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TEXT AND TRANSFORMATION:
TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF INTEGRITY

Sue Levi Elwell

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
1986

Referee: Professor Barry S. Kogan

DIGEST

Text-study stands at the center of Jewish life. Yet historically, such study has been primarily the province of an elite group of male scholars. The androcentricism both of traditional texts and their interpretations has been challenged by twentieth century feminist scholarship. Both Christian and Jewish scholars have questioned the authority of texts that they claim reflect only a portion of human experience. And both Christian and Jewish thinkers have suggested that we consider the development of a new canon that reflects the experience of, and provides inspiration for, both male and female members of our religious communities.

The primary sources for new texts are women's lives and women's writings. By studying the lives and work of individual Jewish women, we discover a rich and heretofore ignored source of strength and insight for all Jews. Women's lives are not the only source for new Torah. Women's writings: women's prayers, poems, fiction, and songs, must also become a part of the developing canon. Reaching for a synthesis of Jewish and feminist values, the prayers and rituals that are being written by women enable a broader spectrum of Jews to reclaim their Judaism. Other women's writing challenges traditional notions of community, maintaining that connections between people must be based on an egalitarian philosophy of mutual respect, mutual worth, and shared power, not

on a hierarchical principle where the powerful dominate the powerless.

The development of new text is inextricably bound to the development of a new theology. The theology of integrity, as developed in this thesis, goes beyond a narrow definition of theology as simply a system of thought. The theology of integrity includes a socio-political agenda with implications for both the nature and structure of the Jewish community. A community of integrity provides a living workshop of mutual cooperation and shared responsibility for tikkun olam. The prayers of such a community both reflect and embody principles of mutuality, and are addressed to a God who manifests both male and female aspects even as such limits are ultimately transcended by the Divine. In a Judaism of integrity, visions of God and Israel are drawn from an expanded Torah that does not supplant but complements the traditional notion of Torah in its broadest sense.

The first chapter of this thesis establishes the place of text in Jewish life, and then explores the textual analysis of several contemporary Jewish and Christian feminist scholars. Chapters Two and Three introduce women's autobiography and women's writings as hitherto unused sources for Jewish cultural, intellectual, and spiritual history. The fourth and final chapter describes the visions of God, Torah and Israel that are implicit in the theology of integrity, a Jewish theological system that integrates and celebrates the history and experiences of all Jews.

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This thesis attempts to synthesize two discrete academic endeavors: my preparation as a scholar of Jewish women's history and five years of intensive studies that will culminate in my rabbinical ordination. In my doctoral dissertation, "The National Council of Jewish Women: Study and Practice as Jewish Women's Religious Expression," I explored the activities of America's first English-speaking Jewish women's organization at the turn of the century. I concluded that Council affiliation served its middle class members not only as a point of identification with the larger Jewish community, but Council membership also provided a vital outlet for women's religious expression.

My study of Biblical and rabbinic texts led me to reframe my questions about the nature of Jewish women's religious exeriences. My thinking was further challenged by my association with B'not Esh, a small group of Jewish feminists who convene each spring to explore the developing phenomenon of Jewish feminist theology and other issues related to Jewish spirituality. My debt to the members of B'not Esh is incalculable. The words and silences we have shared during the past five years have helped me to find my own voice, and I thank each of them for their work in creating a community of integrity.

I asked Professor Barry Kogan to referee this thesis

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Sue Levi Elwell

Cincinnati
March 1986

INTRODUCTION

> The implications of the feminist inquiry clearly involve more than the repair of particular laws or traditions. . . the very bases of Judaism are being challenged.1

In a contribution to the Winter 1970-71 Response symposium, Mary Gendler wrote:

> I am a woman. I am a Jew. I am a Jewish woman. I am both and I want to be both. I have only one problem. I am not quite certain what it means to be a woman; I am equally unclear about what it means to be a Jew. That leaves me especially puzzled about what it means to be a Jewish woman. 2

Gendler articulated questions that were on the minds of many women in the early days of both the feminist and the Havurah movements, and subsequent Jewish feminist scholarship reflected Gendler's dilemma. By the end of the seventies, however, the dilemma was better phrased as a stark and forthright question: "can a woman be a Jew?"

Some, like scholar Naomi Goldenberg, concluded that a woman cannot be a Jew. For her, Judaism is a religion developed solely by men for men, and women's subordination is so deeply ingrained in both the philosophy and the practice

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1Susannah Heschel, "Introduction," On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader, ed. Susannah Heschel (New York: Schocken Books, 1983) xxii.

2Mary Gendler, Response 4:4 (Winter 1970-71), p. 35.

of Judaism that considering women as Jews is impossible. 3 Other scholars and writers, including Martha Ackelsberg, Lynn Gottlieb, Judith Plaskow, and Ellen Umansky, disagree. While each of them acknowledges the historic androcentrism of Judaism and Jewish texts, these thinkers suggest that the Judaism that has been passed down throughout the ages is incomplete. They argue that just as the events that together comprise Jewish history, by definition, have always included women; Judaism, the religion of the Jewish people, must recognize women's experiences of God and of the world as a vital component of Jewish practice.

This thesis begins its examination of the feminist challenge to Judaism by applying feminist critique to the core of traditional Judaism: the study of Jewish texts. The first chapter establishes the place of text in Jewish life, and then explores the textual analysis of several contemporary Jewish and Christian feminist scholars. Chapters Two and Three introduce women's autobiography and women's writings as hitherto unused sources for Jewish cultural, intellectual, and spiritual history. The fourth and final chapter suggests that text is but one aspect of any Jewish theology, and proposes not only the creation of new texts, but the creation of what I call a theology of integrity. This chapter describes the visions of God, Torah and Israel that are implicit

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3Naomi Goldenberg, Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), p. 8.

in this theology of integrity, a Jewish theological system that integrates and celebrates the history experiences of all Jews.

CHAPTER I

TOWARDS A FEMINIST INTERPRETATION OF TEXT

Etz chayim he. For Jews, the Torah is the tree of life, the source of truth and value. It contains the wisdom of the ages, the story of our people's past, present, and future. But some see this ancient record as incomplete. This chapter begins with an examination of the place of text in Jewish life. It continues with an exploration of the historical challenge to the text's Divine origin that prepared the way for the nineteenth century feminist critique of the text as an androcentric, patriarchal document. The chapter concludes with a comparison of the nature and place of text for contemporary feminist Christian and Jewish thinkers.

I. Judaism as a Text-Centered Faith

On Simchat Torah, in many countries around the world, Jews who speak many languages and pursue a wide range of livelihoods, Jews who live in large cities and small towns, Jews who are old and Jews who are young, lovingly remove their Torah scrolls from the quiet arks in which they reside. In humble shuls and magnificent temples, synagogue leaders lift all of the sacred scrolls from their stands and bring them from the darkness of the aron into the brightly lit

synagogue. Dressed in luxuriant garments and laden with jewels and precious silver and gold, the ancient Torah scrolls resemble stately dowagers, elegant and formidable in their holiday finery. One by one the velvet-robed, bejeweled scrolls are presented to the congregation. Then the leaders begin the circumambulation, the hakafot that bring the scrolls to the people, and each Jew is invited to join the dance with the law. The dancing often goes on into the night, for many are eager to hold the Torah in their arms, to possess her, if only for a moment, to move gracefully even while carrying this unbalanced and unwieldy weight.

On Simchat Torah, Jews physically enact out the dance that is done every time a Jew engages in text study. This is the eternal dance of the Jew: the Jew approaches the text, bowing slightly, and shyly extends a hand to the ageless and weathered beauty. Slowly, the seeker engages her in a timeless exchange of questions and answers, queries and inquiries. But this is no duet. Each Jew who takes up Torah study immediately finds him/herself in the company of legions of others who have been dancing with the Torah for centuries: the commentators and exegetes, the students and teachers of many generations from Europe, Africa, Asia and America. Yet the individual' part is eclipsed by the presence of these earlier interpreters; rather as each Jew joins the dance, that Jew adds a unique perspective and a potential for innovation. One should not simply repeat the steps of one's

predecessors; each dancer is called upon to make "a living and dynamic response"to the text. 1

The Jew's desire to join the dance on Simchat Torah reflects the centrality of Torah study to the larger choreography of Jewish life.

> The Jewish people has often been celebrated for the uniquely text-centered character of its culture. . . . Where others have filled their cultural space with soaring cathedrals and palaces, splendid galleries arrayed with paintings and sculptures, the riches of choral and symphonic music, the Jews, by and large, have been content to surround themselves with traceries of words -- commentaries and supracommentaries, responsa and codes, mystic speculations and moral meditations, or, where the aesthetic impulse sometimes made itself felt, the chaste verbal architecture of a poem. 2

The tree of Torah is rooted in human experience, particularly in the experience of the human encounter with the Divine. For the most part, the narratives that develop as the Torah is unrolled, the stories of the ancestors of the Jewish people, are vibrant, believable tales of real men and women . These stories move us precisely because many of the situations and experiences described resonate with our own experiences. Lo ba shamayim he (Deuteronomy 31:12); the Torah does not contain stories that are beyond

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1Barry Holtz, Introduction, Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts (New York: Summit Books, 1984), p. 17.

2Robert Alter, "The Challenge of the Texts," Commencement Address, delivered at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles School, 13 May 1985 (Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion: 1985), p.1.

human existence, but rather it must be rooted in the day-to--day lives of people. 3

The Torah, which traditionally includes all the sacred texts of Judaism, is indeed a source of life for all who hold her fast. Based on the essential encounter of the human with the Divine, Torah's fruits are available to all who engage in the continuing challenge of text study. Study makes the individual part of the living organism that is Judaism; each talmid chacham insures the future of the people just as s/he exemplifies the past. By studying Torah, each Jew affirms his or her legacy not only as a perpetuator but also as a creator of the timeless dance of the Jew with the text.

But does this rich tradition of text upon text, of wisdom added to wisdom truly reflect Jewish experience in the broadest sense? The texts that are recognized as the cumulative wisdom of generations of Jews are actually the creation of an elite group of sages and scholars. One might contend that all classical literature is written by the elite, even as it is intended to reflect the experience and to be enjoyed by a larger audience. Yet unlike other classical texts, Jewish texts demand not only attention but involvement; those who study are also the creators of text.

While Torah study was open to many throughout the ages, more advanced study of Talmud and Codes and Responsa

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3See R. Jeremiah's "remarkable assertion of the independence of human reasoning" in his interpretation of this verse, Baba Metzia 59b, Soncino Talmud (London, 1953), p. 353.

and certainly mystical texts was available only to the elite. That elite consisted of men who were able, because of intellect or privilege, to fulfill the highest aim of Jewish living: studying and creating Jewish text. Such study was altogether beyond the purview of female experience. We must reckon with the implications of the controlled population of those who created Jewish texts. When we acknowledge the restricted character of our sages' vision, it is reasonable to ask whether the authenticity of the texts is perhaps undermined.

Contemporary Christian theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether has written:

> A collection of texts is the accumulated heritage of a people's reflection on its experience in the light of questions of ultimate meaning and value. The texts provide norms for judging good and evil, truth and falsehood, for judging what is of God/ess and what is spurious and demonic. 4

For Jews, this collection of texts, broadly conceived, is Torah. The Jew who honors the Torah by rising when it is removed from the ark and who dances with the Torah may repeat <u>etz chayim he</u> with conviction and exhilaration. For such a Jew, the Torah is the tree of life, and its study provides sustenance to the end of one's days.

But Torah is not the sole source of truth for every Jew. Literary critic Robert Alter writes:

Ben Bag Bag's often quoted statement in <u>The Ethics</u>

4Rosemary Radford Ruether, <u>Womanguides: Readings Towards a Feminist Theology</u> (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), ix.

> of the Fathers, 'Turn it over and over, for everything is in it' is a noble assertion but, except for the fundamentalist, no longer a viable one. It nicely articulates the belief of someone unswervingly committed to the canon, but the fact is we cannot sincerely say any more that 'everything is in it,' feeling as we do that there are all sorts of things outside it that we need to know, from the plays of Shakespeare to the novels of Proust, and from the philosophy of Hume to biochemistry and computer science and political history. 5

In order for a community to continue to return to its texts, those texts must resonate with essential truths that do not deny but rather illuminate the circumstances of our lives. "The experience of the present community cannot be ignored." 6 What, then, becomes of the individual Jew whose study has revealed a Torah that indeed denies or contradicts the life experience of that Jew? What becomes of the Jew, liberal or traditional, whose study has revealed a Torah that denies or belittles human experience that Jew knows to be real? What becomes of the Jew whose essential connection to the text has been undermined by exclusivist interpretations? What becomes of the Jew who has arrived at the conclusion that the Torah is not rooted in Jewish experience, but only in a limited understanding and interpretation of that experience?

Ruether suggests that

> A religious tradition remains vital so long as its revelatory pattern can be reproduced generation

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5Alter, p. 3.

6Rosemary Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), p. 15.

> after generation and continues to speak to individuals in the community and provide for them the redemptive meaning of individual and collective experience....The circle from experience to experience, mediated through instruments of tradition, is thus completed when the contemporary community appropriates the foundational paradigm as the continuing story of its own redemption in relation to God, self, and one another. 7

What becomes of the Jewish community when the record of the revelatory experience is challenged <u>not</u> because of its fraudulence but because of the limited vision it reflects? What becomes of the Jewish community when the fundamental paradigm serves to demonstrate to a substantial majority of adherents only what has been, not what might be?

II. The Challenge of Critical Scholarship

Traditionally, Torah, both in the narrow and broad definitions of the term, has been considered to be God's word, as transmiteed to the Jewish people through Moses. Contemporary Bible scholar Joel Rosenberg explains,

> That Moses' own death would be recorded by the prophet himself was a notion consistent with premodern conceptions of Moses' prophetic capabilities, but premodern readers were not, in any case, troubled by inconsistencies or narrative or temporal logic in the Torah. On the contrary, such inconsistencies were spurs to the interpretive imagination, and precisely because the text was seen as transcendent in origin, the interpreters were accustomed to see all biblical moments as simultaneous: verses could be compared or contrasted entirely out of context; the whole of Scripture. . . was seen as a vast sea of tiny, discrete insights, each with its own independent career in

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7Ruether, pp. 15-16.

the history of the various biblical faiths. . . . 8

Many premodern interpreters used the obvious textual discrepancies to homiletic advantage. However, there is also a long history of challenges to the Divine origin of these sacred texts. In his commentary to Genesis 12:6, Abraham Ibn Ezra hinted at the anachronism of the word az, implictly questioning Moses' authorship of this, and other, biblical verses. But it was not until the seventeenth century that the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch was explictly challenged by the Dutch philosopher, Baruch Spinoza. He was followed by other thinkers, including Astruc and Gabler, who employed contemporary critical linguistic and historical methodology in their study of the ancient text.

Yet it was the scholarship of Julius Wellhausen that shook the foundations of the faith of many nineteenth century religionists. His approach to the text was that of a historian, and he looked at the historical setting and the literary form of the biblical text. He concluded that the Bible was a composite work with four discrete sources or "authors". His method, and that of his contemporaries, became known as "source criticism", or the application of the "historical critical method" to the biblical text. 9

8Joel Rosenberg, "Biblical Narrative" in Holtz, p. 35.

9For a recent reappraisal of Wellhausen, see Stephen Geller, "Wellhausen and Kaufmann," Midstream (December 1985), 39-48.

Consideration of the text as a human document, authored or edited by mortals, drastically altered the way millions of readers regarded scripture. Among those influenced by the theories introduced at this time was Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who initiated a cooperative feminist critique of the Bible that resulted in the publication of the controversial Woman's Bible in 1895. 10 Her flawed study was one of the first comprehensive treatments of the biblical text from the point of view of women, but she and her coworkers were not the first to point out the androcentrism of traditional textual interpretation. In 1888, Emma Willard anticipated later scholars when she pointed out in her Woman in the Pulpit that male scholars approached the text with biases. Willard thus "implicitly questioned one of the presuppositions of higher biblical criticism--scientific objectivity--although she did not elaborate on this in her writings." 11 In the late nineteenth century, women like Stanton and Willard urged a feminist hermeneutic to uncover what they saw as the essentially egalitarian core of the biblical text.

> ...These women were convinced that the Bible did indeed contain expressions of a nonpatriarchal faith and

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10 Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Revising Committee, The Woman's Bible (New York: European Publishing Company, 1895). Also see Naomi Goldenberg, Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions (Boston:Beacon Press, 1979), pp. 11-18.

11Carolyn DeSwarte Gifford, "American Women and the Bible: The Nature of Woman as a Hermeneutical Issue" in Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship, Adela Yarbro Collins, ed. (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), p. 27.

> that through applying textual, historical, and literary criticism to the textual material, such a faith would emerge as normative for biblical religion. 12

III. From Critical Scholarship to Feminist Criticism

A. Contemporary Christian Feminist Textual Criticism

Few contemporary exegetes share Willard's assumption that the text itself is transhistorical and transpolitical. However, exegete Phyllis Trible is one such "lover of Scripture." 13 Her work chronicles her continuing struggle with the essential patriarchy of the text. In 1973 she wrote:

> I know that Biblical religion is patriarchal, and I understand the adverse effects of that religion for women. I know also the dangers of eisegesis. Nevertheless, I affirm that the intentionality of Biblical faith, as distinguished from a general description of Biblical religion, is neither to create nor to perpetuate patriarchy but rather to function as salvation for both women and men. 14

More recently, she has reaffirmed her belief that the text commands our attention, for even as it portrays a world where many women are victims and many others are silent, within the text are many clues that point towards a text that is essentially just. A "just text" is one in

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12Ibid.

13Phyllis Trible, "Postscript: Jottings on the Journey" in Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, Letty Russell, ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985), p. 147.

14Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation", The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives, ed. Elizabeth Koltun (New York: Schocken, 1976), p. 218.

which the scriptural narratives portray a God whose essence is justice, and a divinely created world ruled by justice rather than whim. Thus when we read the text, we find "within the Bible critiques of patriarchy" even as we "document misogyny historically and sociologically". 15 While she acknowledges that the Hebrew Bible is essentially an androcentric document, Trible demonstrates that a feminist hermeneutic can indeed loose the bonds of the past and illuminate possibilities for a reappropriation of the text for a wide range of readers.

Like Trible, theologian Rosemary Ruether finds the model for "depatriarchalizing" the biblical text within the text itself. For her, the prophetic tradition constantly reevaluates and refines scripture; while some narratives sanctify the status quo, the prophetic narratives continually critique the world as-it-is. 16 Ruether sees feminism as a contemporary form of the prophetic critique of the social and political and religious life of the ancient Israelites, and as such, feminist critique becomes not only useful but imperative to the fulfillment of the ultimate aim of text study.

> This biblical principle of prophetic faith parallels the critical dynamic of feminism, which likewise

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15Trible, Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 3.

16Ruether, "Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlation", in Russell, p. 117.

> examines structures of injustice toward women, unmasks and denounces their cultural and religious sanctifications, and points toward an alternative humanity, an alternative society, capable of affirming the personhood of women. 17

Thus, for Trible and Ruether, Scripture itself provides the model for understanding and interpreting the text. The Tanach proposes a legal system with justice at its core; the prophetic narratives call for the creation of a just society. The text provides its own midrash, inviting future exegesis.

Recognizing that all interpretation reflects the society in which it is produced, feminist exegetes face an enormous challenge. 18 We live in an androcentric society; a society where the experience of men is the norm will encourage and support textual interpretation that focuses on male experience. Where man is defined as the "paradigmatic subject of scientific inquiry," woman is defined as the "other", the outsider, the non-normative. 19

17Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlation", p. 118. See also Ruether, Religion and Sexism, pp. 29-32.

18Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "Remembering the Past in Creating the Future: Historical-Critical Scholarship and Feminist Biblical Interpretation" in Collins, p. 48.

