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Can Two Sisters Share One Man? The Story of Leah and Rachel

Jinny Dee Isserow

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for Ordination.
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Candidate for Ordination, 1991
Referee, Dr. Alan Cooper

Digest

The following work encompasses an analysis of Genesis 29-35. I have engaged in a close reading of these chapters, paying specific attention to the questions posed by feminist interpretation and evaluating the information I gathered in comparison to a selection of scholarly material. The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter consists of an overview of selected scholarly interpretations of Gen. 29-35. The second is an explanatory summary of narratology. Narratology, as described by Mieke Bal, is the main method I employ in my own interpretation. The third chapter consists of my interpretation of Gen. 29-35.

In Chapter One I point out that most commentators focus on patriarchs and fathers. Westermann and Von Rad include a great deal of speculation regarding the feelings, actions and motives of Jacob as he is characterized in the narrative, while little attention is paid to those of Leah and Rachel. I will attempt to demonstrate that the text may be read from a different perspective, one which emphasizes women and motherhood.

In Chapter Two narratology is presented as an instrument with which to describe the text. It is on the basis of the description that it is then possible to attach meaning to the text. In addition, I employ the gender code as the overall guide for my interpretation. The gender code is concerned with the differences between the perspectives of the different sexes, and declares these differences significant and vital to interpretation--the foundation of the code.

In Chapter Three, utilizing narratology informed by the gender code, I attempt to read Gen. 29-35 through the eyes of the female characters, from the point of view of Leah and Rachel. Where they impinge on the narrative, the following concerns are included and addressed: infertility, motherhood and interpersonal relationships as depicted in the narrative. It is the feminist enterprise to reconstruct the female experience by asking new questions and thereby filling in gaps left both by the narrative itself and by prior interpretations.

This thesis is dedicated to .
Brett Isserow
and
Fay Roth

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I thank Dr. Alan Cooper for his wisdom, his patience, his precious time, and his unfailing humor.

Introduction

The following work encompasses an analysis of Genesis 29-35. I have engaged in a close reading of these chapters, paying specific attention to the questions posed by feminist interpretation and evaluating the information I gathered in comparison to a selection of scholarly material. The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter consists of an overview of selected scholarly interpretations of Gen. 29-35. The second chapter is an explanatory summary of narratology. Narratology, as described by Mieke Bal, is the main method I employ in my own interpretation of the text; although I do not always utilize her terminology in my own characterization of the narrative. The third chapter consists of my interpretation of Genesis 29-35.

Chapter One outlines the interpretations, primarily those of Sharon Pace Jeansonne, Gerhard Von Rad and Claus Westermann. The importance of the overview is threefold. Firstly, it presents various standard interpretations of the text. Secondly, I attempt to present the biases or presuppositions of the commentators which inform their understanding of the text. Finally, the overview serves as a basis for comparison with my own interpretation in the third chapter. In contrast to Westermann's focus on patriarchs and fathers, I will attempt to demonstrate that the text may be read from a different perspective, one which emphasizes

women and motherhood. Westermann states that "fathers" include all of the ancestors, but it becomes clear through his comments that women are peripheral to the main themes of the patriarchal travel, growth and experience.

Westermann's bias emerges from his evaluation of the relative importance of different elements of the story. The relations and rivalry between Jacob and Esau and Jacob and Laban are the important elements, while the births of the children are an "interlude" between the main events. Westermann and Von Rad include a great deal of speculation regarding the feelings, actions and motives of Jacob and Laban as they are characterized in the narrative, but there is little attention paid to those of Leah and Rachel. For example, both commentators express shock and indignation at Jacob's reaction when he is tricked by Laban into marrying Leah (29:25). According to these commentators this is an incident between two men, Jacob and Laban. They do not mention that Jacob has had sexual relations with the wrong woman. They do not mention Leah who is taken by her father and given in marriage to a man who loves her sister. Where we look for and find meaning in the words: "And in the morning--it is Leah!" (29:25) as they pertain to Jacob, it is critical also to look for meaning in the same words as they pertain to Leah and Rachel.

When discussing Rachel's theft of the teraphim (31:19) Jeansonne notes that Rachel's own reference to her ritual impurity (derech nashim li):

> ...implies that she shows little deference to the gods and treats them merely as objects of her father's property. It is difficult to contend that the narrator wants the reader to believe that Rachel valued the gods for their own sake if she would sit upon them in her genuine or feigned ritually impure state.[1]

Jeansonne notes her agreement with Von Rad, who "correctly sees the parallels between this account and other stories of the foolishness of idols." Westermann comments that the episode is narrated with "gentle mockery" and that it has a "theological aspect which is left unsaid: the almost laughable powerlessness of the wooden image of the god." I offer an alternative interpretation in Chapter Three. I find no trace of mockery in the narrative. I propose that it is the prevailing negative attitude towards both idol-worship and the bodily functions of women which have influenced the standard interpretations of this narrative. This negativity has damaged the understanding of the story both because it demeans Rachel's actions, and because this attitude has resulted in inadequate examination of the text.

In Chapter Two I present a summary of narratology as characterized by Mieke Bal in Narratology, Introduction to

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[1] Jeansonne, (1990) p.83.

the Theory of Narrative. Bal considers narratology an instrument for describing the text. On the basis of the description it is then possible to attach meaning to the text.

> An interpretation is never anything more than a proposal ('I think that the text means this'). If a proposal is to be accepted, it must be well-founded....If a proposal is based upon a precise description it can then be discussed. The theory presented here is an instrument for making descriptions and, as such, it inevitably but only indirectly leads to interpretation.[2]

Bal suggests that there are many different "codes" through which the text may be approached: the historical code, the theological code, the anthropological code, the literary code, the thematic code and the gender code. (For a full discussion of theses disciplinary codes, see Mieke Bal, Murder and Difference.) I employ the gender code as the overall guide for my interpretation, although I consider other codes where they assist in my analysis. The gender code is concerned with the differences between the perspectives of the different sexes. The gender code points out and emphasizes these differences, the distinction

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[2] Bal, Narratology (1985) p.10.

between men and women is declared significant--the foundation of the code.

Bal acknowledges that her interpretations are not "presupposition-free." Rather, a critical component of her approach is her own awareness of focusing on specific themes and asking specific questions of the text. The questions posed reflect feminist presuppositions. Feminist interpretation advocates the gender code, taking for granted that there are differences between the sexes and that those differences are vitally significant for interpretation.

One result of her focus on presuppositions is Bal's search for specific ideologies which are embedded either in the narrative itself or in the interpretations of commentators. According to Bal, the way a story is told communicates an implicit or explicit ideology. Bal refers to narratives with a highly ideological intent as "ideo-stories." There is a relationship between the ideology, the story through which it is conveyed and the process of reading and interpretation. Narratology is concerned with analyzing the ideo-story, and with its effect on the reader. The presentation of an ideo-story is not neutral: it is the interaction between the ideo-story and the reader which gives meaning to the text. The episode of Jacob's marriage to Leah (29:25) may be classified as an ideo-story, both in terms of the biblical text and the later commentary. In the text, Jacob's response in the morning is a telling: what

have you done to me? It is the seed of the widespread interpretation that it is Jacob who was wronged, whose perceptions and sentiments matter. Von Rad indicates that Laban's deception of Jacob represents a "masterpiece of shameless treachery." To approach the narrative informed by the gender code and searching for its ideology is to ask: Is Laban's "masterpiece of shameless treachery" a painful deception affecting Jacob alone, or might it involve other participants in the narrative? I suggest that asking new questions of the text might provide new directions for interpretation.

In Chapter Three I present my interpretation of Genesis 29-35. Utilizing the gender code, I attempt to read the narrative through the eyes of the female characters--from the point of view of Rachel and Leah. Where they impinge on the narrative, the following concerns are included and addressed: infertility, motherhood and interpersonal relationships as depicted in the narrative. In an attempt to interpret the significance of motherhood for Leah and Rachel, my discussion of motherhood is informed by scholarship in history, anthropology, feminist literature and psychology. Esther Fuchs presents the biblical maternal role in a negative light. She indicates that the biblical woman desires offspring exclusively because her husband desires offspring. This is a simplistic view which eliminates the possibility that the biblical woman herself

desires children. I will demonstrate my disagreement with Fuchs by showing that Leah and Rachel wanted children for distinct reasons of their own.

I will devote special attention to the works of Fuchs and Jeansonne, both self-defined feminist commentators. Both of them illustrate the difficulty of avoiding a patriarchal bias in reading the narrative. For example, when Jeansonne introduces her readers to Leah and Rachel she describes the two women not as matriarchs, or simply as Jacob's wives, but as "sisters who become the wives of the patriarch Jacob." This points out the difficulty of viewing Leah and Rachel as independent characters, even according to Jeansonne's feminist interpretation. Leah and Rachel are still defined in terms of their husband, Jacob. It is critical to bear in mind the interpretive presuppositions of the various scholars whose work is under consideration.

Literature has been made to function as part of a tradition which inculcates the dominant male-centered ideology and thereby marginalizes women. Feminist scholarship exposes the collusion between literature and ideology. It is alert to the omissions, gaps and partial truths which ideology masks: it attends to the silences. In breaking those silences (which is to say: asking different questions) women make themselves present and define a new reality. The feminist enterprise reconstructs the female experience by filling in the blank pages and allowing the

silences to speak, and it is in this that I hope I have achieved some modicum of success.

