ass of the desert, lives in highly mobile groups. On Ishmael as the ancestor of the Arabs, see p. 200.

13] El-roi. Apparently, "God of my vision"; the

remainder of the Hebrew is obscure.

/Various emendations have been offered to produce the sense: "I have lived after seeing God" [9]./

14] Beer-lahai-roi. Meaning is uncertain, perhaps "the well of the Living One who sees me."

Between Kadesh and Bered. In the Negev.

בראשית טז אַבְרָם שָׁם־בָּנוּ אֶשְׁרֵי־לָדָה הָגָר יִשְׁמָעֵאל: וְאַבְרָם
 בְּדֹשְׁמֻנִים שָׁנָה וְיֵשׁ שְׁנַיִם בְּלֶדְתָּהּ הָגָר אֶת־יִשְׁמָעֵאל Genesis 16
 לְאַבְרָם: 16
 ס

and Abram gave the son that Hagar bore him the name Ishmael. 16] Abram was
 eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

בראשית יז
 יד בְּבִשְׂרְכֶם לְבְרִית עֹלָם: וְעָרַל זָכָר אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יְמוּל
 יד-ט אֶת־בִּשְׂרֵי עָרְלָתוֹ וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהִוא מֵעַמִּיהָ אֶת־
 טו בְּרִיתִי הַפֶּר: ס וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־אַבְרָהָם שְׂרִי
 אֶשְׁתְּךָ לֹא־תִקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמָהּ שְׂרִי כִי שָׂרָה שְׁמָהּ:
 טז וּבִרְכָתִי אֶתָּה וְגַם נָתַתִּי מִמֶּנָּה לָךְ בֶּן וּבִרְכָתֶיהָ
 יז וְהָיְתָה לְגוֹיִם מְלֻכֵי עַמִּים מִמֶּנָּה יִהְיוּ: וַיִּפֹּל אַבְרָהָם
 עַל־פָּנָיו וַיִּצְחָק וַיֹּאמֶר בְּלִבּוֹ הֲלֹכֵן מֵאַהֲשָׁנָה יוֹלֵד
 יח וְאִם־שָׂרָה הִבְתִּיתְשָׁעִים שָׁנָה תֵּלֵד: וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם
 יט אֱלֹהֵי־אֱלֹהִים לוֹ יִשְׁמַעְאֵל יִחְיֶה לְפָנֶיךָ: וַיֹּאמֶר
 אֱלֹהִים אֲבֹל שָׂרָה אֶשְׁתְּךָ יֵלְדָת לָךְ בֶּן וְקִרְאתָ
 אֶת־שְׁמוֹ יִצְחָק וְהִקְמַתִי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתּוֹ לְבְרִית

Genesis 17

14-19

must be circumcised!—Thus shall My covenant be marked in your flesh as an everlasting pact. 14] An uncircumcised male who does not circumcise the flesh of his foreskin—such a person shall be cut off from his kin; he has broken My covenant.”

15] And God said to Abraham, “As for your wife Sarai, you shall not call her Sarai, but her name shall be Sarah. 16] I will bless her; indeed, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she shall give rise to nations; rulers of peoples shall issue from her.” 17] Abraham threw himself on his face and laughed, as he said to himself, “Can a child be born to a man a hundred years old, or can Sarah bear a child at ninety?” 18] And Abraham said to God, “Oh that Ishmael might live by Your favor!” 19] God said, “Nevertheless, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac; and I will maintain My covenant with him as an everlasting

15] *Sarai*. This is probably an older linguistic form for Sarah, i.e., “princess.”

/The Talmud records the opinion that Sarai’s name change symbolized the end of her barrenness [2]./

18] *Oh that Ishmael might live by Your favor!* A rejoinder either of humility [3] or of anxiety [4].

19] *Isaac*. From צחק (to laugh).

כ עולם לזרעו אחריו: ולישמעאל שמעתיך הנה
 ברכתי אתו והפרייתי אתו והרביתי אתו במאד
 מאד שנים-עשר נשיאם יוליד ונתתיו לגוי גדול:
 כא ואת-בריתי אקים את-יצחק אשר תלד לך שרה
 כב למועד הזה בשנה האחרת: ויכל לדבר אתו ויעל
 כג אלהים מעל אברהם: ויקח אברהם את-ישמעאל
 בנו ואת כל-ילדי ביתו ואת כל-מקנת כספו כל-
 זכר באנשי בית אברהם וימל את-בשר ערלתם
 כד בעצם היום הזה באשר דבר אתו אלהים: ואברהם
 בן-תשעים ותשע שנה בהמלו בשר ערלתו:
 כה וישמעאל בנו בן-שלוש עשרה שנה בהמלו את בשר

בראשית יז
 כ-כה
 Genesis 17
 20-25

covenant for his offspring to come. 20] As for Ishmael, I have heeded you. I hereby
 bless him. I will make him fertile and exceedingly numerous. He shall be the father
 of twelve chieftains, and I will make of him a great nation. 21] But My covenant
 I will maintain with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next
 year." 22] And when He was done speaking with him, God was gone from
 Abraham.

23] Then Abraham took his son Ishmael, and all his homeborn slaves and all
 those he had bought, every male among Abraham's retainers, and he circumcised
 the flesh of their foreskins on that very day, as God had spoken to him. 24] Abra-
 ham was ninety-nine years old when he circumcised the flesh of his foreskin 25] and
 his son Ishmael was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his

20] I have heeded you. שמעתיך, a word play on ישמעאל (Ishmael—God will heed).

פ פ פ

בְּרֵאשִׁית יח א וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה בְּאֵלֶיךָ מִמָּרָא וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח
א-ה ב הָאֵהָל כְּחֹם הַיּוֹם: וַיֵּשָׂא עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה
אָנָשִׁים נֹצְבִים עָלָיו וַיֵּרָא וַיָּרֶץ לִקְרָאתָם מִפֶּתַח
ג הָאֵהָל וַיִּשְׁתָּחוּ אַרְצָה: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי אִם-נָא מִצָּאתִי
ד חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֵל-נָא תַעֲבֹר מֵעַל עֲבֹדְךָ: יִקְחֵנָּא
ה מִעֲטֻמִּים וְרַחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיכֶם וְהִשְׁעֲנוּ תַּחַת הָעֵץ: וְאָקְחָה
פּתִלָּחִם וְסַעֲדוּ לְבָבְכֶם אַחֵר תַּעֲבֹרוּ כִּי-עַל-כֵּן
Genesis 18
עֲבַרְתֶּם עַל-עֲבֹדְכֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ כֵּן תַעֲשֶׂה בְּאִשְׁרֵךְ
1-5

1] The LORD appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre; he was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot. 2] Looking up, he saw three men standing near him. As soon as he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them and, bowing to the ground, 3] he said, "My lords, if it please you, do not go on past your servant. 4] Let a little water be brought; bathe your feet and recline under the tree. 5] And let me fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves; then go on—seeing that you have come your servant's way." They replied, "do as you have said."

18:1] *The Lord appeared.* The aim of this introduction is to make it clear that the visitors in the following story are an apparition of the Divine.

Terebinths of Mamre. Near Hebron, where Abraham had built an altar (Gen. 13:18).

2] *Three men standing near him.* Abraham did not see them coming and seems startled by their sudden appearance.

3] *My lords.* אֲדֹנָי (or, my Lord). The Hebrew

sentences are couched alternately in the singular and plural, suggesting the fusion of two literary traditions. Maimonides understood the entire episode to have been a vision [1].

/Harmonizers suggest that the syntactical variance is due to Abraham's uncertainty over whether the messengers were mere men or represented God. In any case, tradition prescribes that אֲדֹנָי here be read as a sacred word./

5] *A morsel of bread.* The modest understatement

דְּבַרְתָּ: וַיִּמְהַר אַבְרָהָם הָאֵהָלָה אֶל־שָׂרָה וַיֹּאמֶר
 מַה־רֵי שְׁלֹשׁ סָאִים קִמַּח סֶלֶת לְוִשִׁי וְעָשִׂי עֲגוֹת:
 וְאֶל־הַבָּקָר רֹץ אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח בֶּן־בָּקָר רֶדֶד וְטוֹב
 וַיִּתֵּן אֶל־הַנֶּעֱר וַיִּמְהַר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתוֹ: וַיִּקַּח חֲמָאָה
 וּחֶלֶב וּבֶן־הַבָּקָר אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּתֵּן לַפְּנִיָּהם וְהוּא־
 עֹמֵד עֲלֵיהֶם תַּחַת הָעֵץ וַיֹּאכְלוּ: וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו אִיָּה
 שָׂרָה אֲשֶׁתְּךָ וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה בָאֵהָל: וַיֹּאמֶר שׁוּב אֲשׁוּב
 אֵלֶיךָ כָּעֵת חַיָּה וְהִנֵּה־בֵן לְשָׂרָה אֲשֶׁתְּךָ וְשָׂרָה
 שִׂמְעַת פֶּתַח הָאֵהָל וְהוּא אַחֲרָיו: וְאַבְרָהָם וְשָׂרָה

Genesis 18
 6-II

* ט נקוד על איו.

6] Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Quick, three measures of choice flour! Knead and make cakes!" 7] Then Abraham ran to the herd, took a calf, tender and choice, and gave it to a servant-boy, who hastened to prepare it. 8] He took curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them; and he waited on them under the tree as they ate.

9] They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he replied, "There, in the tent." 10] Then one said, "I will return to you when life is due, and your wife Sarah shall have a son!" Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent, which was behind him. 11] Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years; Sarah

ment of a gracious host who expects to serve much more.

6] *Three measures.* סָאִים (singular, סָאָה), probably about twenty-eight cups, an overgenerous amount for three guests. However, it may have been customary on such occasions to include the important members of the household [2] or to supply provisions for the way [3].

8] *They ate.* Traditional interpreters experience great difficulties here. If the three are divine

messengers, why do they eat? According to the Midrash, they merely appeared to eat [4]. According to Rashi, they pretended out of courtesy. And why does Abraham serve milk and meat at the same meal in contravention of the laws of *kashrut*? According to Hertz, the milk was consumed a sufficient time before the meat [5].

10] *When life is due.* After nine months (see II Kings 4:16-17, where Elisha uses the same expression [כָּעֵת] when promising a child to the Shunammite woman).

בראשית יח וְקָנִים בָּאִים בְּיָמִים חֲדָל לִהְיוֹת לְשָׂרָה אַרְחַ פְּנֵשִׁים:
 יב-טו וַתִּצְחַק שָׂרָה בְּקִרְבָּהּ לֵאמֹר אַחֲרֵי בְלִתִּי הִיתָה־לִּי
 י וְעִדָּנָה וְאֵדֹנִי וְקָן: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָהָם לְמָה זֶה
 צִחָקָה שָׂרָה לֵאמֹר הֲאֵף אֲמַנָּם אֵלֶּד וְאֲנִי וְקָנָתִי:
 יד הִיפְלֵא מִיָּהוָה דְּבַר לְמוֹעֵד אָשׁוּב אֵלֶיךָ כְּעַת
 טו חַיָּה וּלְשָׂרָה בֵּן: וַתִּכְחַשׁ שָׂרָה לֵאמֹר לֹא צִחָקָתִי
 Genesis 18 כִּי יֵרָאֶה וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא כִּי צִחָקָה: 12-15

had stopped having the periods of women. 12] And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "Now that I am withered, am I to have enjoyment—with my husband so old?" 13] Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I in truth bear a child, old as I am?' 14] Is anything too wondrous for the LORD? I will return to you at the time that life is due, and Sarah shall have a son." 15] Sarah dissembled, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was frightened. He replied, "But you did laugh."

12] Sarah laughed. וַתִּצְחַק (va-titzchak). Sarah's behavior explains the name Isaac, יִצְחָק (yitzchak) (see Gen. 21:6).

/The Septuagint has: "Sarah laughed openly" (instead of "to herself")./

15] She lied. To Abraham when he confronted her.

Lesson 4: Rebekah

In this lesson, the focus will be Rebekah, as she is portrayed in the book of Genesis. Comparisons and contrasts can be drawn between her, Sarah and the *Eishet Chayil*, focusing on how the *ideal* Israelite woman is portrayed by the text. Students should also be encouraged to see if they can “find themselves” in the text.

*The instructor can begin by conveying the events in Genesis after Sarah’s death; namely, that Abraham sends his servant back to his birthplace to find a suitable wife for Isaac.