19Fiorenza, "Remembering the Past. . .", pp. 55-56. The classic exploration of woman's "otherness" in contemporary western thought and society is Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex. In another article, Fiorenza defines patriarchy as follows: "Just as feminism is not just a worldview or perspective but a women's movement for change, so patriarchy is in my understanding not just ideological dualism or androcentric world construction in language but a social, economic, and political system of graded subjugations and

Any interpretation that is produced by individuals living in a patriarchal society will reflect the values of that society, and it is likely that men who produce such scholarship will do so from an androcentric perspective, using the experience of men (and not that of women) as the norm.

Elisabeth Fiorenza suggests that precisely because of the inherent bias of all biblical interpretation, one must establish very specific criteria for one's own critical evaluation of texts. She boldly proclaims a feminist hermeneutic, beginning with the suggestion that one begin by suspecting rather than assuming the authority of scripture:

> Not only is scripture interpreted by a long line of men and proclaimed in patriarchal churches, it is also authored by men, written in androcentric language, reflective of male religious experience, selected and transmitted by male religious leadership. 20

Secondly, she suggests "critical evaluation rather than correlation" of the text based on women's, not men's, experience. Such an evaluation would lead to a discovery that texts long held sacred may be so deeply androcentric that they can no longer be considered part of the canon by women. Fiorenza suggests that such texts be interpreted through proclamation, in a process of denunciation of "all texts and traditions that perpetuate and legiti-

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oppressions." "The Will to Choose or to Reject: Continuing our Critical Work," in Russell, p. 127. See also Judith Plaskow, "The Right Question is Theological," in Heschel, pp. 224-226.

20Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "The Will to Choose. . . ," p. 130.

mate oppressive patriarchal structures and ideologies." Yet such a hermeneutic would recognize the necessity to "recover all biblical traditions and texts through a feminist historical reconstruction." Thus the text is preserved even as it is reinterpreted, keeping "alive the memory of the struggles and victories of biblical women who acted in the power of the spirit" through celebration and ritual. 21 For Fiorenza, as for Stanton before her, the authority of the biblical text is undermined NOT because the text is written by human beings, but because it is written from a male point of view, a point of view that has been perceived as--and preserved as-- the only viable point of view.

B. Contemporary Jewish Feminist Textual Criticism

One might think that Jewish feminist exegetes, steeped in textual study, would have anticipated the work of their Christian counterparts. However, Jewish scholars have been slow to acknowledge or to wrestle with the problematic androcentrism of the text. The primary reason may be women's traditional exclusion from Jewish academies of higher learning. That absence has meant not only that the majority of women have been unable to develop the linguistic and analytical skills necessary to approach the text, but also that women's silence as actors in or interpreters of texts

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21Fiorenza, "The Will to Choose or to Reject. . . ",pp. 131-135. See also Margaret A. Farely, "Feminist Consciousness and the Interpretation of Scripture" in Russell, pp. 49-50.

has never been considered by the men who have devoted their lives to text study. Once women began to gain access to the tools necessary for unpacking the text, many may have been intimidated or discouraged by the centuries of textual interpretation that have perpetuated and thus implicitly sanctioned women's silence.

There may also be another reason for the dearth of Jewish feminist textual criticism. While any biblical exegete must have a clear sense of the worth of articulating his/her own opinion about the text, the feminist must be doubly armed. Regardless of the personal humility of such a person, s/he is forthrightly challenging the universal applicability of a text long considered to be the ultimate repository of Jewish religious experience. How can one dare to claim that the text is wrong, or even incomplete? For some, even framing such a question is a threatening proposition. It puts one on the edge of a great abyss, a yawning chasm of potential alienation from one's roots. 22

Thus the field of potential exegetes is narrowed to those with the requisite linguistic and analytical skills

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22 Ellen Umansky has noted that " Perhaps Jewish women have been reluctant or ill-equipped to create a Jewish feminist theology, not out of insensitivity to personal experience or ignorance of Jewish tradition but out of their awareness of the potentially irreconcilable conflict between the two." "Creating a Jewish Feminist Theology: Possibilities and Problems" Anima 10:2, p. 126. This may hold for the reluctance of Jewish feminists to create a Jewish feminist textual critique. See also Plaskow, "The Right Question. . . ," p. 223.

who are also willing to take the multiple risks involved in feminist biblical interpretation. In fact, most women who have addressed themselves to the questions of women's position in traditional Judaism have concentrated not on textual politics, but on theology. While Jewish theology is imbedded in and inseparable from Jewish texts, some of the most articulate feminist critics have begun by examining Jewish practice and belief rather than focusing on the textual sources of those practices and beliefs. Thus it seems that Jewish and Christian feminists are asking different questions of the text.

For most Jews, the text is inseparable from the practice of Judaism that it supports; textual study is not merely passive "study", but, for Jews, a religious obligation with implications for action. Even for those who have shed the "yoke of the commandments", the sense of deep connection with the act of study and interaction with the text remains. For Jews, text study is "...less an act of self-reflection than a way of communal identification and communication. One studies to become part of the Jewish people itself." 23 Yet when many women study, they confront denial rather than identification, silence rather than communication. When repeated efforts at "joining" the conversation have proved futile, how long does one pretend to be a part of a continuum where one cannot locate one's (female) ancestors, or reasonably

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23Holtz, p. 18.

hope to bequeath this heritage to one's (female) heirs? Some have held that women's primary exegesis must be midrashic; that is, that one must use the text as the springboard to insights, and not necessarily expect the text to embody the true message on its own. 24 For them, exegesis is dismissed as fruitless; women's voices can be heard only in response to, not in interpretation of, the text.

Finally, no biblical exegesis exists in a purely academic setting. Within the Jewish community, textual analysis is a firmly established part of Jewish study and regular Jewish worship. Jewish exegetes must by definition be concerned about the implications of their assertions and theories in the lives of those who take the text as a model or guide for their lives. This is not to say that the Christian theologians quoted above are either alienated from or insensitive to the political implications of their work vis-a-vis their respective religious communities. 25 Rather, the weekly reading of the Torah portion brings the text into

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24See Paula Hyman's comments in "More than just add women and stir. . . " Genesis II 15:5 (April 1984), p. 13.

25Elizabeth Fiorenza has written:"A feminist biblical interpretation is...first of all a political task. It remains mandatory because the Bible and its authority has been and is again today used as a weapon against women struggling for liberation. "The Will to Choose or to Reject. . ." p. 129. See also Ruether, "Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlation", in Russell, p. 124. A very different perspective is articulated by Naomi Goldenberg (who claims her Jewish roots but rejects Judaism as a viable worldview) in her Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), p. 64.

the ears and before the eyes of the community. Jews who add their voices to the chorus of centuries of commentary cannot ignore the community, that, finally, will either embrace or reject their exegesis. Precisely because of the sexism that lies at the core of many Jewish texts, some Jewish women may decide that preservation of the community is more important than developing a feminist critique of those texts.

In an extraordinary but difficult article, "Notes Towards Finding the Right Question", Cynthia Ozick struggles with the issue of women's place in Judaism. She initially suggests that the essential question of women and Judaism is not theological but sociological, but concludes the piece by concentrating on the absence of women's voices or point of view in the texts that have formed the core of and support for Jewish life throughout the ages. Her conclusion suggests that the "right question" may indeed be textual, for she acknowledges that the text, the Torah, is the source for halacha, and for Jewish life. And the text is blatantly biased against women's and women's concerns. 26 She writes,

> ...the salient meaning of Torah [is] to give precepts against the-way-the-world-ordinarily-is. With...a single tragic exception . We look at the-way-the-world-is with regard to women, and we see that women are perceived as lesser, and are thereby dehumanized. We look into Torah with regard to women, and we see that women are perceived as lesser, and are thereby dehumanized. Torah, in this one instance, and in this instance alone, offers no precept to set against the-way-the-world-ordinarily is. . . .

26Cynthia Ozick, "Notes Toward Finding the Right Question," p. 149.

> With regard to women, Torah does not say No to the practices of the world as they are found in actuality; here alone Torah confirms the world, denying the meaning of its own Covenant.

Her anger does not abate as she concludes: "Torah--one's heartstops in one's mouth as one dares to say these words---Torah is in this respect frayed. 27

It is with great pain that Ozick reaches this conclusion, the very conclusion she, and every other Jew, most fears. Once Torah is "frayed", where does one turn? Does one draw oneself up and proclaim that the time has come to write a new Torah?

Bible scholar T. Drorah Setel concurs with Ozick. For her, the Torah <u>is</u> frayed, for portions of it not only exclude but deny the essential humanity of a majority of the members of that community. Hew work exemplifies the approach articulated by Fiorenza:

> I cannot be in a community that will read <u>Ezekiel 16</u> as a revelatory text. It's basically a description of violence against a female figure, and that for me boils down to a very practical question of will this text be read as text in the community. . . 28

Like Trible and Ruether, Setel demands justice from the text, and when the text seems to deny justice to all members of the community, she does not hesitate to challenge its sanctity:

> As difficult as the process [of excising texts that

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27 Ozick, p. 144.

28T. Drorah Setel, "More than just 'add women and stir,'" p. 13.

> objectify women in a pornographic manner] may seem, it is one that may allow us to redefine our relationship not only to the [original] text but also to our own histories and communities in ways which fully acknowledge female experience. 29

Like Fiorenza, Setel calls upon all Jews to look at our beloved texts with new eyes, eyes that recognize the harmful potential of objectifying any individuals or group by categorizing them as "other". Jews know only too well how such objectification can be used to perpetuate atrocities upon innocents.

Like Ruether and Trible, Judith Plaskow identifies injustice in the biblical text, but unlike her Christian counterparts, she does not suggest that the text includes its own corrective. For Plaskow, androcentrism has so infected the text that she calls for a reevaluation of the place of text in Jewish life:

> Feminism demands a new understanding of Torah,God and Israel: an understanding of Torah that begins with an acknowledgement of the profound injustice of Torah itself. 30

Plaskow does not engage in textual exegesis. Rather, she examines the attitudes of Jews who have learned from the texts and challenges belief systems based on the hierarchical, male models that pervade the biblical text. She suggests that we must consider and revise our image of

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29T. Drorah Setel, "Prophets and Pornography: Female Sexual Imagery in Hosea" in Russell, p. 95. See also Ruether, "Feminist Interpretation. . . ," p. 115.

30 Plaskow, "The Right Question is Theological" in Heschel, p. 231.

God as male. Clearly influenced by the critiques of post-Jewish and post-Christian scholars like Naomi Goldenberg and Carol Christ, 31 Plaskow challenges the Jewish community to recognize "the Goddess", that is, the female, transcendent aspects of the Divine "as a part of God." 32 Yet this, for Plaskow, is just the beginning, the first step in fashioning a Judaism that will reflect a broader range of Jewish experience. And while the first step seems clear, Plaskow admits "the outcome of these new understandings is difficult to see in advance of our turning." 33

Ellen Umansky takes a very different approach, and asks whether we need to look beyond Jewish texts, looking to Jewish history to discover Judaism's spiritual core:

> I would contend...that before Jewish reformists [all those who would reform Judaism] attempt to discover whether Judaism's core of revelation does, in fact, point towards freedom, they must first decide whether Judaism even <u>has</u> a core of revelation. Indeed, I would argue that because Judaism is more than a religion, it is diffi-

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31 Ellen Umansky has distinguished between Jewish feminist theologians and those who see themselves "as post-Jewish or Jewish raised": "The latter can open herself to all forms of religious experience and self-expression, but the former, by choosing to identify herself and her visions as Jewish, attempts to place her experiences of the Divine within a specifically Jewish framework." "Creating a Jewish Feminist Theology. . . " p. 126. See also Goldenberg, <u>The Changing of the Gods. . .</u> and Carol P. Christ, "Why Women Need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological, and Political Reflections", <u>WomanSpirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion</u>, ed. by Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), pp. 273-287.

32 Plaskow, p. 230.

33Plaskow, p. 232.

> cult if not impossible to reduce Judaism to <u>any</u> spiritual core. 34

For Umansky, it is unclear whether "Judaism's core of revelation," which is synonomous with Judaism's "spiritual core," really exists. She is not denying the existence of Torah, but challenging Torah as the focal point of the development of Judaism.

Umansky, like Plaskow, seeks an answer to the quest for sources through the development of a feminist theology, a theology built on women's experience. As such a theology develops, Umansky suggests that the traditional sources to which Jews turn for strength and confirmation will be modified to reflect the emerging vision of Judaism. 35 She thus confirms Ruether's affirmation that

> Feminist theology cannot be done from the existing base of the Christian bible. The Old and New Testaments have been shaped in their formation, their transmission, and, finally, their canonization to sacralize patriarchy. They may preserve, between the lines, memories of women's experience, but in their present form and intention they are designed to erase women's existence as subjects and to mention women only as objects of male definition.. . .
>
> Thus the doing of feminist theology demands a new collection of texts to make women's experience visible. 36

Writer Esther Broner agrees. In her response to a symposium entitled "How to Get What We Want by the Year

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34 Umansky, p. 127-8.

35Umansky, pp.129-132.

36Ruether, <u>Womanguides</u>,ix-x.

2000," she wrote in 1980, "What does the Jewish woman want?. . . She will want a Torah, written by women, that she can kiss, that shames her in no way, neither does it exclude her." 37

What would such a new Torah look like? All of the thinkers whose work we have examined in this chapter have noted the absence of women's voices from the scriptural canon and from the volumes of commentary and interpretive literature based upon scripture. Yet clearly, the story of Judaism must include the voices of both women and men if it is to be the story of a people, not simply a portion of that people. In subsequent chapters, we will recover some of women's lost stories and songs, and consider how they may lead to the creation of a new canon.

37Esther Broner, "How To Get What We Want by the Year 2000," Lilith 1:7 (1980), p. 22.

CHAPTER II

OUR LIVES AS TEXT: RECOVERING JEWISH WOMEN'S HISTORIES

> Jewish feminist theology begins with the recognition that we have received only male visions....the first task of the Jewish feminist theologian is to recognize that the visions we have received are incomplete.1

I. Who Is a Jewish Woman and What is Jewish Women's Experience?

When we turn to traditional texts, or even to standard Jewish histories, we find no records of women's experience written by women.2 When women's experience has been recorded, it has been preserved by others, perhaps by those with sharp eyes and with a keen sense of nuance. But, in the final analysis, men are outsiders to women's lives and women's culture, so their reporting and recording is, by

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1Ellen Umansky,"Creating a Jewish Feminist Theology: Possibilities and Problems" Anima 10:2 (Winter 1985), p. 132.

2Phyllis Trible's incisive analysis of the Book of Ruth hints that this story may have been preserved by women (God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality,[Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978] Chapter 6), and there are those who suggest that the Song of Songs may have been written by women. However, (to date), no major study has posited that women either composed or served as principal redactors to the Biblical, or any subsequent classical Jewish texts. While Jewish women began to recover their mothers' stories in the last century, no comprehensive Jewish histories have been written from a women's point of view, or, for that matter, have any general histories of the Jews included women's experiences as normative.

definition, incomplete.3

In his classic short story, "Ha Derasha", Haim Hazaz' protagonist states:

> We have no history at all....We did not make our own history; non-Jews have made it for us....they made our history for us according to their own desires and in their own way, and we simply accepted it from them. But it's not ours, it's not ours at all!4

Hazaz' character speaks in hyperbolic terms, but his point is echoed in the words of scholar Judith Plaskow:

> Of course, women have lived Jewish history and have carried its burdens, shaped our experience to history and history to ourselves. But ours is not the history passed down and recorded; the texts committed to memory or the documents studied; the arguments fought, re-fought, and finely honed. Women have not contributed to the formation of the written tradition, and thus tradition does not reflect the specific realities of women's lives.5

The Jew who wishes to begin to repair this imbalance, and to fill in the gaps of centuries of silence, turns to women's writings, the guarded and hesitant jottings of centuries of nameless women, the fragments and scattered literary remains of long forgotten authors. Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb has written,

> The stories of the men in the Torah are the stories of everyman, each man, sacred man, man on a journey, the life experiences that men go through. Women

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3See T. Drorah Setel, "Feminist Insights and the Question of Method," Adela Yarbro Collins, ed. Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), p. 39.

4Haim Hazaz, "Ha Derasha." Selected Stories of Haim Hazaz (New York: Tarbut Foundation, 1971), p. 66.

5Judith Plaskow, "The Right Question is Theological," Susannah Heschel, ed. On Being a Jewish Feminist (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), p.230.

> listen to those stories and often can identify with them because they transcend the specific content of the man and become stories about searchers. The men's stories are much fuller in the text than those of the women, and as they are told and retold and retold by later generations, the stories weave into all kinds of visions that are sometimes sewn together into another text.
>
> But with women's stories, we begin with fragments only. In the Torah itself, we have of the women only fragments. . . .so it's left to us.6

We begin, then, with the recovery of Jewish women's experience. But how do we define "women's experience"? Judith Plaskow writes that "'women's experience' means simply this: the experiences of women in the course of a history never free from cultural role definitions" yet ". . . if cultural variation in sex roles means anything, it means there is no universal 'women's experience,' but only the experiences of women in particular societies and particular social groups."7 Plaskow reminds us of the impossibility of discovering a Platonic ideal of women's experience as long as we are excavating women's lives from a male-defined culture. She also challenges any broad definition of Jewish women's experience, for have not Jews lived in many lands and been a part of many different cultures? Thus we must

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6Lynn Gottlieb, "Women and the Recipes of Torah", Menorah I:12(November 1980), 11.

7 Judith Plaskow, Sex, Sin and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1980), pp. 11 and 31.Plaskow continues, citing Simone deBeavoir on this point: "The central dilemma of women's lives, as deBeauvoir sees it, is that women do not shape their own experience, but allow their life choices to be made for them by others." p. 32.

speak of Jewish women's experiences, acknowledging that just as "woman" cannot stand for "women", women's experiences are endlessly rich and varied.

But we must still ask an essential question: as one looks at women's lives, can one distinguish life experiences that are identifiably Jewish, or must one consider all the life experiences of an individual woman who happens to be a Jew in attempting to describe or quantify the Jewish female experience? In discussing premodern Jews, it is quite artificial to make a distinction between "Jewish" experiences and "life" experiences. The medieval and pre-modern European Jew lived in a totally Jewish milieu; her world was circumscribed by her Jewishness. Most modern Western Jews, however, live among Christians, and at first glance, it may seem possible to isolate their particularly "Jewish" experiences. Traditionally, Jewish women are not brought into the covenant (they are not circumcised), they do not publicly become members of the community through a Bar Mitzvah ceremony, nor do they engage in the quintessential Jewish activities of study and communal prayer. Finally, women are not commanded to fulfil the mitzvah of circumcision, passing on their heritage to their sons.

So what are women's Jewish experiences? Let us turn to women and look for their response to their lives and to Judaism. What does the world look like when seen through women's eyes?

II. Women's Lives: Jewish Women's Biography and Autobiography

As we look back across the ages in attempt to discover our mothers' stories, our vision is too often obscured by the mists of time. In Chapter I we alluded to the problems of discerning women's voices, if indeed they do exist, in the Tanach. There are stories about women in the Torah, but too often the voices we hear are discordant. In Esther Broner's innovative novel Her Mothers, the protagonist turns in vain to the Biblical text:

> What do I learn from my mothers? Sister against sister, woman betrays woman. The man is the seed and the woman is the gourd, filled with seed and rattling or dried and to be discarded. 8

To many readers, the Book of Genesis seems to be filled with stories of competition between women for the attention and love of men. Do these stories reflect how our ancestors actually lived or do they reflect the patriarchal world view of the scribes who preserved these texts and the communities that perpetuated them?

