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New York School

Report on the Rabbinic Dissertation Submitted by

Faith Joy Dantowitz

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Ordination

God's Revelation to Woman:

Hannah, Hagar and Tzipporah

This thesis is a collection and close analysis of the extant midrashic traditions concerning God's revelation to three very different female biblical characters--Hannah, Hagar, and Tzipporah. Hannah, Samuel's mother, was barren for 19 years and in her pain she prayed to God who responded to her (I Samuel 1-2). Hagar, the Egyptian maidservant of Sarah, was comforted by God when she fled Abraham's house (Genesis 10) and again was comforted by God after she and her son were banished (Genesis 21). Tzipporah was another non-Israelite to experience direct contact with God when she fulfilled the commandment of circumcision in place of her husband, Moses (Exodus 4:20). The author's intent is not only to understand how the rabbis interpret the biblical traditions surrounding these three women, but also to determine their attitudes towards women in general and the reasons why they occasionally experience revelation.

The first step in her investigation was a close examination of the biblical text material relating to Hannah, Hagar, and Tzipporah. In analyzing the biblical material, she raised all the questions pertaining to it and the themes which are prevalent. After isolating the key issues present in the material on each character, the author then gathered the pertinent midrashic texts by utilizing the available verse indices and topical anthologies, especially Torah ha-Ketuvah v'ha-Messurah. She collected material from the early exegetic compilations up to the later midrashic anthologies. As her research progressed, she began to isolate several key themes emerging from the rabbis' treatment of the three females, including the ability on each person's part to open one's eyes to see God's presence, including non-Jews, and the important role of each human being in bringing about the redemption of humankind. Having gathered and analyzed much of the rabbinic material on Hannah, Hagar, and Tzipporah, the author arranged her findings in three key chapters dealing with each character. In each one, the author presents the analysis of the biblical material prior to the relevant rabbinic traditions.

Chapter One focusses upon Hannah and her praying to God for a son, and then rejoicing afterwards. The rabbis emphasize that there are many lessons to be learned from her, not the least of which is the need to come to God with Kavannah. Hannah prayed with all her heart and God responded, although Eli, the prophet, did not appreciate her. Hannah communicated with God both in her pain as well as when she experienced great joy. And in the end, God's response to her raised her self-image.

In Chapter Two, the author presents the material about Hagar, Sarah's maidservant, and emphasizes that God's revelation gave her the strength to survive her traumatic banishment with her son, Ishmael. Hagar found the strength to reach out to her son in the desert, and by reaching out to him, she strengthened herself. The rabbis also stress that Hagar teaches us that we may not always receive a positive message from God--Hagar was told to return and endure Sarah's harsh treatment, but we must have the faith to accept what is presented to us. God also informs Hagar that the future will be bright for her.

Chapter Three deals with Tzipporah. God appears to her when Moses does not fulfill the mitzvah of circumcision and she is the one who seals the covenant. Tzipporah, a Midianite, moves from being the passive wife of Moses and Jethro's daughter to an active participant in God's covenantal relationship with the Jewish people.

Although, it is always difficult to gain a clear understanding of a large collection of disparate rabbinic traditions, the author has handled it in a highly competent and at times creative manner. She not only presents the reader with many insights regarding the biblical and rabbinic material, but has offered a fairly cogent midrashic picture of the three female characters as shaped by the tradition. In interpreting and extending the biblical stories of Hannah, Hagar, and Tzipporah, the rabbis had a vehicle to address their own constituency regarding issues of God's revelation, their relationship to non-Jews, and their attitudes towards women. In addition, they conveyed a message that each individual can come to experience God's presence no matter who we are and what we have experienced in the past.

Though the rabbis obviously focus much more upon male biblical characters and their relationships with God, the rabbis do generally respond positively to the biblical material on these female characters. Hannah is considered a righteous person and therefore deserved direct communication from God, and both Hagar and Tzipporah are touched and changed by God's presence in their lives. Each one of them experienced terrible pain in real life situations, and each was able to overcome it because God was a factor in her life.

Ms. Dantowitz is to be commended for her research, analysis, and presentation. She has shown an ability to analyze texts creatively and to integrate diverse material. Of course much

more could have been done, especially by gathering more later midrashic material on these three characters. At times, the corpus of the material analyzed seems a bit spotty. Also, some of the tentative conclusions which she draws about rabbinic attitudes needs to be substantiated vis-a-vis other female biblical figures. Nevertheless, this thesis provides us with a window through which to view how the rabbis extend and shape biblical material. The author has also helped us understand how minor even non-Israelite biblical figures can play a more important role on the stage of rabbinic drama.

Respectfully submitted,



Dr. Norman J. Cohen
Professor of Midrash

April 4, 1993

GOD'S REVELATION TO WOMEN:
HANNAH, HAGAR, AND TZIPPORAH

FAITH JOY SMITH DANTOWITZ

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Ordination

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And for my son, Ezra Seth, I hope that one day you will be ready to open your eyes like Hagar, pray intensely like Hannah and perform God's command like Tzipporah.

"Adonai is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in God. I was helped and my heart exulted, so I will glorify God with my song." (Ps. 28:7)

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INTRODUCTION

The subject of revelation has intrigued the rabbis throughout the ages. The Bible records the accounts of a few individuals' experiences with God. Yet, we would ask, why did these particular people receive revelation? By studying their encounters can we learn how to become closer to God? And most importantly, what is the nature of God's revelation to women in The Bible? These questions that I consider have intrigued me and led me to explore the topic of revelation.

Moreover, as a liberal Jew, I believe in progressive revelation. While God revealed the Torah at Sinai or imparted the knowledge to our ancestors, I feel that revelation continues to happen in our time. In many cases, while it may appear that God is distant, we just need to become aware of God's presence. Experiencing intense communication with God can happen at a significant or even seemingly insignificant time. In order to feel God's presence, we must learn to recognize that revelation can happen anytime and any place.

Various accounts of revelation in the Bible show how God does reveal the Divine Self in different ways. A familiar scene is God speaking to Moses from the burning bush. In this case, Moses had to pay attention in order to realize God's presence. Rabbi Lawrence Kushner writes:

How long must someone look at a burning bush to know whether or not it is being consumed? Certainly longer than most people look at anything. Longer, in other words, than you need to. More than to see it. Or to use it. Long enough to see if it will be for you an Entrance. Such a man was Moses, our teacher. And likewise, anyone who is able to gaze on a place long enough without being distracted.¹

1. Lawrence Kushner, Honey from the Rock. Second Printing (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1990), 49.

Moses became aware of a greater sensation than a bush burning. He was ready to listen for God. He, like many others, was able to recognize the spectacular in the simple. Similarly, Jacob awoke from a dream and commented that God was in the place, but he had not realized it until that moment.²

Most of the people mentioned in the Bible as receiving revelation are men. Therefore, the rabbinic texts are filled with commentaries about them. Does this mean that their accounts of revelation are more important than those of the women's? No. This is one of the reasons for a study of God's communication with women, for there are intriguing texts that show God speaking to women.

From the matriarchs and generations to follow, there are scenes of revelation between God and women. Though the texts may not be as well known as that of Moses and the burning bush, they are rich with meaning. A straight text reading is greatly enhanced by a deeper probing of the material.

Midrash offers a wonderful vehicle to study these texts. From the terse Biblical verses the rabbis created a wide variety of midrashim. Their creativity offers a wealth of material to explore, study and with which to come to terms.

Collections of Midrash are easily accessible and specific biblical texts are treated through a variety of historical periods. The rabbis for the most part did not place much emphasis on the Biblical sections on women. Yet, there are plenty of texts to study in order to obtain a fuller picture of God's revelation to women.

I have chosen to study passages focusing on three biblical characters—Hannah, Hagar and Tzipporah. Each one is intriguing in her own light and together their stories present us with some overlapping themes.

2. Genesis 28:16.

Hannah was Samuel the prophet's mother. She was barren for nineteen years before his birth.³ While in pain from her barrenness, Hannah offered a heartfelt prayer to God for a son. She vowed that if God granted her a son, she would have him dedicate his life to God. Her wish was fulfilled and one of the greatest prophets of Israel came into being.

Hannah is included in this study in order to explore her prayer to God. She was a woman who took prayer very seriously and prayed with kavannah, intention.

In addition, Hannah is intriguing because of her personal situation. She and Peninah were co-wives to Elkanah. Hannah was more loved and yet barren while Peninah conceived and had children without difficulty. This passage, in I Samuel Chapter 1, seems to parallel the story of Jacob, Rachel and Leah. Rachel, the more beloved, was also barren. Hannah found solace in her deep prayers to God. She prayed with intensity and was able to isolate herself temporarily from the tormenting of Peninah. In her pain, Hannah sought refuge from God.

Hagar, the Egyptian maidservant of Abram's wife, Sarai, also found comfort from God. When she left Abram's house, she was met by an angel both times.⁴ Even though she was considered to be of a lower status, she received revelation. The angel of God informed her of the hardships she would face in the present, but also informed her of the bright promise in the future.

A prominent question in the midrashim that deal with Hagar is on whose merit did Hagar receive revelation. Was it on her own or was it because of her connection to Abram and Sarai? With or without connections, Hagar was chosen to experience God in an intimate way.

3. I Samuel 1:20.

4. Genesis 16 and 21.

I chose to include Hagar in this study because of the interesting descriptions of God's revelation to her and the questions regarding her status. Her eyes were opened to a well of water which is symbolic of life. By seeing the well, Hagar was able to rejuvenate her spirit. As she named God, "the God of seeing," Hagar recognized God's role in her renewal. She had faith in the God of Abram and Sarai.

Tzipporah, another non-Jew to receive revelation, also had faith in the God of Israel, which her actions demonstrate.⁵ When Moses failed to circumcise their son, Tzipporah fulfilled the mitzvah and sealed the covenant between God and the Jewish people. Though she was often referred to as Moses' wife, Tzipporah's actions earned her special status, even though she was a woman and a non-Jew.

Tzipporah is an interesting choice for this study because of her status: she was a wife, a non-Jew and a mohellet (one who performs circumcision). Her revelation was more subtle than that of either Hannah or Hagar's, yet she did receive a message from God. Otherwise, she would not have known to circumcise her son.

The research method for this study was as follows. First, I studied the Biblical passages related to revelation regarding Hannah, Hagar and Tzipporah. After selecting the specific verses of interest, I turned to the biblical verse index in Torah HaKethubah V'hamessurah.

Through this index, I located all of the midrashim on the specific verses from the midrashim ranging in centuries from the early exegetic midrashim through the later anthologies. This span enabled me to look for changes or similarities in

5. Exodus 2:21-22, Exodus 4:20, Exodus 4:24-26, Exodus 18:2, and Numbers 12:1.

traditions shaped over a number of generations. In addition to the references from the index, I also looked at earlier intertestamental works, including Jubilees, Philo and Josephus.

The next step was to locate the specific midrashim referred to and determine their relevance to the topic at hand. I then copied out the relevant traditions on note cards indicating the key themes included.

Each female character was researched separately. I began my research with all of the relevant midrashim for Hagar. I used notecards for organization of the material and then reviewed the cards to see what themes and topics emerged. In order to solidify my thoughts, I wrote a brief summary of the major themes before moving on to the next set of midrashim.

When I completed the research for all three women, I again referred to my summaries. At this point I needed to determine which midrashim were most relevant and warranted inclusion in the thesis itself. I did this by outlining the key themes in each case. After organizing the themes relating to each character, I outlined the individual chapters.

The three core chapters focus on revelation to Hannah, Hagar and Tzipporah. Chapter One's emphasis is on Hannah's prayer to God. She prayed with great intensity and her prayer was answered. Many of the midrashim explore the nature of Hannah's prayer and what is the proper way to pray according to the rabbis.

Chapter Two deals with the Egyptian maidservant, Hagar. She twice received revelation in the desert. The question raised by the rabbis is why did she encounter God this often and with total ease? One response by them was that Hagar only merited revelation because of her ties to Abram and Sarai.

A major motif in the Hagar passages is water. Water is symbolic of life and God showed her the well of seeing. God enabled Hagar to see her life more

clearly. In opening her eyes, she gained the strength to withstand her pain and save herself and her son. The water was her lifesaver.

Chapter Three focuses on Tzipporah, Moses' wife. While she is often referred to as an object of others' actions, Tzipporah proves her crucial link in Jewish tradition when she circumcises her own son. This is interesting because she was a non-Jewish woman fulfilling the obligation of her husband. When Moses failed to perform the mitzvah, Tzipporah stepped in to seal the covenant.

How did Tzipporah know what to do? As a Midianite, circumcision was not a familiar custom to her. But, because of a message or revelation from God, Tzipporah was able to preserve the well-being of her family.