Chapter One

This chapter provides an overview of the work of several modern commentators on the book of Genesis. The interpretations included will serve three purposes. The first will be to demonstrate the general thrust of the interpretations of Genesis 29-35. The second purpose of this overview will be to point out the biases of the commentators, where those biases are important in understanding the narrative. Finally this overview will serve as a basis for comparison with my own interpretations in the third chapter. The works predominately cited are those of Claus Westermann, Gerhard Von Rad and Sharon Pace Jeansonne.

Fatherhood

The major themes of Claus Westermann's interpretation of the patriarchal narratives may be gleaned from his introduction to Genesis 12-36. According to Westermann, the patriarchal narratives in Genesis are about the human community, and more specifically about the establishment of the family.

> These very basic relationships in human community become the object of narrative in the patriarchal story: the relationship of parents to children especially in the Abraham narrative (Gen. 12-25), of

> brother to brother in the Jacob-Esau narrative (Gen. 25-36), of the several members of the family to each other in the Joseph narrative (Gen. 37-50).[3]

According to Westermann, the function of the patriarchal story is to give each successive generation a vital link with the ancestors. Westermann states that there is no word so characteristic of the patriarchal stories as father. Whereas not even Adam is described as the father of generations to come, the fatherhood of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob "stretches across a number of generations and so is something different from that of mere physical begetter." Abraham, especially, remains father from generation to generation. The fatherhood of the patriarchs who follow him is limited to their own sons. The patriarchal stories attribute to the one father, at the beginning, a significance which surpasses that of his successors.

> The reason these narratives, which are so limited in their range of vision and which deal with ordinary people, their family experiences, their journeys, and their struggle for survival, have acquired a meaning far surpassing these actual events is this: as stories about the fathers they have validity for the story of all their posterity.[4]

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[3] Westermann, (1985) p.23.

[4] Ibid., p.25.

In contrast to Westermann's focus on patriarchs and fathers, my work will focus on matriarchs and mothers. I will attempt to demonstrate that the text may be read in a different way, from a perspective which emphasizes women and motherhood.

The patriarchal stories describe three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in three succeeding generations. (Westermann also includes Esau and Joseph and his brothers. He explains that the narratives begin with the genealogy of Abraham's ancestors and end with the sons of Jacob.) Westermann states that each description of a patriarch presupposes an earlier stage in which each individual father represented an individual tradition. One such individual tradition may be illustrated by the "Jacob tradition." In this tradition, the equation of Jacob with Israel explains why Jacob is considered the father of the people Israel.

> This accords with the tradition of Jacob as the father of twelve sons who bear the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. In both cases Jacob is the father of Israel, and Israel can have no other father besides him....We have to thank those extraordinarily loyal and trustworthy transmitters of the early traditions that the trio of fathers enclosed in the formula 'Abraham, Isaac and Jacob' was preserved, and with it the

variety of traditions reflecting the actual state of affairs.[5]

While Westermann's observations are important, they are equally significant in what they omit. The "trustworthy transmitters" to which he refers also preserved the matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel. While he mentions them, detailed study of the matriarchs is omitted from Westermann's commentary. Westermann states that the "fathers" include all of the ancestors, but it becomes clear through his descriptions and comments that women are peripheral to the main themes of the patriarchal travel, growth and experience. The perspective from which I will approach the text involves an attempt to understand and interpret the portrayal of Leah and Rachel in the narratives. While Westermann discusses fatherhood, I will discuss motherhood.

According to Westermann, the narratives were told about the fathers because their descendants found their own identity in the storytelling itself; they are what they are only in their derivation from and link with their fathers. Remembrance can only be realized in narratives that "bridge the gap between the generations and so acquire a vital importance." Their primary function is to give each new generation a share in the experiences, events and dramas which the fathers themselves lived through. In The Women of

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[5] Ibid., p.26.

Genesis, Sharon Pace Jeansonne adds the matriarchs to the ancestors who are remembered, stating that "the narratives of Rachel and Leah, preserved to propel the history of their people forward, also probe the difficulties of family relationships, the consequences of deception, and the special suffering of women due to their ability to have children."[6]

Esther Fuchs states that the text projects onto woman what man desires most, and thereby creates a powerful role model for women.

> The image of the childless woman who evolves from vulnerability and emptiness to security and pride by giving birth to sons offers a lesson for all women. It should be ascribed to the imaginative and artistic ingenuity of the biblical narrator that one of the most vital patriarchal concerns is repeatedly presented not as an imposition on woman but as something she herself desires more than anything else.[7]

Fuchs is presenting the role model of motherhood in a negative light. She describes the pride of giving birth to sons as the desire of biblical women only because it is the desire of their husbands to produce offspring. This is a simplistic view of the biblical women which eliminates the

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[6] Jeansonne, (1990) p.70.

[7] Fuchs, in Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship Collins, ed. (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985) p.130.

possibility of their own desire for children, and their own pain of childlessness. In my interpretation of the narratives I will demonstrate my disagreement with Fuchs by illustrating that Leah and Rachel wanted children for distinct reasons of their own. I will also present motherhood as a complex position. My interpretation of this position will be informed by a variety of perspectives, such as historical, anthropological, psychological and feminist.

Jeansonne notes that the current generation of biblical interpreters increasingly recognizes that past studies of women in Bible have suffered from patriarchal bias. "Simplistic stereotypes of female characters and their reduction to minor significance have prompted many biblical scholars to reconsider the texts in a new perspective."[8] Fuchs, on the other hand, writes that it is "indeed astonishing that the recent spate of feminist literary critiques has not yet produced a single consistent analysis of the literary strategies deployed by the biblical narrative to promote its patriarchal ideology."[9] Observations will be made regarding how effectively Jeansonne and Fuchs have reconsidered the text, especially in light of the difficulty of removing oneself from "patriarchal bias." For example, when Jeansonne introduces

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[8] Jeansonne, (1990) p.ix.

[9] Fuchs, in Collins, ed. (1985) p.117.

us to Rachel and Leah, she describes the two women not as matriarchs, or simply as Jacob's wives, but as "sisters who become the wives of the patriarch Jacob." She therefore defines Leah and Rachel in terms of their husband Jacob, and not as independent characters. It is also critical to bear in mind the interpretive act of the various scholars whose work is under consideration. All scholars bring to the text their own sets of presuppositions which influence their respective interpretations. The reader's involvement in the text, including these presuppositions, will be discussed in Chapter Two.

The Jacob Cycle

According to Westermann, the major thrust of the Jacob cycle is the theme of "flight and return:" first Jacob's flight from Esau to Laban and subsequently from Laban to Esau. E.A.Speiser reminds us that the original flight was not Jacob's idea, but that "he acted, though not without remonstrance and uneasiness, under pressure from his strong-willed mother; and he had to pay for his misdeed with twenty years of exile."[10] Speiser's describing Rebecca as "strong-willed" (especially in light of Jacob's "remonstrance and uneasiness") seems to indicate that he disapproves of her plan of action. Speiser's bias here may be further substantiated by his description of Jacob's

[10] Speiser, (1962) p.211.

absence as "exile," a value-laden word, particularly in the biblical context.

Jeansonne concludes that Rebecca skillfully completes a task initiated by God, and thus plays a crucial role by ensuring the continuation of the promise for future generations. Jeansonne considers Rebecca skillful, and she quotes Esther Fuchs who argues that Rebecca must use deception to accomplish her goals because of her powerlessness in a patriarchal culture. According to Jeansonne, since the narrator does not make this explicit, Fuchs is:

> ...perpetrating an androcentric reading of the text that stereotypes women as untrustworthy. Fuchs further suggests that Isaac's helpless condition makes Rebecca appear particularly unkind. However, the narrative details of Isaac's blindness and infirmity are used to show how Rebecca's plan could possibly succeed. Deception is typically used by powerless characters in the Bible--it is not a trait limited to women. This account, so important for an understanding of the role of Rebecca and her characterization in the Genesis narrative shows that Rebecca acted decisively to ensure that Isaac's blessing is awarded to the son designated by God to carry on the promise.[11]

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[11] Jeansonne, (1990) p.67.

By attributing Rebecca's success to her use of deception, Fuchs proves her point that Rebecca is actually powerless. The only means available to her, a powerless character, of achieving her goal is deception. Jeansonne, on the other hand, uses the same act of deception to illustrate Rebecca's skillfulness in achieving her goal. It is important to recognize the act of interpretation which allows for such different understandings of the same material.

Marriage

The marriages of Jacob, Leah and Rachel are described by Westermann as being part of the Jacob-Laban episode, which is part of the larger Jacob-Esau story. The main part of the Jacob-Laban episode is the rivalry between the two men, and the birth of the sons of Jacob is "an interlude" in the episode. By his general description of the story, Westermann illustrates his bias relative to those elements of the story that he considers of greater and lesser importance. The relations and rivalry between Jacob and Esau, and Jacob and Laban are the important elements, while the births (which are overseen and acted out by the women) are "an interlude." According to Westermann, the climax of the first scene takes place at the well when Jacob meets Rachel. After describing the watering procedure Westermann notes that:

> ...every day the great stone is lifted from the mouth of the well and then replaced, but this one occasion transformed the everyday into an event that would be narrated for a long time to come....The nice portrayal of the meeting presupposes that at that period girls helped with the work and were able to move among the men freely and unhindered and without the veil, as attested elsewhere in similar social structures.[12]

It is interesting to note that while Westermann comments that "girls helped with the work" the text plainly states: ro'ah hi (29:9), "she was a shepherdess" (New JPS). Rachel's status as a shepherdess will be discussed in greater detail. However, it is interesting to note that Westermann is concerned with explaining that women had some measure of freedom, and "helped" with the work. This is different in perspective from Ramban who had no difficulty with Rachel's position as shepherdess. He was concerned rather with propriety. Ramban explains that Rachel was not kissed on the mouth. This is determined by the use of the Hebrew word for "kissing" followed by the letter lamed. This shows that Rachel was not kissed on the mouth but that Jacob kissed her on her head or on her shoulder.