As noted above, there is some conjecture that women may have written or edited subsequent Biblical books, and one cannot deny that many generations of woman have found models of inspiration, faith and courage in the scriptural text. But

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8Esther Broner, Her Mothers (New York: Berkley Medallion Books, 1975), p. 151.

to recover women's stories, we will turn to more recent literature.

A. Premodern Women and Their Worlds

Glueckel of Hameln is one of the first Jewish voices that comes to us from the middle ages. Glueckel, who was born in 1646 in Central Germany, was a middle-class merchant. By the time she was in her late thirties, she had borne thirteen children and had buried her husband. After her husband's death, she began to write her memoirs to ease her loneliness, and her writing is infused with a deep commitment to and belief in Judaism. Her memoirs function as an ethical will, for she adjures her children to observe and respect their heritage. Her writing reflects a familiarity with the homiletical midrashim that were often taught to girls at that time.

She begins her memoir with one such midrash about a bird that carries each of its three children across a windy sea and asks each one "When you are old, how will you repay me for fighting my way through this wind and rain for you?" When each of the first two fledgings respond, "I shall do whatever you ask of me", the bird drops the young ones into the sea. The third fledgling is saved when it replies:

> "It is true you are struggling mightily and risking your life in my behalf, and I shall be wrong not to repay you when you are old, but I cannot bind myself. This though I can promise: when I am grown up and have children of my own, I shall do as much

for them as you have done for me."9

Glueckel's inclusion of this midrash in her memoirs reflects its power for her, and she skillfully employs it for its intended homiletical purpose: to teach her own children the true meaning of the fifth commandment.

The memoirs of Glueckel of Hameln reflect the home as the training ground for young girls; in a traditional Jewish home, girls were instructed not only in general domestic skills, but in the particular skills associated with maintaining a kosher home and preparing for Sabbath and holidays. The most intensive Jewish experience for young girls may have been the Sabbath--not the communal Sabbath prayer, the Sabbath study, or even the day of rest itself, but the intense weekly preparation for this day. In many traditional homes, the Sabbath was the focal point for the entire week; each Sunday one began to anticipate and plan for the next Sabbath.

The choreography of chores and home duties was arranged deliberately to ready the dwelling and its members for the weekly twenty-five hour period in which no work would be performed. Weekly Sabbath preparation served to prepare women for holiday preparations in general, and for the primary holiday preparation of the year, the complete house cleaning and utensil exchange that precedes Passover.

9Gluckel of Hameln, Memoirs. Translated by Marvin Lowenthal (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), pp. 2-3.

While men prepared the Sabbath Torah portion, women prepared the earthly portion; while men studied to ready themselves for the seder, women dusted and swept and wiped and scrubbed before beginning the laborious preparation of holiday foods. So regardless of the absence of initiation and confirmation rituals, women played a crucial role in the perpetuation of Jewish life, a role that may have paralleled but was nevertheless clearly different from the role of their non-Jewish female counterparts, a role that was invaluable to but not always valued by Jewish men.

Glueckel's memoirs depict a woman whose family is the focus of her life, even when she is consumed with her own business affairs. She is an excellent example of the pre-modern figure whose life is circumscribed by her Judaism: both in her personal and her professional life her contacts are with other Jews and within the security of the Jewish community.

The source of Glueckel's midrashim may have been the Tzenah Ur'enah, the Yiddish commentary written in the early years of the seventeenth century. This popular work, the earliest known copy of which is a fourth edition dated 1622 from Basle, was one R. Jacob ben Isaac's creative reweaving of the Biblical narrative with traditional commentaries, midrashic exegesis, and his own "unabashed. . . moral

instruction."10 Since few women knew Hebrew, this Yiddish commentary became enormously popular, even though few who read it realized that the book they came to love so was not a translation but an interpretation of the Biblical text. During the weekly scriptural reading in the synagogue, the women, sitting away from the men in the ezrat nashim (women's gallery), would listen as one of the women, a firzogerin or foresayer, would read the corresponding section in the Tzenah Ur'enah.

But the synagogue was essentially a male domain. The siddur was in Hebrew and thereby remained alien to most women, and as a guide to prayer written by men for men, it failed to address many concerns that were central to many women's lives.

> The siddur spoke of the God of the patriarchs, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It addressed "Our God and God of our fathers," and used exclusively male pronouns, adjectives, and verbs. The language of the siddur was also plural, designed as it was for public prayer. Yet, when women found time to pray, it was more likely to be at home and in private.11-

As early as 1600, collections of prayers written primarily by women for women were circulating among Yiddish speaking European Jews. These tkhines, or supplications,

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10Meir Holder, "Introduction" Tzenah Ur'enah, translated by Miriam Stark Zakon (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1983), xii. See also Norman Gore, Tzeenah U'Reenah (New York: Vantage Press, 1965), p. 18 ff.

11Tracy Guren Klirs, "Bizkhus fun Sore, Rivke, Rokhl un Leye: The Tkhine as the Jewish Woman's Self-Expression" (Unpublished rabbinic thesis: Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1984), pp. 6-7.

quickly became the vehicle for many Jewish women's deepest spiritual expressions. Unlike the synagogue liturgy, these prayers were composed for private use, and concentrated on domestic concerns, such as the health and well-being of the family and economic security; special prayers for childbirth, infertility, and the death of a loved one; or on the three so-called women's mitzvot: hallah, niddah, and hadlakah. These homely and sometimes clumsy petitions "breathed new life into Jewish prayer, and did more than any other liturgical form to restore it to its original condition of intimacy and spontaneity."12

Some of the most notable characteristics of these supplications are: their appeal to the merit of not only to the avot, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but also to that of the matriarchs Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah and the prophets Miriam, Deborah, Hannah and Hulda; their intention for individual, as opposed to communal use; and their appeal to a God who seems to be concerned with the trials and tribulations of family life. Historian Chava Weissler has pointed out that women who uttered these prayers lived, as it were, a double spiritual life; they participated in the established, androcentric rhythms of the Jewish communal calendar life lived in a "world structured by the private events of...dom-

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12 Klirs, p. 12.

estic life."13

The following tkhine, a kavannah for separating hallah, was written by Sarah bat Tovim, a seventeenth century Ukrainian Jew and one of the most well-known of the tkhine writers.

> ...May my khale be accepted as a sacrifice on the altar was accepted [in former times]. May my mitsve be accepted just as I have correctly fulfilled it. In former times this [expiation of sins] belonged to the priest and he used to forgive them their sins. Thus may I, too, be forgiven of my sins, that I may be like a newborn child. Enable me to honor my dear Sabbaths and holidays. May God protect me, that I, my husband and my children may be nourished. May my [observance of the] commandment of "taking khale" be accepted, that my little children may be sustained by dear God who is praised, with great compassion and with great mercy. May my [observance of the] commandment of khale be as if I had given the tithe. Just as I observe the commandment of khale with my whole heart, so may God, who is praised, protect me from pains and aches.14

As the tkhine opens, Sarah establishes a formal mood as she prays that her sacrifice will be acceptable to the awesome God of history. Then she breaks with tradition as she boldly identifies herself with the ancient high priest, asking for expiation not for the sins of others, but for her own transgressions. Such chutzpah reflects women's ease of relationship with the God they addressed through their petitions, an intimacy that is further demonstrated by the writer's request for protection from her aches and pains.

13Chava Weissler, "The Traditional Piety of Ashkenazic Women", Jewish Spirituality, Arthur Green, ed. (:forthcoming), pp. 7, 17 (manuscript).

14Klirs, p. 39.

Chava Weissler has written:

> Tkhines hallowed women's biological lives and domestic routines. Menstruation, pregnancy, and childhood were considered religious events, important subjects for prayer. And by reciting tkhines women could also sanctify the ordinary events of home life: baking bread, preparing for the Sabbath, bringing up children.15

Many tkhines articulated deep-felt concerns at perhaps the most dangerous time in a woman's life: when she is about to give birth. Another tkhine, which appears in a collection of "both old and new devotions" published in Vilna in the first decade of this century, reflects the pre-modern sensibility of a much earlier age. Like other tkhines of this genre, this prayer invokes the matriarchs and other Biblical figures, and asks that their merit accrue to the laboring woman as she enters the struggle for new life:

> Merciful and gracious God! Mighty Creator, have compassion on the woman so-and-so the daughter of so-and-so. . . , that she may have this child safely. May the merit of our holy matriarchs, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, and the merit of our prophetesses, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah [and] Huldah, and the merit of Yael, sustain her in the time of danger, that she may have this child easily, without suffering. Then You, God, can show such a miracle, through the merit of the righteous women from among our ancestors, that the child should be born a pure spirit for Your service, a righteous person, and should occupy himself with Torah and mitsves. And if it is a female, may she be a modest woman, a woman who fears God. And may she have good fortune. May the mother and child be healthy, and may she come into the world to salvation and comfort for all Israel. May Jews merit a true redemption in her time. Amen.16

15Weissler, p. 11.

16Klirs, pp. 115-116.

This tkhine reflects traditional expectations for women and men: the hope for a boy is that he learn how to fulfil his religious responsibilities; the hope for a girl is that she be a modest and pious Jewish woman. The prayer concludes with a conventional plea for redemption, reflecting the "other world" of the women who composed and repeated these highly personal prayers.

As they poured out their hearts to God, these women did not challenge the religious status quo that segregated them and their daughters from their husbands and sons. That separation was accepted as a given, and these women lovingly passed on their heritage to their children, just as they passed on the rich tradition of women's prayers to their daughters and granddaughters. Yet in addition to being conservators of the tradition, these women were also innovators, for they claimed the tradition as their own and created a uniquely female devotional literature, a literature that reflects a deep trust in God and a keen sense of the sanctity and ultimate meaning of everyday life.17 Taken as a whole, this literature reflects a premodern sensibility. Even though much of it was written in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, its authors and audience were living in a ghetto milieu that was primarily, if not entirely, Jewish.

17See Weissler, p. 37 ff.

B. The challenge of modernity

The coming of modernity presents enormous challenges to traditional societies. Jewish life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was not exempt from the trauma of change. The writings of Pauline Wengeroff, who was born in White Russia in 1833 and died in Minsk in 1916, offer us a glimpse into the spiritual crisis of one traditional Jewish woman as she confronted the challenge of a changing political and social reality. When national and local European polities began to open their doors to Jews, both individual Jews and the Jewish community found it necessary to redefine Judaism and Jewishness.

Wengeroff's memoirs describe her agony as her once-observant but now "enlightened" husband turns away from Judaism, dragging her along with him, and threatening to destroy the very fabric of their family life:

> Little by little, I had to drive each cherished custom from our home. 'Drive' is not the right word, for I accompanied each to the door with tears and sobs. I loved my husband as intensely and as faithfully as in the first days of our marriage, yet I could not submit without resistance. I wanted to preserve this cherished tradition for myself and my children, and I fought a battle of life and death.18

Wengeroff lost the battle: at least two of her six children converted to Christianity in order to matriculate in Russian universities.

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18 Pauline Wengeroff, "Memoirs of a Grandmother", The Golden Tradition: Jewish Life and Thought in Eastern Europe, ed. Lucy Dawidowicz (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), p. 165.

Yet Wengeroff did not completely reject the currents of contemporary, secular culture that beguiled her husband and children. She appreciated the importance of responding to the world in which one lives, but was also very concerned with the preservation of the traditional values that maintain a culture and, perhaps even more importantly, a community. Unlike her husband, she saw that to simply exchange "modern" ideas for traditional ideas, meant to cut oneself from one's moorings and to be set adrift on a sea of doubt. Wengeroff was unique in her ability to analyze the breakdown of a traditional culture, and to put her personal tragedy into a larger framework:

> Other peoples and other nations have drawn from modern, alien currents and ideas only what is congenial to their own character and thus have preserved their own individuality and uniqueness. But the course that befell the Jews was that they could not acquire the new, the alien, without renouncing the old and repudiating their unique individuality, and their most precious possessions. . . . In this transitional period, the woman, the mother, was cruelly brushed aside for clinging to tradition; she wanted to impart to her children the ethics of Judaism, the traditions of its faith, the sanctity of the Sabbath and the Holy Days, Hebrew, Bible study. She wanted to transmit this great treasure along with the enlightenment, with the new currents of West European culture. But the husbands had the same answer to all pleas: 'The children need no religion.' In their inexperience, they wanted to take the dangerous leap from the lowest level of education to the highest, without any intermediate step. They demanded not only assent from their wives, but also submission. They preached freedom, equality, fraternity in public, but at home they were despots.19

19Wengeroff, pp. 163-64.

Wengeroff portrays women as the conservators of traditional Jewish culture at a time when that culture was crumbling. Like many Jewish women throughout the ages, Wengeroff's primary concern was the preservation of a culture in which her role was quite circumscribed, a culture that confined her religiosity primarily to the home, and honored her for her piety and modesty, not necessarily for her intelligence, ingenuity, or business acumen. Yet Judaism was a safe and familiar haven for millions of traditional Jewish women and formed the basis of the community that was their home. To join their husbands in casting off the yoke of the commandments was unthinkable.

While Pauline Wengeroff responded to rapidly changing social and religious conditions in Eastern Europe by privately recording her thoughts and feelings, her contemporary, Sarah Schenirer (1883-1935), launched a frontal attack to preserve traditional Judaism. Schenirer, a seamstress from a Hasidic family in Cracow, was deeply concerned about the growing numbers of Jewish girls who were being raised without any Jewish education. She created a network of Orthodox schools for girls that concentrated on the rudiments of traditional Jewish practice and belief, preparing girls who were, in the words of one historian, "fully suited for and comfortable in their traditional role as Jewish women."20

20Deborah Weissman, "Bais Ya'akov: A Historical Model for Jewish Feminist" in Koltun, p. 144.

Schenirer had a keen sense of the urgency of her mission, "rescu[ing] the new generation for Judaism."21 By 1939, before the destruction of East European Jewry, the Beit Ya'akov movement she had founded included 250 schools with an enrollment of over 38,000 girls.22 As historian Lucy Dawidowicz points out, Schenirer was "herself a product of the modern world whose influence she sought to minimize in the face of the centrifugal forces that beset Judaism. . . " But like many who would follow her, she applied her understanding of the world beyond the ghetto to bring Jews back to Judaism. Dawidowicz continues, "However traditional in her beliefs, she represented the modern woman and the important new role of women, outside the home, in shaping Jewish life."23 Schenirer used the vehicle of education to bring women together, and it was in that women's world that she built the foundations for preserving Judaism. But the very act of educating girls to become informed and literate Jews was revolutionary, and created a generation of girls who were more familiar with, and therefore had more control over, their own Judaism. Their teacher became their model, and they could begin to dream of Jewish lives that included not only

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21Sarah Schenirer, "Mother of the Beth Jacob Schools" in Dawidowicz, p. 209.

22Weissman, pp. 142-3.

23Davidowicz, p. 207.

home and family but education and community service as well.

Another "new" woman who saw education as the means for preserving Jewish values was Puah Rakowski. Rakowski was born in 1865, thirty years after Wengeroff and Schenirer, and her vision reflects the changing historical climate in Eastern Europe. The daughter of an enlightened maskil in Bialystock, she learned Hebrew as a child, and when she became an adult she traded on her unusually good education by becoming a teacher and emancipating herself from a repressive husband. For Rakowski, Judaism became secular Zionism and traditional values were superceded by more "modern" haskalah ideals. Like her predecessors, Rakowski was primarily concerned with passing on her own heritage, which in her case, was the rich linguistic heritage of Hebrew, now wed to the Zionist vision. For Rakowski, the teaching of Hebrew to girls created new links in a chain of commitment to a people and a language. Through her teaching, she shared her love for the language that had been the vehicle of Jewish hope and despair, joy and sorrow throughout the centuries while using that very language to support the revolutionary Zionist vision. Like Schenirer, Rakowski was a role model for her students, but unlike Schenirer, she was a model of a self-defined, independent woman whose life was dedicated to the creation of a society in which men and women would have equal educational and vocational opportunities and would determine the shape of

their own lives.24 For both Schenirer and Rakowski, it was a deeply spiritual act to transmit their heritage to girls who historically had been denied opportunities to learn about their rich past.

In many ways, Bertha Pappenheim (1859-1936) is the mother of contemporary Jewish feminism, for she was the first woman to recognize how the utter exclusion of women's experience from Jewish texts and the interpretation of those texts both created and perpetuated a system that defined women as outsiders.25 Pappenheim was born in Vienna in 1859 and was raised in a cultured, wealthy Orthodox family. While nursing her dying father, she suffered a debilitating depression, and was treated by Freud's colleague, Josef Breuer. (Pappenheim's case became known to the psychoanalytic community as Anna O. But when the psychoanalytic treatment terminated, Pappenheim's life work began.)

After her recovery, she moved to Frankfort and became a housemother in a Jewish orphanage. In 1902, she founded a Jewish women's club to provide direct services to the growing number of Eastern European Jewish women who had fled the

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24See excerpt from Rakowski's memoirs, "A Mind of My Own," in Dawidowicz, pp. 388-393.

25Although she does not deal with this aspect of Pappenheim's thought, the work of Marion A. Kaplan is the primary source on Pappenheim's life and work for the non-German reader. See The Jewish Feminist Movement in Germany: The Campaigns of the Juedischer Frauenbund,1904-1938 (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1979) and "Bertha Pappenheim: Founder of German-Jewish Feminism" in Koltun, pp. 149-163.

pogroms of Poland and found themselves stranded in Germany, often penniless, without marketable skills, unable to speak German, and the sole support of their fatherless children. Two years later she founded the Juedischer Frauenbund, a national organization of German Jewish women whose primary aim was to win suffrage and equal representation in the German Jewish community. In 1914, she established a home and rehabilitation center for single mothers and their children and throughout her life complemented this work by her persistent crusade against the so-called White Slave Trade, the trans-Atlantic prostitution rings that involved thousands of European Jewish women both on the continent and in and around American ports of entry.

Pappenheim was perhaps the first Jew to recognize that women's separate status within the tradition would never change until women became literate interpreters of that textual tradition. Keenly aware of the complexity of traditional Jewish study, she was living in a world where many opportunities for study and subsequent professional work were opening up to women. She saw clearly that the separate status of men and women in Jewish life can only be understood when one

> consider[s] that great conglomeration of law, tradition, and custom which exists subconsciously for the majority of Western Jews of to-day as 'Tradition'; which, for many, has a sort of historical value; while it is still observed by a minority in its entirety. Here is material for the Talmudist, the historian, the sociological student, and it may seem to representatives of these

> branches of learning that I, an ignorant woman, presume too much in attempting to speak thereon. But in very fact, it is significant that there is no woman, nor ever has been, who has thoroughly mastered the Jewish sources of study necessary for a discussion of the question in its religious and historical aspect, or who has treated the material from a woman's point of view, as we see women doing to-day in other branches of juristic work. The house of study--the home and nursery of specifically Jewish culture--has ever been closed to the woman, and wherever Jewish learning is transmitted in the traditional way, so it will remain in the future.Thus, not only in the past, have we been referred always to the male conception of Torah, the commentaries, and the tradition; but even now, when the feminine point of view could be expressed in translations of the Hebrew text, and in reconsideration of the subject-matter, etc., the very possibility of individual critical study of the original texts is denied us. We Jewish women must take, unquestioningly, praise and blame, admiration and condemnation of the sex, as we get it scattered through the vast masses of literature through the spectacles of male scholars, who read into Jewish literature their own personal opinion and personal experiences. 26

While her own work was primarily in the political and social service sphere, Pappenheim advocated a radical "revisioning" of traditional Jewish texts and Jewish law through women's eyes. To this end, she translated into German several works of interest to women: the memoirs of one of her ancestors, Glueckel of Hameln, Tzenah Ur'ena, and the Ma'aseh Buch, a collection of tales and legends. Throughout her life, she worked was with and for women, trying to repair lives broken and battered by unscrupulous and irresponsible men and by a

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26Bertha Pappenheim, "The Jewish Woman in Religious Life", a paper read at the Woman's Congress in Munich, 1912. Jewish Review (January 1913), 3.

social and political reality that denied women the most basic civil and social rights. Pappenheim believed that once women had a hand in making the rules, whether as enfranchised citizens or as textual interpreters, the world would be increased by a measure of justice. The support she received from the women's community in which she immersed herself enabled her to continue her work as a crusader and nurturer of others. She remained an observant Orthodox Jew throughout her life, passionately committed to her heritage and her people, keenly aware that a Judaism that included the experience of all Jews stood a better chance of surviving in the decades and centuries to come.