*The following can be brought forth during the lesson to depict this Israelite woman:

- The servant meets Rebekah by a well where she provides water for him and his camels, an indication not only of her kindness but also her physical strength and stamina¹⁴⁷ (24:15-20, 24:20, 24:26, 24:28). Compare with *Eishet Chayil* in Prov. 31:17 and 31:27.

- The text tells us that Rebekah is very beautiful (24:16 and 26:7); also an attribute ascribed to Sarah.

- Rebekah is described as “a virgin whom no man has known” (24:16)

- Rebekah is portrayed as generous, helpful, friendly and hospitable (24:25). She emulates the Jewish value of *hachnasat orchim*, welcoming the stranger. In this regard, she is comparable to Abraham, as found in 18:2-5.

- There is a similarity between the blessing Rebekah receives (24:60) and the one bestowed upon Abraham (22:17). This is significant for it shows that Rebekah has a role in fulfilling the Covenant made between Adonai and Abraham – progeny and land. Note: Isaac, as the second patriarch, does not receive the blessing of multiple offspring and land acquisition, as does Rebekah.

- The interaction at the well between Rebekah and Abraham’s servant, a complete stranger, provides information about Rebekah’s personality – she is outgoing, confident and feels at ease around others.¹⁴⁸ Other biblical commentators describe Rebekah’s personality as forceful and enterprising,¹⁴⁹ managerial,¹⁵⁰ energetic, and resourceful.¹⁵¹ Compare with *Eishet Chayil* Prov. 31:11, 13, 15, 18, 25, 27.

¹⁴⁷ A single camel “requires at least twenty-five gallons of water to regain the weight it loses in the course of a journey. It takes a camel about ten minutes to drink this amount of water.” Sarna, *JPSG*, 164.

¹⁴⁸ “Nothing suggest that Rebekah, or other women, were expected to be in seclusion, away from men’s gaze or contact, as would become customary later in the Middle East (see also Genesis 29:1-10).” Amit, *WC*, 160. See Plaut, *GEN*, 275.

¹⁴⁹ Alter, *FBM*, 119.

¹⁵⁰ Plaut, *GEN*, 261.

¹⁵¹ Amit, *WC*, 160.

-Rebekah consents to leaving her family and going with Abraham's servant (24:58). She is not forced to go (24:5).¹⁵² We find another parallel between Rebekah and Abraham – both decide to leave their homeland and family (24:57-61 and 12:1-6)

-Rebekah is loved by Isaac (24:67).

-Adonai intervenes in Rebekah's life; this is first noted when Rebekah appears at the well as soon as Abraham's servant completes a prayer asking Adonai for guidance in selecting a wife for Isaac (24:12-15). This idea is also supported by the text in 24:50, when Rebekah's father and brother say, "The matter comes from Adonai." The second intervention by Adonai comes when Rebekah is barren; Isaac pray to Adonai on behalf of Rebekah and she conceives (25:21). The third example of divine intervention comes during Rebekah's pregnancy. When Esau and Jacob are struggling in her womb, Rebekah will "inquire of Adonai" (25:22) and God answers her (25:23). These examples tell us, "In matters of revelation, man is not more important than woman."¹⁵³

-The most controversial action taken by Rebekah is her showing favoritism to Jacob and helping him receive the coveted blessing from Isaac. While some commentators judge Rebekah harshly and question her morals and ethics, others see her as carrying out Adonai's divine plan – the plan that God revealed to her during her difficult pregnancy. Another controversial issue surrounding Rebekah, and one that shows her *humanness*, is her manipulating Isaac into sending Jacob away.

*After the class discusses the texts in both *chevruta* groups and as a whole, there will be time for journaling and concluding remarks.

¹⁵² "Note that Rebekah is asked to consent to the marriage, as was customary also in Nuzi." Plaut, *GEN*, 235.

¹⁵³ Friedman, *FRD*, 87.

Lesson 5: Rachel

In this lesson, the focus will be Leah, as she is portrayed in the book of Genesis. Comparisons and contrasts can be drawn between her, Sarah, Rebekah and the *Eishet Chayil*, while focusing on how the *ideal* Israelite woman is portrayed by the text. Students should also be encouraged to “find themselves” in the text, and see how they can relate to the lives of the Israelite women being discussed.

*The instructor can begin by recounting, with the class, why Jacob fled to Haran – the place where he first meets Rachel.

*The following can be brought forth during the lesson to depict this Israelite woman:

- Rachel meets Jacob at the well (29:6-12); this is where Rebekah met Abraham’s servant.

- Rachel is described as being physically beautiful (29:17); the same is true for Sarah and Rebekah.

- Rachel is loved by Jacob (29:18, 29:20, 29:30). Compare with Rebekah (24:67).

- Rachel is watching her father’s flock when Jacob first sees her (29:9). She is a shepherdess – a critical task for those living an agrarian or nomadic lifestyle, and one that affects the family’s livelihood.

- Rachel interacts with members of the opposite sex.¹⁵⁴ She is not secluded behind the walls of her home, hidden away from public view; rather, she is an active member of society who is visible and seen. Compare with *Eishet Chayil* who interacts with men when performing her duties, and with Rebekah (24:18-21, 25).

- Rachel informs her father of Jacob’s arrival (29:12). Compare with Rebekah (24:28). This supports the idea that Israelite women were free to move about outside the home and have contact with members of the opposite sex; it also shows women as the conveyors of information, as the ones who “spread the news.” Public wells served as a common site for newly arrived strangers to gather.

- Rachel and Leah enter into a jealous competition to win Jacob’s love, by giving birth to children, particularly sons. They both understand that their culture places a high value on producing children, and they know infertility brings pain, shame and embarrassment (30:1). The society of the matriarchs demands that women reproduce to help bring about God’s promise of land, progeny, and a great name.¹⁵⁵ The birth of children is also critical for defense, caring of aging adults, and the transmission of property (inheritance). During the agrarian biblical period, offspring were also needed to work the land, produce food, and help run the household. The narratives that describe Rachel and Leah’s

¹⁵⁴ “ . . . girls helped with the work and were able to move among the men freely and unhindered.” Westermann, *WES*2, 465. See also Ex. 2:16.

¹⁵⁵ Yee, *ABD* 4, 268.

continual efforts to bear more children indicate how closely aligned the image of the *ideal* Israelite woman was with fertility and reproduction.¹⁵⁶ Compare with Sarah and Rebekah.

-Rachel's barrenness is ascribed to Adonai (30:2).

-Desperate for children, Rachel instructs Jacob to lie with her maidservant, Bilhah (30:3); Jacob obediently follows her instruction (30:4); Bilhah conceives (30:5) which is understood as a direct result of God hearing and answering Rachel's prayer (30:6).

-Rachel names her children (30:5-8, 24). Naming a child (and circumcising newborn sons) were ritual acts performed by Israelite women as part of their religious culture.¹⁵⁷ Women pronounce "the newborn's name in 62 percent of the name-giving events [in the Hebrew Bible]."¹⁵⁸ Compare with Leah and Ruth (4:17).

-God intervenes on Rachel's behalf, opens her womb, and she conceives (30:22-23). Compare with Sarah, Rebekah and Leah.

-Rachel's jealousy toward her sister, Leah, shows her *humanness*.

-Rachel's *humanness* is also exhibited when she steals her father's idols (31:19).

-When Jacob wants to leave Haran for his homeland, he consults with Rachel and Leah (31:1-17). Jacob knows that he must obtain their approval before he and his family can actually leave, so he calls them to the field for a conversation. "Jacob proceeds in this fashion not only because he is busy tending the flocks, as he himself repeatedly reminds us in the dialogue, but also because he needs to confer with his wives in a safe location beyond earshot of Laban and his sons."¹⁵⁹ Rachel and Leah consent to leaving (31:16). The consecutive *vav* in the Hebrew text (31:17) shows that the departure is now possible because the wives have agreed.

-Women inherited property (31:14)

-Rachel is honored by Jacob, after she dies, when he places an un-hewn funerary stone over her grave (35:20); this tradition is carried forth today.

*After the class discusses the texts in both *chevruta* groups and as a whole, there will be time for journaling and concluding remarks.

¹⁵⁶ There is archaeological evidence that suggests women performed religious reproductive rituals specifically designed to increase fertility, insure safe childbirth, and/or deliver healthy children.

¹⁵⁷ Meyers, *HH*, 42.

¹⁵⁸ Meyers, *HH*, 42.

¹⁵⁹ Alter, *FBM*, 167.

Lesson 6: Leah

In this lesson, the focus will be Leah, as she is portrayed in the book of Genesis. Comparisons and contrasts can be drawn between her, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and the *Eishet Chayil*, while focusing on how the *ideal* Israelite woman is portrayed by the text. Students should also be encouraged to “find themselves” in the text, and see how they can relate to the lives of the Israelite women being discussed.

*The following can be brought forth during the lesson to depict this Israelite woman:

-Leah is described as having “weak eyes” (29:17). While some interpret this to mean “ugly,” other commentators understand the word “weak” to denote “refinement and delicacy of breeding.”¹⁶⁰ If understood in this way, the verse would imply that Rachel’s physical beauty is being compared with Leah’s internal beauty: her sensitive, kind, and tender spirit.¹⁶¹ Others say Leah has one physically attractive feature – her eyes.

-Leah is loved by Jacob, albeit less than Rachel (29:30); Compare with Rebekah (24:67). Despite that v. 29:31 is often translated as “Leah was unloved,” it is important to know that the Hebrew, *sinu’ah*, is a technical, legal term for the unfavored co-wife.”¹⁶² “When paired with the word meaning ‘beloved’ (*ahuvah*) in a context of a husband’s relationship to his co-wives, it does not mean ‘hated’ against ‘beloved.’ It refers to a degree of preference (see Deut. 21:15).”¹⁶³

-Leah conceives because of Adonai’s intervention (29:31). Compare with Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel.

-Leah, not Jacob, selects names for her children (29:32-35, 30:10-13, 18-21). Compare with Rachel.

-When Leah cannot conceive, she does not ask Jacob if he wants to lie with Zilpah; Leah makes the decision (30:9). Similarly, Leah orders Jacob to lie with her after she *rents* him for the night (30:16). “Within the household itself, the striking absence of hierarchical control of male over female is noteworthy.”¹⁶⁴

-Leah’s jealousy toward her sister, Rachel, shows her *humanness*.

-When Jacob wants to leave Haran for his homeland, he consults with Rachel and Leah (31:1-17). Jacob knows that he must obtain their approval before he and his family can actually leave, so he calls them to the field for a conversation. “Jacob proceeds in this fashion not only because he is busy tending the flocks, as he himself repeatedly reminds

¹⁶⁰ Yee, *ABD* 4, 268.

¹⁶¹ Yee, *ABD* 4, 268.

¹⁶² Alter, *FBM*, 156.

¹⁶³ Potok, *EH*, 173.

¹⁶⁴ Meyers, *EVE*, 169.

us in the dialogue, but also because he needs to confer with his wives in a safe location beyond earshot of Laban and his sons.”¹⁶⁵ Rachel and Leah consent to leaving (31:16). The consecutive *vav* in the Hebrew text (31:17) shows that the departure is now possible because the wives have agreed.

-Women inherited property (31:14)

-When Leah dies, she is buried, in the Cave of Machpelah along with Sarah, Abraham, Rebekah and Isaac (49:31). The inclusion of this information in the Hebrew Bible is a testimony to the significant role Leah (and for that matter, Sarah and Rebekah) played in Israelite society.

*After the class discusses the texts in both *chevruta* groups and as a whole, there will be time for journaling and concluding remarks.

¹⁶⁵ Alter, *FBM*, 167.

Lesson 7: Ruth and Naomi

In this lesson, the focus will be Ruth and Naomi, as they are portrayed in the book of Ruth. Comparisons and contrasts can be drawn between their lives, and those of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah and the *Eishet Chayil*. As in previous lessons, students should focus on how the *ideal* Israelite woman is portrayed by the text. In addition, students should be encouraged to “find themselves” in the text and see how they can relate to the lives of the Israelite women being discussed.

*By way of introduction, the instructor can begin by asking students what they know about Ruth and Naomi. The instructor can then inform them that:

- The book of Ruth, like the book of Proverbs, is found in the third section of the Hebrew Bible, known as *Ketuvim*, or “The Writings.”
- Many scholars date the book of Ruth between the 10th and 7th centuries, B. C. E.¹⁶⁶
- This is only one of two books in the Hebrew Bible that bears a woman’s name (the other is Esther).
- Women dominate both the narrative and the dialogue in the book of Ruth.
- This book of Ruth is read on *Shavuot*.
- Unlike the matriarchal stories, containing drama, deceit, and tension, the book of Ruth does not contain these elements. In its place are people who exhibit loyalty, courage, kindness and concern for each other.
- Ruth becomes the great-grandmother of King David.