The final summary chapter recaps the main themes of the core chapters and tries to synthesize the information. Each woman and the midrash about her have important messages to teach. Combined, this potpourri of a devoted wife, maidservant, and non-Jew sealing God's covenant with the Jewish people provides an interesting selected picture of God's revelation to women.

CHAPTER ONE:

HANNAH

A Heartfelt Prayer

Most of the accounts of revelation in the Bible describe communications between God and men. Though women also received revelation from God, few are named or given much attention in the text. However, this does not mean that women in the Bible are less important than the men. Rather, one can view this as a symptom of a misogynistic perspective. For example, there are many midrashim about Jacob's dream in Genesis 28.¹ However, in the same Torah portion, much attention is given in the text to his wives, Leah and Rachel. The two women compete to have many children. After most of the births, the women choose a name reflecting God's role in the miracle of life. This could have been a form of revelation for them, yet the rabbis do not comment on this at all. It is worthwhile then to look deeper at the significant female characters and contemplate their relationships with God.

Hannah is a special female Biblical character. Like many of the women of note in the Bible, she was barren. She shares this trait with six other women, one of whom, Hagar, is also included in this study. Hannah's reaching out to God was fueled by her desire to bear children. While the theme of barrenness is dominant for many women, especially the matriarchs, it may prove more interesting to focus on the nature of who Hannah was as a person: what traits she displayed in her prayer to God and how her revelation affected who she was.

1. In Genesis 28, Parashat Vayetze, Jacob has a dream with angels going up and down a stairway. When he awoke, he declared that God was in that place. Jacob recognized the revelation and the rabbis of the midrash expound upon this text at great length.

A) The Biblical Material I Samuel 1:10-20; I Samuel 2:1; and I Samuel 2:21.

The first chapter of I Samuel introduces the reader to this intriguing female character in the Bible. She and Peninah are the wives of Elkanah. Hannah is more loved by her husband, but barren. The scene described in this chapter is the yearly family pilgrimage to Shiloh.

This is a painful experience for Hannah. Every year her husband gives Peninah multiple portions of the priests' gift, yet only one to Hannah because she was barren. Hannah was hurt by her husband and by Peninah, who mocked Hannah's condition. In her misery, Hannah was unable to eat and immersed herself in a prayer to God. This prayer is the focus for the midrashic study on Hannah.

Before turning to the midrash on Hannah, however, it may be helpful to examine the Biblical verses of note.

I Samuel 1:10-14: In her wretchedness, she prayed to Adonai, weeping all the while. And she made this vow: "Adonai of Hosts, if You will look upon the suffering of Your maidservant and will remember me and not forget Your maidservant, and if You will grant Your maidservant a male child, I will dedicate him to Adonai for all the days of his life; and no razor shall ever touch his head." As she kept on praying before Adonai, Eli watched her mouth. Now Hannah was praying in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice could not be heard. So Eli thought she was a drunk.

What is the significance of praying to God when one is upset? Is God more likely to respond to a distress call? Hannah is desperate in her desire to have children. Her husband's love can not compensate for her feelings of emptiness in her barren state. In her turmoil, she turned to God. She may have prayed deeply

to God for children in the past, but this prayer comes from her bitter soul or wretchedness, marat nafesh. Hannah thinks that only God can take away her unhappiness.

Hannah prayed directly to Adonai, ('al Adonai). Is there any significance to the use of the grammatical construct of 'al instead of 'el? Also, the use of the infinitive absolute bachoh tivkeh (surely cry) indicates that Hannah cried strongly. It emanated from her intense distress.

Hannah's vow to God was a conditional offering. She bargained: If God gives her a son, then she would dedicate his life to God. Hannah is not afraid to ask God for what she wants: a son. Yet, she feels that if God responds, she should answer God in return. She shows her gratitude to God by offering in advance to return her son to God. Is this a realistic vow or a desperate attempt for a child in which an extreme promise is made?

Hannah made a Nazirite vow. This meant that Samuel would abstain from drinking intoxicants and cutting his hair. A Nazirite is given status resembling that of a priest. By making such a vow, Hannah perhaps intended her son to achieve a high position in the Sanctuary. Her vow would cause her joy and pain since she ultimately would not keep the child to herself. Also, Hannah's vow could cause anguish for her child since it is he who must dedicate his life to God, not Hannah.

At present, Hannah is focused on her own pain more than on the affect of her vow upon her son. She asks if God truly sees her pain in the same grammatical construct as above, ra'oh tireh (surely see). An omniscient God can see. Hannah wants to know if God can understand her pain and see how she suffers. God has taken notice of her and can easily answer her prayer. If so, then she can hope that God would respond by ending her misery.

Hannah emphasizes a view of herself as being subordinate to God and subordinate in her family. She refers to herself as a "maidservant" three times in

the verse. In repeating her status, Hannah emphasizes her status in everyone's eyes, especially God's. God is in control over this humble maidservant. Only God can respond to her suffering and answer her prayer. Is Hannah's thrice mention of maidservant a way for her to glorify God in the hope of a favorable response?

Hannah asks that God remember (zachar) her and not forget God's maidservant. This is a doubling of the request. Why does the text say 'remember me', yet 'do not forget your maidservant'? Is Hannah separate from her role as maidservant? Is the Hannah who is to be remembered, the same Hannah who praises God in I Samuel 2:1? This could indicate that Hannah's low self-esteem is conditioned by her barrenness. By labeling herself a maidservant, she focuses on her weakness before God and feelings of despair. The root zachar, on the other hand, is used in I Samuel 1:19 when Hannah conceives. Hannah may see herself with the potential for happiness, but is stuck in her depressed state.

Once Hannah began praying, she became very involved. The Hebrew mentions that she was long in her prayer (hirbtah l'hitpalel). When is it good to lengthen one's prayer? This is one of the examples that the rabbis point to in the Talmud. Hannah moved her mouth while she prayed and Eli watched it. Why was he staring at her? Did he watch others pray in the same way?

Hannah prayed in or upon her heart— "al libah", just as she prayed 'al Adonai'. Does the mention of her heart indicate that this was deepfelt by Hannah and not just any ordinary prayer?

While Hannah prayed, only her lips moved. Maybe Eli was watching her mouth because this was unusual. Was this the first time Eli saw someone pray silently? Since Eli could not hear her voice, he assumed that she was drunk. Why didn't Eli consider that Hannah may have been whispering? After all, if she was a maidservant, perhaps Hannah did not feel that it was proper for her to raise her voice loud in prayer.

1 Samuel 1:14-17: Eli said to her, "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Sober up!" And Hannah replied, "Oh no, my lord! I am a very unhappy woman. I have drunk no wine or other strong drink, but I have been pouring out my heart to Adonai. Do not take your maidservant for a worthless woman; I have only been speaking all this time out of my great anguish and distress." "Then go in peace," said Eli, "and may the God of Israel grant what you have asked of Him."

Why did Eli attack Hannah instead of asking what she was doing? Since he was in God's service, it might have been more appropriate for him to reserve judgment. Would he have acted as harshly with a man?

Hannah was quick to respond to Eli's accusation. She was not afraid of speaking out. Did she have to defend herself to Eli? Since he spoke harshly to her, why did she explain her plight? Hannah told Eli that she poured out her heart or soul (nefesh) to Adonai. She opened up herself to share her pain with God

Hannah continues explaining herself to Eli and again refers to herself as a maidservant, just as she did with God. Why does she include this title when requesting that Eli not see her as a worthless woman? If she were not a maidservant, maybe he would have viewed her differently. In telling Eli that she is sad, Hannah could be asking for his compassion, as she asked for God's.

Eli accepts Hannah's explanation and then offers his blessing. Why does he drop his attack on Hannah immediately? Hannah must have made a strong impression on him. Perhaps Hannah's persona was such that she was extremely sincere. Then, Eli would not have to question her for the truth was evident. Eli may have sympathized and asked on her behalf for God's help.

1 Samuel 1:18-20: She answered, "You are most kind to your handmaid." So the woman left, and she ate, and was no longer downcast. Early next morning they bowed low before Adonai, and

they went back to Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah and Adonai remembered her. Hannah conceived, and at the turn of the year bore a son. She named him Samuel, meaning, "I asked Adonai for him."

Hannah thanked Eli for his response. Initially she had to set him straight about her situation. Now, she was grateful for his kind words. Was Hannah angered by Eli's initial response and then calmed by his new understanding? Perhaps she recognized that she was a mere handmaid before him and needed to be gracious in accepting his blessing.

In the beginning of the chapter, it is mentioned that Hannah is too distressed to eat. Only this year, after Hannah pours out her heart to God and has a short dialogue with Eli is Hannah able to eat. By mentioning that Hannah eats, does the text emphasize that she is able to affirm life by sustaining herself? Also, how important are the people we are with when we pray? Eli was moved by Hannah's pain and responded with his own prayer for her. Eli's blessing for Hannah's well-being soothed her and lifted her spirit, perhaps giving her the courage to resume living.

The text mentions that they arose early the next morning. Did the family get up early because of a sense of urgency to praise God? The Hebrew vayashkimu is from the same root used in the Akedah.² This invokes a feeling of extreme importance of one's relationship with God. Hannah and her family bowed before God as a manifestation of their complete subordination. In Judaism, one only bows before God since no single human being is worthy of this total surrender.

2. Genesis 22. God told Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac on Mount Moriah. Abraham arises early in the morning, eager to fulfill God's command. The Hebrew word in this passage is vayashkem, from the same root as in I Samuel 1:19.

Without pause, the text continues in the same verse to state that God remembered Hannah, as she requested in 1 Samuel 1:11. Is the terseness indicative of the sense of urgency that God has to fulfill Hannah's vow? Evidently, Elkanah and Hannah were intimate immediately. Does God usually answer prayers this fast?

In the previous verse it states that God remembered Hannah. When God remembers women, does this indicate pregnancy? Hannah's prayer was answered when she bore a son. What if Hannah had born a daughter? Would Hannah have been rejected by God?

Hannah chose her son's name. It is interesting that God didn't give her the name and that Elkanah wasn't involved. Naming is a powerful act and such control is usually given to the man. Recall the Creation story in which Adam names all of the animals and Eve.³ The name Hannah selected, Samuel—Shmu'el, means "his name is God", though it is often translated as "I asked the Lord for him". A more fitting name could have been Natanel (given by God).

1 Samuel 2:1-21: And Hannah prayed: "My heart exults in Adonai; I have triumphed through Adonai. I gloat over my enemies; I rejoice in Your deliverance." For Adonai took note of Hannah; she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. Young Samuel meanwhile grew up in the service of Adonai.

In Hannah's first prayer to God, she is in a state of distress. Now that God has remembered her, she is exultant and prays to God in her state of glory. Initially, Hannah emphasized that she was a mere maidservant. Now she feels like gloating. This shows an unyet experienced side of Hannah or even a completely

3. Genesis 2:19-20.

different person. How does God respond to her in this prayer? Is God pleased that she is thankful and recognizes God's help?

Also, how has Hannah changed as a person? In her first prayer she was in despair, while now she gloats. Her sense of self has changed dramatically. She feels successful because of bearing a son and her relation to God is affirmed.

In I Samuel 1:19, God remembered Hannah. Here the term used is not zachar, but rather pakad. What is the difference between the two terms? In Chapter Two, Eli offers a blessing that God grant Hannah and Elkanah offspring in place of Samuel, their loan to God. Are these children bonuses from God because Samuel was in God's service? How many children did Hannah and Elkanah have? Was Samuel part of the five children mentioned here; or accounted for separately?

B) Midrashic Treatment of Hannah

With this look at the Biblical verses, the midrash can be approached with greater insight into the text. The questions raised concerning the biblical verses may or may not appear in the midrash, but they force the reader to be more open to a fuller exploration of the text.

The midrashim have been divided into a few dominant categories. Their overarching themes include prayer, Hannah's persona and God.

1) Hannah and Prayer

Many midrashim focus on the phrase 'al libah, (in her heart) in I Samuel 1:13. Hannah prayed to God for a long time and only spoke in her heart, and the rabbis probe its meaning.

One suggestion is that people do not need to pray aloud. Hannah shows that a heartfelt silent prayer is heard by God. This is explained in midrash ranging from the fourth through thirteenth centuries. The Tosefta, for example, states "Lest one think that he must pray out loud, Scripture specifies [to the contrary] in the case of Hannah, as it says, 'Hannah was speaking in her heart' (I Samuel 1:13). Therefore, God on high hears even people's soft prayers and the words of those who may be afraid to speak out."⁴

Deuteronomy Rabbah also emphasizes that it is not necessary to raise one's voice in prayer: "When one is standing at prayer, you might think that he may raise his voice; but Hannah has already long ago explicitly shown otherwise..."⁵ Evidently, it was more common to pray aloud. Perhaps the rabbis were concerned about the validity of silent prayer. A few centuries later, Yalkut Shimoni views this proof-text as a directive that the proper way to pray is in your heart, not aloud. Even though the voice is not heard, God hears the prayer.⁶

What does one learn from Hannah's prayer style? In the Palestinian Talmud, there is a lengthy explanation of the manner in which Hannah prayed with only her lips moving.