Pappenheim's vision of women's organizational work as integral to the perpetuation of a healthy Jewish community was shared by the founders of the first independent Jewish women's organization in America, the National Council of Jewish Women. Women like Hannah Greenebaum Solomon (1858-1942) and Sadie American (1862-1944) clearly saw their organizational work as a reflection of their spirituality and as an expression of their deep commitment to Judaism. Sadie American's speech to the delegates of the 1893 founding Jewish Women's Congress reverberated with messianic fervor:

> Then it was that the Committee determined that the Congress should flash a light into the darkness, that it should be a voice to proclaim our needs, our wants, our difficulties, our facilities [sic], telling our women wherein we lack, calling to them in clarion tones: 'Awake! Arise! A new house is to be built in Israel, which shall be the home of all that is fine, and true, and pure, and beautiful.

> From it shall go forth an influence and power which shall uplift men, its atmosphere shall be sweetness and purity and light; it shall be builded on the firm rock of principle and unselfish love and enthusiasm.'27

She concluded by evoking the image of Moses, likening the emergence of this organization to the liberation of the Jews from Egyptian bondage:

> High above all let shine the sun of your union. Individual efforts are like the elemental colors of the dawn, serving to make the darkness visible. Let your organization be the prism to convert them into that pure, brilliant, piercing white light whose shafts alone can penetrate and divide the gloom of ignorance and apathy and hostility, like the staff of Moses at the Red Sea, an undying light and glory, which shall persist for truth and beauty and goodness even through all time.28

Most of the sophisticated, well-educated first and second generation Jewish women who joined the organization in its early years were Reform Jews who were proud of their ancient heritage, but were totally unlettered as Jews. To remedy this, the founders of the new organization pledged themselves to the creation of study groups that would establish a relationship between Jewish women and Jewish texts. They took as their motto "Education and Philanthropy", staking their claim to self-education and the education of children, and to social service within and beyond the Jewish community. Council meetings, which opened and closed with

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27Sadie American, "Organization" Papers of the Jewish Woman's Congress held at Chicago, 1893 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1893), p. 247.

28American, p. 262.

prayers or hymns, provided opportunities for members to support one another as they led one another in prayer and song and learned how to chair and direct both large and small groups. Such meetings functioned not only as forums for Jewish education, but as leadership training as well. For many Council members, Council meetings and Council projects provided a meaningful and supportive outlet for their religious sensibilities. The organization was both self-consciously Jewish and distinctly female, and not only tolerated but celebrated and encouraged women's multiple roles and range of abilities. Together, women reclaimed text study just as they established, often for the first time in America, religious educational programs for girls.

However, by the end of the first fifteen years, the organization had begun to move away from religious education and towards philanthropy, both because of rabbinic pressure and the women's own unreadiness to challenge the status quo.[29] Like Pappenheim, the Council's founders lived at a time of women's increasing participation in the secular world, but the Jewish world, even at its most liberal in the Reform movement, was not ready to welcome women's participation in all phases of Jewish religious life. And while Jewish women lived rich and vibrant religious lives both as indivi-

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29See my dissertation, "The Founding and Early Programs of the National Council of Jewish Women: Study and Practice as Jewish Women's Religious Expression" (unpublished doctoral thesis, Indiana University, 1981), especially Chapter III.

duals and particularly as members of women's collectives, their religious experiences were not in any way integrated into "normative"--male--Jewish practice.

The lives of these Jews are a record of Jewish experience, a record that must be acknowledged and preserved. Their lives reflect the values of scholarship as well as the values of family, the values of tradition as well as a sense of the importance of participating in modernity. Pervading all the lives presented here are the themes of connection between women and those who share their lives and women's clear sense of responsibility for others. For each of these women, Judaism meant connection to the past, to the present, and to the future, a connection that was not simply ideological but profoundly personal. 30

To consider lives as text means that one studies personal histories as sources of truth and value. Slowly, we must add such narratives to the classic texts that inform, instruct, and comfort our people. Just as the argumentation Talmudic arguments, the conversations and discussions that

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30Recent scholarship has made available the lives and work of other exceptional Jews as well. Future discussions must include women like Lily Montague, Henrietta Szold, Tehilla Lichtenstein, and others. See Ellen Umansky, Lily Montague and the Advancement of Liberal Judaism: From Vision to Vocation (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1984), and her Lily Montague: Sermons, Addresses, Letters and Papers (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985), and Joan Dash, Summoned to Jerusalem: The Life of Henrietta Szold (New York and Philadelphia: Harper and Row and Jewish Publication Society, 1979).

transcend historical and geographical boundaries, are a reflection of human beings reaching beyond themselves and towards God, so women's lives represent a continuing struggle to find holiness in the mundane activities and behaviors. Such lives lead us to a new definition of text, towards a text that embraces and celebrates the experience of all Jews. In the next chapter, we will continue to explore women's experience through women's prayers, poems and stories.

III. OUR WORDS AS TEXT: RECOVERING JEWISH WOMEN'S WRITINGS

> There is a strange little melody inside me that sometimes cries out for words. But through inhibition, lack of self-confidence, laziness and goodness knows what else, that tune remains stifled, haunting me from within. Sometimes it wears me out completely. And then again it fills me with gentle, melancholy music. Sometimes I want to flee with everything I possess into a few words, seek refuge in them. But there are still no words to shelter me. That is the real problem. I am in search of a haven, yet I must first build it for myself, stone by stone. Everyone seeks a home, a refuge. And I am always in search of a few words.1

These words were written by Etty Hillesum, an assimilated Dutch Jewish intellectual whose diaries, written in 1941 and 1942, reflect a unique struggle for language and for life. For centuries, Jewish women have been in search of words, words to express their innermost thoughts, longings, and prayers. In a cacophany of tongues as varied as the Jewish nation itself, women have created songs and prayers and chants to celebrate their joys and to mourn their sorrows, but we are only beginning to recover their voices. In Chapter II, we began to recover Jewish women's lives as sources of Torah. In this chapter, we will look directly at Jewish women's interpretations of their experiences, at women's attempt to create written responses to their lives by

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1Etty Hillesum, An Interrupted Life (NY:Pantheon Books, 1983), p. 45 (20 October 1941).

fashioning prayers and poems and songs and stories that echo their experiences.

By the end of the last century, some women began to look at their worlds through a different lens than had their mothers before them. In addition to seeing the world as a Jew and as a woman, these women also looked at the world as feminists, as women who were interested in and concerned about the position of women in the world and in Judaism. A feminist critique not only analyzes gender differences manifest in a culture, but also examines the underlying assumptions of men's and women's abilities and possibilities that support that culture. Implicit in such an analysis may also be an examination of the religious bases of that culture.2 Bertha Pappenheim is the first modern figure to articulate a feminist view of Judaism. Several contemporary writers are, knowingly or not, her heirs, and it is their contributions that will be considered here.

The title story in Julia Wolf Mazow's excellent collection, The Woman who Lost her Names tells the tale of a woman whose life is a series of re-namings by others: her first name is augmented when an uncle dies shortly after her birth, she is renamed by a gentile teacher; and finally, her husband refuses to call her by her name, for it is also his mother's

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2 Carol Ochs analyses the implications and impact of patriarchal and matriarchal world-views on a range of cultures and societies in Behind the Sex of God: Toward a New Consciousness--Transcending Matriarchy and Patriarchy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1977).

name, and he names her himself. The story ends as Sarah/Sarah Josephine/Sally/Yosepha chooses her daughter's name, and is told that it is inappropriate: she must name her newborn infant after her recently deceased mother. Nessa Rappoport's tale is written in a terse, almost Biblical style, and her textual theme, the power of naming, (and, conversely, the powerlessness of those who do not name), mirrors Jewish women's stories throughout the ages, beginning with Adam's naming of Eve in Genesis.3

Naming one's self and one's experience can take a number of forms. In the last chapter, we demonstrated how a number of women have "named" themselves by claiming their past, recording their memoirs for their children and descendants. Other women seek to name their experience by writing not about themselves, but by recording their responses to the tradition. In this chapter, we will present an overview of women's midrash, commentaries on and elaborations of traditional texts by contemporary women. Other women have found that the act of translating, interpreting, or writing new prayers has served as a mode of naming their experience. Still others have created new rituals, using their words or the words of others to sanctify a time and space that was

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3 Nessa Rapoport,"The Woman Who Lost Her Names," The Woman Who Lost Her Names: Selected Writings by American Jewish Women, ed. Julia Wolf Mazow (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), pp. 135-142. As Carol Ochs points out, naming implies dominion over another and who names in any given society reflects the essential power structure that supports that society. Ochs, p. 108-9.

formerly unnamed and unclaimed. This chapter will examine a range of Jewish women's writings that reach toward naming, not to contain or limit an experience, but to claim it as one's own.

I. Women's Midrash

One of the most characteristic modes of Jewish textual interpretation is midrash, commentary and elucidation of traditional text. Historically, women have not participated in this quintessential Jewish enterprise. However, women's renewed interest in Judaism has catalyzed a range of midrashic interpretations of traditional texts by women, including work on biblical, halachic and aggadic sources.

One of the earliest and most well-known contemporary midrashim is Judith Plaskow's midrash on Bereshit, "Apple-source."4 Plaskow introduces Lilith, Adam's first wife, who, according to Jewish tradition, endangers women in childbirth, steals newborns from their cribs and is the cause of the erotic nightmares of even the most pious men. But Plaskow transforms this demon. Drawing primarily on the tale of Lilith as it appears in the Alphabet of Ben Sira, Plaskow tells how Lilith attempts to reenter Gan Eden from which she was expelled by Adam. Meanwhile, Eve, Adam's second wife, has become restless in the paradise she shares with

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4Judith Plaskow, "The Jewish Feminist: Conflict in Identities" in Elizabeth Koltun, ed. The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives (New York: Schocken,1976) pp. 8-10.

Adam. Once Eve sees that this feared demon is simply "a woman like herself," she longs to meet her. "After many months of strange and disturbing thoughts, " Eve escapes from the garden that has become her prison, and the two women meet.

> . . . they sat and spoke together, of the past and then of the future. They talked for many hours, not once, but many times. They taught each other many things, and told each other stories, and laughed together, and cried, over and over, till the bond of sisterhood grew between them.

The midrash concludes as Adam puzzles over his wife's "comings and goings." He consults God, who

> was confused too. Something had failed to go according to plan.. . And God and Adam were expectant and afraid the day Eve and Lilith returned to the garden, bursting with possibilities, ready to rebuild it together.5

This midrash clearly reflects the power of many women's consciousness-raising groups of the 1970s, which gave many women a sense of their "sisterhood" with other women as participants acknowledged their enormous reservoir of shared experience. Yet it is precisely that awareness of shared strength that gives Plaskow's midrash its power. Once both Lilith and Eve free themselves from the bonds of crippling stereotypes that isolated them from one another, they can envision a better world, a world in which they are the subjects, not perennially the objects, a world in which they can pool their resources to create safe spaces for them both. Lilith, the woman who would not submit to the will of another

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5Plaskow, pp. 9-10.

mortal, Adam, is not necessarily a demon; Eve, she who did submit, need not become merely a vessel for Adam's seed. Plaskow's myth transforms Bereshit by shifting the primary conflict from the power-struggle between humans and God to emphasizing the power-struggle between Adam and his wives (as portrayed in The Alphabet of Ben Sira). Seen another way, this midrash proposes an alternative model to the patriarchal theology that is implicit in the original Creation story. Because Adam "played God," assuming dominance over rather than working toward equality with Lilith and Eve, the connection between the two women comes to exemplify an alternative mirror of transcendence. God is not "power-over" but the Source of "power-within", that power of mortals to mobilize their own strength and to develop relationships with one another and the world.6

In 1981, five years after Plaskow's midrash appeared in print, a group of California women published a small volume of original midrashim. Taking the Fruit: Women's Tales of the Bible contains fifteen interpretations of selections from the tanach and one midrash on the apocryphal story of Judith.7 The book begins with a response to Genesis 3:6 ("When the

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6See Gloria Z. Greenfield, "Does Hierarchy have a place in Women's Spirituality?", The Politics of Women's Spirituality ed. Charlene Spretnak (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1982), pp. 532-533.

7Jane Sprague Zones, ed. Taking the Fruit: Modern Women's Tales of the Bible (San Diego: Women's Institute for Continuing Jewish Education, 1981).

woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate. . . . "):

> In the beginning the women told their stories. Sitting in the garden at twilight, under the tree of knowledge, they spun and wove tales about the courageous deeds of their foremothers. With flames of imagination igniting their souls, they sat before the fire and shared the glorious deeds that had been their spiritual inheritance. The miracle of the garden was that each and every woman added her part so that the generations were not separate from each other, but instead were joined together by common experiences and a shared history.8

The midrash describes how the women's ". . . idyllic existence was shattered and they were forced to leave the garden." As time passed, the women's devotion to their families and the pressures of daily life eclipsed their memories of the garden, and because others failed to keep their stories alive, they gradually forgot them too. However,

> one day, quite by accident, the garden wall was rediscovered. It was long and high and looked like it could not be breached. But several women struggling together found a way over the wall, and once on the other side, they discovered a path which led them back to the tree of knowledge. In their joy and excitement, they told others so that shortly more women found their way to the garden.9

Here Irene Fine consciously utilizes the midrash for homiletical purposes, and follows this example with an introduction to the volume that describes the process the women used in creating their midrashim. Together they read

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8Irene Fine, "Prologue," p. 5.

9Fine, p. 6

and discussed the original text, and then turned to traditional commentaries and midrashim. Only once they had read and assessed the responses of the rabbis and exegetes did they attempt to create their own interpretations of the text.

The midrashim in this volume are written precisely to balance the overwhelmingly male interpretations found in traditional sources. These unassuming midrashim join the process of transformation of the traditional images of Biblical women by offering insights into their personalities through their conversations with God, with themselves, and with one another. In one midrash, Adam and Eve argue about who is better equipped to fulfil God's command in Genesis 1:28 to peru u'revu. In another, Lilith comforts a distraught Eve who weeps because Adam has told her she must cover her nakedness. ". . . were her thighs too thick, or her breasts too full, or her skin not fair enough?" "'Nonsense,' said Lilith. . . 'You are a lovely powerful human being. There is nothing wrong with you.'" An unloved Leah prepares, heavy hearted, for a marriage she cannot avoid, and later, she rocks her ten-year old daughter in her arms as Dina sobs after her rape by Hamor.10 These simple and straightforward pieces represent an important beginning to the recovery of women's lost stories, and reflect the philosophy of the group

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10Randee Friedman (on Adam and Eve), pp. 24-26; Jane Sprague Zones (on Eve and Lilith), pp. 30-31; Helen Gotkowitz (on Leah), pp. 38-39 and Betsy Arnold (on Leah and Dina), pp. 40-41. Taking the Fruit.

as articulated in the introduction, "Every Jew has at least one midrash in her that needs to be written."11

Most of the midrashim in the collection look at stories in which women play a role, and begin to fill in the unwritten stories of the matriarchs and other women of note in the Biblical text. However, women's midrash is not confined to an elaboration of stories about women. An engaging midrash that reflects a very different perspective is Nora Gold's "Yosepha," a short story that retells the Joseph story with a woman, Yosepha, as the protagonist.12 The only child of her mother Rachel, Yosepha is the youngest of her father's thirteen children. When she is born, her mother rejects her, for she is not the son, the prince for whom Rachel had prayed, and that night, Rachel dies "from some unknown inner bleeding."

Yosepha grows up on the Palestinian moshav her father farms, taunted by her siblings, and finally abandoned by them one night on the way home from the market. Rescued by a wagonload of kibbutzniks, she excels in her studies, is sent to the university, and becomes an established agronomist. Twenty-two years after she left her home, she is appointed Assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, and when a drought she had foreseen in one of her vivid dreams plagues the land,

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11Irene Fine, "Introduction," Taking the Fruit, p. 13.

12Nora Gold, "Yosepha," Lilith 12/13 (Winter/Spring 1985), pp. 35-39.

Yosepha's advice is sought by farmers trying to save their crops, their livestock, and their families. Finally, her siblings join the throngs who seek her counsel, and like the biblical Joseph whose name she bears, Yosepha sends them back for the one member of her family she most longs to see. Yet Yosepha's desire is to see her father. Like any good midrash, Gold's retelling fills in many of the blanks left in the sparse Biblical text. The reader never knows what Joseph is thinking; Gold puts words into Yosepha's mouth as she wrestles with herself:

> What should I do, God, what can I say to them? And then--Can I forgive?
>
> It had cost her not to, and she knew it. It had cost her to wipe out their memories, but to nurture the hatred, to preserve and feed her seething, nameless anger. She had not hated her brothers and sisters, but herself, she had hated being small and afraid on that road. And she hated her father, too: It was his love that had spawned their hatred; their hatred was, after all, as natural as bacteria feeding on milk in the sun. No, she could not forgive him for cursing her thus: she would not release the past, she would not betray. . . . 13

When her family arrives, she is initially overcome, but then, like Joseph, Yosepha assures her siblings that she seeks no revenge. Then she turns to her father,

> . . . Yakov, the old man, staring toward her voice as though listening to a dream. She went over to him and put her hands on his cheeks. Softly, and from a place so deep in her, she herself was surprised, "You I forgive," she said. 14

The biblical figure of Joseph does not blame his

13Gold, pp. 38-39.

14Gold, p. 39.

siblings because he considers his exile God's will; this modern retelling, like the retelling of the Adam/Eve/Lilith story above, refocuses the human challenge to understand God's will to the challenge to disentangle the complex emotional relationships between human beings. In fact, God is conspicuously absent from this retelling, except as an expletive. Finally, one must analyze the effect of changing the gender of the protagonist. Does the classical tale become more accessible to women when Joseph becomes Yosepha? The sexual interlude that punctuates Joseph's career is absent from Yosepha's story, but there are other, more significant differences in the telling that might be attributed to the change in gender. Joseph accounts his changing fortunes to God's will; Yosepha blames first herself, then her father. At the conclusion of the story, she forgives her father. 15 The reader is left wondering, however, if she also forgives herself.

Merle Feld's poem "Sinai" is a powerful midrash on an event, the pivotal event in Jewish history, that has rarely been considered "from a woman's point of view."

> My brother and I were at Sinai
> He kept a journal
> of what he saw
> of what he heard
> of what it all meant to him

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15 The theme of women's internalization of rage has been well documented in the scientific literature. See, for example, Phyllis Chesler, Women and Madness (New York: Avon Books, 1972), and Sue Cox, Female Psychology: The Emerging Self (Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1976).

I wish I had such a record
of what happened to me there.

It seems like every time I want to write
I can't
I'm always holding a baby
one of my own
or one for a friend
always holding a baby
so my hands are never free
to write things down

And then
as time passes
the particulars
the hard data
the who what when where why
slip away from me
and all I'm left with is
the feeling.

But feelings are just sounds
the vowel barking of a mute.