*The following can be brought forth during the lesson to allow students to obtain a better understanding of Ruth and Naomi, and their roles in Israelite society.

-Ruth and Naomi are two women who “. . . bear their own burdens. They know hardship, danger, insecurity, and death. No God promises them blessing; no man rushes to their rescue. They themselves risk bold decisions and shocking acts to work out their own salvation in the midst of the alien, the hostile, and the unknown.”¹⁶⁷

-After the death of Naomi’s husband and her two sons (who were married to Orpah and Ruth – Moabite women), Naomi is concerned with the welfare of her daughters-in-law (1:8, 9). She understands that in her society it is very difficult for a woman to make it on her own, so she encourages them to return to their native homes, remarry and find security (i.e. a husband). She puts their best interest before her own, and she is willing to travel back to Bethlehem (from where she came), by herself. Naomi exhibits the attributes of kindness, concern, selflessness and courage.

-When Orpah and Ruth indicate they want to remain with Naomi, Naomi’s response indicates how critically important it was for a woman to be married in antiquity and to have children (1:11-13).

¹⁶⁶ Tribble, *ABD* 5, 843.

¹⁶⁷ Tribble, *TW*, 251.

-Orpah decides to return to her people, but Ruth clings to Naomi, choosing Naomi over the pursuit of a husband. “One female has chosen another female in a world where life depends upon men. There is no more radical decision in all the memories of Israel (1:18).”¹⁶⁸

-Naomi once again urges Ruth to return to her own people; Ruth refuses and her response is perhaps the most well-known verse in the book of Ruth (1:16-17). We learn from her response that Ruth is persistent, loyal, strong, determined and courageous. By leaving Moab, Ruth is leaving behind everything that is known to her – family, customs, culture, religion, homeland and national identity. She is willing to endure the same unknown fate as Naomi, which could include hunger, plague, war and other dangers.

-When Ruth and Naomi arrive in Bethlehem, Boaz praises Ruth (2:11) and asks Adonai to reward Ruth for her deeds (2:12), i.e. intervene on her behalf. Boaz praises Ruth, among other things, for leaving her native land. Compare with Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 12:4-5), and Rebekah (Gen. 24:61).

-Ruth and Naomi are greeted in Bethlehem by a group of women. This shows women were visible in public, not hidden away in their homes. Compare with Rebekah, Leah and *Eishet Chayil*.

-Ruth indicates her desire to work in the fields (2:2). She understands that as childless widows, the two women have no one to provide for them and thus, must insure their own survival. Ruth takes it upon herself to meet their needs, indicating she is proactive, takes initiative and is not afraid of hard work. The text indicates that women were part of the work force (2:22-23), thus securing food and sustaining their households.

-Ruth proves to be a diligent worker with a strong work ethic. She begins work in the morning (2:7) and gleans until the evening (2:17). She has stamina and perseverance. Compare with Rebekah and *Eishet Chayil*.

-Ruth is physically strong. She returns to the city, carrying her grain, which – depending upon how one calculates the conversion of an *ephah* (a standard unit of dry measure) into pounds – ranges from twenty-nine to fifty pounds (2:17-18). Compare with Rebekah and *Eishet Chayil*.

-Ruth is generous. Despite working long hours, she saves some of her food to share with Naomi, giving it to her when she returns home at the end of the day (2:14, 18).

-Naomi wants Ruth to present herself to Boaz in hopes that he will serve as their redeemer. This would serve two purposes: a possible heir for Naomi’s son and a husband, home and happiness, for Ruth (2:20, 3:1). Naomi is concerned for Ruth’s

¹⁶⁸ Tribble, TW, 258.

future; there is no other citation in the Hebrew Bible of a mother-in-law's effort to help her daughter-in-law find a spouse.¹⁶⁹

-Ruth shows her loyalty to Naomi by following Naomi's "potentially dangerous and compromising" plan (3:5-8).¹⁷⁰ If Ruth is caught alone with Boaz at night, she would most likely have been shamed, humiliated and/or have her name tarnished on account of inappropriate behavior.

-Ruth's assertiveness and courage come forth when Boaz awakens. By saying to him, "Spread the skirt of your garment over your maidservant, because you are a redeemer," she is proposing marriage (3:9).¹⁷¹ Ruth's boldness results in a foreign woman calling an Israelite man to responsibility.¹⁷²

-Ruth's selfless devotion to Naomi is also attested to in the above example, for by pursuing Boaz, she puts Naomi's desire to have an heir for her deceased son before her own desire for a younger or more suitable husband. Boaz recognizes this, too. He praises her and tells her that the elders and legislatures of the town are aware of her stature, calling her an *Eishet Chayil* (3:10-11).

-Ruth has power in her relationship with Boaz, evidenced by his saying to her, "All that you will say, I will do for you. . . ." (3:11). Compare with Sarah, Rachel, Leah and *Eishet Chayil*.

-Adonai intervenes on behalf of Ruth.

a) This is exhibited by God bringing Ruth to Boaz's field; even though the text uses the term "luck," (2:3), according to biblical thought, there is no such thing as chance; what appears to be luck is understood as divine intervention.¹⁷³

b) Adonai allows Ruth to conceive (4:13). Compare with Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah.

-Naomi inherits property (4:3, 5). Compare with Rachel and Leah.

*After the class discusses the texts in both *chevruta* groups and as a whole, there will be time for journaling and concluding remarks.

¹⁶⁹ Hubbard, *BOR*, 205.

¹⁷⁰ Tribble in *WIS*, 146. See also Tribble, *ABD* 5, 844; Campbell, *ABR*, 121.

¹⁷¹ "It probably reflects a marriage custom still attested among Arabs whereby a man symbolically took a wife by throwing a garment-corner over her." Hubbard, *BOR*, 212.

¹⁷² Tribble in *WIS*, 147.

¹⁷³ See Tribble, *TW*, 260; Hubbard, *BOR*, 141; Campbell, *ABR*, 112.

Lesson 8: American Reform Jewish Women In Modernity and Wrap-Up

Introduction

The aim of this concluding lesson is to draw connections between the ancient model of the *ideal* Israelite woman and the modern concept of the *ideal* Jewish woman. It is necessary to specify which group of Jewish women we will discuss, for the *ideal* Orthodox woman will look different from the *ideal* Reform woman; similarly, the *ideal* American Jewish woman will be described differently than the *ideal* Israeli, Australian or Ethiopian woman. Thus, the comparison being drawn in this lesson will focus specifically on American Reform Jewish women. This said, it is important to recognize that each woman is unique – not all American Reform Jewish women are the same. However, for the sake of this lesson, generalities and overarching conclusions will be drawn. Information from this lesson will be based on articles about five American Reform Jewish women and the views and experiences of the women in the *rosh chodesh* class.

Enduring Understandings

- *There are shared characteristics and attributes between the Israelite women studied and modern American Reform Jewish women.
- *American Reform Jewish women make significant contributions to their families and society.
- *American Reform Jewish women are intelligent, successful and leaders.

Essential Questions

- *How would I characterize American Reform Jewish women?
- *How am I, an American Reform Jewish woman, like the Israelite women we studied?
Dissimilar?
- *What have I learned about my biblical ancestors that has inspired me, and shaped my self-image?

Questions To Be Addressed

- *How do American Reform Jewish women, contribute to their households?
- *How does their contribution compare with that of the Israelite women studied?
- *How have ideas of motherhood shifted from the biblical period until today?
- *What type of relationship do you think exists between Adonai and American Reform Jewish women?
- *Who is your female biblical role model? Why?
- *What contributions do American Reform Jewish women make to society that Israelite women did not?

Evidence of Understanding

- *Women in the class will be able to articulate characteristics of American Reform Jewish women.
- *Women in the class will be able to compare and contrast the Israelite women studied with American Reform Jewish women.
- *Women in the group will be able to indicate if there has been an internal shift in their Jewish identity as a result of this *rosh chodesh* class.

Materials Needed

*For use by instructor:

- a) Detailed summary that compares and contrasts Israelite women and American Reform Jewish women (pp. 83-87 of this document)
- b) Sample Venn diagram (pp. 88 of this document)
- c) Sample Comparison Chart (pp. 89 of this document)

*Handouts for students:

- a) “Finding Our Way – Alone, but not lonely, single women enjoy lives of meaning and connection” found in *Jewish Woman Magazine*. This article will provide information on motherhood that shows a major shift in thinking from the biblical period. Note: some, but not all of the women interviewed, are American Reform Jews. (pp. 90-93 of this document)
- b) Articles that profile five American Reform Jewish women:
 - i. Dana Bash (pp. 94-97 of this document)
 - ii. Meryl Frank (pp. 98-101 of this document)
 - iii. Kim Morris Heiman (pp. 102-105 of this document)
 - iv. Hannah Rosenthal
 - v. Rabbi Amy Schwartzman (pp. 106-109 of this document)
- c) Course Evaluation Form (pp. 113 of this document)

*Flip chart and markers

*List of “Questions to be Addressed”

*Journal (each women will supply her own)

*Paper (in case someone forgets her journal)

*Pens and pencils

Timeline (2 hours)

- 7:00-7:05 Welcome and “Check In”
One of the elements that attract adult learners is the social community that is formed by the group. Thus, it is important for the instructor to help foster a positive group experience by checking-in with students to see how they are doing and what has been going on since the last session. This is important, even during the last session.
- 7:05-7:10 Reflections From the Last Class
This serves two main purposes:
- c) It provides an opportunity for the instructor to review and highlight the ideas brought forth during the last class, and
 - d) It provides an opportunity for students to ask questions about what they have already studied, discuss their thoughts about what they have learned thus far, and/or share their journal entries with the group.
- 7:10-7:25 Independent Reading followed by comments
*Hand out copies of “Finding Our Way – Alone, but not lonely, single women enjoy lives of meaning and connection.”
*Ask for feedback and comments; this is a perfect opportunity to contrast Israelite society with modernity
- 7:25-7:40 *Chevruta* Study
*Ask the women to break into groups of two (three if necessary)
*Give one profile of an American Reform Jewish Woman to each *chevruta*
*Ask the students to think about the characteristics of the American Reform Jewish woman as portrayed by the woman they are studying
*Ask the women to compare and contrast their American Reform Jewish woman with the Israelite women studied during the course
- 7:40-8:10 Group Discussion
*The instructor will facilitate this portion of the session by:
- a) asking one member from each *chevruta* to share information about the woman studied
 - b) writing on the flip chart the various characteristics of American Reform Jewish women that are mentioned
 - c) furthering the conversation by asking the women the “Questions to be Addressed”; answers to these questions will also be written on the flip chart
 - d) entertaining other questions and comments that arise during the class that further the discussion
- 8:10-8:20 Independent Work
*Ask the students to draw a Venn diagram in their journals that shows the characteristics of Israelite women, American Reform Jewish women, and where they overlap

- 8:20-8:30 Group Discussion
*The instructor will then ask participants to share the information they just wrote down so that the group's responses can be compiled on a Venn diagram (on the flip chart).
- 8:30-8:40 Journaling
*Ask each member to make a list of three things that she will take with her, or three ways that her self-image has been altered, as a result of participating in this *rosh chodesh* class on Israelite and American Reform Jewish women
- 8:40-8:50 Sharing
*Invite each group member to share what she just wrote down and/or her thoughts about the course, in general.
- 8:50-8:55 Course Evaluation
*Group members will be asked to fill out the course evaluation sheet and submit it to the instructor.
- 8:55-9:00 Wrap-Up and Concluding Remarks by Instructor
*This is an opportunity for the instructor to reinforce the enduring understandings of the course, share what she, herself, has gotten from the class, make her concluding remarks, and thank everyone for participating.

Detailed Notes For Use By Instructor To Lead Group Discussion During Class

As a result of advanced education levels, and the wider acceptance of women into a greater number of professional fields, American Reform Jewish women are important members of the American work force. It is not uncommon to find American Reform Jewish women employed as doctors, lawyers, business executives, professors, rabbis, cantors, educators and other professions. These women not only add to the welfare of the country's economy, but also to the economic stability of their own households. In this manner, they are comparable to their biblical predecessors. Granted, the method by which these two groups of women contribute to their households is very different; however, what remains constant is the benefit they bring to their families. The modern day American Reform Jewish woman draws a salary that helps procure items needed by her family, while the *Eishet Chayil* of Proverbs purchased real estate, manufactured textiles and garments, traded with merchants, planted a vineyard, and managed the household, servants and workers. Rachel was a shepherdess, watching over her family's flocks, and Ruth gleaned in the fields (alongside other female workers in Boaz's field) to provide for herself and Naomi.