4. Tos., Berachot, 33:9.

5. Deuteronomy Rabbah, 2:1.

6. Yalkut Shimoni, vol. I, Remez 776.

One might think that he must raise his voice and pray. It was stated concerning Hannah, "Hannah was speaking in her heart." [I Sam. 1:13] One might think that he may just meditate [during prayer]. [On the contrary,] Scripture states, "Only her lips moved"[ibid]. What does that mean? That she spoke with her lips [i.e., articulated the words quietly]. Said R. Yose bar Haninah, From this verse you learn four things. "Hannah was speaking in her heart:" from this you learn that prayer requires concentration. [The heart was considered to be the source of thought.] "Only her lips moved:" from this you learn that one must mouth the prayer with one's lips. "And her voice was not heard:" from this you learn that one may not raise his voice and pray. "And Eli took her to be a drunken woman:" from this you learn a drunken person is forbidden to pray.⁷

Hannah spoke in her heart with deep concentration. The rabbis clarify that prayer is more than meditation. By moving her lips, Hannah mouths the words of the prayer. It takes more time to speak than to think a prayer. Hannah had to focus on the individual words by reciting them with her mouth. This can be understood in relation to reading. Reading aloud takes more time than reading to oneself. Further, the rabbis were concerned with the person's intention or kavannah. When Hannah spoke to God, she was focused in her prayer.

The rabbis of the Babylonian Talmud explicate this verse in a similar manner and draw four main points that parallel the Palestinian Talmud.⁸ Contrasting this, Yalkut Shimoni emphasizes only that the proper way to speak to God is in your heart, 'al libah;' not b'kol.⁹

Why do the earlier comments of the rabbis focus on four aspects, while the later Yalkut Shimoni only emphasizes the importance of how to speak to God? The areas of concentration, articulation and not being drunk may have achieved wide acceptance as far as the prerequisites for prayer. But the issue of raising

7. P.T. Berachot 4:1.

8. B.T. Berachot 31b.

9. Yalkut Shimoni, vol. 2, Remez 76.

one's voice could spur debate since there are many who raised their voice in prayer to God. Though the Hannah prooftext is apparently applied to men as well as women, if the rabbis wanted to show that women must not raise their voices in prayer, then this verse in question offers them strong proof. Another concern of the rabbis could have been that raising one's voice has implications of non-Jews hearing the prayer. It is interesting to ponder what the emphasis of Yalkut Shimoni could reflect.

The Talmud explains that concentration is necessary in prayer. Why did Hannah pray so intensely? Pesikta Rabbati offers an explanation by interpreting I Samuel 1:6, "And her rival vexed her sore." This verse states that Peninah angered Hannah. How did she do this? Peninah flaunted her children before the barren Hannah. The rabbis focus on the word hirmah. It is often translated as "to make her fret." They also suggest it could mean "to make her thunder" against God in prayer. Therefore, Peninah's callous treatment of Hannah led Hannah to pray fervently. Moreover, the rabbis suggest that rain always follows thunder.¹⁰ Since water is a symbol of life and redemption, following the thunder or pain, Hannah is renewed by the water. In Hannah's case, God remembered her and granted her children.

In this midrash, Hannah is rewarded because she prayed deeply. The rabbis attribute her intensity to the provocations of her rival co-wife, Peninah. Even though Hannah's motivation to pray hard was because of Peninah, Hannah is rewarded. Do the sources for one's actions matter or do the ends justify the means as they did for Hannah?

10. Pesikta Rabbati, Piska 43:8.

2] Hannah's Personality

The rabbis emphasized that Hannah was a righteous woman. What does this attribute mean for her as a Biblical figure?

According to a few midrashim, the righteous have their hearts under control. When they pray to God, they are in control of their passions. Bereshit Rabbah contrasts Hannah with Esau:

And the Lord said to His Heart. The wicked stand in subjection to their heart (i.e., passions. Thus it says), "The fool hath said in his heart" (Ps. 14:1); "And Esau said in his heart" (Gen. 27:41)...But the righteous have their hearts under their control; hence it is written, "Now Hannah, she spoke at her heart" (I Sam. 1:13).¹¹

Esau is considered a fool for his wish to kill his brother Jacob. In Yalkut Shimoni, he is linked with Haman, a very wicked man, while Hannah is linked with David.¹² Does this elevate her status? Hannah's prayer and hopes are to bear children, a positive act. Only the wicked are unable to resist from hoping aloud for negative things.

Why does God reward the righteous? According to Pesikta Rabbati, this is "Because the Holy One, blessed be He, does not wish to bring frustration to the spirit of righteous men when they pray to Him; the Holy One, blessed be He, grants what they request of Him."¹³ Both David and Hannah are referred to in this midrash. Neither one deserved to wait for their prayers to be answered.

Yet, another approach by the rabbis is that God tries the righteous according to their strength before rewarding them. Therefore, Pesikta Rabbati contradicts

11. Bereshit Rabbah, 34:10 and 67:8.

12. Yalkut Shimoni, vol. 1, Remez 61.

13. Pesikta Rabbati, Piska 43:2, p. 755-6.

itself when it explains that God let Hannah be barren for nineteen years before Samuel was born.¹⁴ Hannah's long wait caused her a great deal of frustration.

Does God help the righteous or frustrate them? In both Pesikta Rabbati midrashim God grants Hannah children. But, if Hannah was not so righteous, might she have been spared from nineteen years of barrenness? Midrash Tehillim explains that the righteous are helped by God:

"I pour out my complaint before Him, I declare before Him my trouble" (Ps. 142:3). It is thus—to the Holy One, blessed be He—that the righteous declare their trouble. So Scripture says: "A prayer of the afflicted, when he fainteth, and poureth out his complaint before the Lord" (Ps. 102:1). And Hannah said: "I poured out my soul before the Lord...Out of the abundance of my complaint and my vexation have I spoken hither to" (I Sam. 1:15-16). Hence I pour out my complaint before Him, I declare before Him my trouble, And the Holy One blessed be He, replies: "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain thee; He will never suffer the righteous to be moved" (Ps. 55:23).¹⁵

They declare their trouble and then God helps them. In Hannah's case, perhaps God helped her conceive only after she prayed deeply to God.

In other texts, the rabbis focus on Hannah's logic. When Hannah spoke to God, she used her reasoning skills to request what she desired. This is evident in a number of the midrashim explored.

Midrashim in Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer and a similar one in Pesikta Rabbati portray Hannah confronting God about the upper and lower worlds.¹⁶

14. Pesikta Rabbati, Piska 43:5. The same passage appears in Bereshit Rabbati, 25:26.

15. Midrash Tehillim, Psalm 142:3.

16. Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer, p. 29.

According to R. Judah, the son of R. Simon, Hannah said to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe, there is a host above, and there is a host below. The host above do not eat, nor drink, nor procreate, nor die, but they live for ever; and the host below eat, and drink, and procreate, and die. Now, I do not know of what host I am, whether I am of the one above or the one below. If I am of the host above, I should not be eating, nor drinking, nor possibly bearing children, nor dying, for I should live for ever, just as the host above live for ever. But if I am of the host below, then not only should I be eating and drinking, but I should be bearing children and eventually dying, even as the host below eat, and drink, and procreate, and die. Hannah's implication in the apostrophe "O Lord of hosts" was that since she was of the host below, the Lord should grant her wish for a child.¹⁷

Hannah calls God Adonai Tzevaot (Lord of Hosts) to emphasize that God is in charge of the upper and the lower hosts who have different worldly functions. Hannah employs logic when speaking to God and reasons that if she is from the lower hosts, then she should partake of the normal functions there, such as eating, drinking and procreating.

The Babylonian Talmud offers two further examples of Hannah's logic. In one case, Hannah speaks to God concerning power. She states after all, "Thou hast created in Thy world, is it so hard in Thy eyes to give me one son?"¹⁸ God is capable of anything. Therefore, Hannah rationalizes with God how easy it would be for God to grant her request and give her a son.

Elsewhere, the rabbis describe Hannah speaking concerning her heart. The heart was considered the seat of thinking in ancient times. Hannah praised God for creating each part of a woman with a purpose. Hannah is thankful for her body functions, eyes that see, ears that hear and the others. Yet, she wonders

17. Pesikta Rabbati, Piska 43:3.

18. B.T. Berachot 31b.

why God gave her breasts that suckle if she has no son. With her logical explanation, she requests that God enable her to fully use her God given parts.¹⁹

Midrash on Proverbs mentions that Hannah had good ta'am tefilah, (logical prayer).²⁰ The midrash explains that Hannah's logic is evidenced in her prayer, for she rejoiced in God. Therefore, Hannah was rewarded with a son who would be a light to Israel like Moses and Aaron. This midrash places Hannah in high esteem by focusing on her as the mother of Samuel, famous among the Jewish people.

We also get a glimpse of Hannah's character as described by the rabbis in her response to Eli's accusation of drunkenness. Hannah is quick to answer him and explain that she is a sad woman, not a drunkard. Hannah shows that she is unafraid to defend herself and assert her true status.

Note for example how Kallah Rabbati suggests that "Hannah answered and said: 'No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit' (I Sam. 1:15) From this [it is to be learnt] that a person under suspicion must free himself from it!"²¹ This message is repeated in parallel passages in the Babylonian Talmud Berachot and the Sheiltot that it is important for a person to clear one's name.²² Moreover, if the suspicion is known only to the accused, then it is okay to minimize it. However, if neighbors know of it, one must make a stronger effort to fully clear one's name.

In I Samuel 1:11, Hannah makes a vow to God. The rabbis emphasize how Hannah was rewarded for her vow. Is making vows a positive action? It's interesting to consider that the most famous Jewish prayer, Kol Nidre, is a yearly

19. Yalkut Shimoni, vol. 2, Remez 78.

20. Midrash on Proverbs, 31:18.

21. Kallah Rabbati, Chapter 3.

22. B.T. Berachot 31b and Sheiltot, Shemot 40.

statement for people to annul their vows which are often made without the possibility or intention of fulfilling the human part of the vow.

Hannah's vow was drastic. She promised to give her son over to God's service. What would have happened if she did not do so? When she and Elkanah did bring Samuel to Eli, she explained to Eli who Samuel was. Does this imply that she could have kept Samuel without Eli knowing that she had vowed to place him in God's service? Hannah was thankful to God and wanted to fulfill her part of the vow. Her faith was strong and she knew that she would dedicate her son's life to God.

God rewarded Hannah for her vow by giving her a son. God knew that Hannah was a worthy righteous woman. Bereshit Rabbati says that Hannah was rewarded for her vow as was Israel.²³ Yalkut Shimoni also mentions that Israel as well as Hannah were rewarded for vows.²⁴ Just as God stood by Israel, so did God stand by Hannah and answer her request.

Another passage in Yalkut Shimoni places Hannah in an opposite position to Jeptha, who also offered a vow to God. "There are four who vowed: Two vowed and were rewarded and two vowed and lost...Jeptha vowed and lost his daughter...Hannah vowed and was rewarded as it says 'And she made this vow.' (I Sam. 1:11)"²⁵ Jeptha's vow was dangerous as he offered to sacrifice the first person he saw on his way home from a victorious battle (Judges 11:34). God helped Jeptha to succeed in battle. However, in fulfilling his part of the vow, Jeptha sacrificed his own daughter. In contrast, the fulfillment of Hannah's vow was a positive act. Therefore, her success in giving birth to Samuel can truly be

23. Bereshit Rabbati, 29:31.

24. Yalkut Shimoni, vol. 1, Remez 122.

25. Yalkut Shimoni, vol. 2, Remez 68.

seen as a reward from God. Jephtha's victory in battle ultimately can not be viewed as a reward from God since it cost him his daughter's life.