My brother is so sure of what he heard
After all, he's got a record of it
consonant after consonant after consonant

If we remembered it together
We could recreate holy time
Sparks flying. 16

Initially, this poem seems to deal not with the content, but with the circumstances of God's revelation to the Jewish people at Sinai. Implicit in this piece is that the Torah as we know it is a <u>human</u> document, the record of experiences and reflections on those experiences compiled by many hands over many years. Yet Feld takes up the point raised by Rachel Adler: were women even <u>present</u> at Sinai? For Adler, Moses'

16Merle Feld, "Sinai," unpublished manuscript sent to the author, Fall 1984.

instructions to b'nei Yisrael in Exodus 19:15 are very clearly directed to the men; it is the sons of Israel with whom the covenant is made.17 For Feld, women were present at Sinai, but their domestic and familial responsibilities took precedence, and they were unable to record the event. These women without names were unable to name an event that would reverberate throughout Jewish history. Yet Feld alone dares to ask what Sinai, and all of Jewish history, might look like if women and men "remembered it together." She articulates what others have merely hinted: that together, Jews have the power to "recreate holy time."

All the midrashim we have discussed focus on human relationships, reflecting Carol Gilligan's thesis that women see the world primarily through their connections with others.18 In "Sinai," Feld suggests that the recognition of that essential truth of relationship, the imperative of mutuality, is what Sinai is really about. Only when women and men come together will the b'nei Yisrael find God.

II. Women's Prayers and Women's Rituals

Judaism is a tradition with an ancient and elaborate liturgy. The traditional order of prayer, preserved in the

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17Rachel Adler, "I've had nothing yet so I can't take more." Moment VIII:8 (September 1983), 22-26.

18Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

siddur, represents the final product of thousands of years of development. Responding to that fixed body of prayers, Eastern European women composed tkhines, private petitions that expressed their innermost longings and articulated their previously unexpressed hopes and dreams. Yet the impulse to pray has not entirely waned as Jews have entered modernity, and Jewish women continue the struggle to write, translate and interpret prayer.

In 1976, two undergraduate members of Brown University's women's minyan came to the conclusion that the traditional siddur did not give them the words they felt they wanted to pray. Maggie Wenig and Naomi Janowitz were less concerned with reforming the intent of the prayers in the siddur than amending the form to better meet their needs as female petitioners. They wanted to find their own voices and longings reflected in the prayers, so together they retranslated and supplemented the traditional Shabbat services: shacharit, and mincha, and ma'ariv. Like many European and American "reformers" before them, Janowitz and Wenig concentrate on changing the vernacular (English) version of the prayers, but leave the Hebrew in its original form.

The thoughtfully written introduction to their Siddur Nashim states their purpose and reflects the humility and sincerity with which they approach their task.19

19Following the example of my teacher, Jakob J. Petuchowski, I have taken the liberty of quoting from the introduction at length. See Prayerbook Reform in Europe (New

> The authors of rabbinic midrashim expressed their world view in the form of commentary on Jewish texts. We too express our world view in the form of a 'commentary' on and translation of traditional texts. But our commentary is not only to be read and studied-it is to be prayed, for we have entered the process of the creation of liturgy. Our liturgy is, like those that precede ours, a product of the experiences of its authors--in this case the experience of contemporary Jewish women.
>
> Our prayers, then, are not a critique of the classical liturgy from a feminist perspective, but an affirmation of our choice to remain in the tradition and to sanctify our everyday lives as women. Our prayers are not a treatise on the rights of Jewish women. They do, however, have social implications. Through our prayers, we define ourselves as women in terms of our relationship with God. . . .
>
> In writing prayers, we struggle with the meaning of our relationship with God. Our metaphors and ideas come initially out of wrestling with the liturgy---trying to make it embrace our experience--rather than out of an effort to develop a systematic theology. . . . . .
>
> With these prayers, we offer encouragement to women, as they look around and inside themselves for God, to write prayers, to pray together and to renew the meaning of all that has been passed down to us. We have found that, when women are reminded that they too are created in the image of God, they can bring forth what they carry inside--the beauty, wisdom, and strength gained as the bearers of 4,000 years of tradition.20

Like other women who are naming their experiences of prayer, Janowitz and Wenig see themselves as the rightful heirs of the rabbis who have interpreted Jewish tradition through the

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20Naomi Janowitz and Maggie Wenig, Siddur Nashim: A Sabbath Prayer Book for Women (Providence, RI: privately printed, 1976), iii-iv.

ages, and their respectful posture is reflected in their consistent maintenance of traditional Jewish liturgical forms. It is also important to note that their siddur grew out of an immediate need to pray, and that they make no pretense that it articulates or reflects "a systematic theology." Much contemporary women's prayer "suffers" from the pressure of exigency: women want words to pray, and are often unable to wait until "it has all been figured out." Of course, their disclaimer should not prevent the keen student of liturgy from analyzing their efforts in an attempt to extract their primary theological assumptions. The last paragraph of the introduction reveals their own sympathy for what might be called the "influence of immanence" on their thought: "...we offer encouragement to women, as they look around and within themselves for God. . ." (emphasis mine).

Siddur Nashim is a thoughtful and bold step towards the creation of a Jewish liturgy that not only acknowledges but celebrates women's lives and experiences. The extensive use of traditional female metaphors for God and the incorporation of not only the imahot but also the prophets Miriam and Deborah invite all worshippers to move beyond the androcentrism of the traditional siddur and thus closer to God21.

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21 In "(Re)Imaging the Divine," Response XIII:1-2 (Fall-Winter 1982), Ellen Umansky has written:

As long as all images of power, strength, and glory are embodied in a God who appears only as Father, Lord, and King, power, strength, and glory will continue to be perceived as

Other innovations, such as their yehi ratzon and their alenu [22] challenge traditional notions of galut and olam haba, and offer prayers that reflect the historical realities that define contemporary Judaism: the state of Israel and the Holocaust.

Yet throughout these prayers, God also remains Wholly Other. While these prayers recover and utilize a broad range of traditional female metaphors for God, that God remains Lord, beyond human experience and, finally, beyond human description, ". . . whose glory transcends all praises, songs and blessings that can be rendered unto Her. . ."[23]. We may be created in God's image, but we ultimately remain only an image, not a replica. And while we may be God's partner in creation, we are do not share the work equally. We are midwives to the laboring mother, assistants to the master craftsman, handmaidens to the Sovereign. Even when God is with us, God is not us. Siddur Nashim thus preserves the traditional conception of the God of the Jews, the Holy One who is Blessed/Praised by the people Israel.

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22Janowitz and Wenig, pp. 21 and 25.

23Wenig and Janowitz, p. 28.

Angeles. She acknowledges her debt to those who began to challenge the deep patriarchal bias of traditional liturgy by asserting God's femaleness and by bringing women's experience into Jewish prayer. Yet, by 1985, Falk writes: "It not merely a matter of changing male images to seemingly equivalent female ones. . . For a feminized patriarchal image is still patriarchal, though now in transvestite masquerade."24 For Falk, "patriarchal" implies "hierarchical", based upon a system of "power-over" as opposed to "power-within", a system of domination of one over another as opposed to a system that encourages and supports the innate power of each individual. For her, the liturgical model of God above and humans below dictates behavior between humans, leading to a justification of domination of the strong over the weak, the powerful over the powerless. Rather, Falk suggests a model that uses human power as a reflection of the power of the Divine, and proposes language that supports a sense of equality and mutuality between humans just as it implies the interdependence between humans and the Creator of life. Quoting the psalmist, she reminds us: "Lo hametim yehalleluyah": "not the dead but the living sing God's praises"(Psalm 115:17). She suggests that those who live must compose prayers that will

> articulate mutually supportive relationships between male and female, and between transcendence

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24Marcia Falk, "What About God? New Blessings for Old Wine" Moment 9:2 (March 1985), p. 35.

> and immanence. And in my wildest, most daring dreams, I envision the result: Judaism's great gift for making distinctions joined with feminism's deep insights about integration, so that the distinctions, the choices we make, affirm us all in the healthy pursuit of life.25

For Falk, changing the passive form baruch to the active n'varech is a first step in claiming one's own power of blessing, and she creates new berachot in Hebrew and English that resonate with the experience of four thousand years of Jewish history even as they point the way towards a new articulation of Judaism.

Her sheheheyanu reads as follows:

> Nevarech et eyn hachayyim
> matzmichat pri hagafen
> venishor et serigei chayyenu
> bemasoret ha'am.
>
> Let us bless the source of life
> that ripens fruit on the vines
> as we weave the branches of our lives
> into the tradition.26

She sees such liturgical change as a mirror for prayers that

> make the old new and the new timeless, as we embrace ourselves into history. With this gesture, we enter that stream as it flows from the past and through us into the future; with this gesture we claim the tradition as we go forward to continue making it.27

Professor Falk's utilization of the active Hebrew form reflects her own "self-embrace" into the tradition; precisely

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25Falk, p. 35.

26Falk, p. 36.

27Falk, p. 35.

because traditional Jewish liturgy excludes women's experiences, we must bring ourselves in, boldly claiming that this is our tradition, and that "we go forward to continue making it."28

Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb of Albuquerque, New Mexico, is a charismatic and creative storyteller whose prayers articulate the longings and experiences of many Jewish women. Like the psalmist and the classical liturgist, she heaps adjective upon adjective, verb upon verb to praise God and give God's creatures a sense of their chosenness. In the introduction to one of the few published collections of her work, she has written:

> These prayers come from the need to speak, praise, exult, lament, wail, rejoice, and thank the ever-present spirit of all being that continues to sustain us. Women are giving voice to the powerful emotions of prayer that for so long were not recorded or heard by the Jewish community. We are filling these occasions with words and stories that come from both oral and written traditions, as well as from our need to unite these words to our own experience of God.29

Like Falk, Gottlieb proposes an alternative form to the classic beracha, and addresses God in the feminine: "B'rucha Yah Shechinah. . ." For Gottlieb, God remains primarily Other: She is Creator and Preserver, and the prayers Gottlieb creates resonate with Her praise. Yet God is also mighty,

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28See the responses to Falk's article and her reply in Moment 10:8 (September 1985), pp. 4-9.

29Lynn Gottlieb, "Speaking into the Silence," Response XIII:1-2 (Fall-Winter 1982) 19.

"Most awesome of the mighty."30 Unlike many feminists, Gottlieb retains and uses traditional Jewish names for God, including Elohim and Adonoi. For her, elohim is "allspirits",

> a name reflecting Elohim as grammatically plural and as theologically beyond all gender.. . All-spirits does not hover over the face of the waters as does Elohim in traditional translations of Genesis, but rather "breaks the inner waters," an image that reflects women's own experience of birth. The world is created by Elohim but not from her. She establishes neither hierarchies nor polarities and issues no commands. Without asserting "Let there be light," all-spirits simply says: "Light. . . behold light. . . it is good, " and, separating light and darkness, creates distinction without polarization. Light is distinguished but not divided from darkness.31

Gottlieb transforms an image that has been seen by many to be exclusively patriarchal, claiming it as an image for all who seek meaning in traditional texts. Such transvaluation of traditional God-language enables her to remain, liturgically, within the Jewish community, even as she asserts her independence from the patriarchal language of traditional Jewish prayer.

The experiments discussed above offer challenges to the fixed liturgical cycle. Wenig and Janowitz, like many "reformers" before them, confine most of their innovations to translations or paraphrases of the original Hebrew prayers. Falk and Gottlieb, on the other hand, challenge the very language of prayer, and suggest changing that language to

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30Gottlieb, "A Psalm", "Speaking," p. 21.

31Ellen Umansky on Gottlieb's theology, "Creating a Jewish Feminist Theology: Possibilities and Problems, "Anima 10:2 (Winter 1985), p.

reflect changing notions of God. Gottlieb also suggests one way to transvalue traditional God language, but implies that such language must be used in concert with other, less traditional forms of prayer.

Yet for some, liturgical change continues to seem impossible. At a recent national convocation for Jewish leaders to explore what is loosely termed "the Jewish Renewal Movement"32, simultaneous workshops were announced: one on "new rituals," and one to explore the possibility of creating a new siddur that would reflect the changing spiritual and political realities and priorities of many American Jews. All but one of the rabbis, educators, and lay leaders who attended the workshop on rituals were women; all of the rabbis, educators and lay leaders who attended the siddur group were men. When this discrepancy was discovered and subsequently discussed, the women agreed that they had "given up" on "reforming" the siddur; despite the enormous changes of the last decades, the synagogue remains a men's club. For most of the women who chose to explore new rituals, they could not imagine fixed prayers that could include their experience as Jewish women. They wanted instead to create rituals to sanctify the worlds in which they make their lives.33

32see Arthur Waskow, These Holy Sparks: The Rebirth of the Jewish People (New York: Harper and Row, 1983).

33B'nai Or Kallah, June 30-July 7, 1985, Radnor, PA.

Such women acknowledge that the siddur contains many ancient prayers, and represents centuries of Jews' spiritual search. They also acknowledge that for many, not only the order but the content of the prayers is irrevocably fixed and immutable. Those familiar with the range of Reform and liberal prayerbooks written during the last century may be no more optimistic about changing the traditional attitudes embedded in prayer; in spite of the many far-reaching and thoughtful changes and emendations made by those who have developed new liturgies, none of the commercially published prayerbooks presently in use in the English-speaking world have fully addressed the androcentrism of Jewish prayer. The challenge of prayer book reform has seemed to be too great for some who nevertheless seek to pray in a way that affirms their experiences both as Jews and as women.

Liturgists Wenig, Janowitz and Gottlieb acknowledge the limits of liturgical change, and have complemented their work in this area with the creation of new rituals that reflect the remarkable effloresence of life-cycle rituals created in the American Jewish community in the past fifteen years. Eager to celebrate events in their lives in a way that affirms both their Judaism and their femaleness, many committed Jews have created rituals for the onset of the menses, for welcoming an infant girl into the covenant, for weaning, and for marking the changes in a woman's life at the time of menopause. But not all the recently developed rituals

deal with the physical "stages" and changes of women's lives. Rosh Chodesh has been reclaimed as a day on which women were traditionally exempt from all but the most pressing labor, and across the country Jews have begun to gather together to welcome each month of the Hebrew year with prayer and song.

Siddur Nashim opens with a prayer that underscores the gap between women's experiences and traditional liturgical expression. Despite the many pages of regulations for menstruating women, the sages were not particularly concerned with the cycles of unmarried women, or with the menarche of young girls. And nowhere in Jewish literature (until very recently) do we find a discussion of or a celebration for menarche, for the monthly onset of menstruation, or for menopause.34 Yet for women, the majority of Jews, these are highly significant events that have deep spiritual resonance.

In the introduction to Siddur Nashim, Janowitz and Wenig encourage women to "look around and within themselves for God...," and they have taken their own advice. Wenig and Janowitz do begin with themselves, and the first prayer in the siddur is neither a translation nor an interpretation but an original prayer to be said on the first day of each

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34On menarche, see Mary Gendler, "Womantime: Cycles and Ceremonies", Menorah IV:5-6 (July/August 1983), pp.5-7 and Phyllis Berman, "Enter: A Woman", Menorah VI:1-2 (November/December 1984), pp. 1 ff. On menopause, see Irene Fine, Midlife and its Rite of Passage Ceremony (San Diego: Woman's Institute for Continuing Jewish Education,1983).

menstrual cycle. The prayer is accompanied by detailed notes, as well as an introduction that explains that while the prayer is constructed "in a traditional way" using classical liturgical formulae, referring to rabbinic concepts, and composed "almost entirely" of Biblical quotations, its metaphors and intent are highly untraditional.

The prayer is preceded by an original kavannah:

> You have woven through me
> the possibility of life
> and today it is unfolding within me.
>
> Woman is not as strong as the hills
> nor as enduring as the deserts.
> Yet, created in Your image,
> She has the greater gift.
> For what are the hills and deserts before Your womb?
>
> I know that for an offering to be acceptable it must be brought before You with the proper intentions. When I stand before You, may my body be pure and strong and my mind clear and deep. May I humble all my being before Your skirts as I bow down in Your Presence.35

In this kavannah, we are introduced to some of the themes and modes of interpretation that characterize the entire siddur. Using biblical motifs (the strength of the hills, the eternality of the desert), the prayer presents woman as mortal, but as a mortal who can create life bi'dmut elohim, in God's image. The Eternal, here, is most definitely female, as She is throughout Siddur Nashim. The petitioner does not ask God to purify her body, but that it will be regarded as pure as she stands before the Holy One. She seeks a body not only pure but also strong, complemented by a mind

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35Siddur Nashim, p. 95.

that is clear (presumably to perceive God's wonders) and deep (capable of wrestling with the mystery of God's oneness).

Drawing on the prescription in Numbers 28:11 for an additional Rosh Chodesh sacrifice, the writers construct their prayer as a petition to God for the acceptance of menstrual blood as a personal atonement offering. In their explanatory notes they write: ". . . blood is an appropriate atonement offering because the soul or breath of life is contained in the blood. By offering our blood we dedicate our life and our deeds to the service of God." They compare the monthly flow to the circumcision:

> It is a sign between You and Your daughters of our dependence on you. For you not only created us but breathed into us the breath of life, which is blood, and you renew every month that life within us.36

The prayer concludes with a messianic hope:

> May it be your will, Lord our God and God of our mothers and fathers, that the day soon come when Your Presence will return to dwell within us. Then our blood will no longer be needed for atonement. And all of our womb's strength will be directed towards replenishing the earth and assisting You in the deliverance of a full creation.37

Instead of looking forward to the restoration of the Temple, this prayer anticipates the presence of the Shekhina on

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36 Siddur Nashim, v-vi. Here they refer to the two stages in the creation of human beings articulated in Genesis 2:7.

37Siddur Nashim, v. The phrase "dwell within" is unfortunate, for it might lead one to conclude that this prayer asks for a Divine impregnation that would lead to nine months when no "atonement blood" flows. The authors would have been better advised to use dwell among.

earth, a time when

> Animal sacrifices and human martyrdom will come to a final end with the advent of the Messiah. In a post-Holocaust age, we cannot believe that the sacrifice of human life will still be expected of us in the Messianic days. All atonement will become unnecessary, for when God's Presence dwells within us we will no longer sin. Then God's commandments will be firmly implanted 'in our hearts and in our souls.' 38

This unique prayer not only claims women's most intimate biological experience as Jewish, but also uses that experience to reinterpret the traditional Jewish concepts of sin and atonement and messianism.

Catholic theologian Rosemary Ruether has written:

> Insofar as they appropriate their own experiences, such as the experience of menstruation, as a positive and creative rhythm of ebb and flow, they must do so in contradiction to the male hermeneutic of their own experience imposed upon them by the dominant culture. Their positive appropriation of their experience from their own vantage point becomes a covert critical counterculture over against the official culture.39

Wenig and Janowitz' prayer is offered in the context of reclaiming traditional liturgy for women's tefilah. However, their challenge to "the official culture" is overt, not covert. The very creation of the prayer challenges traditional liturgical expressions as it points out its failure to sanctify this basic human experience.

The first step in creating liturgy is to turn to texts to support and enhance and deepen the event or the passage

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38Siddur Nashim, vii.

39 Ruether in Russell, p. 114.

that is being celebrated. Yet when the authors of Siddur Nashim turned to traditional texts, they found no sources or teachings that affirmed the sanctity of this monthly occurence. Others who have begun to create new rituals are equally stymied by the limits of traditional sources. Not only are the cycles and passages that they wish to mark conspicuously absent from traditional Jewish texts, it is often very difficult to find texts that can be applied in any way to the rite of passage or event in question. So Wenig and Janowitz created their own prayer, drawing on their own experience as women and as Jews.

One of the most powerful of Gottlieb's texts is "A Celebration of Naming," written for National Women's Day, 1980. In this long piece she acknowledges how many of our mothers' names are lost to us, and boldly challenges the tradition of the fathers "by singing our own names."