In addition to the work done outside of one's home, the American Reform Jewish woman is also responsible for taking care of her family (as noted in many of the profiles looked at during this last lesson). This includes, but is not limited to food shopping and meal preparation, maintaining the home, and tending to the many needs of children including educational, socialization and emotional nurturing. Mothers also have the responsibility of purchasing (or sewing) clothing for their children. While men might participate in all of the tasks just named, the primary responsibility for running the home and caring for the children still falls mainly on women—even those employed outside of the home. An example of this is *back-to-school*

shopping; one need only visit a clothing store at the end of the summer to see that more mothers, than fathers, are engaged in this activity. None of this is surprising, for the roots of this behavior can be traced back to the biblical period. The *Eishet Chayil* sought out quality material and then made clothes for her children and herself (31:13, 19, 22, 24). Proverbs 1:8 and 6:20 indicate that mothers were involved in teaching their children the needed skills to grow and develop into productive and useful members of society. Sarah was very protective of Isaac and had Ishmael sent away when she thought Isaac was in danger; Rebekah was the mastermind behind Jacob's being sent away so that Esau could not harm him; and Naomi was concerned with finding an heir for her deceased son so that his name could be carried on. Additionally, it was the female members of Israelite society who were responsible for food production (as noted in earlier notes to the instructor).

Another characteristic of the American Reform Jewish woman is that she decides *whom* she will marry, *when* she will marry, and *if* she will marry. The first and second characteristics are not entirely different from two of the biblical women discussed in this study: Rebekah and Ruth. Rebekah decided if and when she would follow Abraham's servant to Canaan and marry Isaac (24:58), and Ruth took initiative by proposing to Boaz (3:9). While they are not characteristic of the average Israelite woman, they are part of the biblical text. However, the point of departure comes with the third characteristic—the uncertainty of marriage.

While biblical narratives never imply that a woman might not want to marry, the article published in *Jewish Women Magazine* by Rahel Musleah, entitled, "Finding Our Way – Alone, but not lonely, single women enjoy lives of meaning and connection," indicates that marriage is a choice – an option – and not one that every Jewish woman will want to exercise. This represents a break with tradition and is a major difference between the ancient Israelite woman

and the American Reform Jewish woman.

This phenomenon, in turn, is related to another aspect of the modern Jewish woman that is significantly different from the *ideal* Israelite woman: she might not choose to have children. Unlike the Israelite women who felt pain, shame, embarrassment, and punished by Adonai when unable to reproduce, today's American Reform Jewish women do not necessarily regard having children as a sign of status, self-worth, and/or a sign of favor by God. Jewish women who choose to remain single and/or choose to remain childless are no less accepted than married women with children. Marriage and motherhood are recognized as one of the options today, not the *only* option.

For those women who choose to marry, it is safe to assume that the vast majority, if not all, feel loved by their husband on their wedding day. The desire to enter into a love-filled marriage has its roots with our biblical matriarchs, Rebekah (24:67) and Rachel (29:18). The text clearly states that both of these women were loved by their husbands. The *Eishet Chayil* was trusted, valued and praised by her husband, as indicated by Proverbs 31:11 and 28-9. Similarly, prior to Ruth's marriage to Boaz, she was praised by him and referred to as an *Eishet Chayil*.

Another attribute of the *ideal* Israelite woman was the involvement of Adonai in her life. This course has indicated that the four matriarchs and Ruth each experienced divine intervention, either through conception (Sarah, Rachel, Leah, Ruth), becoming aware of God's greater plan (Rebekah), or in other ways. While the *Eishet Chayil* did not experience such intervention, she was in awe of God and had an awareness of Adonai. Many American Reform Jewish women would not claim that God micromanages or is directly involved in the details of their lives. A fair number would probably acknowledge the desire to feel the presence of God. In the twenty-first century, it is common to hear Reform Jews speak of a quest for spirituality. For some, this is

expressed through synagogue worship and/or Jewish study. For others, this comes by assuming a leadership role in their synagogue or larger Jewish community. Others will experience God when they engage in acts of *tikkun olam* and social action. In whatever form, I suggest that the search for some type of connection or relationship with the Divine is also an attribute of the American Reform Jewish woman.

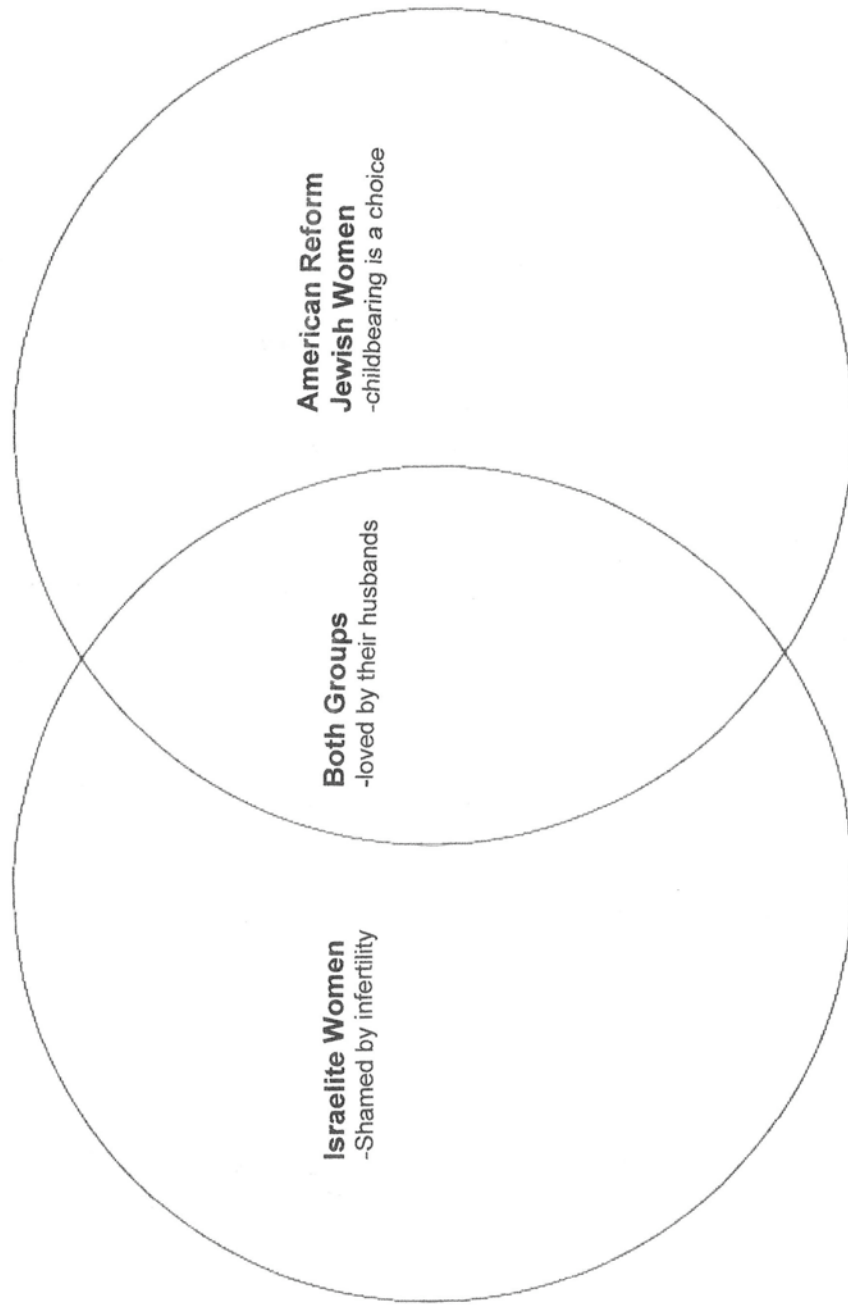
Another aspect of the American Reform Jewish woman is her desire to be physically fit, physically attractive, and physically healthy. It is a common sight, today, to see Jewish women exercising in JCCs, gyms and fitness centers. The Hebrew Bible implies that there is nothing wrong with a strong woman who is physically attractive. Rebekah's physical strength is demonstrated when she draws water for multiple camels (24:20); Ruth's strength is implied by her ability to carry a heavy load of grain from the field back to the city limits (2:18); and the *Eishet Chayil* girds her loins with strength and strengthens her arms (31:17). The book of Ruth implies Ruth has the necessary stamina and vigor to work from early in the morning until late at night (2:7, 17); the same holds true for the *Eishet Chayil* (31:15, 18). The Hebrew Bible also explicitly mentions the physical beauty of three of its matriarchs: Sarah (12:11), Rebekah (26:7), and Rachel (29:17).

In addition to being physically strong and beautiful, the Israelite women discussed in this curriculum made decisions on behalf of themselves, their husbands and family; they took risks, showed courage, and exhibited strength of character. The *Eishet Chayil* was a successful businesswoman and manager, who cared for her family while successfully maneuvering in a male-dominated society. She is praised for excelling above other Israelite women (31:29) and is described by commentators as alert, energetic, and in control (noted in the lesson on *Eishet Chayil*). Sarah was a strong woman who knew how to make tough decisions. When she

believed her son was being threatened, she insisted that Abraham expel both Ishmael and Hagar. Sarah commanded respect when she spoke and Abraham heeded her words. Rebekah was noted for her hospitality, kindness and generosity. However, she is also described as forceful, enterprising, energetic and resourceful. While Rebekah was privy to, and carried out Adonai's plan, her method of execution was manipulative and deceitful. Rachel was envious and became competitive with her sister. However, she was also bold, gutsy, and defied her own father by removing the idols from the household without his knowledge. Leah was also a competitive woman who, along with Rachel, had the courage to leave home for a new land when their husband was no longer being treated properly by their father. Ruth was perhaps the most courageous of all the women studied, for she left her homeland and adopted a new culture and new religion. She did so out of the goodness of her heart and the loyalty of her character. Ruth was also an assertive woman who took initiative and was not afraid of hard work. She will always be remembered as the great-grandmother of King David.

The matriarchs of our people, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, along with Ruth and the *Eishet Chayil*, were instrumental in shaping the traditions of the Israelite, and later, the Jewish people. They serve as role models for women while reminding us that they, too, were imperfect human beings. Their flaws did not overshadow their contributions. Additionally, their humanity allows every Jewish woman the space to fall, stumble and err, as she does her best to advance her family and the Jewish people. While the heroines of the Hebrew Bible have secured their place in Jewish history, each Jewish family has its own Jewish matriarch who will resemble, in one form or another, the characteristics and attributes of the *ideal* Israelite woman.

Venn Diagram



Israelite Women and American Reform Jewish Women

This worksheet will help you compare and contrast the biblical and American Reform Jewish women studied. Students might offer additional responses based on their own experience.

Israelite Woman/Women	Characteristic/Attribute	American Reform Jewish Woman
Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah	Physically beautiful	Applicable to some ARJ women
<i>Eishet Chayil</i> , Rebekah, Ruth	Physically strong	Applicable to some ARJ women
Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah, Ruth	Adonai takes notice of them	Some ARJ will think this
<i>Eishet Chayil</i> , Rachel, Ruth	Contributes to economic stability of household	Applicable to some ARJ women
<i>Eishet Chayil</i> , Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah, Naomi, Ruth	Responsible for caring for her family members	Applicable to ARJ women
Rebekah, Ruth	Decides whom she will marry	Applicable to ARJ women who choose to marry
Biblical women are not described in these terms	Decides if she wants to marry	Applicable to ARJ women
Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah, Naomi, Ruth	Desires children	Applicable to some ARJ women
Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah, Ruth	Loved or respected by her husband	Applicable to some ARJ women
<i>Eishet Chayil</i> , Ruth	Praised by her husband	Applicable to some ARJ women
<i>Eishet Chayil</i> , Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah, Naomi, Ruth	Decision-makers	Applicable to ARJ women
<i>Eishet Chayil</i> , Rebekah, Rachel, Naomi, Ruth	Interact with members of the opposite sex who are non-family members	Applicable to ARJ women
<i>Eishet Chayil</i> , Sarah, Rachel, Leah, Naomi	Own/inherit land or property	Applicable to some ARJ women
Biblical women are not described in these terms	Spiritual	Applicable to some ARJ women
Biblical women are not described in these terms	Perform acts of <i>tikkun olam</i>	Applicable to some ARJ women
Biblical women are not described in these terms	Politically involved	Applicable to some ARJ women

Handout For Students: Finding Our Way – Alone, but not lonely, single women enjoy lives of meaning and connection.