Westermann describes Jacob as "happy and excited" as he rolls the stone from the well all by himself and waters "Rachel's sheep, the sheep of his uncle Laban, his mother's

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[12] Westermann, (1985) p.465.

brother" (29:10). He concludes that this is a fine example of the narrative art which can portray "in wordless action the climax of feeling resulting from a sequence of events." Gerhard Von Rad states that Jacob "had to do something for the girl," and so he "stormily broke the custom regarding the well, and with gigantic strength" lifted the stone from the opening by himself. Jeansonne notes that the "maternal imagery is obvious here," and it is ironic that with this foreshadowing, Rachel will struggle for many years before she will ever have children. In addition, the scene is "proleptic of Jacob's future success as a shepherd and breeder of sheep in spite of the unfair circumstances that Laban creates."[13]

After the meeting, Rachel, "all excited," runs home to tell her father the news, leaving the flocks in Jacob's care. Where Westermann describes Rachel as "all excited," Von Rad describes her as "agitated" when she hurries home to tell Laban the news. According to Westermann, the narrative has marriage as its goal, and the "natural conclusion" would be Jacob's marriage to Rachel. The narrative is expanded, however, by Laban's act of deceit whereby Leah becomes Jacob's first wife, "thus introducing a new tension which runs beyond 29:1-30--the opposition between Jacob and Laban." The opposition which exists between Leah and Rachel is virtually omitted by Westermann.

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[13] Jeansonne, (1990) p.71.

While there is still peace between Jacob and Laban, according to Westermann, they negotiate the conditions of marriage. Since Jacob has come empty-handed, and can offer no bride-price, he offers his service.

> It is his love for Rachel that moves him and makes this long period seem short even though it was by no means easy, as Gen. 31:38-40 shows. Laban meets Jacob's offer; he stands by the custom that cousins are privileged suitors. At each step Laban will hold to custom and practice and use them as security.[14]

In his comments on this negotiation, Von Rad sums up that it was "the common notion that daughters were a possession, an item of property that could be transferred from one owner to the other without further ado."[15] It is important to note that while there is a great deal of speculation regarding the feelings, actions and motives of Jacob and Laban, there is little attention to those of Leah and Rachel. It is the discrepancy in the consideration given to the male characters as opposed to the female characters which forms the basis of my criticism of Westermann, and the focus of my interpretations.

When the time comes, Jacob must demand his earnings. According to Westermann, Laban does not want to lose a good worker. He arranges a marriage feast because his

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[14] Westermann, (1985) p.466.

[15] Von Rad, (1972) p.290.

"self-esteem obliges him to do this." The scene after the wedding feast is, according to Westermann, a classic example of Hebrew narrative art.

> Only what is absolutely necessary is said; but what is unsaid speaks with such force as to give these few sentences the weight and density proper to noble metal. 'And in the morning--it is Leah!' There is no trace of direct speech; all is encompassed in three brief words; amazement, indignation that cuts short any utterance.[16]

What is significant about Westermann's comment is his focus on Jacob. Westermann mentions amazement and indignation as the emotions relevant to the shock Jacob has just endured. From his androcentric perspective Jacob is tricked by the shameless Laban, and, by deception, he has not obtained the woman he loves. Westermann does not mention the fact that Jacob has had sexual relations with the wrong woman. He does not mention Leah, taken by her father and given in marriage to a man who loves her sister. Where we find meaning in the words: "And in the morning--it is Leah!" (29:25) as they pertain to Jacob, it is critical also to find meaning in the same words as they pertain to Leah and Rachel.

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[16] Westermann, (1985) p.467.

According to Von Rad:

> ...that Laban secretly gave the unloved Leah to the man in love was, to be sure, a monstrous blow, a masterpiece of shameless treachery....Jacob's anger in the morning could accomplish nothing. After this night he is legally bound to Leah, and therefore Laban does not need to exert himself in his explanation to Jacob. Laban's statement, however, that in his country, one did not give the younger before the older, has a very serious aspect, in spite of the disregard with which it was thrown at Jacob. No one understood it better than Jacob, for he himself as the younger son had crossed the finishing line before his older brother.[17]

The only indication given by the commentators that Jacob is not entirely blameless in this event is the mention of a poetic justice. Jacob, who tricked his father, is now the one tricked. Speiser also notes that Laban's:

> ...elaborate pretense of family solidarity is maintained for just one month. Immediately thereafter he puts into operation a scheme of singular cunning and duplicity. But the schemer is himself the unwitting tool of destiny, the means whereby Jacob is repaid for

[17] Von Rad, (1972) p.291.

> his part in the mistreatment of Esau, through an ironic turn of fortune.[18]

According to the commentators, this is an incident between the two men, Laban and Jacob. Leah and Rachel are not mentioned in the text or in the commentary. While commentators speculate on what the male actors are feeling and thinking, no such speculation takes place regarding the female actors.

When Jacob reacts, Laban's defense is that he has only acted in accordance with the custom of the country. Jacob's accusation, that he has worked these seven years for Rachel, has no effect on Laban. He is still the foreigner, and Laban has the local people on his side. Jeansonne describes Laban's explanation as "pathetic," and Jacob's agreement to the new proposal as "surprising." He agrees to it, according to Jeansonne, because he is "desperate for Rachel." However, Westermann states that he must first complete the seven days of feasting which result from his first marriage to Leah because:

> ...it is a local feast and would have done great harm both to Laban and Jacob to cut it short. Jacob acquiesces: in his humiliating and constrained situation he now acquires Rachel as wife....Laban has destroyed something. He has not only deceived Jacob, but his daughter Rachel as well, who can now only

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[18] Speiser, (1962) p.227.

> become Jacob's second wife. By his cunning deceit he has infringed crudely on the blossoming love between the two.[19]

Westermann refers to the "blossoming love" between Jacob and Rachel. Jacob's love for Rachel is mentioned three times (29:18, 20 and 30). However, there is no indication in the narrative that Rachel loves Jacob. The significance of this fact is that what commentators consider a love-story is actually based upon the mention and importance of Jacob's feelings alone. There is no consideration of the question of whether or not Jacob's feelings are reciprocated by Rachel. This question will be addressed in my interpretation.

Jeansonne notes the disparity in Jacob's feelings for the sisters, and considers it central to the narrative. "The reader must wonder what the consequences of this preference will be for Leah and Rachel, who are forced to live their lives inextricably bound together through no desire or plan of their own."[20] Jeansonne notes that the juxtaposition of the sisters foreshadows their interconnectedness. Although Rachel is beautiful, it is Leah who is fertile. While Jeansonne is not free of a patriarchal perspective in her approach to the narrative, she attempts to deal with questions involving the lives and emotions of Leah and Rachel. Westermann sees in this juxtaposition of Leah and

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[19] Westermann, (1985) p.468.

[20] Jeansonne, (1990) p.74.

Rachel the fusion of two narratives; a simple love story fused with an account of how the harsh demands of external circumstances "force their way into the intimate life of two lovers." Poverty, dependence, social and economic interests intervene. Unavoidable conflicts lie along the way, and Jacob must endure what has happened to him.

The Births and Namings

In his chapter on "The Birth and Naming of Jacob's Sons" Westermann indicates that this section is not a narrative at all, but:

> ...rather like a genealogy; it is a report of the birth and naming of Jacob's twelve children from his two wives and their maids, with some narrative interpolations. What is peculiar to this genealogy is that it is stamped throughout by the rivalry between Jacob's two wives.[21]

While Westermann describes the sibling rivalry between Leah and Rachel he devotes far less attention to it than to the activities of Jacob and Laban. Westermann indicates, nevertheless, that the biblical writer's purpose in the narrative is to show that conflict between women was considered as important as that between men.

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[21] Westermann, (1985) p.471.

> Whereas men were basically at strife over living space and means of subsistence, women clashed basically over position and status in the community; here it was still in the simple realm of the family where recognition by the husband and the birth of children were decisive for them....a profound conflict between recognition because of one's function as a mother and recognition because of personal liking had established itself in the society of that era....Here, as in a number of other places, it is the woman who is the champion of the interest of the person over against the prevailing interest of the community.[22]

Despite that assertion, however, Westermann devotes hardly any attention to specifically female concerns--Rachel's anger at her childlessness, for example.

Von Rad agrees with Westermann that the naming episode is not a narrative, and adds that it is "without a context." Westermann notes that the naming of the children always refers to the mother either in its entirety or in the first half of the explanation of the name, although it is an "artificial formation to which no real name giving can correspond." The first part of the naming is praise, while the second part applies to the situation of the mother. In one group they consist of a verbal sentence in the first person (the mother) reporting an event which explains the

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[22] Westermann, (1985) p.472.

birth, and are to be explained solely by the rivalry between the sisters.

According to Westermann, the naming episode combines an older narrative about the rivalry between the sisters with a second narrative which "set in relief Yahweh's action in the birth of Jacob's children." Von Rad is in agreement, adding that while the names were originally "testimonies to God as the giver and protector of life," each one is now interpreted in relation to the concrete family conditions. The names are not etymologies in the strict sense of the word, according to Von Rad, but free allusions to which the narrator is inspired by the names and which the hearers receive as ingenious. Westermann's commentary on the actual naming consists mainly of attempts to distinguish between the sources of the names: which stem from the "rivalry narrative" and which from the "praise narrative." Jeansonne also describes the rivalry and the praise, giving more attention to the emotions of the mothers.