. . .
which name to speak
she puts on a veil
isolates her eyes on a covered face
just the eyes passed down
no story
the mouth covered from telling
just the eyes passed down
. . .
she speaks
she speaks what she hears
she speaks what she has seen
which name to speak
there are so many
calling names
. . .
we break your idol
your commentaries
your exegesis
your homiletics

your image of us in you as not us

we break your idol
by singing our own names

sarahs and rachels and dinahs and miriams
and leahs and esthers
and tamars and devorahs and
liliths and havas
and endors and huldahs and hannahs and peninahs
and shifras and puahs
and serachs and yeheves and elishevas
and delilahs and jezbels [sic]
and naomis and ruths
and the wise women of tekoah
and the midwives and those who gathered the heart
offering
in song and dance and celebration with tears and cries
of longing
with pride and vision and deep calling names
we gather you
rising in us
. . .40

Gottlieb creates a ritual of naming that is both intensely Jewish and intensely female. She returns to what for her is the source, the essential text: Hebrew Scriptures. Like Phyllis Trible, Gottlieb implies that the Tanach tells the story of a people seeking God that is essentially truthful, and thereby transcends the flawed interpretation of patriarchal exegetes and commentators. She reclaims women's access to the text by ritually chanting women's names, first the names of Biblical women, and then the names of those women in the circle of women who participate in the ritual.

When women name themselves, only then do they become true subjects, not the objects of other's namings. Gottlieb

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40Gottlieb, "A Celebration of Naming" in "Speaking," pp. 24-25.

calls for an end to the idolatry of text and textual interpretation, and for a radical revisioning of Jewish religious experience that includes the names and the spirituality of all Jews. Gottlieb's chant reflects what I. Carter Heyward has coined "the theology of mutual relation"41:

> Only with a principle of mutuality can persons truly be affirmed as embodied subjects; as beings whose value lies not only in their freedom but also in their capacity to know and be known, to love and be loved; as beings whose destiny is communion.. . . Feminist consciousness stands as a corrective to a liberal philosophy that fails to understand human solidarity and the importance and need for mutuality. . . . Feminists are convinced that persons, women and men, are centers of life, capable (without contradiction) of being centered more and more in themselves as they are centered more and more beyond themselves in one another. They are convinced, too, that in this mystery of autonomy and relationality, equality and mutuality, lie the clues we need for the relations of persons to the whole universe in which we live42.

Women's experience, according to Heyward and Farley, is at its core, shared experience, and includes experiences of mutuality and of relationships, of mutual respect and ongoing commitment to an inclusive worldview.

Others who design contemporary ceremonies are less able, or are simply hesitant to frame their own prayers, perhaps sensing the "danger" in creating ritual:

> All rituals are paradoxical and dangerous enterprises, the traditional and the improvised, the sacred and the

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41Isabel Carter Heyward, The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1982).

42Margaret Farley, "Feminist Consciousness and the Interpretation of Scripture" in Russell, op cit., p. 47.

> secular. Paradoxical because rituals are conspicuously artificial and theatrical, yet designed to suggest the inevitability and absolute truth of their messages. Dangerous because when we are not convinced by a ritual we may become aware of ourselves as having made them up, thence on to the paralyzing realization that we have made up all our truths; our ceremonies, our most precious conceptions and convictions--all are mere invention, not inevitable understandings about the world at all but the results of mortals' imaginings.43

It is precisely the sense of danger that comes from creating one's own prayers that sends us to "timeless", "proven" texts. Yet creators of liberal Jewish liturgies have often turned to contemporary literature to enrich their prayers, implictly acknowledging that people in every age invent their own shields of words with which to defend themselves against the ravages of time. These words become new texts for each generation.

The diaries of Etty Hillesum are a rich and relatively unknown source for prayer. These diaries, which were first published in English in 1983, reveal a sensitive and deeply religious soul trying to make sense of the world around her. She began to write before her world began to crumble in the wake of the Nazi occupation of her country, and her entries remind the reader first of the occasionally solipsistic journals of her American contemporary, Anais Nin, and then of her Dutch compatriot, Anne Frank. Hillesum is an articulate and passionate seeker, and sections of her work read as prayers. In fact, she unwittingly echoes several themes of

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43Barbara Meyerhoff, Number Our Days (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), p. 86.

traditional Jewish liturgy in her diary entries, perhaps attesting to the universality of outcries to a God who is beyond human imaginings.

The following diary entry, which might be called the "prayer of the healer" reflects her deep commitment to people as well as her faith in God as the ultimate healer.

> How great are the needs of Your creatures on this earth, oh God. They sit there, talking quietly and quite unsuspecting, and suddenly their need erupts in all its nakedness. Then, there they are, bundles of human misery, desperate and unable to face life. And that's when my task begins. It is not enough simply to proclaim You, God, to commend You to the hearts of others. One must also clear the path towards You in them, God, and to do that one has to be a keen judge of the human soul. A trained psychologist. Ties to father and mother, youthful memories, dreams, guilt feelings, inferiority complexes and all the rest block the way. I embark on a slow voyage of exploration with everyone who comes to me. And I thank You for the great gift of being able to read people. Sometimes they seem to me like houses with open doors. I walk in and roam through passages and rooms, and every house is furnished a little differently and yet they are all of them the same, and every one must be turned into a dwelling dedicated to You, oh God. And I promise You, yes, I promise that I shall try to find a dwelling and a refuge for You in as many houses as possible. There are so many empty houses, and I shall prepare them all for You, the most honoured lodger. Please forgive this poor metaphor.44

We know all too little about this woman who perished in Auschwitz at age twenty-eight. We do know that she went to work as a typist in the offices of the Amsterdam Jewish Council, but when she became aware of the first round-up of

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44 Hillesum, pp. 173-4 (17 September 1942).

Jews to be sent to the work-camp at Westerbork, she elected be go with them. Three months later, she was granted a sick leave from Westerbork, and returned to Amsterdam to recuperate. While she was there, her lover died, and her friends urged her not to return to the camp. But she felt firmly that her fate was bound up with her people, and subsequently returned to the camp. On 7 September 1943, Etty, her parents and one of her brothers were placed on a transport for Auschwitz, where she died two months later.

In the fall before her death, she wrote:

> We have embraced a new reality and everything has taken on new colours and new emphases. And between our eyes and hands and mouths there now flows a constant stream of tenderness, a stream in which all petty desires seem to have been extinguished. All that matters now is to be kind to each other with all the goodness that is in us. And every encounter is also a farewell.
>
> I so love being with people. It is as if my own intensity draws what is best and deepest right out of them: they open up before me, every human being a new story, told to me by life itself. And my eyes simply read on joyfully. Life has confided so many stories to me, I shall have to retell them to people who cannot read the book of life itself.45

These words exemplify the theology of mutuality as articulated by Margaret Farley and I. Carter Heyward: here Hillesum's words become a new text.

The works of two Jewish poets, Adrienne Rich and Marge Piercy, have been used in many new rituals. Rich has acknowledged that while women have always marked events in their

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45Hillesum, p. 139 and 191-92 (July and 4 October 1942).

lives and in the lives of others, there exist no supportive structures, no fixed ceremonies for many of the events and passages of women's lives.

> I call you in Nebraska. . .
> and we make a promise to talk
> this year, about growing older
>
> and I think: we're making a pledge.
> Though not much in books of ritual
> is useful between women
> 46

Rich's own words become a frame for women's prayers for they affirm women's involvement in and experiences of the worlds beyond them, the worlds within them, and the worlds between them. In many ways, Rich's work articulates the "theology of mutuality" implicit in Buber's work and further developed by Heyward. 47

In addition to affirming the connection between women, Rich also affirms women as the center of their own universe, reflecting a theology of immanence articulated, among others, by Starhawk.48 The conclusion of Rich's powerful "Transcendental Etude" describes a woman turning away from the cacaphony of the world's expectations of women and turning

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46Adrienne Rich, "For Julia in Nebraska," A Wild Patience has Taken me This Far: Poems 1978-1981. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1981), p. 16.

47 See especially "Origins and History of Consciousness," The Dream of a Common Language (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978) pp. 7-9, and Carter Heyward, The Redemption of God.

48Starhawk [Miriam Simos], Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics (Boston: Beacon Press, 1982) and The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979).

towards what is often considered, demeaningly, "women's work": the piecing together of useless odds and ends, scraps that when sewn together, make a warm and beautiful quilt. The poet's words focus our attention on the larger, indeed the ultimate importance of such labor:

> Vision begins to happen in such a life
> as if a woman quietly walked away
> from the argument and jargon in a room
> and sitting down in the kitchen, began turning in her lap
> bits of yarn, calico and velvet scraps,
> laying them out absently on the scrubbed boards
> in the lamplight, with small rainbow-colored shells
> sent in cotton-wool from somewhere far away,
> and skeins of milkweed from the nearest meadow--
> original domestic silk, the finest findings--
> and the darkblue petal of the petunia,
> and the dry darkbrown lace of seaweed;
> not forgotten either, the shed silver
> whisker of the cat,
> the spiral of paper-wasp-nest curling
> beside the finch's yellow feather.
> Such a composition has nothing to do with eternity,
> the striving for greatness, brilliance--
> only with the musing of a mind
> one with her body, experienced fingers quietly pushing
> dark against bright, silk against roughness,
> pulling the tenets of a life together
> with no mere will to mastery,
> only care for the many-lived, unending
> forms in which she finds herself,
> becoming now the sherd of broken glass
> slicing light in a corner, dangerous
> to flesh, now the plentiful, soft leaf
> that wrapped around the throbbing finger, soothes the wound;
> and now the stone foundation, rockshelf further
> forming underneath everything that grows.49

Rich's "dream of a common language" is shared by all who wrestle with the words of prayer, and her own words act as

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49Rich, "Transcendental Etude", The Dream of a Common Language, pp. 76-77.

wings for the prayers of many who feel themselves to be part of the ultimate: "the. . . rockshelf further forming underneath everything that grows."50

Marge Piercy writes of women's need to name themselves and their world:

> I am pregnant with certain deaths
> of women who choked before they
> could speak their names
> could know their names
> before they had names to know.51

And she names them, by celebrating the richness and variety of women's experience:

> In another
> life, dear sister, I too would bear six fat
> children. In another life, my sister, I too
> would love another woman and raise one child
> together as if that pushed from both our wombs.
> In another life, sister, I too would dwell
> solitary and splendid as a lighthouse on the rocks
> or be born to mate for life like the faithful goose.
> Praise all our choices. Praise any woman
> who chooses, and make safe her choice.48

50See Carol Christ's insightful analysis of Rich's poetry as a source for spirituality. Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers On Spiritual Quest (Boston: Beacon Press, 1980), p. 76-96.

51Marge Piercy, "They Inhabit Me," My Mother's Body (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), p. 3.

48 Piercy, "The Sabbath of Mutual Respect"Circles on the Water: Selected Poems of Marge Piercy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), p. 271.

Piercy's words praise not God, but God's creation, she who is created in God's image. Until they have claimed their own names and their own experience, many women they cannot turn to God. By naming a range of women's choices, in this case, choices about how and with whom to live and love, Piercy's words affirm women's lives and choices and are thus natural inclusions in rituals that celebrate life passages. Her poetry provides a textual framework and support when traditional texts fail.

Contemporary women's poetry is incorporated in new rituals, but contemporary fiction can become the actual source of women's ritual. For Claire Satlof, the raison d'etre of the works of such writers as Esther Broner and Joanne Greenberg is their reclamation of the power to name women's experience through women's words, thus creating ritual.

> Yet more than the loss of a name of one's own, lack of the very power to name is the most terrifying aspect of the Jewish woman's status until now, and the one Jewish feminist fiction eminently seeks to counteract. The ritual act of naming entails more than bestowing names on children; it includes the acts of creating images and symbols, interpreting perceived reality, telling personal and communal stories and rituals. In other words, one who controls names controls the language. And if history is the product of its recordings, and tradition the accumulation of its tellings, language controls reality, for it is the means by which we conceive and perceive the world.49

Satlof points out that the very act of writing, of claiming

49Claire R. Satlof, "History, Fiction and the Tradition: Creating a Jewish Feminist Poetic" in Heschel, p. 190.

one's own voice, forming one's own words, and speaking in one's own, chosen name, is a revolutionary act for women, and especially for Jewish women, steeped as they are in a patriarchal culture that, for the most part, denies women the power to name. She continues:

> Writing itself, for feminists, is a form of rebellion, usurpation, or re-visioning; it also marks the beginning of a new ritualization and a new myth-making, for language is intimately bound up with religious ritual. More than the vehicle for performing rituals, language establishes the reality of myth. 50

The work of novelist and teacher Esther Broner has established her as the boldest myth-maker writing today. In A Weave of Women, Broner creates a community of women who forthrightly claim the prophetic tradition as their own even as they transform it with their highly unconventional rituals and ceremonies. In this loosely-constructed tale of the interweaving of the lives of several very different women, these women of the stone house in Jerusalem develop their own mitzvot, their own Torah, and their own eschatological vision.51 Together, Broner's characters create rituals that order the chaos of their lives. Some of their rituals provide a feminist corrective to a traditional male rite; others begin where Jewish tradition ends; all of their rituals challenge the very essence of patriarchal culture. Broner's

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50Satlof, p. 193.

51Esther Broner, A Weave of Women (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), pp. 280-281; 199-200.

vision is thoroughly grounded in a Jewish worldview that resonates with irreconcilable opposites: the unbending halacha that is complemented by the folkloric aggadah; the sacred round of ancient agricultural feasts that have been recast to reflect the unfolding relationship between God and the Jewish people; a vision of world peace that is challenged by the reality of a national home that has become an international battlefield; an ancient commitment to justice undercut by thousands of years of denial of the essential humanity of Jewish women. The women's rituals recast these dichotomies into their own terms; they establish a tribunal to effect herem when one among them breaks their covenant; they reclaim their female bodies by banishing false images and naming one another; they plan to protect women's right to self-determination. Together, they assist in the delivery of a new baby, and they sanctify both the new-born and the mother in an intimate ceremony. Later, they join together to initiate the infant into the ancient covenant between the Jewish people and God. In Weave of Women, ritual becomes the medium through which Broner's characters approach life.

Broner builds on the essential Jewish sensibility that by ordering one's life through ritual and celebration one invests life with meaning. Traditionally, that meaning comes through the performance of mitzvot that grant humans an opportunity to demonstrate their love for and commitment to God. For Broner, the creation and repetition of their own

rituals empowers women to deliberately transform their own reality.

Broner's rituals are collective in their conception and in their realization. While one of women in her story, Simcha, acts as the catalyst for many of the rituals, the women's spirits are ultimately kindled not by Simcha's invocations, but by their own sense of collective power. Their union invokes the Shekinah, and Her presence in their midst simply fuels the fire of the women's connection.

For many Jewish women, Broner's vision transcends the realm of literary fantasy and is seen as a blueprint for the enactment of women's rituals. Claire Satlof thinks that this is not merely accidental:

> The extreme self-consciousness of the literary form, the constant references to language and literature make clear that these authors [Joanne Greenberg, Rhoda Lerman, Cynthia Ozick, Nessa Rappoport, and others, as well as Broner] are offering an alternative to an inadequate reality which is much more than just another woman's ritual. Even while these texts provide the necessary framework for understanding the significance of the new ritual forms, they do not depict the forms; they embody them.
>
> Herein lies the power of the works' contribution to Jewish feminism. ... Jewish feminist texts . . . are actual agents of change in an uncompleted society, that of contemporary Judaism. They effect the changes they portray, not merely redistributing roles, but realigning and revaluing the realms of ritual and history.52

Satlof suggests that literature does not imitate, but rather influences life, that the rituals described in and embodied

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52Satlof, p. 193.

in much of contemporary Jewish feminist literature are not only models for ritual and liturgical change but actually become powerful new myths. These writings, the texts of women's lives, become new texts, filling in the gaps of tradition, forming delicate letters on new scrolls.

The words of women, woven into prayers and poems and fabulous stories, demand a hearing. These words, articulating as they do both the realities and the dreams of women's lives, become the source of new texts. For some women, the most natural approach to self-expression is through traditional texts, either by translating or reinterpreting the words of the fathers. Others have wrestled with the fathers long enough, and now claim their right to use their own words, to say their own names, to name their own worlds. As women reach out to one another, they find God; as they reach out to God, they discover God in others. Each naming is a beginning, "a whole new poetry beginning here."[53]

53Rich, "Transcendental Etude," Dream, p. 76.

IV: TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF INTEGRITY

> A feminist theology of Judaism must resonate with women's experience, must ground women's lives in a Jewish dimension. The outcome may be new or revised traditions, observances, and prayers. But above all, in the future when a woman looks to Judaism, she should not only see a reflection of the experiences of Jewish men.1

> It is true that modernity has assaulted traditional Judaism. It has been a destructive force in many ways. Yet there is another sense in which it, too, is acting as a channel for the echoing voice of Sinai. For what purpose, to teach just what lesson, to reveal what new facet of Torah, have these particular trials and questions come to the Jewish people just now? As some sources explain, just as the grape has to be crushed and squeezed to give forth wine, so the Jewish people need to endure exile to bring out a higher essence. Galut, the Hebrew word for exile, is thereby related to the root galah "to reveal"--in the crucible of modernity, what new forces can be brought forth, what new light revealed?2

In the first chapter of this thesis, we explored traditional Jewish texts as the primary historical, theological and mythic source for the Jewish people throughout the centuries. We concluded that Torah, in its broadest sense, is, in the words of Cynthia Ozick, "frayed," for the ideal of justice that is at the core of Torah does not apply to all

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1Susannah Heschel, "Introduction," On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader (New York: Schocken, 1983), xxxii.

2Susan Handelman, "Inscribe Me in Your Book," Sh'ma 15:298 (4 October 1985), 142.

Jews. The Jewish tradition, written and codified by men, does not treat Jewish women as equals; like the cultures that have surrounded the Jews throughout many centuries of development, Jewish culture, Jewish religion and Jewish life reflect a patriarchal worldview characterized by androcentric values. The second and third chapters explored Jewish women's lives and Jewish women's writings as new sources of Torah. This final chapter will evaluate these new sources of Torah as a key to the development of a Judaism for all Jews, a Judaism that is built upon what I shall call a theology of integrity.

This chapter explores the theology of integrity by examining the implications of such a thought-system on the three essential categories for Jewish inquiry: Israel, God, and Torah. The theology of integrity envisions a community comprised of many peoples with many experiences and many views who come together as one people in service to One God. What is the nature of such a community? What is the nature and image of the God to whom such Jews pray? And how does one redefine Torah in such a context? Our discussion begins with Israel, for community is an essential building block for this theology. We will continue by examining the nature and place of God in such a theology. The theology of integrity grows directly out of the commitment to developing new sources of texts discussed in Chapters II and III. We will conclude with a discussion of the nature and place of

Torah in such a theology.

I. ISRAEL

A. Jewish Women's Spiritual Quest and the Quest for Community

Carol Christ's ground-breaking work, Diving Deep and Surfacing analyses women's fiction and poetry as reflections of and sources for women's spirituality. Christ's examination of five contemporary writers leads her to suggest that women's spiritual quests often begin with an "experience of nothingness", a sense of "emptiness in their own lives--in self-hatred, in self-negation, and in being a victim....Experiencing nothingness, women reject conventional solutions and question the meaning of their lives, thus opening themselves to the revelation of deeper sources of power and value." This sense of emptiness can lead to an "awakening," which can develop into a mystical identification which may be experienced as a union with nature or a connection with others. This mystical identification often leads to a new naming "of self and reality that articulates the new orientation to self and world. . . . " This process of spiritual development may be linear, or may unfold in other ways. Yet "it should not be assumed that a woman can ever be through with the experience of nothingness. As long as she lives--and especially in a male-centered society--the

experience of nothingness will reappear."3

Of the five writers that Christ examines, only one, Adrienne Rich, is a Jew, and Christ does not discuss any of Rich's explictly Jewish work.4 Are the categories Christ suggests, the experience of nothingness, awakening, mystical identification, and new naming appropriate for Jewish women's "quests"? Does "women's quest" transcend religious boundaries? Or, must Jewish women's quests differ because of the essential connections between Jewish women and the Jewish people?