Jewish Woman Magazine, Online Resource: <http://www.jwi.org/Page.aspx?pid=658>

By Rahel Musleah

Ellen Tillman won't call herself single. "I say I am not married. Single seems to imply that I stay home and knit and have lots of cats." No cats, she clarifies, but she knits happily with a group of friends once a month.

Though she's never been married, she's far from being a desperate single whose life is on hold. Tillman, 54, bought a condo in Rockville, Md., when she was 35 and worked as an economic consultant until she started her own insurance and financial planning business at 42. She gets her "kid fix" from her 18-year-old niece, her 14-year-old nephew and her cousin's two children. She values her freedom and independence, as well as her friends. "I don't sit around and say, 'How horrible; I should be married,'" says Tillman.

Tillman is, in fact, part of a new majority. According to a *New York Times* analysis of census data, 51 percent of women in 2005 said they were living without a spouse (never-married, widowed or divorced). The list of famous never-married singles includes Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and journalist Maureen Dowd. Economic advances stemming from the women's movement make single life possible for more women.

Any Web search under "single women" will not only turn up hundreds of dating sites, self-help books and magazine articles, but also the Alternatives to Marriage Project, which advocates equality for unmarried people (www.unmarried.org), and information about National Singles Week in September.

"Nearly all American women will for some of their adult lives exist singly—that is a statistical fact," writes Betsy Israel in *Bachelor Girl: The Secret History of Single Women in the Twentieth Century* (Morrow). "Some of us will enjoy it, some will feel relieved or depressed or will have no particular views on the subject. And yet we all know that 'single' as a social entity has its unique complications. Namely, other people's sexist attitudes."

Israel traces "single phobia" to antiquity, but her own research examines stereotypes from the industrial revolution to contemporary society. "The media refrain remains the same: No matter what the single woman says, she can't really be happy ... And for a long time, I think, women believed it." But single life is no longer a "half-life," she concludes.

No one would call Rabbi Sally Priesand's life a "half-life." Ordained in 1972 as the first woman rabbi, Priesand knew at 16 that she wanted to be a rabbi. "My parents gave me the courage to dare and dream," she says. "When I began attending classes at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, the faculty thought I'd come to marry a rabbi—not to become a rabbi. Once I was going out with a classmate for a long time and a professor said to him, 'When are you going to do the school a favor and marry her and help us get rid of her?'"

In her rabbinical school interview, Priesand said she planned to have a nursery next to her office, but she ended up making a conscious choice not to marry. "In the early years I made decisions based on what was best for women in the rabbinate—not necessarily what was best for me," she says.

Because Jewish tradition encourages marriage and children, she worried that she was not a "proper role model"—until she discovered a Talmudic teaching that if you partner in the upbringing of a child who is not biologically yours, it is as if you are the parent. "Having spent 25 years in one synagogue—Monmouth Reform Temple in New Jersey—I feel I have lots of children." To those who advocate that every Jewish family should have two children and a third for those lost in the Holocaust, she replies: "I fall on the side of quality instead of quantity. People should take more responsibility for their own Jewishness."

When Priesand retired last June, she didn't consider moving away from the community: "My temple is my family," she declares. On a broader scale, her synagogue doesn't plan separate events for separate groups. Instead, a single parent with children may be matched up with an older couple whose grandchildren live far away.

Likewise, involvement in Jewish organizations is Tillman's way of contributing to Jewish continuity. She serves on JWI's National Leadership Council and this year will chair the Women's Pomegranate Campaign (gifts of \$1,800 and over) for the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington. Though she was wary of how she would be accepted as a single in a synagogue setting, the Conservative egalitarian synagogue she joined eight years ago has accepted her warmly. The friends she has made, both married with children and unmarried, often include her in their Shabbat and holiday celebrations.

Like many other singles, Rikki Fayne, 39, didn't plan on living a single life. For years, she pictured herself as a traditional wife and mother. But as she reached her early 30s, she says, "I saw myself more with a baby—and the ideal husband was the blurry background." Through donor insemination, she now has two children: Madeline, who will soon turn 6, and Sophia, 3. "It's not that I didn't want to get married," says the fourth-grade teacher who lives in Tarzana, Calif. "It's that I wasn't willing to give up having children just because I wasn't married."

Fayne belongs to a local chapter of Single Mothers by Choice; seven of the eight members are Jewish. The women, most of whom decided to have children around age 40, serve as a support group and family for one another. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Jewish women may account for a large percentage of single mothers by choice.

"In the Los Angeles area, my life is not outrageous in any way," says Fayne, who notes that she and her friends describe themselves as "strong, independent women" rather than singles. Though there are bittersweet times when she wants to share her children's milestones with someone else, she says, mostly she "treasures the moments when it's just me and the girls. This is my family. This is my reality and I embrace it." Fayne has put dating on the back burner. Her brother and her cousin's husband serve as male role models for her children.

A year ago, she joined the Reform synagogue she grew up in, enrolling Madeline in religious school and becoming active in the sisterhood and a social action group. Her parents have passed away, but their presence still hovers in the synagogue. "Every time we go to services, someone tells them, 'I knew your grandma.' I wanted them to be in a place where they had a history," says Fayne. She attributes some of her independent thinking to her parents' example. "They had a wonderful marriage, a love story every couple should aspire to, yet they were also independent."

Of course, says Fayne, there are times she thinks about how different her life would be if she were married—but it would also be different if her parents were alive, or if one of her children were a boy instead of a girl. She is even happier that she decided to have children early because some of her older friends struggled to conceive.

Hagit Bartuv, 38, a Jerusalem resident who lives an Orthodox lifestyle, is in a "new relationship." But, she says, if she is still single in two or three years, she will start her own family through donor insemination. "The rabbis accept it, even encourage it over remaining childless," she says. "The doctors say, *kadima*, do it now. Don't wait until you're in your 40s."

Bartuv, the project coordinator at the Yakov Herzog Center for Jewish Studies, wrote in the modern Orthodox *Edah Journal* about the difficulty single women face in the Orthodox community, where, even past 30 and with successful careers and rich personal lives, they are still regarded as children, "as appendages of their parents.... The single woman internalizes the social concept that a woman does not become a woman until she marries and establishes her home," she wrote. "Society's voice becomes an inner, critical voice, inducing a deep sense of something missing."

For instance, says Bartuv, if she is invited to a family bar mitzvah, she doesn't receive her own invitation, though she lives by herself. Instead, she is included in her parents' invitation along with her 15-year-old brother, while her younger married siblings receive their own invitations. Her parents try to counter the stereotypes: Bartuv recalls that her grandparents bought her married siblings silver *hanukkiot*. When they passed away, her parents used part of the inheritance to buy her a hanukkiah and inscribed it in Hebrew, "A memento from Saba and Savta."

Everyone, says Bartuv, desires love in their lives. "I want to have someone to share life with and to take the car to the garage—even if I know I can do it myself. Yet it's often an illusion that all the sadness and loneliness will go away the minute you find a partner."

For Shelley Kleiner (not her real name), an urban Jewish professional in her 40s, singleness is rarely a topic of discussion or a part of her self-description. "My identity as a single person is more how people view me than how I view myself," she says. "Whether I'm happy or content does not have to do with being single. The things I'm unhappy with—job security and family health problems—would be problems even if I were married." When people remark that they are impressed that she has been able to buy two adjoining apartments in Manhattan (she remodeled to create one large apartment), she replies that she doesn't see that as the mark of a person.

Kleiner says she had a 10-year relationship, dates regularly, "frequently enough has romantic companionship," and always has one male friend with whom she shares emotional intimacy. She takes an active role in the lives of her niece and nephew, who sleep over at least once a week. She spends holidays and vacations with family and friends, both married and single.

What does make her unhappy is when people view her as a "subcategory" or a stereotype. "Being single is a segregating factor in the Jewish community," she says. In contrast to the inclusiveness of Priesand's congregation, Kleiner has found that "Jewish organizations are not especially inclusive of different family styles. Usually, there are events for singles and events for couples, events for men and events for women, but not events for people."

Chicago-based psychotherapist Karen Gail Lewis, 63, author of *With or Without a Man: Single Women Taking Control of their Lives*, says that many in her clinical practice blame themselves and embark on a destructive "fix-it" solution: "If I can identify the problem with me, then I can fix it, and then I won't worry about being single." She teaches women how to shift their thinking away from the subtle cultural messages they may not even know they are receiving. "For instance, if you're told, 'You're too choosy; give a guy a chance,' you may not trust your judgment or intuition." To help women take control of their lives, she asks them to imagine meeting the man of their dreams—but not for eight years. Asks Lewis: "What would you do in the meantime?"

"Singles need to make themselves heard that they will not buy into stereotypes," says Lewis, "ever-single" herself and in a long-term relationship. "Being married or single should be like having long or short fingernails—just a fact of life."

Handout For Students: 1st Article on Dana Bash

Jewish Woman Magazine, Online source: <http://www.jwi.org/Page.aspx?pid=2033>

10 Women to Watch in 5771: Dana Bash

By Susan Josephs

On her first day at CNN, Dana Bash got chewed out by a news anchor for screwing up his newscast. She had been filling in for someone on vacation in the feeds room, unaware that her responsibilities also included feeding scripts to a teleprompter for the newscast.

“The newscast was nonsensical and the anchor comes flying in, looks at me and asks, ‘Who are you?’” she recalls. “I said, ‘It’s my first day on the job,’ and he says, ‘It’s going to be your last.’ I thought I was going to throw up.”

Instead, Bash rose steadily through the ranks of CNN as a producer and on-air reporter covering the White House. Today, the 39-year-old broadcast journalist is CNN’s senior correspondent on Capitol Hill, where she frequently interviews members of Congress and feels she “gets to cover everything. When you report on Wall Street and health care reform...what could be more relevant to people’s lives?” she says.

Over the years, Bash has covered the Bush White House during the war in Iraq, traveled the world with the former president covering summits from Asia to the Middle East, conducted lengthy interviews with Sen. John McCain during the 2008 election and experienced many “pinch-myself moments, where I have a front-row seat to history,” she says.

A self-described “adrenaline junkie” who sometimes works 17-hour days, Bash credits her success to multiple mentors, a willingness to perform any task and simple perseverance. “I just kept raising my hand, volunteering to do things that went beyond my job description,” she says of starting out working in CNN’s tape library in 1993.

Bash also acknowledges a debt to her father, an ABC news producer who took his children to work with him. (Her father retired last year after 41 years with the network.) “Some of my most vivid childhood memories are being in the control room with my dad or wandering around the smoky newsroom,” she says.

Raised in Montvale, N.J., Bash grew up “with an enormously strong Jewish identity” and can still remember all the songs she learned at her UAHC summer camp. Her mother, who has a master’s degree in Judaic studies from Hebrew Union College, and her grandfather, who escaped the Nazis, also proved to be formative Jewish influences. “Judaism is such a huge part of who I

am,” she says, noting that her husband and CNN colleague, John King, converted to Judaism for that reason.

As a kid, Bash resisted the idea of one day working in television. At George Washington University, she majored in political communications and considered applying to law school before securing internships in television news and “loving it. It was always in my blood,” she concedes.

Bash also never imagined she would one day wind up in front of the camera. When offered the job as an on-air reporter in 2002, “I wasn’t sure if I should take it. I stunk at first, but I learned how important it is to always be prepared,” she says. Speaking from personal experience, Bash observes that “gender is still an issue” for women in television, especially in the area of personal appearance. “If you’re a woman, you’re under so much more scrutiny if your hair is sticking out...all you can do is try not to take that stuff personally.”

Ultimately, Bash says, she feels extremely grateful that she’s only had one employer throughout her entire career. “I’ve only worked for CNN, and that’s unheard of in my business,” she says. “I truly love what I do and I just continue to take things one step at a time.”

Handout For Students: 2nd Article on Dana Bash

Jewish Woman Magazine, Online Source: <http://www.jwi.org/Page.aspx?pid=2636>

Dana Bash's 'Pearl of Wisdom'

From JWI's Women to Watch gala event on Monday, December 6, 2010

View a video of Dana Bash delivering her 'Pearl' at

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g0S3QyowLOI&lr=1&user=jewishwomenintl>

For as long as I can remember, the tenet of Judaism that touched me most was L'dor V'dor – from generation to generation.