> Thus after giving birth to her first three sons, Leah thanks God, but hopes that Jacob will come to love her as he loves Rachel....Leah's desire to be loved, however, does not truly abate, for at the births of her additional sons she again will express her hopes....Although Leah already has five sons, she

continues to measure her worth by her ability to have children.[23]

The focus of my interpretation of the namings will be an attempt to understand the lives of Leah and Rachel, as they express themselves, through the naming-speeches for their children. Von Rad alludes to what the respective mothers might be experiencing, referring to God as the one who blesses and comforts the neglected wife. He calls the explanation of Reuben "particularly hair-raising" because he overlooks the obvious explanation ("Look, a son!") in favor of an explanation in terms of affliction. When Von Rad comes to Rachel's passionate plea for children (30:1) he has little to say. He recognizes only that she is "despairing," and that Jacob does not at first understand her suggestion that he have intercourse with Bilhah: how can one acquire children when the "Giver of Life" denies them? Von Rad concludes that Bilhah's bearing of Dan and Naphtali is equivalent to Rachel's having borne them.

Westermann comments on "Rachel's outburst and Jacob's angry retort" (30:1-2):

> To think that after the beautiful, gentle love story of 29:1-20 this angry exchange between the two is our first and only experience of their marriage! It is the suffering of the childless wife, of which we hear so

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[23] Jeansonne, (1990) pp.75-6.

> much in the Old Testament, that cries out in Rachel's demand. The suffering is all the more bitter when each day Leah and her son are present: 'She became jealous of her sister'. It was a pain unto death; the childless wife has no future--such is the despair voiced in this outburst.[24]

According to Westermann, it is understandable that Rachel directs her attack against her husband since "someone must listen," and equally understandable is his angry reply. Commentators express sympathy for Rachel when she expresses the pain of her infertility. However, I propose that the depth of her pain, as well as the underlying reason for Jacob's anger are insufficiently explored. I will attempt to describe more fully the emotional factors associated with infertility. My interpretation of Rachel's plea and Jacob's anger will address the question of whether Jacob's love for Rachel is reciprocated. I suggest that Jacob's anger is a result of his unrequited love for Rachel. His anger may actually be an expression of pain. He has loved Rachel for many years and yet he seems to be incapable of pleasing her.

Westermann's commentary continues with his analysis of vv.14-18 in which the "love-apples" (which Leah's son Reuben finds) become "apples of discord." The rivalry between Leah and Rachel is expressed in an exchange of words. As

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[24] Westermann, (1985) p.474.

Jeansonne points out, "this is the first time the two sisters are engaged in dialogue with one another. Their desire for Jacob is prompted by their need for children (for Rachel) and for companionship (for Leah)."[25] Westermann suggests that Rachel either thinks she is entitled to the "love-apples" because she is the "favored wife," or that she thinks she will conceive a child because of them. Von Rad writes that Rachel wants the fruit because of its quality of increasing desire. "For this wonderful fruit she will relinquish a night with Jacob in favor of Leah." Leah as the first wife, on the other hand, claims to be the principal wife. She knows that her precedence has been confirmed by the son she has borne to Jacob.

According to Westermann, the discussion ends with a "compromise" from which both women benefit. Without developing that observation, he goes on to describe Jacob's role in the episode: "In the evening Leah goes out to meet Jacob and tells him that he has been the subject of a deal. Jacob plays here a rather lamentable role which is deliberate and speaks for itself."[26] It is important to recognize that Westermann's comment is indicative of his interpretive point of view. It is likely that Westermann describes Jacob's role as "lamentable" because the patriarch is sexually manipulated by Leah and Rachel. One would

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[25] Jeansonne, (1990) p.77.

[26] Westermann, (1985) p.476.

expect, as Westermann seems to, that the women would be manipulated by the men, as in the marriage negotiations (29:18-19, 26-8). However, it is important to observe that there is no indication in the narrative itself that Jacob's role is "lamentable."

Similarly, Von Rad states that the narrator vividly tells a story which relates the struggle of the women for the man and the child. He adds that there is "above all, an apparently complete lack of religious point of view." Von Rad's comment indicates his interpretive point of view. It is likely that this "complete lack of religious point of view" refers to Von Rad's own opinion that there is sexual impropriety in Jacob's being manipulated by his wives. Westermann and Von Rad are both reluctant to detail the bargain Leah and Rachel have made, and they portray Jacob's position in a negative light. Westermann and Von Rad seem to imply that there is a difference between Jacob having two wives, as opposed to Leah and Rachel sharing a husband. This is to say that there is no concern with impropriety when Jacob has sexual relations with Leah, and then Rachel, Bilhah and Zilpah. It was not unusual for a man to have more than one wife. However, in this episode where Leah and Rachel are in control of Jacob, Westermann and Von Rad describe Jacob's role as "lamentable."

Jeansonne is more direct in stating that at some point in the marriage Rachel has obtained sexual monopoly of

Jacob, and that the two women control Jacob's sexual activity. "This is astonishing when it is recalled that previously it was their father who determined Jacob's sexual unions."[27]

Von Rad indicates that the namings develop completely from the mother's personal, human situation and refer primarily to her relationship to Jacob. He continues that "it is quite out of the question that the narrator could have forgotten even for a moment that this narrative concerns the two ancestral mothers of later Israel and the birth of the tribal ancestors."[28] After indicating that the namings all have to do with the mothers only, as well as mentioning the place of the women in the family setting, Westermann goes on to discuss the "purpose and thrust" of the namings. However, once he indicates a "theologizing thrust," the focus returns entirely to Jacob.

The "theologizing thrust" is meant to demonstrate that the relationship of the patriarchs to God was so natural that the old narratives spoke of God only when the course of events demanded it. Here, the "praise version" of the naming narrative was combined with the "rivalry version" at a time:

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[27] Jeansonne, (1990) p.86.

[28] Von Rad, (1972) p.297.

> ...when it made good sense for the reviser to bring the naming of Jacob's sons into the context of God's action within the family of Jacob in this persistent manner. The reviser links the story of the patriarchs immediately with the worship of his day when he gives as the reason for Judah's name his mother's exclamation: 'Now I will praise Yahweh!'[29]

The result of this summary is twofold. First, the "rivalry version" is depicted as the older (and perhaps, for Westermann, the less vital) one, seeing as how the "praise version" is added as an explanatory gloss. Second, it is interesting to note that despite the fact that it is "the mother" (in this case Leah) who voices the words of praise to Yahweh, once Westermann adds the theological element it is only in relation to Jacob, Jacob's sons and Jacob's family.

Westermann comments on the birth of Benjamin and the death of Rachel (35:17-20). He notes the "profound sensitivity" of the midwife who cries out to the woman in labor: "Fear not!" She knows that Rachel will be comforted in her pain knowing that she has borne a son. Von Rad concurs that "In her death Rachel saw the fulfillment of her desire." Fuchs agrees, stating that Rachel's fatal pregnancy is presented as peripheral to the birth of Benjamin.

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[29] Westermann, (1985) p.477.

Von Rad comments that the name Rachel gives Benjamin, Ben-oni (35:18) is a name which records the early death of the mother. It "would have placed the child for the rest of his life under the shadow of this grief." Jacob, however, "snatches the child from that darkness which is about to determine its beginning life. He grants no existence to this evil name by changing its meaning."[30] This renaming, according to Jeansonne, should not be seen as an example of Jacob's encroachment on Rachel's right to name her son but should be interpreted as a sign of hope. "Indeed, Jacob expresses his love for Rachel even in death. He sets up a monument to her, which continues, in popular tradition, to the narrator's present time."[31]

Fuchs concludes that the biblical mother figures attain neither the human nor the literary complexity of the male counterparts.

> The patriarchal framework of the biblical story prevents the mother-figure from becoming a full-fledged human role model, while its androcentric perspective confines her to a limited literary role, largely subordinated to the biblical male protagonist.[32]

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[30] Von Rad, (1972) p.341.

[31] Jeansonne, (1990) p.85.

[32] Fuchs, in Collins, ed. (1985) p.136.

In her concluding remarks, Jeansonne wishes to see Leah and Rachel in a positive light, their lives containing meaning for women (people) reading the story today.

> The narrator does not hide the fact that Leah and Rachel have difficult lives. Because of their father's scheme, they are forced into marriages filled with tensions and disappointments. Rachel's story demonstrates the bitterness of childlessness in a world where women's worth was measured by the number of sons they bore. Leah's story, which shows the rejection by her husband for his prettier wife, underscores the suffering that women endure when their value is determined by physical beauty. Despite their powerlessness in the face of their father's or husband's actions, the narrator does show that these women could act with independence and strength.[33]

In order to point out the difference in presuppositions employed in approaching the narrative, it is interesting to examine the contrasting interpretations of Fuchs and Jeansonne. By their own definitions, both commentators are feminist and devote most of their attention to the women in the narratives. Both commentators discuss the position and power of the women characters. In their discussion of Rebecca's plan to send Jacob to Haran, Fuchs describes her as "deceptive," while Jeansonne describes her as "skillful."

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[33] Jeansonne, (1990) p.85.

In her discussion of Rachel's infertility, Fuchs describes Rachel as "childish" and interprets her desire for children exclusively as an attempt to please her husband. Jeansonne expresses sympathy with Rachel's pain resulting from her infertility. Fuchs attempts to expose the negative role model of the biblical mother-figure, and her subordination to the male protagonists. Jeansonne attempts to see the biblical women in a positive and powerful light. Each commentator, using her own method, proposes to uncover the androcentric perspective of the biblical text. Each derives a different interpretation of the events involving the women characters.