When we speak of Jewish women's experiences we are always speaking of women's experiences as members of, or as outcasts from, the people Israel. Glueckel could not have imagined life beyond the bounds of community. As a child and then as a young bride, she lived with her parents and siblings. She then lived with her husband and growing children. Her first husband died, and when she remarried, she brought her new husband to live with her and her children. And although she does not write of it specifically, even as she pens her memoirs to her children after the death of her second husband, one imagines her living in the house of one of those offspring. Throughout her life, her

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3Carol P. Christ, Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest (Boston: Beacon Press, 1980), pp. 13-14.

4See for example, Adrienne Rich, Sources (Woodside, CA: The Heyeck Press, 1983).

social, religious and economic worlds were made up of Jews--even her travels were between one Jewish community and another.

Pauline Wengeroff's life was also intensely familial and communal. She yearned for the restitution of a supportive community, a Jewish community that might be able to meet her husband's need for modernization while also preserving some of the forms of traditional life that she held so dear. In spite of their political and religious differences, both Sarah Schenirer and Puah Rakowski were totally committed to building the future of the Jewish people, and both saw the future of the Jewish community absolutely dependent upon the creation of a communal consciousness, and a shared appreciation for the depth and the wealth of the tradition that binds Jews together. Bertha Pappenheim worked to equalize the power between women and men in the Jewish community, both directly through the Juedischer Frauenbund and more subtly at Isenberg, the rehabilitation center for homeless women and their children. For each of these women, their Jewishness was rooted in their commonality with other Jews, and their spiritual quest was inextricably bound into and was expressed by their attachment to and involvement in that community.

B.From a Community of Jews to a Community of Women--and Back

Yet Pappenheim also had a vision of another community: a community within a community, a community of Jewish women. Working for change within the larger am, the members of the Frauenbund, like their American counterparts, the members of the National Council of Jewish Women, had a clear sense of connection to one another, not only as Jews but also as women. And while Pappenheim worked to better women's lives through the Juedischer Frauenbund, she also established and oversaw the daily workings of Isenberg, the resident community where women served as counselors, teachers, guides, mentors and friends to other women. It is reasonable to conjecture that many of the women with whom Pappenheim worked, both in the Frauenbund and at Isenburg, were familiar with the "experience of nothingness," whether it was as recognition of the emptiness of one's life as a bourgeois matron whose children are grown and whose life revolves around entertainment and consumption, or by finding oneself destitute and outcast in a strange city. In their loneliness and isolation, such women may have sought the familiar comforts of community. But if such women turned to the established Jewish community, seeking spiritual or material support, what might they have encountered? Certainly, Jewish communal norms have always included help for the widow and the orphan, but such dependents have remained on the periphery of Jewish communal life. Women, as women, have no real place in the community except as daughters of, wives of, or

widows of men. Throughout Jewish history, men have controlled Jewish social, economic, and religious life; women have served and supported the men who made the rules and oversaw the rituals of the community.

For isolated or alienated women, community was the answer, but not the Jewish community as it exists. Rather, an alternative, female Jewish community would better begin to meet their spiritual needs. Thus for many, the first step towards spiritual awakening, the experience of a deep sense of nothingness, was followed by a connection with other Jewish women. That connection and subsequent identification leads to a "new naming," a reformulation of one's identity, yet not as an individual, as Christ suggests, but as a member of group with a long history of wandering and searching for meaning. Through identification with other Jewish women, these women were able to name themselves, as Jews and as women. For these women and many like them, the community of Jewish women becomes the community they seek; Jewish women become Israel. Jewish women become the first (and perhaps primary) point of identification for those seeking a way towards connection with their people. 5

Like the women whose biographies are presented in Chapter II, the writers we explored in Chapter III also

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5 See Janice Raymond, "Female Friendship and Feminist Ethics" in Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, Christine E. Gudorf, and Mary D. Pellauer, Women's Consciousness, Women's Conscience (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), p. 166-172.

struggle with finding a place in Jewish community, both as it presently exists and with their different visions of what it might become. Yet most of these writers focus on a community of Jewish women, not a community that includes Jewish women and men. The editors of Siddur Nashim envision a commmunity of women who can pray together to a God described primarily with female images, a community whose prayer incorporates the experiences of women's lives. Their prayers seem to be for women only, thus merely "updating" the traditional contention that women and men ought to pray separately.

Is "traditional Judaism," then, for men only and "feminist Judaism" for women only? Lynn Gottlieb's work fails to address this question. Marcia Falk, anticipating that her efforts at reforming prayer language will be immediately attacked as "separatist," writes that her proposals for reform are offered "In the name of monotheism, [and] for the sake of unity. . ."6 For her, liturgical reform is a prerequisite for the preservation of a Jewish community of women and men; without such reform, Judaism will cease to be a living tradition.

Rich and Broner concern themselves almost exclusively with the worlds of women. Yet for both of them, this is a conscious, political act. Rich explains her keen sense of

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6Marcia Falk, "What About God? New Blessings for Old Wine," Moment (March 1985), 35.

men's and women's worlds in her poem, "Natural Resources":

> Could you imagine a world of women only,
> the interviewer asked. Can you imagine
>
> a world where women are absent. (He believed
> he was joking.) Yet I have to imagine
>
> at one and the same moment, both. Because
> I live in both. Can you imagine,
>
> the interviewer asked, a world of men?
> (He thought he was joking.) If so, then,
>
> a world where men are absent?
> Absently, wearily, I answered: Yes.7

This excerpt underscores Christ's point about women's perpetual tendency to be overwhelmed by a sense of not belonging: women live in a world not of their own making. Yet by intentionally creating communities of women, women are creating their own worlds, and claiming that those communities "name" them, i.e. give them an identity, and allow them to name their experiences in a way that was impossible when they "lived" exclusively in "the world of men."

Until very recently, Judaism has been "a world of men," "a world where women were absent." That is changing, but we are still locked in the struggle to determine the shape of this change. Are Jewish women condemned to live forever in two worlds, split between two communities, between the vibrant world of female ritual described by

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7Adrienne Rich, "Natural Resources," The Dream of A Common Language: Poems 1974-1977 (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1978), p. 61.

Broner and prescribed by some of Gottlieb's prayers and the "dead" world of "frozen metaphors" and calcified liturgical language dreaded by Falk?8 Or is the women's community only a way-station on the road to the creation of a Judaism that echoes the experiences and meets the needs of all members of the Jewish community?

Both Carol Ochs and Drorah Setel advise us to look beyond the polarized thinking that characterizes much traditional scholarship, and to turn from "either/or" to a consideration of "both/and."9 Few would exclude from am Yisrael the many Orthodox Jews (both men and women) who maintain that the separation of the sexes both in the synagogue and in the world is Divinely ordained. If we reject an either/or way of looking at the Jewish community, we will recognize that there is also a place in the Jewish community for those Jewish women whose rituals, prayers and lifestyles reflect an understanding of Judaism that is integrally bound to their understanding of themselves as women and their connections to other Jewish women. And while their rituals, prayers, and lives may exclude men,

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8Falk, "New Blessings" and "Response" in Moment X:8 (September 1985), pp7-8.

9 See Carol Ochs, Behind the Sex of God (Boston: Beacon Press,1977), pp. 129 ff. and Drorah Setel, "Feminist Insights and the Question of Method," Feminist Perspectives On Biblical Scholarship, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), p. 35-42. See also Setel, "More than Just Add Women and Stir. . .", p. 12, and Sheila Peltz Weinberg, "Creating a New Paradigm," Genesis II XV:5 (April 1984), pp. 12,16.

these women are no less Jewish than their Orthodox sisters and brothers. A basic premise of the theology of integrity is that Am Yisrael must include all who call themselves Jews.10

This does not mean, however, that an Orthodoxy that demands the separation of the sexes and a radical feminism that demands a separation of the sexes, are the only two options that exist. In fact, I would argue that despite the historical precedent of a radical separation of men and women in Jewish religious life (and social and economic life as well), any constellation of Jewish practices, that is, any Jewish communal "life-style" that fails to bring women and men together for prayer, celebration, mourning and dancing in a way that affirms the unique and shared gifts of both men and women, any Judaism that denies that women and men are created b'tzelem Elohim is an unacceptable form of Judaism, a Judaism lacking in integrity. The core of Judaism is an ethical monotheism that must affirm not only God, but must also affirm the inherent worth and goodness and, most importantly, the inherent holiness of each Jew's body, each Jew's religious expression, and each

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10I do exclude the so-called "Jewish Christians" or "messianic Jews," who will agree that their identity as Christians or as messianists is ultimately more important than is their identity as Jews. If there are women (or men) whose gender identity is more important than their Jewish identity and their commitment to the Jewish people, (not necessarily as it is, but as it can, and for some, must become), then these people may be "drawing a circle that keeps them[selves] out." (apologies to Emily Dickinson).

Jew's power. Thus, for Judaism to survive, there must be a middle ground between the separatism of the Orthodox and the separatism of the radical feminists. There must be a space for and a means for men and women to pray and celebrate and mourn together as Jews, in a way that includes the historic as well as the contemporary experience of representatives of the entire Jewish people. There are, I believe, times and places when women need to be only with women and when men need to be only with men, just as there are times when we prefer the intimacy and privacy of the family over the support of the larger community. But a Jewish community by its very definition must not exclude those who wish to be counted as Jews, nor ought it deny any Jew access to participation in a wide range of Jewish experiences. Am Yisrael will be torn asunder unless men and women, separately and together, begin to listen to the voices within them that have been silent for so long.

We are just beginning to formulate the words, to sing the syllables, to create the prayers, and to design the rituals to answer this great need. In havurot, at camps, and at weekend retreats, small groups of Jews are comning together with the explicit intention of becoming, however briefly, a community of shared commitment to and responsibility for creating an accessible, egalitarian Judaism. The initiators of such groups are often members of the "Woodstock generation," men and women who were exposed to and/or

involved in a range of social and religious communal experiments in the 1960s and early 1970s. For many who seek connection with other Jews, on either a temporary or permanent basis, "the spiritual is political," i.e. Jewish religious concerns are inextricable from one's political life and commitments. In describing one such community, Martha Acklelsberg, Professor of Goverment at Smith College, has written,

> 'Politics'. . . is properly understood as the attempt to create . . . the conditions for the experience of wholeness, for the attainment of spiritual fulfillment. Thus, rather than seeing politics and spirituality as two oppositional impulses, we have come to see them (and to see the roots of this insight in both feminist and Jewish tradition) as two expressions of the same impulse: an impulse toward wholeness and fulfillment.11

"Community building," in such a context, is both the end and the means of such a group. Such groups usually pray and celebrate together, either on a regular or on a haphazard basis. But the essential commitment to building a Jewish community catalyses the participation of each member. Such groups exist in many places across the country, but the spirit that brings young and old, traditionalist and radical together must be nurtured. We are just beginning to create communities that exemplify a theology of integrity. The process must continue; the future of Israel depends on it.

11Martha Acklesberg, "Spirituality, Community, and Politics: B'not Esh and the Feminist Reconstruction of Judaism," Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, forthcoming. (I am grateful to Professor Ackelsberg for sharing this manuscript with me prior to its publication.)

II. GOD

> If we are to worship with other people, we must have a common language--a set of images and symbols---that we can share. Yet if the purpose of public prayer is not simply feeling at one with the community of Israel but is also achieving communion with the Divine, then these images and symbols must have personal meaning and must reflect both the experiences of those around us and our own experiences.12

Ellen Umansky articulates one of the most difficult challenges for the Jewish feminist: the language, symbolism, and imagery of prayer. Once we acknowledge the heterogeneity of the Jewish community, what are the implications of this heterogenity for the language we use for God and God's people?

The first question for the feminist who wishes to address God is the problem of what to call God. The Jewish tradition is rich with names of and names for God, but many women who want to begin to pray can no longer call God what has become for them a male or masculine name.13 Both Elohim and Adonai, the two most common names for God in the Tanach, have masculine associations: Elohim includes El, a Canaanite god name. In addition to its traditional "meaning" as my or simply the Lord, Adonai is too loudly echoed in the modern

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12Ellen Umansky, "(Re)Imaging the Divine," Response XIII:1-2 (Fall-Winter 1982),p. 114.

13For a comprehensive descriptive listing of traditional names of God, see Louis Jacobs, A Jewish Theology (NY:Behrman House, Inc, 1973), Chapter X.

Hebrew adon (sir) to be "reclaimed" by most women. Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb is alone among feminist liturgists in her assertion that these God names transcend the male-gender identification that has accrued to them over the ages.14 The wealth of God names, or nicknames, in rabbinic literature offers no solution, for virtually none of them (except the controversial Shekhina), is a feminine form.15 That is, all these names, whether or not they have an inherent gender (and most, e.g. ha makom, do not) are grammatically masculine nouns, which require masculine adjectives, verbs, etc. Other names are blatantly masculine, such as melech, and av, neither of which have any feminine equivalent as Jewish names for God. (The feminine equivalent of king is, of course, queen. Yet melechet hashamayim [Jeremiah 7:18; cf. 44:17] is considered to be a reference to a Canaanite goddess for whom Israelite women prepare cakes, thereby committing idolatry).16 Thus God is always described in "male" terms,

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14Ellen Umansky, "Creating a Jewish Feminist Theology:Problem and Possibilities" Anima,p. 130.

15Rachmana does appear, but is not well-known. Professor Jonathan Sarna has suggested Even Yisrael (rock of Israel), which is grammatically feminine, but, like tzur Yisrael, is typically "masculine" in meaning. On the Shekhina, see Falk, p. 35 (who rejects the appelation), and Gottlieb, "Women and the Recipes of Torah", p. 2 (who reclaims it).

16Rosemary Ruether's pointed response to the critique of Canaanite religions embedded in the Bible may be illuminating here. She writes, "By allowing Canaanite religion to criticise Hebrew religion rather than only the reverse, by allowing minority Biblical and Christian traditions to criticise dominant traditions, one begins to discover lost critical principles. One senses suppressed human potential lurking

even if some concede that this "God of Israel . . . is a relatively genderless male deity. . . "(emphasis mine).17

Ellen Umansky has asked,

> Why do we address the Divine as Our Father and Our King but not as Our Queen and Our Mother? If it is a matter of convenience, surely it is as "convenient" to use feminine nouns and pronouns as it is to use those that are masculine. If it is a matter of convention, surely that convention can be changed (in both the siddur and in our private prayers.) But if it is a matter of conviction, whether conscious or not, that God really is male and therefore is properly imaged as such, then we and our ancestors have not been entirely honest with others or with ourselves, for we claim that God's nature(in and of itself) is unknowable, that religious language is metaphorical rather than literal, and that we are forced to speak of God as if He were human because human language is all that is available to us.18

Umansky leads us to the core of the matter: the plethora of God's names reflect our attempt to name what cannot be named. We are trapped in the web of words that is our primary form of communication with one another. We seek to name God even as we acknowledge that no name can reflect God's essence. But precisely because of our dependence upon

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17 Rabbi Arthur Green patronizingly concludes his sentence: "Jews do not think, to put it bluntly, of God as a being with a male sex organ. . . " "Keeping Feminist Creativity Jewish," Sh'ma 16:305 (10 January 1986), p.35. See also Arlene Agus' response, "Keeping Jewish Creativity Feminist" in the same issue, pp. 38-40, and Umansky, "(Re)Imaging...", p. 115.

18Ellen Umansky, "(Re)Imaging the Divine," pp. 111-112.

language, we continue to search for words to reach towards the One who is beyond all naming.

Troubled by the overwhelmingly male presentation of God, some women have envisioned God as female. So why not simply call God Goddess? This, in effect, is what Janowitz and Wenig propose in Siddur Nashim as they address their prayers to God. By emphasizing the so-called "feminine" attributes of the divine without denying the traditional "masculine" attributes, they create an image of the Deity which is both more complex and more complete than the God who is addressed and imaged by most Jews. And the images and attributes they utilize all have their source in Jewish tradition. But does that make God a Goddess?

In an important article, Carol Christ explains the positive response of many American women to the the suggestion that a female God, or Goddess, is not only a sensible but a highly efficacious symbolic focus for their spiritual lives. In "Why Women need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological, and Political Reflections," Christ proposes that the Goddess is compelling because this female symbol of power and compassion affirms women's individual and collective power, affirms the female body and its cycles, offers a "positive valuation of will" by personifying "engery as power", and celebrates women's connections to one another.19-

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19Carol P. Christ, "Why Women Need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological, and Political Reflections," Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion, ed. Carol

She concludes:

> The symbol of Goddess has much to offer women who are struggling to be rid of the. . .devaluation of female power, denigration of the female body, distrust of female will, and denial of the women's bonds and the heritage that have been engendered by patriarchal religion. As women struggle to create a new culture in which women's power, bodies, will and bonds are celebrated, it seems natural that the Goddess would reemerge as symbol of the newfound beauty, strength, and power of women.20

But do Jewish women need the Goddess? Are Jewish women simply seeking a recognizable female deity? 21 Some who have been intrigued and challenged by the movement describ-

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20Christ, "Why Women Need the Goddess," p. 286. Also Naomi Goldenberg's remarks on the impossibility of constructing a feminist iconography or image system in The End of God (Ottowa: University of Ottowa Press, 1982), ix-x.

21A number of years ago, I was a member of a small group of friends who met on a regular basis to discuss issues of interest to us as Jewish women, and distinctly remember the broad range of responses to Christ's article. Some of us were intrigued, others were challenged by this reappropriation of a symbol rejected thousands of years ago by our ancestors (or at least by those ancestors who controlled the community), still others were amused by this self-acclaimed "post--Christian's" attempt to create a symbol to replace the symbols she had rejected. Those in the last group rejected the Goddess, regardless of how she makes women feel, as avodah zarah, idolatry. This group was articulating the traditional Jewish view on goddesses who were seen primarily in opposition to Adonai/Elohim. See Raphael Patai, The Hebrew Goddess (New York: Avon Books, 1978), especially Chapters I-V. For a fuller description of this group and our collective study, see the excerpt from a paper I delivered at the National Women's Studies Association, May 1980, "Jewish Women's Studies Beyond the Classroom: Recovering the Book of Esther," in Susan Weidman Schneider, Jewish and Female: Choices and Changes in our Lives Today (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), pp. 190-192.

ed by Christ and by Starhawk (a priestess of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess)22, have attempted to incorporate the recognition and affirmation of women's power, women's bodies, women's spiritual energy, and women's connection into Jewish ritual by reclaiming what they call the "lost" Goddess tradition in Judaism. They follow the lead of scholars such as Raphael Patai, who has written that,

> contrary to the generally held view, the religion of the Hebrews and the Jews was never without at least a hint of the feminine in its God-concept.. . .Only in the most recent times, did the female element disappear from the Jewish God-concept to leave it centered upon a striclty monotheistic, spiritual and non-corporeal, but nevertheless masculine, godhead.23

Writers such as rabbinical student Jane Litwoman have argued that goddess imagery need not compete with traditional God imagery, but should be seen as complementing an incomplete vision of the Divine. Although she does not cite any sources for her claim, she contends that as the God idea developed through Israelite history,

> . . . while . . . various tribal gods were incorporated into the One Deity, Yahweh, the once equally worshipped tribal goddesses were excluded. This rejection of female metaphor has been a corrupting force in Jewish monotheism ever since. It is the most signifi-

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22See Starhawk [Miriam Simos], The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979) and Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics (Boston: Beacon Press: 1982).