While Hannah was ultimately rewarded for her vow, she was not afraid to express her pain to God. In fact, she spoke brazenly to God. In the Babylonian Talmud and Pesikta Rabbati she even threatens to sleep with another man in order to convince God to help her conceive. The rabbis interpret the words ra'oh tireh (surely see) and both passages emphasize Hannah's threat in which she says:

If Thou wilt not remember me, I will go and make it appear that I had secluded myself with another man; my husband will see me, suspect me of infidelity, take me to a priest, and have me drink the bitter water of the test given to women suspected of infidelity. I will be found undefiled, and then Thou wilt be obliged to remember me and give me a son, since in the Torah Thou didst cause it to be written, "If the woman be not defiled...then she shall be cleared, and shall conceive seed" (Num. 5:28). Hence the words "If seeing Thou wilt see" mean: See what will please Thee; else Thou wilt have to see that which pleases Thee not.²⁶

This passage offers a portrayal of a determined woman. In the Biblical text, Hannah believes in and prays to God. Here, Hannah challenges God. She again employs logic by arguing rationally with God. She tells God that, either through a thorough inquiry about her being with another man or because God promptly responded to her prayer, she will have a child. Hannah speaks to God in a knowing manner, almost like a parent who tells a child that regardless of what is done, there is only one possible result. Hannah strongly suggests that God choose the easier method for herself and God.

26. Pesikta Rabbati, Piska 43:3. See the parallel passage in B.T. Berachot 31b.

The rabbis of the midrash do not say that God was angered by Hannah's game. Perhaps God was impressed with Hannah's forthright manner and rewarded her quickly.

Actually, it appears that the rabbis have a sympathetic view of Hannah. In Shemot Rabbah, they explain the phrase, "Only she felt this bitterness,"²⁷ as stressing that only Hannah could fully understand the pain she was going through. The rabbis acknowledge their own limitation of comprehending a barren woman's pain and present a compassionate view of Hannah. The midrash shows that Hannah deserves sympathy and should not be chastised for feeling bitter.

As mentioned in the previous section, Hannah experienced pain in her prolonged state of barrenness. A few of the midrashim focus on the Hebrew word 'ein' (none) in I Samuel 1:2 which states that Hannah had no children. The specific statement that she did not have any indicates that she later will have a child.

Lamentations Rabbah comments that "Whenever Scripture says, 'There is not,' ('ein) it is implied that the alternative will take place."²⁸ This passage mentions Hannah, Sarah and Zion. Hannah and Sarah were barren and then God remembered them by granting them children. Pesikta Rabbati and Yalkut Shimoni also mention Hannah, Sarah and Zion²⁹.

This is an interesting combination of people. Hannah is Samuel's mother, a great prophet for Israel. Sarah is the first matriarch and Zion represents the Jewish people. All are extremely important in the history of the Jewish people and all had to endure the pain and suffering of barrenness before joy. Pesikta

27. Shemot Rabbah, 19:1.

28. Lamentations Rabbah, 1:26.

29. Pesikta Rabbati, Piska 32:2 and Yalkut Shimoni, vol. 1, Remez 62.

Rabbati says that God causes barrenness so that women will rejoice more in their children.

3] Hannah Experiences Revelation

Hannah is linked with the matriarchs Sarah and Rachel in the Babylonian Talmud. It states that God remembered (zachar) Rachel and Hannah while God visited (pakad) Sarah and Hannah.³⁰ Both words indicate pregnancy in these cases. For Hannah, the text says zachar when she bore Samuel and pakad for her other children. Is there any significance to the use of one word or the other? The rabbis do not offer any suggestions.

A fitting question now is why did God remember (pakad) Hannah? According to Pesikta Rabbati, it is because of her prayers that God remembered Hannah.

"And Hannah was also remembered because she was constantly going up and praying in the Sanctuary and pleading before the Holy One, blessed be He; He heard her prayer and remembered her. And the proof? It is to be found in the lesson for the day: 'So the Lord remembered Hannah.'"³¹

This passage provides an affirmative answer to the question of whether God answers people's prayers. But in another section of this collection, the commentator translates the word pakad as "requite," since remembering could imply that God forgets.³²

30. B.T. Rosh Hashana 11a.

31. Pesikta Rabbati, Piska 43:1.

32. Pesikta Rabbati, Piska 43:6.

Both Midrash Tanhuma Ha-Nidpas and Tanhuma Buber claim that pakad is used in a context where God's power can be shown. "If they say to you that The Holy One Blessed be He does not visit barren women, say to them, Behold Elkanah from Mount Ephraim witnessed that God visited his wife, as it says 'For God visited Hannah and she conceived.' (I Samuel 1:2)"³³ God can and does visit (pakad) barren women. The midrash emphasize that there is no debate about God's power.

When Hannah prayed to God, she asked God to help her at a time pleasing to God. Aggadat Bereshit says that Hannah was willing to accept God's help whenever it came.³⁴ Therefore, God rewarded Hannah because she recognized God's power. This does not fit with the earlier portrayal of a demanding Hannah.³⁵

Two passages in Yalkut Shimoni explain that Hannah was remembered (pakad) because she bowed down to God.³⁶ Bowing is an act of complete humbling. Hannah, the maidservant, recognized her true subordination before God. A different Yalkut Shimoni passage says that God answered Hannah's prayer because of Peninah's harsh treatment of her co-wife. God reached out to a distraught Hannah who had to endure terrible suffering at home. Hannah respected God's control and was rewarded.³⁷

Hannah is also portrayed as one of seven prophetesses and barren women. She also may have born seven children. Is there any significance to this number? In the first two categories, it is interesting to note who is linked with Hannah.

33. Midrash Tanhuma Ha-Nidpas, Naso, 28 and Tanhuma Buber, Naso, 21.

34. Aggadat Bereshit, Chapter 29:2.

35. Pesikta Rabbat, Piska 43:1

36. Yalkut Shimoni, vol. 1, Remez 100 and vol. 2, Remez 80.

37. Yalkut Shimoni, vol. 2, Remez 77.

The Babylonian Talmud mentions that Hannah is one of prophetesses. The others are Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Abigail, Hulda and Esther. All of these women were famous, and Hannah is also viewed as one of the important Biblical female figures. The Biblical text does not actually call her a prophet, though her son was one. The Talmud's overall view of Hannah was positive. This is clear by its labeling her a prophetess.³⁸

The later midrashim, Seder Olam Rabba and Yalkut Shimoni, also mention the seven prophetesses. These midrashim include special traits about each woman. Regarding Hannah, the rabbis mention that she prayed and Hannah is known for her style of praying. In addition, each prophetess offers a special quality.³⁹

Hannah is also one of seven barren women. Pesikta deRav Kahana mentions them all. They are Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, Manoach's wife, Hannah and Zion.⁴⁰ What is the significance of Hannah being linked with all of these women? This grouping of seven includes the four matriarchs which places Hannah in good company. She is clearly one of the major Biblical woman. Midrash Samuel refers to Hannah as one of seven moshivai 'akeret habayit (barren women).⁴¹ Each woman is mentioned and given a fuller description than in Pesikta derav Kahana.

Does it matter how many children are accounted to Hannah? If seven is a special number and the rabbis view her as an important figure, maybe the rabbis worked hard to make the number fit. Pesikta Rabbati offers a few different ways to count Hannah's children.

38. B.T. Megillah 14a.

39. Seder Olam Rabba, 280:21, and Yalkut Shimoni, vol. 2, Remez 42.

40. Pesikta deRav Kahana, Piska:1.

41. Midrash Samuel, Chapter 6. Parallel passages can be found in Bereshit Rabbati 28:20 and Yalkut Shimoni vol. 3, Remez 873.

R. Judah, R. Nehemiah and the Rabbis differed in their explanations. R. Judah said: Hannah bore five children; but she speaks of having seven because five were born after Samuel and Samuel himself was regarded as equal to two—that is to Moses and Aaron, as is said "Moses and Aaron among His priests: Samuel among them that call upon His name (Ps. 99:6)." R. Nehemiah said that besides Samuel she gave birth to five other children, but that she speaks of having seven more because she lived to see Samuel's two sons...and the children of one's children are like one's own.⁴²

The rabbis of the midrash offer many interpretations for counting the number of Hannah's children. A third alternative would be Hannah's five children plus Peninah's last two children, who were spared death on Hannah's behalf and thus accounted to her. The midrash also suggests that Hannah had five children as stated in the Biblical text.⁴³

The midrashim play with the number seven. Hannah was one of seven prophetesses and barren women. She may have had seven children. The number may be of no consequence or it could be quite significant. The rabbis do not explore its meaning. More important is who the other prophetesses and barren women were. Hannah is linked with important figures and is a strong female Biblical character.

42. Pesikta Rabbati, Piska 43:7. p. 766-8. Other Midrash claim that Hannah had seven children. Aggadat Bereshit, Chapter 29 and Bereshit Rabbati.

43. I Samuel 2:21.

C] Summary

The majority of midrashim dealing with Hannah focus on her prayers to God. Hannah prayed when she was sad and happy; in her heart and with kavannah. The rabbis probed the meaning of all of these circumstances.

Hannah's actions teach that the proper way to pray to God is in your heart. When she was upset about her barrenness, Hannah prayed fervently, alone. The intensity of her praying led Eli to think she was a drunkard. When she explained her situation, he offered her a blessing. Hannah showed the priest an important way to communicate with God.

Hannah teaches us the value of praying to God when times are difficult and when happiness abounds. Her first prayer is a petition to God to grant her a son. She was miserable and desperately wanted a child. When God answered her prayer, Hannah recognized the Holy One's interest in her well-being and Hannah fulfilled her part of the vow.

Hannah's second prayer was in praise of God. She expressed her joy to God and gloated about her happiness to her enemy. Hannah's attitude was quite different here. She was a confident person who could boast about her good fortune in contrast with her earlier feelings of desperation. God's revelation to her raised her self-image.

Hannah turned to God at low and high points in her life. Her actions point out the significance of praying to God under both types of circumstances. Out of her deep faith she trusted that God would be her support. When God did respond favorably to her request to have a son, Hannah did not hesitate to fulfill her part of the vow. God helped Hannah and she was committed to God.

CHAPTER TWO:

HAGAR

The Well of Seeing

Hagar is a special woman in the Bible. She bore Abraham's first son and experienced revelation from God. Yet, she generally is not viewed in positive terms by most commentators and readers because of her attitude toward Sarai. After Hagar conceived by Abram, she was disrespectful to her barren mistress, Sarai.

Yet, God spoke directly to her. Revelation between God and a non-Jew is striking, especially in light of the fact that it occurs to only a few people in the Bible. Also, as one of the few women to experience revelation, Hagar should be viewed in a new light. She is usually referred to as Sarai's maidservant, lowering her status. However, Hagar, an Egyptian woman, received God's revelation and her actions were not all negative. It is possible to focus on her positive experiences with God in the Biblical text and contemplate their meaning for the rabbis and for us.

A) The Biblical Material: Genesis 16:7-11, 13 and Genesis 21:16-19, 21.

Genesis 16:7-9: An angel of Adonai found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the road to Shur 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." And the angel of Adonai said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit to her harsh treatment."

Hagar was "found" by an angel of God. This is the first reference of God speaking to Hagar. What is the significance of an angel of God finding her, a non-Jew? This places Hagar amongst a few select women of the Bible.

The angel found Hagar by a spring of water ('ein hamayim). Water is a powerful symbol of life and renewal. Therefore, the revelation must have been a

turning point for Hagar. While she is referred to as "the slave of Sarai", God speaks to her. By encountering an angel of God by the spring, Hagar knew that she still had much for which to live. Hagar's revelation raised her self-image.

Hagar was on the road to Shur. Why was she heading there? Hagar does not explain, though she does tell the angel from where she came. The word literally means "to look or gaze", even into the future. Hagar indeed was setting out toward her future. As a conversation opener, the angel pretended not to know whence Hagar came. Was Hagar a person with direction? She came from Abraham and Sarah's home and was headed to Shur. Though her path may not be explained, Hagar had an idea of where to go.

God first appeared to Hagar while she was on a physical journey. God finds people on their paths, physical and spiritual. In meeting the angel, Hagar knew that she was not alone. Her path was difficult, but God was accompanying her, because God responds to people in distress.

The angel's response to Hagar could not have pleased Hagar. Hagar is told to return and endure suffering from her mistress. Why would Hagar listen to such a message and follow it? Simply put, she believed in God.¹

There is a possible play in the Hebrew text on 'ein (water) and 'anah (pain).² This sets up the tension Hagar encounters between redemption and suffering. The well sustains her, yet she has to endure harsh treatment from Sarai.

Genesis 16:10-11,13: And the angel of Adonai said to her, "I will greatly increase your offspring, And they shall be too many to

1. It's also interesting to note that God tests the righteous. This provides a parallel between Hagar and Hannah. Hagar endured mistreatment while Hannah was barren nineteen years.

2. Genesis 16:7, 9.

count." The angel of Adonai said to her further, "Behold, you are with child and shall bear a son; You shall call him Ishmael, for Adonai has paid heed to your suffering..." And she called Adonai who spoke to her, "You are El-roi" by which she meant, "Have I not gone on seeing after God saw me!"