Passing down knowledge and tradition has kept our religion alive for more than 5,000 years.

For me, it goes beyond our sacred Jewish traditions. In my own family, what I have learned from the people who came before me is to take a risk, and don't look back.

“Don't look back” were the words my great grandfather spoke to my grandfather when the two saw each other for the last time in Nazi-occupied Austria. My Grandpa was about to leave a comfortable life and lucrative business that Hitler was in the midst of destroying. He embarked on a dangerous journey, alone, without identification papers, across two countries and a treacherous mountain range to find my grandmother and her family in Hungary.

That risk, one of many to come in his life, paid off. He made it to my grandmother and later, with a little luck and the tenacity of his wonderful brother - already in America – my grandparents made it to the United States on Columbus Day 1941 - just two months before Pearl Harbor.

That was my mom's parents.

My father's father died when my dad, an only child, was just 6 years old. My grandfather had a small business – commercial air fresheners. In the early 1950s it was rare for a woman to run her own company, but my grandmother kept it going. Ultimately, the business didn't survive, and she supported them as a legal secretary.

They didn't have much – at all. But the risk my grandmother took planted a seed with my dad – who always wanted to go into television - that it was worth it to reach for his dreams.

Those stories I heard through my childhood stayed with me and served as a subconscious guide as I got older.

I was a producer with CNN – pretty comfortable with the job – until I was asked whether I wanted to become a reporter. I had never been an on air reporter before, but I took the risk. It was ugly at first, and some days, it still is. But I knew I had to try.

My pearl is this– don't be afraid to leave your comfort zone. Sometimes, as in the case of my grandparents- circumstances of war or an untimely death don't leave you with many options.

And too often, these tumultuous economic times are leaving people little choice but to try something new.

It is always scary.

But taking a risk and not looking back is something that I learned from the generations that came before me.

L'dor V'dor.

Something we can teach those who come next...and remind ourselves.

Handout For Students: 1st Article on Meryl Frank

Jewish Woman Magazine, Online Source: <http://www.jwi.org/Page.aspx?pid=2037>

10 Women to Watch in 5771: Meryl Frank Building the International Status of Women

By Susan Josephs

When she was 18, Meryl Frank confessed to her future husband that she wanted to be the United Nations ambassador who specializes in women's issues. "That was my dream," she says.

Some 33 years later, Frank, 51, now sits between Tanzania and Zambia when she attends U.N. Commission on the Status of Women meetings. Officially appointed by President Obama last year, the former mayor of Highland Park, N.J., serves as ambassador and deputy U.S. representative to the Commission on the Status of Women. Traveling to New York and Washington, D.C., for meetings, she says her dream job "is mostly about establishing relationships with people from all over the world while moving the U.S. agenda forward." Passionate about encouraging women's leadership in politics and preventing violence against female political leaders, Frank also works as a master trainer with Women's Campaign International (WCI), an organization that promotes female political participation in emerging democracies and post-conflict zones.

"Lacking the confidence and the resources to run for office is a common obstacle for women who may consider running for office...it's just as common in New Jersey as it is in Africa," she says. Frank uses her experience as an elected official to connect with and to inspire women's political participation worldwide.

A stay-at-home mom for 12 years, Frank became the mayor of Highland Park in 2000 despite her status as a political outsider and earned a reputation as a tireless reformer of government corruption during her 10 years in office. She also became New Jersey's first "green" mayor when she launched Highland Park 2020, an initiative that promoted environmental and economic sustainability in her community.

"It was a 24/7 job, and I would sleep with my cell phone," she says. "But being a Jewish mother turned out to be the best preparation I had to be the mayor. I knew how to take care of people, to listen, to advise and to lovingly nudge them in the right direction. Raised in Ocean Township, N.J., Frank grew up with a deep awareness of the Holocaust and was the kind of teenager who, she says, "organized events like World Hunger Day in school." She credits one of her aunts for instilling in her a passion for Jewish history and political activism. "My Aunt Mollie would tell

me all these stories about my family in Vilna. She was a smart, passionate and independent thinker and because of her, I became politically active, and the family historian,” she says.

After earning her undergraduate degree in history from Rutgers University, Frank went on to earn graduate degrees in public health, international relations and political science from Yale University. She worked for the World Health Organization in Copenhagen and became one of the key activists responsible for getting the Family and Medical Leave Act signed into law by President Clinton in 1993.

“I always wanted to make a difference, and I wanted my work to matter,” says Frank. “It also goes back to my family and my Jewish upbringing. My Aunt Mollie made it very clear to me and to my sisters that we, as Jews, had a responsibility to help fix the world.”

A longtime activist for women’s causes, Frank served as president of the American Jewish Congress’ Women’s Division and on the board of the Democratic National Committee’s Women’s Leadership Forum. She also has served on the board of her local Jewish Federation and made it a priority to give her four children, now between the ages of 15 and 23, the formal Jewish education she never received as a child.

“My kids always put me right back in my place when I come home from the U.N. or meetings with women in Afghanistan or Malawi,” she says, laughing. “They bring me right back to earth. To them I’m simply their mom, and they remind me, each and every day, how lucky I am.”

Being a Jewish mother turned out to be the best preparation I had to be the mayor.

Handout For Students: 2nd Article that Relates to Meryl Frank

New Jersey Jewish News

Online Source: <http://njewishnews.com/njjn.com/092007/sxBatMitzvahAsks.html>

Bat mitzva asks synagogues to go green for Israel's sake

by Debra Rubin, NJJN Bureau Chief/Middlesex 09.18.07

Belle Gabel-Frank, who will become a bat mitzva Dec. 8 at Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple, is asking area synagogues to plant trees in Israel to offset their own annual carbon dioxide production.

In an effort to protect the environment around her hometown, a 12-year-old Highland Park girl is planting trees in Israel.

Belle Gabel-Frank, as her bat mitzva project, asked synagogues in and around the borough to buy enough trees through the Jewish National Fund to offset their own annual carbon dioxide production.

"Actually, my idea was to get synagogues nationally to erase their carbon impact by buying trees," said Belle, who will become bat mitzva Dec. 8 at Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple in New Brunswick. "A lot of people have been interested in this. I guess they never heard of anyone doing anything like this, and I've been getting a lot of support."

Belle plans to buy 100 trees — enough to offset a year's worth of carbon dioxide production from Anshe Emeth — on behalf of her own synagogue. The plan is for people at other shuls to purchase their own trees.

As she began her project, one of the people Belle contacted was Rabbi Eric Lankin, JNF's chief of institutional advancement and education and a Highland Park resident. He informed her the organization was already working on its GoNeutral-An Environmental Movement for Tomorrow project.

The campaign, unveiled Aug. 30, seeks to educate individuals about their personal impact on the environment and provide tools to help them halt climate change.

"Our Jewish tradition reminds us of our responsibility for the Earth," said Lankin, who said Belle was one of the first in the nation to participate in the GoNeutral campaign.

"I look forward to working with Belle," he said. "She is a tremendous example of youth leadership."

Rabbi Bennett Miller of Anshe Emeth also praised his young congregant's project.

"It's a mitzva extended in lots of ways," he said. "She's dealing with ecology. She's connecting to Israel. What better way to connect with God's earth?"

Belle, the daughter of Highland Park Mayor Meryl Frank and energy and public utilities

consultant Steve Gabel, said she got the idea for her project after discussing her concern about global warming with her mother.

"She's very into the tree community thing, and that kind of inspired me and got me interested," said Belle. She also had her interest piqued by a global warming program presented at school.

She sent out information to all area synagogues and has spoken with a representative from each of the five shuls in Highland Park. She has also received an invitation from Andrew Getraer, director of Rutgers Hillel in New Brunswick, to address the student group about her tree project.

Gayle Brill-Mittler, a past president of the Highland Park Conservative Temple-Congregation Anshe Emeth, said her synagogue may be interested in participating. Moreover, she liked the project so much that as national assistant chair of the Social Action/Public Policy Committee of United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, she planned on bringing it up at its next meeting.

"I'd be delighted to see if there was something we could do to help Belle," said Brill-Mittler. "I think it is wonderful that Belle, or any of our young people, could find a way to bring greater awareness to issues of our environment and tikun olam in a very Jewish way. It reinforces my faith in the worldliness of our youth."

The temple, part of which was destroyed by fire in August 2006, is incorporating many "green" environmental features into its new facilities.

Belle said she hopes to branch out to synagogues outside the area and state over time in the hopes of encouraging them also to go green.

It is not the young environmentalist's first foray into raising money to help others. Several years ago she joined with her older sister, Eve, to form the Bellevue Company. The sisters made earrings that were sold to benefit the Tikva Children's Home in Odessa, Ukraine.

She also had the example of older brother, Eli, who collected supplies for a Jewish medical center in Vilna as his mitzva project and oldest brother, Gabriel, who collected sports equipment for a community center in Jamaica.

Each child was also taken by Frank and Gabel to see firsthand how their efforts helped those in need in Vilna, Odessa, and Jamaica. The family plans a trip in October to Israel, where Belle will tour JNF facilities and plant trees.

Belle said she hoped to donate 20 percent of her bat mitzva gifts to charity.

"We have a deal in our family that our children must donate 10 percent of their gifts, although I'm thrilled Belle wants to give 20 percent," said Frank. "She is so thoughtful about these things. She became a vegetarian three years ago, and no one else in our family is a vegetarian. She gave this a lot of thought."

Handout For Students: 1st Article on Kim Morris Heiman

Jewish Woman Magazine, Online Source: <http://www.jwi.org/Page.aspx?pid=2979>

10 Women to Watch in 5772: Kim Morris Heiman Dedicated to Textiles and Philanthropy

By Susan Josephs, Fall 2011

At age 5, Kim Heiman tiptoed into her bathroom one night and nimbly climbed onto the counter. She gathered every toothbrush, towel and bathroom appliance in sight and threw item after item out the window. “My mother came running in and asked me what I was doing,” Heiman recalls. “I explained that I was giving everything away to the poor people.”

With a lifelong drive to help others succeed, Heiman became a successful business executive and philanthropist intent on “giving back.” Hired by her husband more than 25 years ago to join Cincinnati-based Standard Textile, she’s now a senior vice president of one of the leading producers of textiles for the hospitality and healthcare industries. With 24 factories and service to more than 60 markets worldwide, the company has a significant international presence.

Heiman is responsible for the company’s international business development, which has included opening factories in Israel and Jordan and fostering economic ties between the countries. She loves her job because of her “deep passion for people ... For me, management is about developing and empowering people to find their potential,” she says.

In addition to her role as vice president, international, Heiman runs Standard Textile’s decorative products division and operates her own decorative products company, SK Textile. Passionate about fabrics and product designs, she says she is constantly on the lookout for new ideas and inspiration. “I’m always walking into hotel rooms and checking out labels and colors,” she says. “To me, towels and sheets are a thing of beauty.”

A former stockbroker, Heiman, 55, says she never felt “at a disadvantage being a woman” in the textile industry. At the same time, she considers the employment of women around the world, who are often from disadvantaged communities, to be the most rewarding part of her job. “By utilizing their weaving and sewing skills, these artisans are able to provide a livelihood for themselves and a more hopeful future for their children,” she says.

Named a “Woman of the Year” by the *Cincinnati Enquirer* for her philanthropic work, Heiman spends time volunteering for mostly Jewish causes, including Hebrew Union College, Yad Vashem, the American Jewish Committee and her local Jewish day school. She has been president of the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati and runs a family foundation with her husband,

Gary, which recently donated funds to create a Jewish studies center at the University of Cincinnati.

“It’s genetic,” says Heiman of her commitment to philanthropy and community service. “My mother and grandmother were incredible volunteers and leaders. I come from a long line of strong, involved, community-minded Southern Jewish women.”

Raised in Nashville, Tenn., Heiman always felt acutely aware of being Jewish. In high school, she went on a teen tour to Israel with NFTY, the youth group of the Reform movement. The trip led her to spend a year as a college student studying and working on a kibbutz, an experience that had a profound impact on her Jewish identity. “I had always felt like a minority in Nashville, but in Israel, I had this incredible feeling of belonging,” says Heiman, who returned to Israel in her twenties to work in the financial industry.

Israel also played a role in Heiman’s decision to send her children, now 24, 23 and 20, to Jewish day school. “They had the Jewish education I didn’t have,” she says, “and this is one of the best gifts I gave my kids.”

Heiman hopes her children will continue the family’s philanthropic tradition. “My children remember me always being at meetings when they were smaller,” she says. “Now that they are grown up, I can see how much they appreciate the importance of supporting their community and understand the value that it brings to their lives.”