23Patai, pp. 258-9.

cant and pervasive form of Jewish idolatry.24 Litwoman and others have reclaimed the word elilah as a historical God name, thus attempting, in Hebrew, what the editors of Siddur Nashim attempted in English: to feminize God.25 However, this diminuitive appelation undercuts rather than promotes their purpose of imaging God as a powerful female figure who serves as a model for Jewish women. Despite Litwoman's remarks to the contrary, elilah finally resonates not with the female power of the single Divine reality, but with female power that is antithetical to traditional Jewish ideas of God. In addition, as Marcia Falk has pointed out, such "cross-dressing" masks the larger issue of God's patriarchal authoritarianism.26

Thus the challenge of "re-imaging" God remains. The "male" names of God, precisely because they are not "genderless," reflect an image that may be, as Litwoman suggests, idolatrous; in any case, these names reflect a God that a growing number of thoughtful and well-educated

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24Jane R. Litwoman, "'God' and 'Goddess' are One," Sh'ma 15:286 (25 January 1985), pp. 43-44. See also Plaskow, "The Right Question is Theological," p. 230.

25 Litwoman has been one of the leaders of what might be called the "elilah movement." Her bold and pioneering work has challenged many to reevalute long-held yet never-examined concepts of the God to whom they pray. See Ma'ariv, Shabbat Shacharit, and a Pesach Hagadah, for which she served as the sole or primary editor, in the author's private collection.

26See Rosemary Ruether, Womanguides: Readings Towards a Feminist Theology (Boston: Beacon Press,1985), p. 8.

Jews can no longer see as <u>their</u> God.27 Burt Jacobson, Rabbi of Congregation Kehilla in San Francisco, has pioneered in the creation of liturgy that forthrightly addresses this problem. He has described his "severe personal religious crisis. . ." resulting from his realization that

> the classical Jewish image of God that I had accepted for years [was] a God who is pictured as authoritarian and external to the human being. In the tradition, God's will is manifested through the Torah, which is seen as perfect and complete; the task of the Jew is to learn to conform to His dictates. This theology had become stifling to my growth.. . . I came to understand that the tradition does not contain all truth, and that Torah and <u>mitzvot</u> emerge from the human heart.28

Jacobson is not merely expressing the crisis of a traditional Jew who, for the first time, comes to understand the motivation for much of what we now know as liberal Judaism. Moving beyond the reformers who preceeded him, Jacobson sees that just as the traditional prayerbook "is unfair to God, " it is also unfair to women, "for it tends to limit the modes through which we permit the divine to enter our imaginations."29 His creative solutions include a new <u>Avinu Malkenu</u> that begins

> Our Father, Our King, teach us how to make this year a new beginning.
> Our Mother, Our Queen, teach us how to grow from the

27Ellen Umansky, and others, have suggested the abstract noun "Elohut," but it seems almost forced, and has not been accepted. "Creating. . . ", p. 129 ff.

28Burt Jacobson, "The <u>Siddur</u> alienated me from God," <u>Sh'ma</u> 15/286 (25 January 1985), p. 44.

29Jacobson, <u>ibid.</u>

harshness of life.
Our Source and our Destiny, teach us to accept what we must accept.
Our Guide and our Truth, teach us to change what must be changed.30

These four introductory phrases are repeated six times throughout the prayer, thus offering a challenging alternative to the traditional Avinu Malkenu. Jacobson disarms the reader by introducting "Our Mother, Our Queen, " and then moves beyond both male and female personifications to "Our Source," "Our Destiny," "Our Guide" and "Our Truth."

Christian theologian I.Carter Heyward would classify Jacobson as a feminist liturgist. For Carter,

> . . . feminist theology is not theology written by women or about women's lives, but rather is a theology based on certain epistemological and hermeneutical principles: namely, that all knowledge--knowing what we know, or consciousness--is rooted in human experience; and that "human" always includes female as well as male experience.31

Many liberal Jewish theologians would agree with Heyward's theological approach; however, few have integrated women's

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30Burt Jacobson, ed. Mahzor; a Prayerbook for the High Holy Days (San Francisco: Kehillah, 1983), p. 28. Here Jacobson (presumably unknowingly) responds to theologian Naomi Goldenberg's echoing of the high holiday liturgy as she has written: "Images of God dictate who will feel worthy in society and who will feel inferior, who will be respected and who will be despised, who will get easy access to the literal material goods of culture and who will have to fight for those same goods." The Changing of the Gods, p. 126. See also Jacobson's Morning Service for Shabbat, Shabbat Service for Friday Evening, and A Passover Haggadah (San Francisco, Kehilla, 1982, 1984, and 1985).

31I.Carter Heyward, "An Unfinished Symphony of Liberation: The Radicalization of Christian Feminism Among White U.S. Women" Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion I:1 (Spring 1985), 109.

experience into their theologies. The time has come for liberal Jews to recognize that the job of liturgical reform is incomplete until both women and men can pray together, using language, images, and symbols that affirm the humanity of each member of the community _just as_ these words and symbols affirm the _otherness_ of God. The time has come for liberal Jews to create a theology of integrity.

Asserting God's otherness does not necessarily negate God's immanence. The Jewish tradition is rich with a range of images of God as One who is slow to anger and full of mercy (_erech apayim rav chesed v'emet_) yet who judges and even punishes us. As Wenig and Janowitz demonstrate in _Siddur Nashim_, God has been imaged in many ways by Jews throughout the ages. We need to celebrate this diversity by broadening our images of God, even as we reassert God's Oneness. If God is indeed One, we are enriched rather than impoverished by using a range of names and images to invoke the Holy Presence in our midst.

Ideally, all God language would refer to a God-beyond--gender. In English, we can accomplish such "neutering" by using nouns such as "One," "Eternal," "Source of Life," or "Sovereign," in place of male pronouns and nouns. Hebrew, of course, presents a separate challenge: we must use male _or_ female language. Or, as Jacobson and others have suggest-

ed, we can use both.32 By using male and female language and metaphors for God, we emphasize both God's Otherness and God's closeness. When God is imaged as both male and female, all men and all women are recognized as embodiments of God's image. All humans are seen b'zelem Elohim: in God's image.

Yet only God combines maleness and femaleness in perfect balance, transcending the boundaries of gender that limit many humans. We must work towards naming God as that force within us and beyond us that moves us beyond the narrowness of self-interest towards a concern for collective survival and the fulfilment of all people. Such a God, whole within Itself, provides a model for each Jew to work towards wholeness, both of the self and of the world. A God of Wholeness encourages us "to make peace with the split and alienated parts of ourselves. As we expand our sense of our own possibilities, we thereby expand our sense of responsibility for our world."33 New visions of a community of integrity lead us to a new vision of God as Integrity, a God who is both the reason for and is present in that community. Such a comprehensive vision of God leads to a redefinition of Torah. Hence we must now ask: What is the

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32The editors of V'Taher Libenu (Sudbury, MA: Congregation Beth El of the Sudbury River Valley, 1980) pioneered in the alternate use of male and female language and imagery in their English translations and interpretations of the liturgy, providing one model of what can be done in Hebrew.

33Sheila Weinberg, "Creating A New Paradigm," Genesis II XV:5 (April 1984), 16.

nature of a Torah that is the basis for such a community?

III. TORAH

We began this thesis with an examination of traditional texts from a feminist point of view. We now conclude with an affirmation of text as the key to developing a theology and community that exemplifies integrity. Let us first return to the Tanach, which is historically the essential text for any Jewish theology. What is the role of of our ancient scriptures in such a reevaluation of Judaism?

We begin with Bereshit: creation. Philosopher Carol Ochs proposes that Judaism is based on a patriarchal model of creation by word,34 which leads to a potential estrangement between the Creator and the creation. The creator as artist has no real connection to the life that is created; even though God breathes life into the nostrils of adam, the first human was created from dust. For Ochs, such creation "leads to serious problems of estrangement and flawed creation without moral responsibility [on the part] of the creator."35 The creation myths characteristic of matriarchal societies, on the other hand, involve sexual generation, creating a relationship between the Creator and created that

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34Ochs perhaps unconsciously refers to the opening prayer of the daily p'sukei d'zimra section of the morning service: baruch she amar v'hayah haolam. . .

35Ochs, p.13.

is based on the absolute power of what might be called maternal bonding.

> . . . what has emerged from the conflict between matriarchy and patriarchy has been an emphasis on the distinction between the unconditional and the judgemental positions. In matriarchy, one is saved because of a relationship; in patriarchy, one is saved because of an ethical judgment.36

We return, from a very different point, to the issue of what might be called the principal of "responsibility of relationship" versus that of "absolute justice," the dichotomy between women's and men's modes of ethical decision--making explored by Carol Gilligan.37 Thus women's decision making reflects (Ochs' description of) a matriarchal view of creation; men's method of solving similar dilemmas reflects a patriarchal view.38

36Ochs, pp. 22-23. Ochs uses the akedah to demonstrate her point about infanticide: "In order to prove that Abraham is not rooted in the older tradition, God demands that he renounce the most fundamental tenet of the matriarchal religion and kill his own child. Abraham's choice is between the matriarchal principle of protecting his child and the patriarchal principle of following an abstract ethic, obedience to God. Abraham passes the test and is fit to be the father of a new, patriarchal religion." p. 45.

37Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

38Thus underscoring Ochs' contention that: ". . . the opposition of matriarchy and patriarchy. . . is far more pervasive, deep-rooted, and influential than generally acknowledged. As the constellation of concepts and values that belong to this pattern is drawn out, we will see it influences every aspect of human life. It affects the grounding of our ethical code, our view of the material world, our concept of the meaning in or of life, and our attitude toward death." x.

Where does that lead the Jew who approaches the Bible as text? Bereshit is our legacy, and God the Creator clearly creates by fiat. Yet while the first human is not created by a sexual act out of God's body, God does breathe the breath of life into the lifeless mortal's body, thus enabling adam to live. When we read Genesis 1:27 ff and Genesis 2:4 ff as one story, this nishmat hayim can be seen as the distinguishing mark of b'zelem elohim; this breath of life is what makes humans godlike, and thus more than a simple "artistic creation."39 This unique form of creation transcends both patriarchal creation (by word) and matriarchal creation (by sexual generation) by combining them: the God who creates by forming a human and then breathing life into it may have both the distance of He-who-forms-by--word and the attachment of She-who-forms-from-her-body.

Certainly, such an analysis does not solve all the problems that stem from the patriarchal context of the composition or canonization of the biblical text; the same "version" that explains adam's creation by breath establishes this creature as the one who names all other living things, including the isha that is created from his flesh and bones (Genesis 2:19-23). Phyllis Trible attempts to redeem the story by suggesting that like the animals that

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39 Animals, of course, breathe, but they are not created in this way; the nishmat hayim, then, is clearly more than simply the ability to inhale and exhale. On the creation of the animals and birds, see Trible, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), pp. 91-2.

are created, ha'adam is "sexually undifferentiated" until Genesis 2:21, when ha'adam undergoes surgery, "only after [which] does this creature, for the very first time, identify itself as male."40

In addition, Professor Trible points out that ha'-adam's naming of isha is not comparable to its naming of the animals in Genesis 2:19, as the verb qr' (call) appears in Genesis 2:23 without the word shem (name). Trible's grammatical analysis convinces her that ". . in calling the woman, the man is not establishing power over her but rejoicing in their mutuality."41 Elohim/Adonai can be seen, then, as a Creator who transcends gender, both in the mode of creation and in identification with the creatures created.

Trible's technique can help us to uncover a previously obscured layer or structure of the Biblical text that supports the theology of integrity articulated above. Yet any reappropriation of the biblical text must include the possibility that the texts as they have been handed down throughout the ages may be beyond redemption, or may be simply incomplete. When we encounter sections or portions of the text that we can no longer read,42 we must acknowledge the limits of the text as we have received it and be open to making changes in it. Yet who can make such changes

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40Trible, p. 98.

41Trible, p. 100.

42See p. , above.

and how shall they be made? Should such changes be permanent, or should we rather acknowledge when we judge any given section to be incomplete or obsolete that such an passage calls for continual "re/vision": seeing the issue with new eyes each time we come upon it in our cyclical reading?

We have lived for thousands of years with a static textual tradition; perhaps now is the time to acknowledge that the only constant is change, and that what we use as "texts" should reflect change in ourselves and in our world. Theologian Naomi Goldenberg has suggested that

> Whatever we use to mirror our experience--be it dreams, visions or literature--sacred scriptures of the new age will be in continuous flux. One text will be unable to reflect the infinite diversity of experience possible in a culture that permits a variety of styles of life and thought. There will be many texts to read, mull over, discuss and dream about. And we will change those texts often, knowing that our unwillingness to hold on to any single description of spiritual experience is not proof that we are fickle--it is proof that we are alive.43

Her assumption of a community that includes "the infinite diversity of experience" reflects the community of integrity described above. If such openness to a wide variety of texts were wed to an acknowledgement of the essential worth of traditional Jewish texts--texts appreciated not for their historical worth as the chronicles of a dead civilization but because they reflect the metahistorical spiritual journeys of the Jewish people throughout the

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43Naomi Goldenberg, The Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), p. 120.

ages--if the new could be wed to the old with love and respect and commitment to building a future for Jews and Judaism, Judaism would flourish.44 If liberal Jews truly believe in progressive revelation, we must listen to the voices of our contemporaries as well as to the voices of our ancestors to hear echoes of the Divine will. This means that we must become vehicles for Torah, much as our predecessors have been. But not in the way Goldenberg suggests. If the development of the siddur is representative of the development of other Jewish religious literature, we have a model not of "continuous flux" but of the continual addition of one layer on top of another; each age has added its own insights, poems, and prayers to the fixed liturgy of the previous generation.45 The Talmud represents a conversation between scholars that spans the generations. Let us, too, add our voices to the voices of the poets and prophets of the past, reinterpreting the revelation of our ancestors even as we add the visions that are unique to our own generation.

In Chapters II and III, we explored women's lives and women's writings as new sources of Torah. Again and again, we read of women's commitments to others, both to indivi-

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44See Elizabeth Fiorenza's remarks on using the Bible as a historical prototype in "The Will to Choose," pp. 135-6.

45Jacob J. Petuchowski, Prayerbook Reform in Europe (New York: The World Union for Progressive Judaism, 1968), Chapter I. As Petuchowski points out, the European reformers were among the first Jews in history to take up the challenge of editing what had become an almost unwieldy document by excising certain portions of the text (See p. 350).

duals and to specific communities, as a reflection of their commitment to God. "The highest form of feminine wisdom," writes Ann Belford Ulanov, "is not abstract or disinterested knowledge, but a responsive wisdom that comes from loving participation in a relationship."46 This wisdom is an integral component of new Torah. Another aspect of women's wisdom is that the physical and the spiritual are not dichotomous; the integrity of experience is the cornerstone of the creation of new sources of Torah.

The criteria for inclusion in a new Torah will vary from individual to individual, from community to community. New narratives may be added to the Tanach, new discussions may be added to the Talmud. The codes and responsa will be developed to answer the changing needs of our people, and a rich new midrashic literature will be repeated from parent and teacher to the generations of Jews to come. The new texts will reflect the diversity of ways in which Jews experience the world. Such texts must also acknowledge that as Jews, we also experience God in a variety of ways. For such texts to have validity in a community of integrity, they will invite interpretation and question rather than close it off. They will compel each reader to look closely at her/his life and at the way s/he interacts with others. The

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46Ann Belford Ulanov, The Feminine in Jungian Psychology and in Christian Theology. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971), pp. 186 ff.quoted in Judith Plaskow, Sex, Sin, and Grace. . . , p. 28.

words of these texts will please the ear and tickle the mind, bringing the reader and the worshipper closer to God and closer to community. These words will acknowledge that there is a wide range of ways to live Jewish lives of integrity, and that we must safeguard our freedom to determine our own life choices. The new Torah will enlighten and encourage, challenge and comfort, while it acknowledges that each generation must add to it to keep Judaism vibrant. Such a Torah will contain the words to begin to build a Judaism of integrity.

CONCLUSION

> When you're in Mitzrayim, the Narrows, first you don't realize you're a slave. Then suddenly you realize; you hear something that makes you realize that the outside image is an idol in your heart, and the idol starts to hurt, and you try to take it out, and it's very painful to take it out--and you have to pass through the pain. And then the water from that place which up till now has given you life--that water is now blood. Death comes out of the water--frogs, lice, disease. Forget it. You can't drink from that source anymore. You can stay there and die, from the plague, or you can leave. And the leaving is very scary because you come to this great huge salt sea. You have to step in it, and only then it parts. . . through the birth canal, and then it parts--a birth. Almost like discovering air. You're astonished at what you see, as a child is astonished at birth, at finding air. The event is past then. It has to become a shared event. Then if you can share it. . .
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> But it's scary. It's wilderness there. And the first thing everybody wants to do is go back there, into the known place, Mitzrayim. And that's where it's important to connect in community, because strength to stay in a place of transformation happens when we connect.1

Text-study stands at the center of Jewish life. Yet historically, such study has been primarily the province of an elite group of male scholars. The androcentrism both of traditional texts and their interpretations has been challenged by twentieth century feminist scholarship. Both Christian and Jewish scholars have questioned the authority of texts that they claim reflect only a portion of human

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1Gottlieb, "Women and the Recipes. . .", 3.

experience. And both Christian and Jewish thinkers have suggested that we consider the development of a new canon that reflects the experience of, and provides inspiration for, both male and female members of our religious communities.

The primary source for new texts are women's lives and women's writings. By studying the lives and work of individual Jewish women, we discover a rich and heretofore ignored source of strength and insight for all Jews. By examining the choices and commitments of a range of Jewish women, the silence of the ages is finally broken, and we are able to add our mothers' stories to those of our fathers we have held dear for so long.

Women's lives are not the only source for new Torah. Women's writings: women's prayers, poems, fiction, and songs, must also become a part of the developing canon. Reaching for a synthesis of Jewish and feminist values, the prayers and rituals that are being written by women enable a broader spectrum of Jews to reclaim their Judaism. Other women's writing challenges traditional notions of community, maintaining that connections between people must be based on an egalitarian philosophy of mutual respect, mutual worth, and shared power, not on a hierarchical principle where the powerful dominate the powerless.

The development of new text is inextricably bound to the development of a new theology. The theology of integrity, as

developed in this thesis, goes beyond a narrow definition of theology as simply a system of thought. The theology of integrity includes a socio-political agenda with implications for both the nature and structure of the Jewish community. A community of integrity provides a living workshop of mutual cooperation and shared responsibility for tikkun olam. The prayers of such a community both reflect and embody the principles of mutuality, and are addressed to a God who contains both male and female even as such limits are transcended by the Divine. In a Judaism of integrity, visions of God and Israel are drawn from an expanded Torah that does not supplant but complements the traditional notion of Torah in its broadest sense.

We are in a place of transformation, a place where the very bases of Judaism are being challenged. Feminism is the catalyst for a renewal of the reform impulse that freed us from a narrow medievalism that had stunted the growth and development of Jews and Judaism. The passion for justice that lies at the core of feminism is simply a rekindling of the smoldering coals of reform that have lain dormant for too many years. All who wish to renew Judaism must acknowledge their debt to the first visionaries of change even as they recognize that the deepest reforms lay not behind, but ahead of us.

By building communities where each Jew's questions, and each Jew's gifts are welcomed, we move closer to naming a God

who lives within us even as this Eternal One lives beyond us. By turning to a Torah that guides even as it reflects our rich and complex lives, with its interwoven strands of new and ancient wisdom, we can nurture our common vision of tikkun olam. This is the vision of integrity that must inform our lives if the Jewish people, we who seek the One, is to remain one.

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