This latter part of the angel's message offered Hagar great promise for the future. In her current situation, Hagar was distraught and could barely imagine surviving her pregnancy in her mistress Sarai's home. Now, the angel tells her that she will have too many offspring to count. Is there a relation between suffering and reward? Does Hagar need to endure harsh treatment in order for the angel's promise to come to fruition? It appears that it is Hagar's plight to endure the pain, but at least she learns of the joy to come.

The angel of God then tells Hagar what to name her child. The name Yishmael literally means that God will hear. Since God responded to her pain, her son's name is to reflect this response. God listened to Hagar, a non-Jewish Egyptian maidservant. God does not discriminate and hears the voice and prayers of all people.

Interpreted differently, yishma 'el could be translated as "he will hear God." Ishmael becomes the progenitor of antagonists to the Jewish people. Thus, this translation would not be an accurate reflection of his character. Rather, it is best understood as God doing the hearing.

Why did the angel tell Hagar the name of her son at this moment? If Hagar knows the name chosen by God for her son, what role will Abraham have in naming his son? Hagar evidently had enough influence with Abraham to convince him what to name their son and is important on her own account.³

3. God told Hagar what to name her son. Abraham did not choose his son's name. Hannah, however, named her son.

Hagar responded to the angel and spoke back to God. She showed no fear in having a dialogue with God. Why was she at ease with the angel? Many commentators suggest that Hagar was accustomed to them visiting Abram and Sarai.

Hagar shared her feelings by offering God a name, El-Roi (God who sees). Naming is a powerful act, as seen with Adam's naming of the animals in the Creation story.⁴ Hagar wanted to express her feelings to God by offering this name. God saw Hagar in distress and responded to her with both a difficult truth and a bright promise for the future. Hagar felt comfortable about her encounter with God. She chose a name for God to reflect God's power as one who sees people and enables them to see. Hagar now had a greater vision of her place in life and what the future could bring.

Genesis 21:16-17: And [Hagar] went and sat down at a distance, a bowshot away; for she thought, "Let me not look on as the child dies." And sitting thus afar, she burst into tears. God heard the cry of the boy, and an angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heeded the cry of the boy where he is."

At this point, Hagar and Ishmael are in the desert, dying of thirst.⁵ Hagar felt helpless and decided that she could not watch her son suffer. But why did Hagar move a bowshot's length away from Ishmael? Since he was an archer, the question is even more intriguing. Does Hagar's leaving his side show her failure as a mother or her human limitations?

4. Genesis 2:19-20.

5. Hagar was in the desert in her first experience with revelation in Genesis 16, also situated by a well.

She didn't want to see him ('al-'ereh) die. The word "seeing" could be a play on Hagar's name for God El-Roi, the God who sees. Now, Hagar can not bear to see her son's pain. God is always capable of seeing, yet human beings can not always live with what they see.

Though Hagar could not watch her son, she did raise her voice in a cry (vatissa 'et kolah). The text does not say that she prayed to God, but it is interesting that she raised her voice. She thought that God would hear her pain and see her tears. Hagar expressed her strong emotions which she kept inside while at Sarai and Abram's house. She cried out to God from her discomfort. This is in stark contrast to Hannah who prayed in her heart.⁶ Which form of prayer or communication is more effective?

God responded to Hagar (not Ishmael) because of her son's cry. Perhaps God can't resist helping a crying woman. But, the text is explicit in stating that God heard the voice of the boy. God had a special connection with Hagar, but responded on Ishmael's behalf since his life was in danger. God helped Hagar and Ishmael but the revelatory experience was Hagar's. God knew that Hagar was fearful that her son would die and responded to his voice and her pain.

The angel then spoke to Hagar and asked her what is wrong. God is depicted as caring; God tried to calm Hagar by letting her know that her son would be fine. God heard Ishmael's cry "where he is" because he was still an innocent boy. God could respond to his needs then since he was not yet an enemy of the Jewish people. Does Hagar immediately end her crying? In any event, God is there to wipe away her tears.

Genesis 21:18-19: 21: "Come, lift up the boy and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him." Then God opened her

eyes and she saw a well of water. She went and filled the skin with water and let the boy drink. He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

In her weakened state, God told Hagar to grasp hands with her son. What does it mean that God forces her to carry her son? By holding Ishmael's hands, Hagar strengthens her own hands. She now has to lift him up rather than her voice in a cry. The Hebrew word for lift or carry is tissa. Hagar lifted her voice and then her son. Is there a special connection to God achieved through human contact? God wanted Hagar directly involved with her son's recuperation. She is strengthened by a promise of his future greatness. Her salvation comes as a result of helping him.

After Hagar lifted her son, God opened her eyes [pokeach 'einyha] and she sees even more than in her first revelation. In the daily morning prayers, God is thanked for opening one's eyes.⁷ If God did not open Hagar's eyes, she would not have seen the well of water. The Hebrew text plays with the key words here, her eyes ('einyha) and the well ('ein). It is as if the text were saying that God opened her [own] well. If Hagar and Ishmael did not call out to God, would they have died? Or, could Hagar have found the water on her own? It appears that God's intervention is necessary. The theme of water first mentioned in Genesis 16 reappears here. Water gives life. This well was Hagar and Ishmael's lifesaver.

When Hagar called God, El Roi, she focused on God's ability to see. In this passage, God gave her the ability to see. God took care of Hagar and enabled her to take care of her son.

After this near death episode, Hagar stayed with Ishmael and even chose an Egyptian wife for him. Hagar was compelled to insure her son's great future and

7. The morning blessings include many blessings that thank God for the ability to use each part of the human body.

lived with him in the wilderness. Maybe she felt that because of her experiences of revelation she would be able to protect Ishmael best by being with him. She could remain close to God and her son.

B] Midrashic Treatment of Hagar

1] Hagar Experiences Revelation

Many of the midrashim focus on Hagar's experiences of revelation and explore why God appeared to Hagar. The commentators emphasize various points in their explanations.

Several midrashim explore the reasons why Hagar received revelation from God. A negative view is presented by Josephus. He commented on Hagar's attitude toward her mistress Sarai, stating that by "becoming pregnant, this servant had the insolence to abuse Sarra, assuming queenly airs as though the dominion were to pass to her unborn son."⁸ Evidently, the angel of God appeared in order to chastise Hagar. She had forgotten her status and insulted her mistress.

The same passage, however, goes on to suggest that the revelation occurred in order for God to tell Hagar of her future goodness. The angel promised her a "happier lot through self-control, for her present plight was but due to her arrogance and presumption towards her mistress."⁹ If Hagar could find it within herself to be subjected to Sarai's harsh treatment and curb her ill manner, she

8. H.S.T.J., Thackeray, Josephus IV. Jewish Antiquities Books I-IV (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1965), 185-190:4.

9. Ibid.

could look forward to a bright future. Josephus portrays an image of a restored Hagar buoyed by her relationship with God.

God appeared to Hagar in order to save her life. In addition to God's promise of goodness, the well was Hagar's actual lifesaver. Without God's revelation, Hagar would have died since she did not find the well on her own. God not only revealed the divine self, but also provided Hagar with a source of salvation.

The importance of the well is also mentioned in Bereshit Rabbati: "This well appeared for life. You find that it appeared [two times] to Hagar and that if it was not there, she would have died."¹⁰ God's revelation to Hagar saved her life twice. Without God's support, Hagar would not have survived.

Beer lahai roi (The well of seeing) showed Hagar life two times. When the angel first encounters Hagar in Genesis 16, the text says that she was found (matza). According to Bereshit Rabbati, this indicates that it was necessary for Hagar to be exactly where she was or she would have died. The angel also rescued Hagar and her son from thirst and death in her second bout in the wilderness. By pointing the way to the well, God showed Hagar life.¹¹

The compilation Midrash HaGadol cites a passage indicating that the well already existed at the beginning of the world. An angel of God opened her eyes and she saw the well that was created at twilight at the end of Creation. "Opened to them [Hagar and Ishmael] was the well that was created at twilight and they went and drank and filled their sacks with water. From there they went in the desert."¹² What does it mean that Hagar's well of life is linked to Creation? It seems that the vehicle of redemption is programmed in from the outset. It is up to

10. Bereshit Rabbati, 16:14.

11. Ibid.

12. Midrash Hagadol to Genesis 21:19.

humans to "open their eyes" and to see the source of redemption around them. Hagar was able to open her eyes and as a result she was saved.

Hagar was an unusual person. In addition to being a non-Jew experiencing revelation, she was quite comfortable conversing with the angels. The rabbis consider how many angels visited Hagar. Whether it was one or many, Hagar was not afraid. She may have been used to angelic visitations because she lived with Abraham and Sarah.

Midrash Tanhuma Buber finds it curious that angels were sent to Hagar. "And you should not be surprised that angels were sent to Jacob and Joseph, but even to Hagar."¹³ Mentioning her in contrast with Jacob and Joseph does not provide a helpful comparison. To the midrashist, Jacob and Joseph would certainly appear much worthier of revelation than Hagar. But, why not explore Hagar in comparison with Sarai and Abram? It seems that the rabbis are frustrated that a female non-Jew was special enough to experience revelation.

Other midrashim debate how many angels visited Hagar. Bereshit Rabbah raises the question, probably raised earlier, and suggests the number four or five. "Rabbi Yosi bar Hanina said five [angels visited Hagar. This corresponds to] every place that says 'spoke' (amirah) [indicates an] angel. Rabanan said that four [angels visited. This corresponds to] every place where it says 'angel'."¹⁴ Either interpretation suggests that at least a few angels visited Hagar. Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer suggests that five angels (melachim) visited Hagar,¹⁵ while Midrash Tanhuma Buber claims that three angels appeared to Hagar.¹⁶ The

13. Midrash Tanhuma Buber, Vayishlach:3.

14. Bereshit Rabbah 45:7.

15. Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer Genesis 16:7-11.

16. Midrash Tanhuma Buber, Vayishlach:3.

rabbis arrive at their opinions by counting the number of times the Biblical text says the angel spoke.

Does it matter how many angels visited Hagar? Most important is that she experienced revelation on more than one occasion. In addition, the rabbis, in their debate over the number of angels, emphasize that Hagar was comfortable in the presence of the angel or God. While God had to open her eyes for her to find the well, Hagar was not afraid to respond to God's call.¹⁷

When God told Hagar what to name her child, Hagar was ready to respond. Why did God choose the name Ishmael? Midrash Haseret V'yiterot explains that God chose this name because God heard Abraham's prayer.¹⁸ This midrash credits Abraham for praying. However, Hagar is the one to whom God calls and tells the name in the Biblical text. Apparently, the rabbis don't believe that Hagar the non-Jew is worthy of being responded to by God.

Though Hagar is not always viewed favorably by the rabbis, even her son is considered worthy of recognition in the midrash. Midrash Haseret V'yiterot and Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer mention that Ishmael is one of a few characters whose name is announced before his birth. The others include Isaac, Moses, Solomon, Josiah and King Messiah.¹⁹ Ishmael is thus linked to many important people. He is the only non-Jew mentioned. Why is Ishmael connected to these people in this way? He was Abraham's first child and father of a numerous religion. Even though his descendants caused trouble for the Jewish people, he was a significant figure, worthy of recognition.

17. This can be seen in contrast to Manoah's wife who was afraid when she experienced revelation. See in this regard, Judges 13.

18. R. Shlomo Aaron Wertheimer, Midrash Haseret V'yiterot (Jerusalem, 1968), 229.

19. Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer Chapter 32 and Midrash Haseret V'yiterot p. 229 (does not mention Solomon).

2) Who Merited Revelation

An interesting subject of a few of the midrashim is whose merit caused the angel to appear. Did Hagar experience revelation because of her individual status or was it because of her connection to Abraham?

The rabbis explore the notion of Hagar as a righteous woman in a few midrashim. Apparently, only the righteous are spoken to by angels. Bereshit Rabbah sums it up well by stating that "God is never compelled to speak with a woman, unless she is righteous."²⁰

Midrashim on Hagar emphasize that God spoke to her because she was a righteous woman. Yalkut Shimoni restates the earlier passage from Bereshit Rabbah that "God is never compelled to speak with a woman, unless she is righteous."²¹ It seems that only special woman draw God's attention.

Hannah is also considered a righteous woman. Regarding Hannah, the rabbis emphasized that God only tries the righteous. Though the midrashim don't focus on this theme, Hagar was also tried. She was sent out by Abraham and nearly died of thirst. Was this a test from God? Hagar, like Hannah, was a righteous woman who was tried by God.