Handout For Students: 2nd Article on Kim Morris Heiman

The Cincinnati Enquirer

Online Source: <http://www.cincinnati.com/womenofyear/heiman.html>

***The Cincinnati Enquirer* – 2001 Women of the Year – Kim Morris Heiman**

Businesswoman works for peace in Middle East

By Janelle Gelfand, The Cincinnati Enquirer

Kim Morris Heiman has the courage to live between two worlds - Cincinnati and the Middle East - and the far-reaching vision to be a leader in both.

Her work in Israel, managing international operations at Standard Textile Co. Inc., resulted in Israelis and Jordanians working together, despite being longtime adversaries in a troubled land. Her endeavors inspired Ehud Barak, former Prime Minister of Israel, to nominate her as Enquirer Woman of the Year.

"The cooperation between Israelis and Jordanians which Kim has fostered begins in a commercial setting, but will ultimately serve as an example of how all of the people in our region can live harmoniously," writes Mr. Barak. "In doing so, she has shown vision and boldness which I hope will eventually bring peace to the Middle East."

But her work doesn't stop there. In Cincinnati, the mother of three is president of the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati, which annually raises nearly \$7 million for social services here, in Israel and in 52 other countries.

In 1998, she co-chaired the creation of the Garden of Peace at Cincinnati Zoo in honor of the 50th anniversary of Israel.

Volunteering, she says, was part of her life growing up in a sixth-generation Nashville, Tenn., family.

"I grew up on grits," she says, flashing a radiant smile, and smoothing back windblown hair. She's dressed in a basic black suit and has little time for primping. She's up at 4:15 a.m. daily to jog and work out - then she drives the car pool to Walnut Hills High. That's followed by a breakfast meeting, a long day at the Standard Textile offices in Reading, where her husband, Gary, is president and CEO. She's at evening meetings four nights a week.

"My mom is my role model," says her daughter Danielle, 14. "Her determination to act selflessly to fix communal and global problems has positively impacted me in the way that I view the world and my life."

Ms. Heiman has never let anything deter her from her goals. After graduating from college, her dream was to work for a Wall Street firm. But, because they only took men into their training programs, she worked her way up from secretary.

Then, interested in visiting Israel for a few months, she took a job at Bank Leumi. It became

five years. During that time, she moved to Shearson/American Express and later became a partner at Comstock Trading, dealing in commodities. Her investors were a melting pot of ultra-Orthodox Jews and West Bank Palestinians, who would sit in her office and chat in a mixture of languages for hours.

"This was my beginning to understand the culture of the Middle East," Ms. Heiman says.

She also met her husband, who was building Standard Textile's first plant in Arad. (The company now operates four manufacturing facilities and generates \$60 million in sales of medical textiles to 32 countries.) They married in 1984 and moved to Cincinnati.

Six years ago, Ms. Heiman returned to Israel to run a new plant in Migdal Ha'Emeq. The fabric is cut in Israel, she explains, and sewn in two plants in Jordan.

While there, she was moved by the story of a Jordanian woman employee, whose father, the head of an Islamic fundamentalist group, forbade her to work in the plant. The daughter said she would respect his wishes, but asked him to visit, and see the working conditions for himself.

He saw his daughter work among friendly people in an air-conditioned workplace. He let her stay.

"It's only one person," Ms. Heiman says. "But it's a beautiful story about how these relationships can be built, and that will bring about peace, eventually."

Undaunted by recurring violence in Israel, she believes that one person can still make a difference.

"Margaret Mead said, 'Never doubt that a small group of concerned people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has,'" she says.

Handout For Students: 1st Article on Hannah Rosenthal

Jewish Woman Magazine, Online Resource: <http://www.jwi.org/Page.aspx?pid=853>

10 Women to Watch in 5766: Hannah Rosenthal Sparkling Programs to Benefit Women and Girls

By Pauline Dubkin Yearwood

When Hannah Rosenthal left New York and her job as executive director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs in January 2005 to accept a position as executive director of the Chicago Foundation for Women, some in the Jewish world decried the move. After all, Rosenthal was leaving a post that made her the top female executive in the Jewish world.

She is quick to point out that although her home base may have changed (actually she's a Chicago native who has spent most of her life in the Midwest), her priorities haven't.

From the time she announced, as a child, that she wanted to be a rabbi [Sally Priesand, the first woman rabbi, was at Hebrew Union College (HUC) at the time], Rosenthal, 54, says she has always been adept at "lighting fires under people." As for the Chicago Foundation—which, with a \$6.5 million budget, is one of the largest women's foundations in the world—its mission dovetails nicely with her own. "We are the people who light a lot of fires under people," she says of the organization, which makes grants in the Chicago metropolitan area on issues benefiting women and girls.

Activism has been the watchword of Rosenthal's life. Her mother and father, who was a Reform rabbi and a Holocaust survivor, drove her lifelong passion for social justice, and she became involved in community organizing and the antiwar and civil rights movements of the '60s.

She enrolled at HUC to pursue her dream of becoming a rabbi but dropped out in her second year. "I decided that the vehicle I had chosen was not producing [social] change at a fast enough pace for me, so I switched vehicles." She headed a Jewish religious school for the next several years, then switched again—to politics. After getting her feet wet working for a state representative and for a member of Congress, she became the head of the Wisconsin Women's Council, leaving to devote her time to heading the ClintonGore campaign in Wisconsin.

In 2000, Rosenthal joined the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, an umbrella organization of local community councils and national Jewish agencies, and made history as the only woman heading a major national Jewish organization.

Her activities before and since have been refracted through a Jewish lens, she says, noting with satisfaction that the governor of Wisconsin once told her, meaning it as a compliment, that she "had a neon sign on [her] forehead that says 'Jew.'" Today, she adds, dissatisfaction with many of the current government's policies also drives her.

Rosenthal had another powerful reason for the New York-to-Chicago move: her two grown daughters, Shira and Francie, both live in nearby Madison, Wis. (Husband Rick Phelps works in

development for a bank and is also active in the Jewish community.)

As for her new job, Rosenthal says that "some days it's overwhelming, but look what's happening in the country—all our fundamental issues are on the table or on the chopping block. As a Jew, as a woman, I'm lucky that I get a platform to discuss these issues."

Handout For Students: 2nd Article on Hannah Rosenthal

Chicago Sun-Times

Online Source: http://blogs.suntimes.com/sweet/2011/11/state_departments_anti-semitis.html

State Department's Anti-Semitism fighter, Hannah Rosenthal focusing on Holocaust denial By Lynn Sweet on November 10, 2011

WASHINGTON -- On Kristallnacht -- Nov. 9, 1938 -- when Jews were rounded up in Germany and Austria and Jewish stores and synagogues smashed, a young German rabbi was arrested and eventually sent to Buchenwald, the concentration camp. Frank Rosenthal survived and made his way to the United States and to the pulpit of Temple Anshe Sholom in Olympia Fields.

Today, the late rabbi's daughter, Hannah Rosenthal, is the State Department's Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, a post created by Congress in 2004.

"There is nowhere I have been where everything is fine," said Rosenthal, in Chicago on Thursday to deliver a speech to the Middle East Media Research Institute.

After Chicago she is in London for a conference and then to Tallinn, Estonia, with Justice Department Nazi hunter Eli Rosenbaum to "express total dismay and astonishment" that the Estonian government is not prosecuting Mikhel Gorshkow after he was deported from the U.S. because of his Nazi war crimes.

Rosenthal's family moved to Flossmoor when she was five; she graduated from Homewood-Flossmoor High School in 1969. After picking up a bachelor's from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, she studied two years for the rabbinate at Hebrew Union College but eventually switched gears, turning to women's issues, politics and government.

She ended up the Wisconsin chair of Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign, which led her to run the Department of Health and Human Services Chicago regional office before she moved to posts dealing with women or Jewish affairs.

Rosenthal met Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton when they both were working on children's policy years ago. Speaking about Rosenthal in a July 13, 2010, speech, Clinton said "she has traveled the world devising new strategies and engaging governments and people to confront anti-Semitism and to promote tolerance and non-discrimination."

Seventy-three years after Kristallnacht -- the pogroms are seen as the start of the Holocaust -- anti-Semitism still exists. Of 193 countries Rosenthal's office monitors, the last study showed increases in anti-Semitic incidents in 75 nations, to a "disturbing degree" in 38 of them.

Of the troubling trends, Rosenthal is paying particular attention to growing Holocaust denial and anti-Semitic textbooks, particularly in Saudi Arabia.

Holocaust denial comes in many contexts: from clerics, heads of states, so-called academics, textbooks and websites. Between Aug. 7-11, 2010, Rosenthal accompanied a group of seven Muslim-American Imams and community leaders -- of which two included Holocaust deniers -- to Dachau and Auschwitz where millions were systemically murdered by Nazi Germany.

Rosenthal did have an ask for the group. "I was clear," she said. "If they could find it in themselves in the end of the trip to issue a statement." They did.

"We bear witness to the absolute horror and tragedy of the Holocaust," they said in a long statement turned into a poster in Rosenthal's State Department office--along with a collection of framed cloth Jewish stars Nazis forced Jews to sew on their clothes.

During a trip to Saudi Arabia, she met with officials and "they assured me they have taken all elements of intolerance out of their textbooks." She is waiting for results of a Saudi textbook study.

Rosenthal works closely with two State Department envoys to Muslim communities. "I will define success," she said, "when non-Jews are condemning anti-Semitism and Jews are condemning hatred of Muslims and hatred of other vulnerable populations."

Handout For Students: 1st Article on Rabbi Amy Schwartzman
Jewish Woman Magazine, Online Resource: <http://www.jwi.org/Page.aspx?pid=850>

10 Women to Watch in 5766: Amy M. Schwartzman
Speaking Out on Critical Social Issues
By Pauline Dubkin Yearwood

You might have seen Rabbi Amy M. Schwartzman's name in the news.

In 1998, when she became senior rabbi of Temple Rodef Shalom in Falls Church, Va., the congregation was the largest in the country headed by a woman rabbi at that time.

She made headlines again in 2003 when she was one of 15 rabbis (and the only woman) asked to meet with President George W. Bush to discuss Jewish concerns. Schwartzman drew both praise and a smattering of criticism when she raised the issue of poverty with the chief executive and pointedly criticized his welfare bill and other programs.

"Poverty is a Jewish issue; every issue is a Jewish issue, and to say that poverty is not is absurd," Schwartzman says now in response to the reproofs she received from several of the other rabbis who were present.

But she doesn't want to be known simply as the rabbi who gave the president a dressing-down. Nor did she have much time to ponder the matter: She's the leader of a large, diverse congregation whose membership includes many of Washington's Jewish power brokers. She also holds a number of leadership positions within the Reform movement and is the wife of Kevin Moss, an executive with a global telecommunications company, and the mother of Hannah, 6, and Eliana, 3.

Born and raised in Philadelphia, Schwartzman, 42, was active in the Reform movement growing up and continued her communal involvement in college, where she started out as a biology major.

She had no epiphany that led to her career choice, she says. "It was more of a coming together of the many things to which I am committed—study, community service, political action, teaching and counseling—all under the umbrella of Judaism, that led me to the rabbinate."

"I realized that all the things I enjoyed as an avocation could become my vocation by becoming a rabbi," she says. She is really overjoyed that this has come to fruition. "I feel so happy that I go to work every day excited and passionate about the job I have chosen."

Schwartzman joined Rodef Shalom right after ordination, serving as the temple's assistant, then associate rabbi before becoming its senior rabbi. As the first female rabbi of such an influential congregation, "the weight of the historical accomplishment was forced upon me," she says.

"When I'm in the synagogue, I feel as though I am simply doing my rabbinic job. But those I encounter often see me as more than just the rabbi of Rodef Shalom. I often hear people

comment on the fact that I am the first woman rabbi they have met. The outer world has pushed me into this position of acknowledging that I'm not just a rabbi but a woman rabbi in a large congregation."

She has accepted that role but feels she has more important tasks, such as speaking out on issues she considers critical. "There are congregants who don't want to hear me talk about poverty, welfare, immigration and so on. I don't agree," she says. "I believe we don't really fulfill our Jewish obligations unless we bring our Judaism to these issues. We have to carry our Jewish tradition with us to discussions about poverty, about everything."