Jacob Leaves Haran

When discussing Jacob's decision to leave Laban, Westermann states that Jacob is making "careful plans" to provide for his family. The encounter between Jacob and Laban as Jacob flees is, according to Westermann, the climax of the narrative. Where the first seven years of Jacob's service to Laban "seemed but a few days" because of his love for Rachel, Jacob expresses the hardships of the rest of his service.

> For twenty years Jacob led the hard life of a herdsman exposed to all the inclemencies of the weather....Jacob worked fourteen of the twenty years for his two wives, but of his own free choice only for the first seven.

> Laban allowed him nothing from the next seven years, and for the following six he tried to cut down his wages in cattle. Jacob goes still further, and this is the real accusation that he makes against Laban: if Laban had his way, Jacob would have ended up empty-handed after twenty years of hard and loyal service.[34]

Jacob's relationship with God comes to the fore as Westermann comments that God allows Jacob's cunning to succeed and thus free him from dependence. "Yahweh, the God of Jacob, is clearly with the weak who is being abused by the strong."[35] Von Rad agrees that it:

> ...becomes a pious story in which much is said about God and his relationship to Jacob. God has frustrated Laban's knavery, God was with Jacob, God has given Jacob Laban's flocks, and finally God has called him to leave Laban and go home....This entire speech ends with an unspoken question to the women. Actually they too are impressed with Jacob's right and God's guidance. This makes the situation ultimately clear for Jacob.[36]

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[34] Westermann, (1985) p.496.

[35] Westermann, (1985) p.484.

[36] Von Rad, (1972) p.306.

Westermann also notes that Jacob needs the agreement of his wives in order to carry out his plans to flee. This detail is noted by Jeansonne as well, who states that "in having the courage to disown their powerful father, they allow Jacob to return to Canaan." According to Von Rad, one must be very clear about Jacob's intention in speaking to his wives.

> He himself was not sure whether Leah and Rachel really would follow him to his distant homeland. They were, of course, Jacob's wives by marriage, but that did not make them cease belonging to Laban's great family, of which Jacob himself had also become part....One discerns here the women's strong connection with property. Both are basically a possession which can be separated only with difficulty.[37]

According to Von Rad, when Rachel and Leah answer Jacob concerning their consent to leave Haran, they describe the legal situation as they see it. They are already excluded from sharing in the possession of the land, and by using their bridal price, their father has "sold" them. "The statement that they are already considered 'foreigners' gave Jacob precisely the desired cue."[38] According to Millar Burrows, the statement made by Leah and Rachel: "Have we

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[37] Ibid., p.307.

[38] Ibid., p.306.

still any portion or inheritance in our father's house?" is complicated by the (surprising) mention of "the sons of Laban." If these sons were born after Jacob had already been living with Laban, the statement made by Leah and Rachel means:

> ...that before their brothers were born they could have expected an inheritance, but now the sons will inherit the estate. The daughters' claim that everything which Jacob has won from Laban belongs to them and their children (v.16) will then mean: 'Since you have acquired all this, it now belongs to us and our children, instead of our brothers, so that it is in our interest to go with you'.[39]

If the reason Rachel and Leah no longer expect an inheritance from their father is that Jacob's gains at Laban's expense have left no estate for them to inherit, then the same statement will then mean:

> 'Since what you have gained would have fallen to us anyway, we are justified in carrying it off with us'. Jacob's recital of grievances does not include any reference to Laban's sons as coming between him and the inheritance of the estate.[40]

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[39] Burrows, (1937) p.263.

[40] Ibid., p.264.

Either interpretation helps explain Laban's claim that everything (the women, the children and the flocks) belongs to him. This passage has inspired considerable debate regarding adoption, dowry and laws of inheritance.

According to Von Rad, one must be "just" with Laban; for this departure from the family confederation was an act of violence. In a strange land his daughters had no legal protection. Von Rad asks, "Who would give it to them in those circumstances if not the clan to which the women belonged?" It seems that Von Rad has forgotten that Jacob himself is their kinsman. Nevertheless, Von Rad also comments that:

> In the matter of Jacob's departure, Laban limited himself to reproaches, but in the matter of the theft of his idols, which is apparently more important to him than the legal protection of his daughters, he goes to all lengths.[41]

Speiser concurs that Laban was more concerned about the disappearance of the images "than about anything else."

Jeansonne comments that Leah and Rachel's answer to Jacob's decision to leave Haran indicates defiance of their father, and their estrangement from him. According to Westermann, in acceding to Jacob's wishes, the daughters renounce the house of their father and a new house arises:

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[41] Von Rad, (1972) p.309.

the house of Jacob. Westermann states that "once again we see the importance of women in patriarchal society." Jeansonne quotes Westermann here, adding that the importance of Rachel and Leah lies not only in their role as bearers of Jacob's children and the means by which God fulfills the promise of descendants, "but also as the decision makers who secure the future for their descendants in the land of the promise." I suggest that Jeansonne's view credits Leah and Rachel with more power than they actually possessed. I propose that Leah and Rachel faced two poor options, staying in Haran or leaving Haran. Assessing their situation, they are not the decision-makers, rather they simply comply with Jacob's decision.

Rachel's Theft

According to Westermann, Leah and Rachel blame their father for harm done to them: Laban has given his daughters nothing from what he has gained from their marriages. Therefore, Laban has treated them as foreigners, and not as members of the family. This, according to Westermann, is the reason for Rachel's theft of the <u>teraphim</u>: to secure herself against the injustice done to her. According to Speiser, if Rachel was <u>not</u> motivated simply by a whim, resentment or greed, but if she intended to undo what she regarded as a wrong, and thus took the law, as she saw it, into her own

hands, the translation "stole" would be not only inadequate but misleading.

Von Rad calls Rachel's theft of the teraphim:

> ...a serious burden to this hurried departure. It is characteristic, however, of the attitude of our source that it studiously emphasizes Jacob's innocence. In the succeeding conflict he is really unsuspecting.[42]

However, Von Rad continues that Jacob's situation, because of his oath and Laban's threatening attitude, was dangerous enough. "It was rescued only by Rachel's presence of mind. Thus a very sharp judgement is given concerning the unholiness and nothingness of this 'god'; a woman sat upon it in her uncleanness" (Lev. 15:19).[43] This comment seems self-contradictory. Presumably, Rachel's presence of mind "rescued" the situation where it concerned danger to Jacob, while simultaneously proving the nothingness of the god because she sat "upon it in her uncleanness."

Speiser describes Laban's search as "suspensefully depicted," and Rachel's:

> ...pretense of female incapacitation is a literary gem in itself....Rachel was in a position to know, or at least to suspect, that in conformance with local law her husband was entitled to a specified share in Laban's estate. But she also had ample reason to doubt

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[42] Ibid., p.308.

[43] Ibid., p.310.

> that her father would voluntarily transfer the images as formal proof of property release; the ultimate status of Laban's daughters and their maidservants could well have been involved as well. In other words, tradition remembered Rachel as a resolute woman who did not shrink from taking the law--or what she believed to be the law--into her own hands.[44]

Jeansonne agrees that Rachel "appears strong" with regard to the theft of the teraphim, and:

> ...able to outwit her father, a trickster himself. Either Rachel took advantage of the fact that she was menstruating by sitting on the hidden gods, or she invented the tale in order to save her life. In the final analysis she is victorious over the father who used her and then ignored her....Moreover, Rachel's own reference to her ritual impurity implies that she shows little deference to the gods and treats them merely as objects of her father's property. It is difficult to contend that the narrator wants the reader to believe that Rachel valued the gods for their own sake if she would sit upon them in her genuine or feigned ritually impure state.[45]

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[44] Speiser, (1962) p.250.

[45] Jeansonne, (1990) p.83.

Jeansonne notes her agreement with Von Rad, who "correctly sees parallels between this account and other stories of the foolishness of idols." Despite Jeansonne's attempt to avoid the "patriarchal bias" in her interpretation, she accepts the standard views of Rachel's ritually impure state, and the foolishness of the gods. I intend to offer alternative interpretations in Chapter Three.

While Westermann has commented that by stealing the teraphim, Rachel attempted to secure herself against the injustice done to her, he states that the outcome leaves Rachel appearing foolish.

> This episode, which is narrated with gentle mockery, presupposed that Rachel was conscious that she was in the right when she took her father's teraphim. The injustice that the daughters of Laban were convinced they had suffered forms the background to the theft. The mockery, however, has a theological aspect which is left unsaid: the almost laughable powerlessness of the wooden image of the god.[46]

I find no trace of mockery in the narrative. In my interpretation I propose that it is the prevailing negative attitude towards both idol-worship and the bodily functions of women which have influenced the standard interpretations of this narrative. This negativity has damaged the understanding of the story both because it demeans Rachel's

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[46] Westermann, (1985) p.495.

actions, and because this attitude has resulted in insufficient examination of the text.

In his article "Another Look at Rachel's Theft of the Teraphim," Moshe Greenberg gives a detailed description of the many and varied suggestions as to why Rachel stole the teraphim, and what its significance was in light of the possibilities such as securing legal heirs, providing for safe travel, harming Laban in some way, or somehow affecting the whole Jacob-Laban relationship. He concludes that the explanation (anticipated by Josephus) is simply that:

> ...this custom of the Mesopotamians to carry their household-gods along with them wherever they travelled is as old as the days of Jacob, when Rachel his wife did the same....Rachel was about to depart for a far-off land from which, to all appearances, she had no thought of returning. In the normal course of events, we may suppose, she would have made, or her father would have given her, replicas of her hearth gods, to accompany and protect her. But the decision of Jacob and his wives to flee was taken secretly, and Laban had to be kept in the dark about it. So Rachel resorted to a desperate device: she absconded with the original images themselves. That was reason enough for Laban to light out after them. The original images were the most

> sacred heirloom of the family; they must never leave their consecrated niche in the home.[47]

Greenberg's suggestion that Rachel stole the teraphim in order to "accompany and protect her" will be helpful in my interpretation of the episode. It is important to recognize his proposal that Rachel's theft was deliberate, and her motivation serious. Greenberg points out that Rachel was only one of many who carried their gods from Haran (35:2ff.). He indicates that she was motivated by her (popular and common) religious convictions. This is further substantiated in Greenberg's comments by his mention of Rachel's particular concern to have the teraphim because she was "anxious for children." I will explore the possibility that Rachel indeed stole the teraphim in order to protect Joseph, and her second (unborn) son, Benjamin.