Other midrashim focus on Hagar's connection to Abraham and Sarah. A passage in Midrash Tanhuma HaNidpas states that "God opened her eyes and she saw the well...It's good to live near your distant cousin."²² This link of Hagar's experience with Abraham and Sarah suggests that if she were not in

20. Bereshit Rabbah, 48:20 and 63:7.

21. Yalkut Shimoni, vol. 1, Remez 16.

22. Midrash Tanhuma HaNidpas, Yitro:5.

close connection with them, revelation might have escaped her. Moreover, through whose merit was Hagar's life saved?

Hagar may have merited revelation because of her connection with Abraham. If so, would her well-being depend on continued contact with him? Another passage in Midrash Tanhuma suggests that Hagar and Abraham had an ongoing relationship even after she was banished.

Isaac said, I will take a wife and my father will be without a wife. What did he do. He went and brought [Abraham] a wife. Rabbi said she was Hagar, she was Keturah.²³

The passage explains that Isaac found a new wife for his father after Sarah died. Her name was Keturah but she may have been Hagar. The name Keturah means fine scent which could be a description of her. Was Hagar still connected to Abraham through all this time?

Yalkut Shimoni also questions through whose merit the angel appeared to Hagar.

"An angel of God called from the heavens" (Gen. 21:17) on Abraham's merit. "Where he is" (Gen. 21:17) [God called] on his [Ishmael's] own merit. The prayers of the sick are better to God than other prayers.²⁴

The midrash first mentions that revelation occurred due to Abraham's merit. Then it explains that God responds to the prayer of the sick before other prayers. Does this comment refer to Hagar? She was not sick, but Hagar was in distress

23. Midrash Tanhuma, Haye Sarah:8.

24. Yalkut Shimoni, vol. 1, Remez 94.

and cried. Avot deRabbi Natan emphasizes that God responds to a person's tears.²⁵

In the Biblical text, God responds to Hagar because of Ishmael's prayer. Bereshit Rabbah explains that the angel appeared because of Ishmael since God hears the prayers of the ill.²⁶ The rabbis felt that since Ishmael's offspring would be enemies of the Jewish people, God should not have helped him. But the midrash explains that God responded to Ishmael for who he was at that moment, an innocent boy.

C] Summary

The rabbis of the midrash explore many aspects of Hagar's revelation. Why did God respond to her and did she merit it on her own are two of the major themes discussed. The rabbis seemed troubled that God paid heed to a female, non-Jewish slave.

As seen in the midrash, Hagar's experiences of revelation were lifesaving. The well was a Beer Lahai Roi, a well of life. God helped her open her eyes so that she could gain physical and emotional sustenance. With her newfound ability to see, Hagar had hope for the future. The well that she saw was thought to have been from the time of Creation. Therefore, redemption is a part of God's plan. God's revelation to Hagar was intended to save her life.

Hagar was strengthened by her experiences of revelation. She was rejuvenated about living. Also, in helping her son, she was able to help herself.

25. Avot deRabbi Natan Section 2, chapter 47.

26. Bereshit Rabbah, 53:14.

She achieved salvation through her physical connection with her son and her emotional commitment to God.

Hagar is a unique woman in the Torah. She was a non-Jewish concubine who received revelation from God. She bore Abraham's first son. Did her connection to Abraham make her worthier? It probably made her more comfortable with the angels. Hagar listened to God and was strengthened by her encounters.

CHAPTER THREE:
TZIPPORAH
Sealer of the Covenant

A study of the passages which deal with Tzipporah, Moses' wife, offers another lens through which to understand God's communication with women. The revelation she received was not as direct as Hannah's or Hagar's, but she still experienced God in a meaningful way. As Moses' wife, she became accustomed to regular communication from God.

In most of the passages about Tzipporah, she is the object of other people's actions. Her father Jethro gave her in marriage to Moses. When Moses was called by God to lead the Jews out of Egypt, Tzipporah followed her husband until he sent her back to her father's house. In stark contrast with following her father's and husband's conduct, Tzipporah fulfilled the mitzvah of circumcision when her husband failed to do it. In this case, she was in charge of her actions which were crucial to saving his life, and insuring their son's future.

A] The Biblical Material: Exodus 2:21-22, Exodus 4:20, Exodus 4:24-6, Exodus 18:2 and Numbers 12:1.

Exodus 2:21-22: Moses consented to stay with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Tzipporah. She bore a son whom he named Gershom, for he said, "I have been a stranger in a foreign land."

The first mention of Tzipporah in the Torah introduces her as a gift presented to Moses. As the object of others' actions, does this imply that Tzipporah is a passive person? Moses is the dominant figure in this citation. He agreed to stay with Jethro who in turn gave him his daughter as a wife. This sets up the primary relationship between Moses and Jethro. Tzipporah's role initially is minor. Yet, later passages reveal that Tzipporah is a woman who acts on her own and out of

a connection to God. This apparent tension only seems to underscore the questions about Tzipporah's importance.

Jethro arranged his daughter's marriage. Were Tzipporah's feelings considered in this matter? Did she have the right to refuse marrying Moses? It is unclear on whose behalf Jethro was working. He may have wanted Moses in the family for his own interests, or for his daughter's well being. Since Jethro set an agreement with Moses, this could be indicative of the importance of their relationship.

As stated in the text, Moses agreed to stay with Jethro. The Hebrew word used here is lashevet which means to dwell. Jethro and Moses intended on more than an overnight stay. Moses decided to dwell with Jethro and his family. Afterwards, Jethro offers Moses his daughter as a wife. The Hebrew actually does not state that she was to be Moses' wife. Can this be assumed? Also, would Moses have dwelt with Jethro and his family if he did not get his daughter as a wife?

Tzipporah is referred to as an object. The Torah does not give her a voice in this passage, nor does it mention what Moses' feelings were towards her. First, her father gives her to Moses as a wife. Then, in the next verse, it is mentioned that she has a son. But Tzipporah does not have equal rights concerning her child either, for Moses chooses the name, Gershom. Moses was a stranger, a ger, and wanted his son's name to indicate this. The word ger is also used for a convert. Maybe Moses hoped to persuade Tzipporah to become a Jew by naming their child Gershom. Tzipporah does not have the opportunity to respond. It seems that Moses and Jethro were in total control.

Exodus 4:20: So Moses took his wife and sons, mounted them on an ass, and went back to the land of Egypt; and Moses took the rod of God with him.

Exodus 18:2: So Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Tzipporah, Moses' wife, after she had been sent home.

This is the first time where the Torah actually refers to Tzipporah as Moses' wife ('isha). In Exodus 2, Jethro gave her to Moses, but, the Hebrew does not include the word for wife, 'isha. With this chapter's mention of wife, Tzipporah's status is clarified and perhaps elevated.

God called upon Moses to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt. Moses did not want to perform this task alone. Therefore, God agreed to have Aaron serve as Moses' spokesperson. Did Moses also want to bring his family on his journey? The two verses cited above contradict each other. In Exodus 4 it appears that Moses returned to Egypt with his entire family. But the purpose of his journey was to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Therefore, Exodus 18 intimates that Moses did not bring Tzipporah into Egypt and that Jethro brought Tzipporah back to Moses. It is confusing whether Tzipporah was by her husband's side during this challenging time or was she at her father's house. Did Moses find support from his wife or his father-in-law, or both?

Moses is a point of reference for both Jethro and Tzipporah. Jethro is known as Moses' father-in-law because his fame comes through Moses. Likewise, Tzipporah is referred to as Moses' wife because of his importance. Again, the mention of the term wife, 'isha, indicates that Tzipporah was not a mistress or maidservant.

Exodus 4:24-26: At a night encampment on the way, Adonai encountered him and sought to kill him. So Tzipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin, and touched his legs with it, saying, "You are truly a bridegroom of blood to me!" And when God let him

alone, she added, "A bridegroom of blood because of the circumcision."

Moses and Tzipporah stopped on their journey and spent the night at a resting place. Where is this night encampment located and why is it unnamed? It is especially ironic since this is a place of revelation. Because it has no specific name, it may indicate that God indeed appears to people in any place. One can not hide from God.¹ If Moses and Tzipporah stopped somewhere else, would revelation still have occurred? What may have been intended as a simple break from a long journey turned into a critical life experience for them.

Why does God want to kill Tzipporah's husband or son after God just told Moses to go and rescue the Jews from Egypt? The Hebrew text is ambiguous about the object of God's threat, as it says l'hamito, "to kill him," and does not define "him." If Moses was worthy of being chosen by God for this noble task, it seems strange that God would kill him or his son without explanation. Also, God is focused on saving Jewish lives in this story, which makes taking one all the more unsettling.

Tzipporah emerges as an active woman in this passage. She realized that God was upset with Moses for not circumcising their son. How does she, a non-Jew, understand the significance of this? God did not command her to circumcise him, yet she voluntarily filled in for her husband by doing so.

The Hebrew word for cut, l'khrot, in this passage is the same word used in connection with establishing a covenant, l'khrot brit. Why is Tzipporah performing a Jewish ritual? Moreover, this is an obligation of the father. Tzipporah broke new ground by fulfilling this mitzvah. Yet, was it valid for her, as a non-Jew, to do so?

1. Note for example, Jonah 1:10. Jonah thought that he could escape from God. But, God finds us wherever we are.

Apparently God is satisfied that the covenant is upheld since Moses is not killed. She affirmed the covenant between God and the Jewish people.

When she completed the act, Tzipporah touched Moses' or her son's legs with the foreskin. The word legs actually could be a euphemism for genitals. Such an act is symbolic of a vow or covenant. For example, when Abraham was dying he asked his servant Eliezer to place his hand under his master's thigh, also a euphemism.² Another interpretation of Tzipporah's actions suggests that since Moses was not circumcised, by touching him with her son's foreskin this could substitute for his own. Or, the fact that Tzipporah performed this rite indicates that she left her clan to join that of Moses.³

In addition to taking action, Tzipporah's voice is finally heard in the text. She called Moses or her son a "bridegroom of blood." She mentions this phrase twice, perhaps because she was surprised with the act of circumcision and the blood involved with it. Maybe she also wants to stress that Moses is her bridegroom. In performing the circumcision, Tzipporah insures that her husband will live. Did this change her view of her husband and her understanding of Judaism? Tzipporah showed her fear of God by performing this act and also by waiting for God to leave Moses alone so that she didn't offend God with her thoughts on circumcision.

Numbers 12:1 Miriam and Aaron spoke concerning Moses because of the Cushite woman he had married: "He married a Cushite woman!"

2. Genesis 24:2.

3. Gunther Plaut, The Torah . A Modern Commentary, (New York: U.A.H.C., 1981), 415.

Who is the Cushite woman being discussed? This could suggest that Moses took a second wife. If so, then how did Tzipporah feel? After being married for a long time to her, it is confusing that Moses might have taken another wife.

Another possibility is to understand this as a reference to Tzipporah being a Cushite woman or more probably being compared to one.⁴ Then, one might wonder why wasn't this included in the Exodus passages? This could indicate that Miriam and Aaron displayed prejudice while Moses did not. Maybe they were bothered by her strong influence on their brother.

B) The Midrashic Treatment of Tzipporah

1) Tzipporah as Moses' Wife

Tzipporah's first important role in the text is as Moses' wife. This leads many commentators to explore her actual importance. She was given to Moses by her father Jethro which raises the question of Jethro's relationship with Moses as well.

Moses was a worthy person and Jethro wanted him in his family. Jethro may have been looking out for his own interests as well as his daughter's. Moses helped Tzipporah and her sisters with their work and showed that he was a good man.⁵

4. Note in this regard how Midianites and Cushites are compared in Habakkuk 3:7. The term "Cushite" here might only be descriptive. Tzipporah was darkskinned like a Cushite.

5. Exodus 2:16-20.

Philo explored how famous men attained their wives. In his On the Posterity of Cain and his Exile, 76-79, he states "and Abram and Nahor took to themselves wives; ... Isaac and Moses take wives indeed, but they do not take them purely of themselves, ... to Moses, the man with whom he abode, he gives in marriage his daughter Tzipporah (Exod. 2:21)."⁶ While Abram was in complete control of his own actions, Moses merely responded to Jethro's offer. Tzipporah was not involved in the decision between her father and future husband. Jethro's influence is key to many of the midrashim which focus on his ties to Moses.