Handout For Students: 2nd Article on Rabbi Amy Schwartzman

Online Resource: <http://leg1.state.va.us/cgi-bin/legp504.exe?101+ful+HJ336ER+pdf>

2010 SESSION [State of Virginia]

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 336

Commending Rabbi Amy M. Schwartzman.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 26, 2010

Agreed to by the Senate, March 4, 2010

WHEREAS, Rabbi Amy M. Schwartzman is celebrating her 20th anniversary as a clergy member at Temple Rodef Shalom in Falls Church, the largest Jewish congregation in Virginia; and

WHEREAS, Rabbi Schwartzman has been Senior Rabbi of Temple Rodef Shalom since 1998, and under her leadership, the congregation has grown to include 1,470 households; and

WHEREAS, Rabbi Schwartzman has successfully led a vibrant Jewish community at Temple Rodef Shalom and has made life-cycle events for members personal and profound; and

WHEREAS, through her compassionate guidance, Rabbi Schwartzman has led Temple Rodef Shalom to be a congregation that continues to deepen its commitment to improving the lives of those in need locally and beyond; and

WHEREAS, the broader Northern Virginia community has benefited from Rabbi Schwartzman's outstanding qualities and commitment to social justice, as she has provided leadership and support for such organizations as SHARE; Northern Virginia AIDS Ministry; Lazarus at the Gate, now Food for Others; the local FEMA chapter; McLean Clergy Association; Habitat for Humanity; Rebuilding Together; and all the local high schools; and

WHEREAS, Rabbi Schwartzman has long engaged actively in the Reform Jewish movement, including leadership in the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Women's Rabbinic Network, the Washington Board of Rabbis, and several Union for Reform Judaism task forces on social justice issues; and

WHEREAS, Rabbi Schwartzman has been recognized nationally for her stellar work, in 2008 by *Newsweek* magazine as one of the top 25 pulpit rabbis in America, and in recent years, she was honored as one of the "Forward 50," a list of prominent Jewish leaders published annually by the *Forward*, as well as being named one of the ten Jewish "Women to Watch" by Jewish Women International; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly commend and congratulate Rabbi Amy M. Schwartzman of Temple Rodef Shalom on the occasion of her 20th anniversary with the congregation; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to Rabbi Amy M. Schwartzman as an expression of the General Assembly's appreciation for guiding an exceptional community, the largest Jewish congregation in the Commonwealth.

Student Handout: Course Evaluation Form

1. What are the “big ideas” that you learned in this class?
2. What was the most surprising thing you learned?
3. How has this course impacted your identity as a Jewish woman?
4. Do you feel a stronger connection with your biblical ancestors? Why? Why not?
5. Did this course meet your expectations? Why? Why not?
6. If you could make changes to this course, what would you change?
7. Was the instructor prepared?
8. Was the instructor a good educator?
9. Would you sign-up for another *rosh chodesh* study session? Why? Why not?

Name (optional) _____

SOURCE ABBREVIATIONS

ABD	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> 1-6, David Noel Freedman, ed. N.Y.: Doubleday, 1992.
ABG	<i>The Anchor Bible: Genesis</i> , E. A. Speiser. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964.
ABR	<i>The Anchor Bible: Ruth</i> , Edward F. Campbell Jr. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975.
BOP	<i>Book of Proverbs: A Commentary</i> , W. G. Plaut. N.Y.: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1961.
BOR	<i>The Book of Ruth</i> , Hubbard, Robert L., Jr. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988.
CEC	<i>A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Book of Proverbs</i> , Crawford H. Toy. The International Critical Commentary, C.A. Briggs, S.R. Driver, and A. Plummer, eds. N.Y.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899.
COP	<i>A Commentary on Proverbs</i> , Peter A. Stevenson. Greenville, S.C.: BJU Press, 2001.
COT	<i>Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes</i> , vol 6, C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch. James Martin, trans. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1973.
EH	<i>Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary</i> , David L. Lieber and Chaim Potok, eds. N.Y.: The Rabbinical Assembly, 2001.
EPG	<i>Every Person's Guide to the Book of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes</i> , Ronald H. Isaacs. Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 2000.
EVE	<i>Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context</i> , Carol Meyers. N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1988.
FBM	<i>The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary</i> , Robert Alter. N.Y.: W. W. Norton, 2004.
FRD	<i>Commentary on the Torah with a New English Translation</i> , Richard Elliott Friedman. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001.
GEN	<i>Genesis: A Modern Commentary</i> , W. Gunther Plaut. N.Y.: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1974.
HAL	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> , Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., and M.E.J. Richardson, trans. Boston: Brill, 2001.

- HH *Households and Holiness: The Religious Culture of Israelite Women*, Carol Meyers. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005.
- JPSG *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, Nachum M. Sarna. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989.
- JSB *The Jewish Study Bible*, Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds. N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- MM “The Marriageable Maiden of Prov. 31:10-31,” M. B. Crook. *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 13 (1954): 137-40.
- MRSR “Material Remains and Social Relations: Women’s Culture in Agrarian Households of the Iron Age” in *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past*, Carole Meyers. W. G. Dever and S. Gitin, eds. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003.
- NS “Needlework and Sewing in Israel from Prehistoric Times to the Roman Period” in *Fortunate the Eyes that See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday*. Avigail Sheffer, Astrid B. Beck et al., eds. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995.
- OWJ *On Women and Judaism: A View From Tradition*, Blu Greenberg. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981.
- PNA *Proverbs: A New Approach*, William McKane. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970.
- PROV *Proverbs*, Kenneth T. Aitken. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1986.
- PROVAC *Proverbs: Hebrew Text & English Translation with an Introduction and Commentary*, A. Cohen. Surrey: Soncino, 1945.
- RH “Returning Home: Ruth 1.8 and the Gendering of the Book of Ruth” in *A Feminist Companion to Ruth*. Carol Meyers. Athalya Brenner, ed. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993.
- SVW *The Song of the Valiant Woman: Studies in the Interpretation of Proverbs 31:10-31*, Al Wolters. Waynesboro, Ga.: Paternoster, 2001.
- TBOP *The Book of Proverbs*, W. O. E. Oesterley. London: Methuen, 1929.
- TEX “Textiles: Textiles of the Neolithic through Iron Ages” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*. Miriam Peskowitz. Eric M. Meyers, ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

- TW “Two Women in a Man’s World: A Reading of the Book of Ruth,” Phyllis Tribble. *Soundings* 59 (1976): 252-79.
- WC “*Parashat Chayei Sarah*” in *The Torah: A Women’s Commentary*, Yairah Amit. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, ed. N.Y.: URJ and Women of Reform Judaism, Forthcoming.
- WES1 *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, Claus Westermann, John J. Scullion, trans. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984.
- WES2 *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary*, Claus Westermann, John J. Scullion, trans. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985.
- WIS *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, Carol Meyers, ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.
- WOM *From the Wisdom of Mishle’, Samson Raphael Hirsch*. N.Y.: Feldheim, 1976.

Annotated List of Resources for Students and Teachers

Brown, Erica. “‘An Intimate Spectator’: Jewish Women Reflect on Adult Study.” *Religious Education*, 98, no. 1:65-81. 2003

This article focuses specifically on Jewish adult women who are actively engaged in Jewish learning. More specifically, it shares the results of a research study that was conducted to determine why women study as adults, what their educational expectations are, and how well their learning situations meet their needs. Thirty-two women, across denominations, were interviewed, ranging in age from 20 to 71 (with the average age being 47.5). This article indicates, among other things, that adult Jewish women seek spiritual edification, they want to be full participants in the Jewish community, they value a warm and welcoming learning environment where the teacher is less of a lecturer and more of a facilitator, and they appreciate the opportunity to explore, question and challenge their pre-existing ideas about Judaism.

Flexner, Paul A. “An Interview with Arthur Kurzweil.” *Agenda: Jewish Education*, no. 12 (summer): 3-8. Jewish Education Service of North America (JESNA), 1999.

In this article, Paul Flexner of JESNA interviews adult learner and teacher, Arthur Kurzweil. Their conversation focuses on the important role of the instructor in motivating and facilitating adult learners. Kurzweil believes his own involvement as a Jewish learner contributes to his ability to successfully teach Jewish adults, saying, “knowing how to learn is half of the success of being a teacher” (p. 3). Other needed qualities include being enthusiastic, connecting to the subject matter, helping students feel comfortable in class, drawing on what students say, and bringing ancient texts to life in our modern age. Touching people’s lives, helping them grow spiritually, and facilitating a connection with other Jews, are also discussed as necessary components of a successful adult education class.

Grant, Lisa D., Diane Tickton Schuster, Meredith Woocher, and Steven M. Cohen. *A Journey of Heart and Mind: Transformative Jewish Learning in Adulthood*. New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2004.

This book focuses primarily on adult learning in one venue, The Florence Melton Adult Mini-School. However, it serves as a model for adult learning in general, for it reminds the reader that successful adult learning goes beyond just mastering the material. Adult learners want an environment that feels safe and welcoming, they seek to create relationships with their fellow students, and they have the desire to make connections between the material studied in class and their own life experiences. This resource also speaks to the role of a successful adult education instructor: s/he must be in touch with the students and their needs, create intellectual

stimulation, interaction and dialogue, and function less as “a detached expert” and more as “an interactive facilitator” (p. 173). In short, this text offers a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of adult learning.

Imel, Susan. “Adult Learning in Cohort Groups.” ERIC Practice Application Brief no. 24. Columbus, OH: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Center on Education and Training for Employment, College of Education, The Ohio State University, 2002.

This article focuses on the value of adult learning that takes place in cohort groups. It emphasizes the need to “create” a cohort in order to foster learning and development. This is best done when the group first comes together and by focusing on the development of group relationships. In addition, attention must be paid to the individual needs of each member as well as to the group, as a whole. To be a successful instructor, one must create an environment that promotes belonging, respect, risk taking, critical thinking, and shared understanding.

Imel, Susan. “Transformative Learning in Adulthood.” ERIC Digest no. 200. Columbus, OH: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Center on Education and Training for Employment, College of Education, The Ohio State University, 1998.

This article discusses “transformative learning” that was first introduced by Jack Mezirow in 1978. It then adds to this understanding by introducing the research of Robert Boyd. While transformative learning was first understood to be a by-product of critical reflection, newer research suggests that it is prompted by intuition and emotion. When transformative learning is the goal, the teacher needs to help create a trusting and caring environment that will lead learners to build relationships and create shared experiences. The students, in turn, need to take responsibility for creating a positive learning environment where transformative learning can take place.

Keller, Carolyn. “From the Outside In: Renaissance and Adult Jewish Learning.” *Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Responsibility* 31, no. 576:6-7, 2000.
<http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=8045>

This article speaks of a “renaissance of Jewish learning.” The author suggests that renewed interest in adult Jewish learning is motivated by a desire to know “why” we do what we do, rather than “how.” When adults find answers to the questions they seek, Judaism adds meaning to their lives. Technology and an increased number of available Jewish scholars make it easier for Jews to study and attain such knowledge.

Schuster, Diane Tickton and Lisa D. Grant. "Adult Jewish Learning." In *What We Now Know About Adult Jewish Education*," ed. Goodman, Roberta Louis, Paul A. Flexner and Linda Dale Bloomberg. Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 2008.

This article recognizes that there are many different paradigms for adult Jewish learning, ranging from one-time sessions to multi-year learning programs. It acknowledges the increase in adult studying that began in the 1980s and 1990s. The authors indicate that adult learners have a social desire to be part of a Jewish community. They want their teachers to be knowledgeable and supportive of their needs, while also challenging them to grow. Adult learners want their instructors to be credible, "human," and learners, themselves. Learning in a safe environment is also important, especially when the students come from diverse backgrounds. Instructors are valued when they create dialogue in the classroom – both between students and within an individual.

Schuster, Diane Tickton. "New Jewish Development - New Lessons for Educators of Adult Jewish Learners." *Jewish Education News*, (winter): Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education (CAJE), 2001.

<http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=2113>

This article focuses solely on adult Jewish learners. It makes the point that many, if not most, Jewish adults have succeeded in life without a strong Jewish education. That said, a trend began at the end of the 1990s that led more Jewish adults to seek out Jewish learning opportunities. Schuster indicates that for adult learners to be fully engaged, there needs to be collaboration between instructors and learners, i.e. they need to know about and understand each other. In addition, teachers of adults need to understand the developmental needs of adult learners, which are: they welcome change, they have the ability to learn and process new information, learning adds purpose and meaning to their lives, and learning in a group setting allows for community building. The article concludes by discussing four strategies for teaching adults: inviting learners to share their stories, creating a safe environment and an atmosphere of inclusiveness, allowing for questioning and critical thinking, and developing continuity.

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