I cite many of these comments in my interpretation of the narrative in Chapter Three. While I agree with some of these comments and reject others, the comparison serves to illustrate that the episodes in the narrative may be read and understood in a variety of ways. This point is fundamental to Mieke Bal's methodology, described in the following chapter. The purpose of each methodology, replete with its own presuppositions, is ultimately the attribution of meaning to the text.

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[47] Greenberg, (1962) pp.246-7.

Chapter Two

An Introduction to Narratology

Narratology is the theory of narrative texts. It describes the way in which a narrative text is constructed, and examines the component parts of the narrative. It thus offers readers an instrument with which they can describe narrative texts. Narratology is not a mechanical procedure, but a set of interpretive tools. The description of the narrative text begins with a distinction among the three layers of the narrative: text, story and fabula. This distinction is the point of departure for Mieke Bal's theory of narrative texts which I will present in this chapter, and which will then serve as the basis for my own interpretation of the biblical stories about Leah and Rachel.

The text/story/fabula distinction implies that it is possible to analyze the three layers separately, although the layers do not exist independently of one another. Only the text layer, embodied in the sign system of language, is directly accessible. The fabula consists of the material that is worked into the story--a series of events occurring in time and space. Events, actors, time and location together constitute the material of a fabula. All of these components are referred to as "elements," which are organized in a certain way into the story. The arrangement of the elements, in relation to one another, can produce the

desired effect, be this convincing, moving, disgusting, or aesthetic.

Several processes are involved in ordering the various elements of the fabula into a story. This is not to be confused with the activity of the author, but is rather part of the descriptive and analytical system of narratology. In Bal's Narratology, the "principles of ordering" are presented as follows:

1. The events are arranged in a sequence which can differ from the chronological sequence.

2. The amount of time which is allotted in the story to the various elements of the fabula is determined with respect to the amount of time which these elements take up in the fabula. (This is to say that while on the level of fabula elements are simply "presented," this presentation produces certain effects on the level of the story.)

3. The actors are provided with distinct traits. In this manner, they are individualized and transformed into characters.

4. The location where events occur are also given distinct characteristics and are thus transformed into specific places. (These "transformations" described in #3 and #4 may be described as the movement from the fabula to the story.)

5. In addition to the necessary relationships among actors, events, locations and time, all of which were

already describable in the layer of the fabula, other relationships (symbolic, allusive, etc.) may exist among the various elements, producing an effect on the level of the story.

6. A choice is made from among the various "points of view" from which the elements of the fabula are presented, also producing a given effect in the story.[48]

The result of these processes is a specific story which is distinct from other stories. Each story has its own specific traits, or "aspects." The "elements" of the fabula are transformed into the "aspects" of the story. The fabula, then, consists of elements presented in a given manner, the result of which produces a story. The distinction between the three layers of text/story/fabula may be illustrated by Jacob and Rachel's meeting at the well in Haran (29:10-12). The following information is provided by the text:

Jacob sees Rachel,
Jacob approaches,
he rolls the stone from the mouth of the well,
he waters Laban's flock, his mother's brother.
Jacob kisses Rachel,
he lifts up his voice and cries.
Jacob tells Rachel who he is,
she runs and tells her father.

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[48] Bal, Narratology (1985) p.7.

From these words provided by the text it is possible to discern the elements which comprise the layer of fabula. The elements include the event of the meeting, the actors Jacob, Rachel and Laban, that it is not yet the time of day when the flocks are watered and the location of the meeting at the well. The arrangement of these elements produce an effect, comprising the third layer of the story, and the effect is open to interpretation. The various interpretations of these elements will be detailed in the following chapter.

A narrative text is a text in which a narrative agent tells a story. The narrative agent or "narrator" is a linguistic subject, a function (and not a person) which expresses itself in the language that constitutes the text. The narrator is not the author, rather it is a function used by the author. There is a relationship between the three agents that function in the three layers: the actor in the fabula, the focalizor in the story, and the narrator in the text.

The narrator relates continually. Whenever direct speech occurs in the text, it is as if the narrator temporarily transfers this function to one of the actors. It is thus important to ascertain who is doing the narration. A text also contains more than the narration of dialogue and events, such as a disclosure which is not directly connected with the events: a description of a face or of a location.

It is thus possible to describe what is being said in a text, and to classify it as descriptive or narrative. It still remains to be ascertained how all of this is being narrated. There is often a noticeable difference between the narrator's style and that of the actors. The textual description which results from the procedure of ascertaining these details and differences provides the basis for an eventual interpretation. In other words, in applying the system of narratology, we have an instrument which is used to describe the text. On the basis of the description it is then possible to attach meaning to the text.

> An interpretation is never anything more than a proposal ('I think that the text means this'). If a proposal is to be accepted, it must be well founded ('I think, on the basis of the data shown, that the text means this'). If a proposal is based upon a precise description it can then be discussed. The theory presented here is an instrument for making descriptions and, as such, it inevitably but only indirectly leads to interpretation.[49]

The Fabula and its Elements

The material which constitutes the fabula may be divided into "fixed" and "changeable" elements; that is to say: "objects" and "processes." Objects include not only actors, but also such stable elements as locations and

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[49] Ibid., p.10.

things. Processes are the events, the changes which occur in, with, through and among the objects.

> The word process emphasizes the ideas of development, succession, alteration, and interrelation among the events. Both sorts of elements - objects and processes - are indispensable for the construction of a fabula.[50]

Events within the narrative text must themselves be defined using certain criteria. The description of an event is one which indicates a change, a choice or a confrontation. Once events are distinguished and classified, the relationships which connect them to one another may be described, producing the 'structure' of the events. This structure indicates specific groupings of events. When the groupings are enlarged into groupings of series of events, they then produce the fabula. "Three phases can be distinguished in every fabula: the possibility (or virtuality), the event itself (or realization), and the result (or conclusion) of a process."[51]

When Jacob decides to leave Haran (30:25), Jacob, an actor, may be described as an object in the fabula. The decision to leave is a change or alteration, and therefore described as a process. Jacob, an object, and the decision, a process, are both elements in the fabula. The three phases

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[50] Ibid., p.13.

[51] Ibid., p.19.

distinguished in every fabula may be illustrated by this example. The "possibility" includes the element of Jacob's request that Laban send him away (30:25). The "event itself" includes the element of fleeing (31:17-18). There are many "results" of Jacob's request. They include his negotiations with Laban regarding the animals (30:31- 34), Jacob's complex animal husbandry (30:37-43), and his conversation with Leah and Rachel (31:5-16).

Actors who cause or undergo events fall into a category which is called "functional." The subdivision of actors into classes presupposes that human thinking and action is directed towards an aim: the actors have an intention. The intention is toward the achievement of something agreeable or favorable, or the evasion of something disagreeable or unfavorable. The class of actors who possess intention are called "actants," and they exist in relation to each other and to the ultimate intention. This relation itself is called "function."

> One can never escape the obvious fact that literature is made by, for, and usually about, people. Relations between people themselves and between people and the world will therefore almost always be of importance in fabulas. It is possible to describe in every fabula at least one type of relation between actors that is of a psychological or ideological nature, or of both simultaneously. On the basis of the information about

> the actors contained in the text, one may group them according to those principles which seem important in the frame of reference of the fabula or groups of fabulas under analysis.[52]

Laban and Jacob are actants in the episode describing their meeting (29:13-19). Each has an intention to achieve something, and they exist in relation to one another. Their respective intentions and relation to one another will be described in the following chapter.

Psychologically oriented criticism pays special attention to how one actor relates to another, such as daughter to mother or father to son. Ideological relations occur in many if not all fabulas. Ideological oppositions occur for example, between feudalism and liberalism, patriarchy and egalitarianism, the individual and the collective, or the individual and the representatives of power. Other oppositions of groups result in ideological relationships such as black "against" white, men "against" women, or conformist "against" individualist. Other oppositions may also become important, such as those based on physical appearance: fair versus dark-haired seems to coincide in popular fiction with good versus evil, thus bearing an ideological component. Another ideologically colored opposition is that between tall and slender on the

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[52] Ibid., p.36.

one hand and short and fat on the other, which is related to its consequence: marriageability or spinsterhood. Rachel is described as "of beautiful form," and Leah as having "weak eyes" (29:16-17). It is the beautiful daughter, Rachel, whom Jacob wants to marry.

> Spacial elements play an important role in fabulas. It is, for instance, possible to make a note of the place in each fabula, in each fabula, and then to investigate whether a connection exists between the kind of events, the identity of the actors, and the location. The subdivision of locations into groups is a manner of gaining insight into the relations between elements. A contrast between inside and outside is often relevant, where inside may carry the suggestion of protection, and outside that of danger.[53]

Spacial oppositions may also be related to psychological, ideological and moral oppositions, for instance high-low related to favorable-unfavorable, far-near to familiar-strange, or safe-unsafe. Spacial opposition is relevant to Laban's search for the teraphim (31:33-35). Rachel, the woman, is seated above her father on the camel. Laban is below, going in and out of tents - an interior, female-associated space. Rachel, physically above, is "in the know," while Laban, physically below, is searching.