A passage in the Mekhilta suggests that Moses asked Jethro if he could marry Tzipporah. "Jethro said to him: 'Accept one condition which I will state to you and I will give her to you for a wife.' 'What is it?' asked Moses. He then said to him: 'The first son that you will have shall belong to the idol and the following may belong to God.' Moses accepted."⁷ This same midrash reappears centuries later in Yalkut Shimoni.⁸

According to this tradition, Moses acted in accordance with his father-in-law's wishes. Jethro set the rules for the marriage. In order for Moses to marry Tzipporah, their first son had to follow Avodah Zara (idolatry). Surprisingly, Moses accepted these terms! Moses, the famous leader of the Jewish people, is portrayed as a man willing to raise one of his son's with a different faith.⁹

This paints a picture of Moses as a man in love. It seems that Moses was willing to do anything in order to marry Tzipporah. Love makes people do strange things. It seems that even Moses was overcome by his emotions and the price he was willing to pay nearly cost him his life. If Moses was crazy about Tzipporah,

6. Philo, On the Posterity of Cain and his Exile, vol. II, 76-79.

7. Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael, Messechta d'Amalek: Parasha 3.

8. Yalkut Shimoni, Part I, Remez 169.

9. Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael, Messechta d'Amalek: Parasha 3.

does this suggest that she was happy to marry him as well? Moses might have charmed Tzipporah or frightened her with his intense desire to marry her.

Many rabbis focus on the fact that Moses took a vow to dwell with Jethro; not Tzipporah. The Palestinian Talmud mentions Exodus 2:21 as a prooftext of a valid vow. It shows that Moses was sincere in his commitment to stay with Jethro.

Shemot Rabbah also explains that Moses vowed to stay with Jethro. The midrash further comments,

"Why did [Jethro] adjure him? Because he said unto him: 'I know that Jacob your ancestor, when Laban gave him his daughters, took them and left him without his knowledge. I am afraid if I give you my daughter, you will do the same to me?' Whereupon, Moses swore at once and he gave unto him Tzipporah."¹⁰

Here, Jethro is portrayed as a loving father who does not want his daughter to leave home. His demand of Moses is the result of his own concern that his daughter will be taken away from him. Moses' vow to stay with Jethro is a guarantee that Jethro's family will remain intact.

Later midrashim defend Moses' vow as sincere. In Yalkut Shimoni and Eliahu Rabbah, the rabbis explain that Moses had no intention of making a false vow. Moses committed himself to Jethro's conditions.¹¹

Why was Jethro intent on having Moses stay with him? Some texts emphasize that he viewed Moses as a future redeemer and wanted him for his daughter. For example, in Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer the rabbis explain Jethro's thoughts:

10. Shemot Rabbah, Chapter 1:33.

11. Yalkut Shimoni, part 2, Remez 797, and Eliahu Rabbah, Chapter 17.

When Moses came to Jethro's house, he went into the garden and saw the rod and read the letters which were upon it, and he put forth his hand and took it. Jethro watched Moses, and said: This one in the future will redeem Israel from Egypt. Therefore, he gave him Tzipporah his daughter to wife, as it is said, "And Moses was content to dwell with the man; and he gave Moses Tzipporah, his daughter"(Ex. 2:21).¹²

In the Biblical text, Jethro learned about Moses through his daughters' description. In the midrash, however, Jethro is portrayed as having the opportunity to observe Moses and evaluate his character on his own. He thought that Moses would be a famous person in the future and decided to give his daughter to him. Is Tzipporah chosen because her father thinks that she would be a good partner to this special man? Or does Jethro want to insure he will have his own claim to fame when Moses becomes well-known? It is unclear if Jethro is more concerned about himself or his daughter.

The rod that is mentioned in Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer appears in the later collections Bereshit Rabbati and Yalkut Shimoni. The two passages provide background on Jethro as a magician and tell that Moses took the rod from Jethro's possession that was created at twilight at the end of Creation. When Jethro saw Moses do this, he knew that Moses was destined for greatness. The rod served to indicate that as it was passed down through the generations it wound up only in the hands of important people such as Abraham, Jacob and Joseph. This vehicle of redemption was programmed from the beginning of time and available to a leader in every generation.

Following Moses' demonstration of future greatness, the Bereshit Rabbati midrash continues that Jethro "gave his daughter Tzipporah to Moses, as it is said 'And Moses agreed to dwell with him.' (Exodus 2:21)"¹³ The Yalkut Shimoni

12. Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer, Chapter 40:16-19.

13. Bereshit Rabbati, to Genesis 48:22.

mentions that Jethro "gave his daughter Tzipporah as a wife."¹⁴ In this passage, the rabbis emphasize Tzipporah's status.

Jethro asked Moses to uphold a vow in order to marry Tzipporah. The term for wife, 'isha, is not applied initially to her, but the Yalkut Shimoni passage includes it. Tzipporah's standing with Moses is at question. She could be married to him and be a maidservant or be his only wife. Jethro's vow may have been an attempt to secure a place of honor for his daughter beside her husband. This would suggest that Jethro cared deeply for his daughter. But, it is uncertain what Jethro's motivations were.

2] Family Separation

Another dominant focus of the midrashim treating Tzipporah is on the theme of family separation. It is unclear if Moses brought Tzipporah and their sons to Egypt with him, since as mentioned, Exodus 4 and 18 stand in conflict.

If Moses went back to Egypt without Tzipporah, did he divorce her? The word used in the Biblical text of Exodus 18:2 is shilucheha, which means "he sent her away." According to the Mekhilta, this indicates a bill of divorce. Rabbi Joshua notes that the same use of the word shiluach in Deut. 24:1 refers to divorce. However, Rabbi Eleazar of Modi'im believes that Tzipporah was dismissed from Moses [only] by word. Note the passage from the Mekhilta, which is also found in Yalkut Shimoni.¹⁵

14. Yalkut Shimoni, vol. 1, Remez 173.

15. Yalkut Shimoni, vol. 1, Remez 247.

R. Joshua says: After she had been dismissed from him by a bill of divorce. Here the term "send" (shiluach) is used and there (Deut. 24:1) the term "send" (shiluach) is used. Just as the term "send" used there implies a bill of divorce, so also the term "send" used here implies a bill of divorce. R. Eleazar of Modi'im says: After she had been dismissed from him by a mere speech. For at the time when God said to Moses: "Go and bring out My people, the children of Israel, from Egypt," as it is said: "Come now therefore and I will send thee unto Pharaoh," etc. (Ex. 3:10), Moses immediately took his wife and his two sons and led them to Egypt,...¹⁶

The rabbis take different stands on which word to emphasize. Midrash HaGadol also includes this same passage.¹⁷ If Moses did divorce Tzipporah, why is there a reunification scene in Exodus 18? Does this mean they were remarried and why would Moses divorce her in the first place?

The Mekhilta provides an explanation for the separation. When Moses met up with Aaron, his brother asked him why his family was with him.

Then Aaron said to him: "We are worrying about those already there and now you bring upon us these newcomers." At that moment, Moses said to Tzipporah: "Go to your father's house." She then took her two sons and went. Referring to this, it is said: "After he had sent her away."¹⁸

Moses originally intended to make the trip to Egypt with his family. However, Aaron reasoned with Moses that it was not wise to bring more people into Egypt than necessary. After all, the goal was to take people out of and not into Egypt. In the Mekhilta passage, Tzipporah responds by leaving as suggested by Moses and Aaron. It appears that Moses tried to act on his family's best interest.¹⁹

16. Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael, Messechta d'Amalek:Parasha 3.

17. Midrash HaGadol to Exodus 18:2.

18. Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael, Messechta d'Amalek:Parasha 3.

19. The same midrash appears in Yalkut Shimoni, vol 1, Remez 174.

Another midrash suggests that God, not Aaron, told Moses to send his family home. In Midrash Hadash, God tells Moses to leave his family at Jethro's. This is after God sought to kill Moses. Later, when Moses returned from Egypt, Jethro brought Tzipporah and her sons back to Moses.²⁰ Why did God want Moses to leave his family at Jethro's? Was Tzipporah the cause of God's threat to kill Moses? After all, Moses was to rescue the Jews but was married to a non-Jew. If Tzipporah did endanger Moses' life, this creates strong tension with the fact that she actually saved his life by performing their son's circumcision. Perhaps Tzipporah was sent home after that episode.

There are many suggestions as to why Moses sent his family back to Jethro's. He may have really intended to divorce Tzipporah. However, it seems more likely that Moses acted out of love and concern for his family. Aaron pointed out to his brother that it would make more sense for Moses to go to Egypt without his family. Moses responded by sending his wife and sons to Jethro's home. He knew that they would be safe there. But, did Tzipporah like this arrangement? She is really not given a chance to respond to Moses' request.

While the majority of commentators try to explain the family separation, Josephus stands alone in his view that the family remained united.

[Moses] besought Raguel [Jethro] to permit him for the welfare of his countrymen to go to Egypt; and, taking with him Sapphira [Tzipporah], his wife, daughter of Raguel, and the children whom he had by her, Gersos and Eleazar, he hastened thither.²¹

20. Midrash Hadash in Jacob Mann, The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue (New York: Ktav Publ. House, Inc., 1971), 237.

21. Josephus, Jewish Antiquities, II, 277.

His explanation is based on Exodus 4:20 and does not account for the later passage in Exodus 18. According to Josephus, Tzipporah and sons accompanied Moses to Egypt.

Did the family remain together? On their journey their son was circumcised after God sought to kill Moses. This crisis may have drawn the family closer or caused them to become estranged. Though Josephus' account stands alone, it is not inconceivable for the family to have stayed together based on the flow of the narrative.

3] The Circumcision

Tzipporah emerges as a woman of action in the rabbis' explication of her performing her son's circumcision. In contrast with a woman who is sent home by her husband, Tzipporah now appears as a dominant player. She fulfills her husband's obligation and the rabbis find this whole Exodus pericope interesting.

While on their journey, an angel sought to kill Moses. According to the Mekhilta and Yalkut Shimoni, early and late midrashim, this was because Moses failed to circumcise his son.²² Tzipporah understood that their son needed to be circumcised and performed the task herself. This was a revelation for her since she knew exactly what to do. And in so doing, Tzipporah was able to save Moses' life.

The Babylonian Talmud offers another interpretation of the angel's intent.

22. Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael, Messechta d'Amalek: Parasha 3 and Yalkut Shimoni, vol 1, Remez 169.

R. Jose said, God forbid that Moses should have been apathetic towards circumcision, but he reasoned thus: If I circumcise [my son] and [straightway] go forth [on my mission to Pharaoh], I will endanger his life, as it is written, "and it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore." ... Why then was Moses punished? Because he busied himself first with the inn.²³

The inn in which Moses and Tzipporah stayed was quite important. Because Moses concerned himself with finding a place to stay before circumcising his son, he risked his life. Circumcision should not be delayed, and its importance is underscored in the Mekhilta and Yalkut Shimoni passages earlier cited.²⁴ It is at this unnamed inn that Tzipporah circumcised her son, a significant action.

After the circumcision, Tzipporah calls Moses or her son a "bridegroom of blood." The Palestinian Talmud says that it would be horrible to think that the angel sought to kill Moses. After all, it was the baby whose life was at risk.²⁵ Yet, Tzipporah felt that she actually saved Moses' life. According to Shemot Rabbah, she knew he was in danger because of not performing the circumcision:

How did Tzipporah know that Moses was in jeopardy because of this delay to perform the circumcision? Because the angel came and swallowed Moses from his head to his circumcised membrum. When Tzipporah perceived that, she realised that he was being threatened on account of this delay in circumcising, and she recognised the great protective power of circumcision, seeing that he could not swallow him further than that membrum. So immediately, She cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at her feet; and she said: "Surely a bridegroom of blood art thou to me (Ex. 4:25)." She said: "Thou shalt be my affianced by a covenant; thou art given unto me by merit of this blood of circumcision, because I have fulfilled the command."²⁶

23. B.T. Nedarim 31b-32a.

24. as well as Yalkut Shimoni, vol 1, Remez 81.

25. P.T. Nedarim 13a, 3:9.

26. Shemot Rabbah 5:8.

Tzipporah figured out the importance of circumcision on her own. Moses failed to fulfill the covenant with God, but she was able to perform the mitzvah for her husband and save his life.²⁷ God accepted her actions even though she was a non-Jewish woman. It's ironic that God chose Moses to lead the Jews out of slavery, yet the covenant of circumcision was sealed by his wife. Tzipporah's connection to God must have been very strong. This elevates Tzipporah's status from the role of a passive wife to a lifesaver, instructed by God, who is the vehicle to seal the covenant.

4] Moses' Cushite Wife

A final theme that emerges from the midrashim on Tzipporah focuses on the term "Cushite" used in Numbers 12:1. According to the rabbis, Miriam and Aaron call Moses' wife a Cushite woman. Is this a positive or negative statement? The midrashim offer explanations supporting both possibilities.

The Babylonian Talmud suggests that the term Cushite is used to describe how Tzipporah is distinct.