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[53] Ibid., p.44.

The Story and its Aspects

The "aspects" distinguish the story from the fabula. The story does not consist of material different from the fabula, but in the story layer the material is looked at from a particular angle: How is it that the narrative text comes across to the reader in a certain manner? Why do we find the same fabula beautiful when presented by one writer and trite when presented by another?

> If one regards the fabula primarily as the product of imagination, the story could be regarded as the result of an ordering....The fabula is 'treated' and the reader is being 'manipulated' by this treatment. It is basically at this level that ideology is inscribed.[54]

Such manipulation takes place when actors are turned into specific characters, and especially when 'perspective' (or point of view) is determined:

> The point of view from which the elements of the fabula are being presented is often of decisive importance for the meaning the reader will assign to the fabula. This concept always plays a part in the most everyday situations. A conflict is best judged by letting each party give its own version of the events, its own 'story'....Perspective, then, is the technical aspect: the placing of the point of view in a specific agent.[55]

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[54] Ibid., p.50.

[55] Ibid., p.50.

Point of view has a significant part to play in the shaping of meaning. The episode of Leah's marriage to Jacob illustrates how the fabula is "treated," and how the meaning is shaped by the point of view. According to the elements of the fabula Jacob has served Laban for the agreed-upon amount of time and he requests his wife (29:21). Laban makes a wedding-feast, brings Jacob his wife, and the marriage is consummated (29:22-23). "...[I]t came to pass in the morning, behold, it was Leah" (v.25). The text is narrated so that we experience this event as something which has transpired between Laban and Jacob. In the morning, Jacob is the focalizor, so the reader perceives the event from his perspective. Something has happened to him, as he indicates by demanding of Laban: "What have you done to me?" (v.25).

When meaning is attributed to this episode it is affected by the fact that Jacob is the focalizor. The reader is exposed to Jacob's shock, waking up with the wrong woman. When most commentators attribute meaning to this episode they refer to Jacob's long years of service, and love, for Rachel. They attempt to inspire sympathy for Jacob, the butt of Laban's treachery. Since the episode is not related from Leah's point of view, the reader is not exposed to her feelings or thoughts about being given in marriage to a man who loves her sister.

The sequence of events in the story is not necessarily the same as the chronological order of the fabula. The chronological order of the fabula is a theoretical construction based on the laws of everyday reality: one cannot arrive at a place before one has set out to go there, but in a story this is possible. The following passage serves as an example: John rang the neighbors' doorbell. He had so irresistibly felt the need to stand eye to eye with a human being that he had not been able to remain behind the sewing machine. In reality (fictitious or not), the sequence of events must have been the other way around: first John must have felt the desire to go and see someone, then he acted accordingly and went to ring the doorbell.[56] Differences between the arrangement in the story and the chronology of the fabula are called chronological deviations or anachronies.

According to the chronological order of the fabula Jacob rose up and with his sons and his wives and all of his possessions he set out for the land of Canaan (31:17- 18). Laban went to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole her father's teraphim (v.19). In reality, the sequence of events must have been the other way around: first Laban went to shear his sheep (since he was not aware that had Jacob fled), then Rachel stole the teraphim (because she had them with her when they fled), and then Jacob and his retinue fled. There

[56] Ibid., p.51.

is a difference between the arrangement in the story and the chronology of the fabula.

An anachrony may be either in the past (retroversion) or in the future (anticipation). A retroversion which takes place outside of the time span of the primary fabula is referred to as an "external analepsis" (external retroversion). If it occurs within the time span of the primary fabula it is referred to as an "internal analepsis" (internal retroversion).

External analepsis often provides information about the past of the actors when the past can be of importance for the interpretation of events. For example, the narrator describes Jacob's arrival in Haran and the scene at the well (29:1-8). While Jacob is speaking with the shepherds, Rachel approaches. The narrator includes information about her past stating: "She was a shepherdess" (29:9).

Internal analepsis may provide information about a newly-introduced actor who has been concerned with other things during the events of the primary fabula. For example, Laban is introduced when Rachel runs home to tell her father of Jacob's arrival (29:12). Laban has been concerned with other things during the events of the primary fabula related by the narrator.

An "ellipsis" indicates that something has been omitted in the "fabula-time." It is not always possible to discover an ellipsis. One cannot know what should have been included,

or what information has been omitted; all one can do is deduce that something is missing. What is missing may or may not be of importance. It may be that what is omitted is unimportant, painful, difficult to put into words, or the actor may want to deny or attempt to undo something. An ellipsis may be illustrated by the "fabula-time" which clearly elapses between the marriage negotiations discussed by Laban and Jacob (29:18-19) and Leah's marriage to Jacob seven years later (29:23-25). While the reader cannot know what information has been omitted, one can deduce that dialogue and events have taken place over the course of the intervening seven years.

Spaces function in the story in two ways. A space may serve as a frame, a place of action. In this capacity, the description will lead to a picture of that space. The space may also remain entirely in the background. In other cases, the space may be "thematized:" it becomes an object of presentation for its own sake. In this capacity it influences the fabula when the fact that something is happening in a particular place, is just as important as the thing which is happening.

> The movement of characters can constitute a transition from one space to another. Often, one space will be the other's opposite. A person is travelling, for instance, from a negative to a positive space. The space need not be the goal of that move. The latter may have quite a

> different aim, with space representing an important or an unimportant interim between departure and arrival, difficult or easy to traverse. The character that is moving towards a goal need not always arrive in another space. In many travel stories, the movement is a goal in itself. It is expected to result in a change, liberation, introspection, wisdom, or knowledge.[57]

An example of a thematized space is the well where Jacob meets Rachel (29:9-10). It is already known from a preceding narrative that one may meet a future bride at a well. Abraham's servant Eliezer meets Rebecca, Isaac's bride-to-be, at a well (24:15). The well is also replete with meaning concerning Jacob's movement in the narrative. He was travelling from a dangerous situation, his brother's anger, to a safe place. Arrival at the well is a turning point for him, representing his safe arrival in Haran, his future as a shepherd, and his initial meeting with his future wife.

The relationships between elements on the story level arise because of the way they are combined and presented. The relations between space and event become clear when we think of well-known, stereotypical combinations, such as a declarations of love by moonlight, a rendezvous in an inn, or a brawl in a cafe. The relationship between space and

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[57] Ibid., p.96.

event is certainly clear in the biblical context where there are many examples of places named for an event which has occurred there.

Some events have a strong influence on the course of the fabula, such as turning points and changes. Such events are usually presented extensively. Other events are quickly summarized, usually indicating that they are less significant, in the sense that they do not greatly influence the course of the fabula. There are other techniques which affect how the fabula is understood, such as slowing down the tempo, pausing, or repeating. When Jacob arrives at the well in Haran the process of watering the sheep is repeated twice (29:3 and 8). The repetition is significant in its anticipation of the unusual way in which Rachel's flocks will be watered on that day. Instead of waiting for the usual time, and all of the shepherds rolling the stone from the mouth of the well together, Jacob moves it by himself (29:10).

Character Development

Characters in the story resemble people. They are not real people, but imitation, fantasy, fabricated creatures.

> The character is not a human being, but resembles one. It has no real psyche, personality, ideology, or competence to act, but it does possess characteristics which make psychological and ideological description

> possible....The description of a character is always strongly colored by the ideology of the investigators, who are usually unaware of their own ideological principles. Consequently, what is presented as a description is an implicit value-judgement. Characters are attacked or defended as if they were people.[58]

When a character is allotted its own name, this determines not only its sex/gender (as a rule) but also its social status, geographical origin, and sometimes even more. A portrait, the description of the exterior character, further defines the character. If a character is old, it does different things than if it were young. If it is attractive, it lives differently from the way it would live if it were unattractive. Leah and Rachel are not introduced simply as Laban's daughters, but they are each allotted their own names (29:16). The portraits which develop of Leah and Rachel distinguish the two women from each other. Leah was older, and Rachel younger (29:16). Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful (29:17). Leah was fertile, but Rachel was infertile (29:31). Leah was hated, and Rachel was loved (29:30-31). Each character is defined.

Repetition, accumulation, relations to other characters, and transformations are four different principles which work together to construct the image of the

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[58] Ibid., pp.81-2.

character. Characteristics are either mentioned explicitly, or may be deduced from what the character does. When determining a characters' importance, it may be helpful or necessary to discover the following information:

1. Qualification: comprehensive information about appearance, psychology, motivation, past.

2. Distribution: the character occurs often in the story, his or her presence is felt at important moments in the fabula.

3. Independence: the character can occur alone or hold monologues.

4. Function: certain actions are those of the character alone; s/he makes agreements, vanquishes opponents, unmasks traitors, etc.

5. Relations: s/he maintains relations with the largest number of characters.[59]

Focalization

Whenever events are presented, they are always presented from within a certain "vision." A point of view is chosen, presenting a certain <u>way</u> of seeing things.

> Perception is a psychological process, strongly dependent on the position of the perceiving body; a small child sees things in a totally different way from an adult....Perception depends on so many factors that

[59] Ibid., p.92.