But just as a Cushite [Ethiopian] is distinguishable by his skin, so was Saul distinguishable by his deeds. In like manner you explain: [And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses] because of the Cushite woman that he had taken to wife. Was she a Cushite woman? Was not her name Tzipporah? But as a Cushite woman is distinguishable by her skin, so was also Tzipporah distinguished by her deeds.²⁸

27. Tzipporah was not the first woman to rescue Moses. His sister Miriam insured his well-being when Pharaoh's daughter pulled him out of the Nile. See Exodus 2:4-8, in this regard.

28. B.T. Moed Katan 16b.

Here, the rabbis understand the term to be used as a description of Tzipporah's uniqueness as a person and not a statement of who she was. They don't necessarily think that she was a Cushite. The same explanation is given in Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer and Midrash HaGadol.²⁹ While Miriam and Aaron might think being compared to a Cushite is negative, the midrashim suggest that different can be great.

Yet the term Cushite is also used in a negative manner. In Midrash Tehillim it says that "When the children of Israel differ with the Holy One by sinning, [God] calls them Cushites, as when He said: Are ye not as the children of the Cushites, unto Me, O children of Israel?(Amos 9:7)." ³⁰ This suggests that it is awful to be called a Cushite. However, the passage then continues to explain that when Tzipporah was referred to as a Cushite, this was because she was distinguishable by her deeds as mentioned in other midrashim previously.

Not until the passage in Numbers is Tzipporah referred to as a Cushite. Why were Miriam and Aaron speaking about their sister-in-law? Midrash HaGadol explains that Miriam spoke against Tzipporah because of an exchange between the two women.

And what did Miriam say? When the elders were counted, all of Israel lit candles and held a celebration for there were seventy elders to rule. And when Miriam saw the candles she said they are happy and so are their wives. Tzipporah said to her do not say that their wives are happy, but rather woe to their wives. For since the day that The Holy One Blessed be He spoke to Moses your brother, he has not needed me.³¹

29. Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer, Chapter 53 and Midrash HaGadol to Ex. 2:21.

30. Midrash Tehillim, Chapter Seven:14.

31. Midrash HaGadol to Numbers 12:1

Miriam might have thought Tzipporah was being disrespectful. This could have led her to speak against her sister-in-law. But, Miriam may have spoken on behalf of Tzipporah when she realized what needs of hers Moses was not fulfilling. A passage in Sifrei explains:

[It is now taken for granted that the criticism of Moses had to do with his ceasing to have sexual relations with his wife, Tzipporah.] Now how did Miriam know that Moses had ceased to have sexual relations with his wife? She realized that Tzipporah was not making herself up with women's ornaments. She said to her, "How come you're not making up like other women?" [Tzipporah] said to her, "Your brother does not pay any attention to such things." Thus Miriam realized and told her brother, and both of them spoke against him.³²

Here the rabbis understand Miriam and Aaron to be rebuking Moses, not Tzipporah. Moses' busy schedule apparently led him to neglect his conjugal obligations. By neglecting his marital obligations to be fruitful and multiply, Moses was hurting the future of his people. This is ironic in light of the fact that Tzipporah sealed the covenant by circumcising their son. She insured their family's survival and now, Moses was jeopardizing it. Moses was more concerned with his public responsibility than with his own family.

Miriam and Aaron may have been emphasizing to Moses how wonderful his wife was. They were frustrated for Tzipporah and conveyed their anger to Moses. According to Sifrei, Miriam and Tzipporah were close friends and Miriam wanted to help her sister-in-law.

The Numbers verse raises many questions about the term Cushite and about Aaron and Miriam's relationship with Tzipporah. If, as the rabbis suggest, the

32. Sifre to Numbers Ninety-Nine:2.

comment is about Tzipporah, then it is uncertain whether they were referring to her in a positive or negative sense. Most of the midrashim seem to emphasize that Tzipporah was special.

C) Summary

Most of the midrashim that focus on Tzipporah involve a study of her in relation to her father, Jethro or her husband, Moses. But, the rabbis' understanding of Exodus 4:24-26 show that Tzipporah was capable of acting on her own and quite competent too.

Tzipporah saved her family. Because Moses did not fulfill the mitzvah of circumcision, God sought to kill him or his son. Without a verbal explanation, Tzipporah realized that she needed to circumcise her son to protect her family's welfare. She jumped from the role of passive wife to sealer of the covenant and lifesaver.

Tzipporah was able to understand God's message without a direct revelation. In recognizing that God is everywhere, she opened herself up to a profound calling. She, a female, Midianite, non-Jew, upheld the covenant between God and the Jewish people. Her ability to hear God's message shows that Tzipporah was not a passive or meek person: she rose to the occasion when God called on her.

CONCLUSION

Each of the woman in this study has unique qualities. By exploring the midrashim, we have gained a deeper understanding of how the rabbis perceive these Biblical characters. Let us take a look at what we have learned about the characters first on an individual basis and then as a collective.

The majority of midrashim related to Hannah focus on her prayers to God. The rabbis probed the meaning of the circumstances under which Hannah prayed. In I Samuel Chapter 1 she prayed out of despair, while in I Samuel Chapter 2 Hannah rejoiced.

The rabbis stress that we can learn many different lessons from Hannah's actions. First of all, she teaches us a way to pray. When praying to God, it is crucial that we possess kavannah, deep intention. Eli did not understand that she was praying and assumed she was a drunkard. When Hannah explained her motives, he offered her a blessing. She showed the priest an important way to communicate with God. Hannah prayed in her heart which is considered by the rabbis as the proper way to pray. As we explore styles of prayer today, we should remember to look to Hannah as a model.

Hannah prayed to God when she was in pain and as well as when she experienced great joy. In our society it is common that people pray to God for help with their troubles. And like Hannah, we may engage in bargaining with God and making "vows" that we could not possibly uphold. If our pain is not alleviated we tend to blame God, though this usually exacerbates our suffering. When the pain dissipates, do we remember to thank God? Hannah shows us that it is important to recognize God's beneficence.

Hannah trusted in God always. When her spirits rose, she remembered to praise God. Hannah's attitude changed drastically when she left her barren state. She became a confident person who could boast about her good fortune in

contrast with her earlier feelings of desperation. God's revelation to her raised her self-image.

Hannah's spirit was lifted by God's response to her prayer. She made a vow with God that most people probably would not want to fulfill. In exchange for having a son, she was willing to dedicate his life to God.

The rabbis of the midrash also emphasize the lifesaving theme of Hagar's revelation. The well she encountered truly was a Beer Lahai Roi, a well of life. God helped Hagar open her eyes so that she could find a source of her own physical and emotional sustenance. With her newfound ability to see, Hagar had hope for the future. The well that she saw was thought to have been from the time of Creation. Therefore, the vehicle of redemption is understood by the rabbis as being a part of God's original plan.

God's revelation to Hagar gave her strength and renewed her life. And, by helping her son, she was able to help herself. Hagar achieved salvation through her physical connection with her son, through her own actions and her emotional commitment to God.

Hagar was comfortable communicating with God. We can learn from Hagar that if we gain the courage to open our eyes, then we, too, can recognize God, and our own strength to cope, survive and flourish. Just as God helped Hagar, God can give us strength.

Yet, the rabbis emphasize that when we connect with God, we may not always be pleased with God's message. Hagar was told to endure the harsh treatment of Sarai. However, she was also informed that the future would be better. Hagar did not turn away from God. She heard this message and accepted it. We can look at Hagar's reaction as courageous and strive to accept that which life presents us, both the good and the bad.

Tzipporah emerged as a key figure in the Biblical text when she saved her family. Because Moses did not fulfill the mitzvah of circumcision, God sought to kill him or his son. Tzipporah realized that she needed to circumcise her son to protect her family's welfare. She changed radically, moving from the role of passive wife to sealer of the covenant and lifesaver.

Unlike Hagar, Tzipporah was able to understand God's message without a direct revelation. In recognizing that God is everywhere, she opened herself up to a profound calling. The rabbis stress that she, a female, Midianite, non-Jew, upheld the covenant between God and the Jewish people. Her ability to hear God's message shows that Tzipporah was not a passive or meek person: she rose to the occasion when God called on her.

The midrashim indicate that God accepted Tzipporah's actions on behalf of her husband Moses. Yet, this is curious since the obligation for circumcision falls upon the father. Moreover, Tzipporah was not even Jewish, yet she is the one who brought her son into the covenant of Judaism.

Intermarriage is now rampant. If Moses was permitted to intermarry, what are the implications for us? Tzipporah shows how a non-Jewish partner can still be an active member of the Jewish community. In synagogues today, there are many intermarried couples. As people struggle in the twentieth century to determine the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue, Tzipporah's sealing the covenant is a potentially important model from which to learn.

Why did these three women merit revelation? The rabbis explored what the circumstances were in each situation for God to reveal God's Divine Self. This was not common, so these women must have been very special.

According to the rabbis, Hannah merited revelation because she prayed regularly. Hannah's style of prayer is considered the proper way and her

dedication to it enabled her to receive revelation. The rabbis seem to agree that Hannah was worthy of this communication with God.

As for Hagar, however, the rabbis explain that she had the ability to see God. Because she was ready to open her eyes, Hagar was able to experience the divine presence. Though Hagar was in pain and felt bitter about her life situation, she was able to see through it and connect with God.

The rabbis give credit to Hagar for seeing, but also think that it was probably because of her connection with Abram that she received revelation. Regardless of the "why," Hagar was strongly influenced by the revelation. She learned of a potentially bright future.

Tzipporah, like Hagar, did not seem to merit revelation on her own behalf. But, she was able to save her husband's and son's lives as a result of her performing the circumcision. Her response shows that even a non-Jew can experience the Divine and stand in relationship with God.

A fairly clear rabbinic attitude toward women emerges from the study of these midrashim. Though it is also clear that the rabbis are much more interested in the male Biblical characters based on the number of extant midrashim, they do focus upon the women and their direct relationship with God in some cases.

One important theme that arises is why God speaks to women. One clear motif is that God is only compelled to dialogue with a righteous woman. One midrash lists Hannah as one of seven righteous woman, while another explains in reference to Hagar that God only speaks to the righteous. Tzipporah obviously was also a special woman, even though she is not called "righteous" in any text.

All three women experienced real pain and the rabbis recognized that. This shows that the rabbis were somewhat sympathetic to their needs. Hannah was barren for nineteen years. Her pain was alleviated when she became pregnant. Hagar had to endure Sarai's harsh treatment. This ended when Hagar and

Ishmael were sent away for good. Though they nearly died in the desert, Hagar and Ishmael were able to escape their unpleasant home environment and survive. Finally, Tzipporah wanted more attention from Moses. She was an outsider and wanted to be included more in his life. Even though Moses may have ignored her, she played a vital role in his life and the life of the Jewish people when she performed their son's circumcision and sealed the covenant with God.

Each woman benefitted personally from her experience of God's revelation. Their self-images were raised following revelation. Even Tzipporah who had to face the blood of circumcision benefitted from her experience as she asserted herself and her independence, and became part of the community.

Hannah, Hagar and Tzipporah were three special women in the Bible. They were also three very simple people—an Egyptian maidservant; a non-Jewish Midianite; and a devout wife—as far as their daily lives were concerned. Revelation for them, therefore, indicates that anyone has the potential to experience the holy, and even God's presence.

Each of us is as unique as the characters in the Bible. There is no reason why we too should not also experience God's presence. While it may not happen frequently, it is important that we remain open to the possibility. After all, for Moses and Tzipporah, God appeared to them during their overnight stay at an inn on the roadside. God can reveal the Divine Self to anyone at anytime. It's up to us to open our eyes and see a wider horizon.

In addition, since God is accessible to Jews and non-Jews alike, we may be compelled to reevaluate how we incorporate the non-Jew in the synagogue. Questions about participation in Jewish rituals should be reconsidered especially in light of the fact that it was Tzipporah who performed her own son's circumcision. God's revelations to Hagar and Tzipporah could suggest an

expanded notion of integrating the non-Jew into synagogue life. Synagogues are now considering such issues as non-Jews serving on the Board and their participation in B'nei Mitzvah ceremonies.

Of course, this thesis offers a rather limited view of God's revelation to women. It could be enhanced by further study of these three women and by expanding to other female characters in the Bible. For example, it would be interesting to see how later medieval traditions treated Hagar, Tzipporah and Hannah as well as other women in the Bible.

Another avenue to be explored is current feminist theory. Articles and books of the past few years have widened the horizons of study of Biblical characters. If desired, references for this study could be traced from the fourteenth century through the twentieth century. It would be very interesting to see how modern day feminist midrashists would study and try to resolve the same problems that have confronted the rabbis through the centuries.

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