> striving for objectivity is pointless. To mention only a few factors: one's position with respect to the perceived object, the fall of the light, the distance, previous knowledge, psychological attitude towards the object; all this and more affects the picture one forms and passes on to others.[60]

In a story, elements of the fabula are presented in a certain way. The relation between the elements presented and the vision through which they are presented (or: the vision and that which is perceived) is the focalization. It is possible, in fiction and in reality, for one person to express the vision of another. When examining a narrative text, it is important to make this distinction: between "those who see" and "those who speak." According to Bal, this distinction must be made: the agent that "sees" must be given a status other than that of the agent that narrates. By describing the focalization of events in a story, one may make this distinction between the what one agent narrates and what another agent "sees."

Focalization belongs in the story, the layer between the linguistic text and the fabula, because the definition of focalization refers to a relationship.

> Each pole of that relationship, the subject and the object of focalization, must be studied separately. The subject of focalization, the 'focalizor', is the

[60] Ibid., p.100.

> point from which the elements are viewed. That point can lie with a character (i.e. an element of the fabula), or outside it. If the focalizor coincides with the character, that character will have a technical advantage over the other characters. The reader watches with the character's eyes and will, in principle, be inclined to accept the vision presented by that character.[61]

Character-bound focalization can shift from one character to another, giving the reader a picture of the origin of a conflict or how the various characters view the same facts. Nevertheless, there usually is no doubt in the mind of the reader which character 'should' receive the most attention or sympathy.

Where focalization is concerned, the following questions are relevant:

1. What does the character focalize; what is it aimed at?

2. How does it do this; with what attitude does it view things?

3. Who focalizes it; whose focalized object is it?[62]

Not only characters, but objects, landscapes, events, and all elements are focalized. Based on the focalization, the reader is presented with an interpretation of the

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[61] Ibid., p.104.

[62] Ibid., p.106.

elements. Leah is the focalizor of the naming-speeches for her children. For example, when she names Reuven, Leah expresses her own perspective on her marriage: "...now my husband will love me" (29:32).

The Gender Code and Feminist Interpretation

A code may be seen as a system of communication which controls interpretation. Different disciplines utilize different codes on which to base their interpretations; codes control their interpretation. Bal examines four disciplines in Murder and Difference: history, theology, anthropology, and literary. The disciplines function as codes when a rule of correlation (in language and communication) is institutionally tied to a particular group of people, and projects its own interests upon interpretation.

> Because codes are anchored in social life, and specifically that of a particular group, they are inevitably biased by the interests of that group....they determine which meanings are permitted and which meanings are prohibited, according to the interests that are served by this legislation.[63]

This is to say that a discipline functions as a code because there is a common understanding (implicit or explicit) within that group which determines meaning. Due to the fact

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[63] Bal, Murder and Difference (1988) p.5.

that these codes naturally reflect the interests of the groups that promulgate them, these disciplinary codes are by definition biased and limiting.

Bal argues that other codes, such as the thematic code and the gender code, are less limiting than the disciplinary codes because they are transdisciplinary. In advocating the gender code, which I will be adopting as well, Bal contends that it:

> ...is not institutionalized in any discipline, but disciplines adopt it freely. The gender code is adopted, most often in its masculine version, without ever being avowed. Only since the development of women's studies is it both criticized and explicitly embraced: in its feminist version, of course.[64]

The gender code is not a priori polemical or dualistic. To keep in mind one sexual group is not to oppose another; it is, rather, to see the differences that separate them. The feminist enterprise, therefore, affects not only meaning, but the status of meaning itself. It attempts to bring to light the forces which would have meaning be isolated, determined, and fixed.

The gender code is concerned with the differences between the focalization of the different sexes. (It may be noted here that "sex" refers to a biological construct,

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[64] Ibid., p.10.

while "gender" refers to a cultural construct.) The gender code points out and emphasizes the differences between the sexes. The gender code assumes that female experience and male experience differ from one another and that the difference is worth exploring. The distinction between men and women is declared significant--the foundation of the code. Women read differently from men, not because of an innate quality, but simply because they have a different background.

> If women today are better equipped than men to understand those parts and aspects of the Bible which have been under-emphasized, there is no reason for surprise, let alone for disturbance. Women, by virtue of their so far excluded position, can rearrange the text in such a way that the account of women's lives as we find them in the Bible become more interesting, more instructive, more inspiring than they were read so far. Unfortunately, they also become more disturbing, due to the disturbing distribution of power in the text's pre-text. But rather than repressing or explaining away the disturbing aspects of the text, the response of the female readers, or male readers willing and able to 'read as a woman' (Culler 1983) should be gratefully acknowledged as an addition or an improvement.[65]

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[65] Bal, Anti-Covenant (1989) p.16.

A transdisciplinary use of the gender code is illustrated by my discussion of motherhood in the following chapter. In an attempt to interpret the significance of motherhood for the Leah and Rachel, I examine motherhood from the perspective of the women. This examination is informed by scholarship in various fields including history, anthropology, feminist literature and psychology. In my interpretation of Rachel's theft of the teraphim I found it necessary to include a brief overview of attitudes towards menstruation. It is my opinion that these attitudes negatively influenced the standard interpretations of the episode, and have resulted in insufficient examination of the text.

According to Bal, scholarly debate about "what the text means" has had the important impact of showing that "no scholarship is void of interpretive acts, of historical and ideological biases, and of the blindness inherent in privileged positions."[66] Feminist biblical scholarship constitutes a challenge to established assumptions. It is necessary at times to dismantle pre-established readings of a text to pave the way for alternative readings. In these readings, "another side of male behavior, and the experience of women" are magnified and made visible. The Bible contains a wealth of ideological representations of women and gender

[66] Ibid., p.15.

differences which have been used in many different ways throughout history. It is important to uncover not only the ideology in the biblical narrative, but (perhaps even more) in the commentaries and traditional interpretations which shape our reading of the texts.[67]

"For a feminist reading of a text, concepts previously thought universal, and presented as universal, can often be seen as coming out of particular social frameworks and cultures, out of the dominant discourses, primarily shaped by particular groups of men and serving their particular purposes."[68] Interpreters may claim that they have "the objective reading of the Bible," or, "The Truth," but those claims have historically been used, and continue to be used, by those in positions of power to pursue their particular goals. Interpretation of the Bible may be seen as a political issue because of the Bible's central place in western culture:

> ...people wishing to lend weight to their particular ways of viewing how we should relate to each other in our social framework, how that social framework should be organized, and so on, have used biblical texts not only to support their views but to give origins to

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[67] Merideth, in Anti-Covenant (1989) p.64.

[68] Shaw, in Anti-Covenant p.114.

> their views, to claim an authority for them beyond all human authority--God.[69]

A feminist scholar approaches biblical texts and their "authoritative" interpretations with suspicion. A feminist analysis begins with the assumption that the inequality of the sexes is neither a biological given nor a divine mandate, but a cultural construction. It is necessary to become aware of how various interpretations of the Bible are used to construct notions of what is "feminine" and what is "masculine."[70]

As explained above, the elements of a fabula are organized in a careful way to tell a story. The way the story is told propagates an implicit or explicit ideology. "This ideology suggests to the reader that particular events, according to their relationship with other events, are valuable, successful, or normative. Narratives with a highly ideological intent or function are referred to as 'ideo-stories'."[71] There is a relationship between the ideology, the story through which it is conveyed, and the process of reading and interpretation. Narratology is concerned with analyzing the ideo-story, and with its effect on the reader. The presentation of an ideo-story is not

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[69] Shaw, in Anti-Covenant p.114.

[70] Shaw, in Anti-Covenant p.115.

[71] Tapp, in Anti-Covenant p.157.

neutral: it is the interaction between the ideo-story and the reader which gives meaning to the text. It is necessary to examine the components of a story, and to gain an awareness of the process of reading.

An ideo-story may be illustrated by the episode of Leah's marriage to Jacob (29:23-25). In the text, Jacob's response in the morning is telling: what have you done to me? It is the seed of the widespread interpretation that it is Jacob who was wronged, who is distressed, whose perceptions and sentiments matter. Neither the narrator nor the majority of commentators have speculated on what Leah and Rachel felt.

Bal and other feminist scholars admit and agree that their own readings are not "presupposition-free." Rather, a critical component of their approach is their own awareness and acceptance of this fact. There is an awareness of focusing on specific themes and asking specific questions of the text. The questions posed reflect feminist presuppositions and suspicions but they do not claim to be the only valid questions to ask. Feminist interpretation advocates the gender code, taking for granted that there are differences between the sexes and that those differences are vitally significant for interpretation.

The Reader in the Text

> The text is not an object upon which we can operate; it is another subject that speaks to us. We can listen, and just as in real life, we will hear our own voice reflected; yet we cannot attribute just anything to the other speaker. If we shout too loud, so that the other is reduced to silence, we will lack arguments to make our case. This is the point of rational argumentation, of the attempt to give evidence in the text while we do not believe interpretations can ever be truly based on it. It is not a matter of empirical proof; it is a matter of plausible interaction.[72]

Umberto Eco is often quoted for his assertion that writing is a "communicative process," causing every text to be more or less indeterminate when considered from the vantage point of reading. An obvious difference between reading and other forms of social interaction is the fact that with reading there is no face-to-face encounter. A text cannot adapt itself to each reader it comes into contact with. Whereas partners in conversation can ask each other questions to bridge the gap of the "inexperienceability of one another's experiences," the reader can never learn how accurate or inaccurate his/her views of the text are. However, the communication between text and reader must be controlled in some way. "This control cannot be understood

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[72] Bal, Murder and Difference p.240.

as a tangible entity occurring independently of the process of communication. Although exercised by the text, it is not in the text."[73] In other words, a "controlled communication" takes place between reader and text. The reader is given some information, while other information is not given. The reader is bound by what is given, but the process of interpretation, and attribution of meaning is part of the process. The reader fills in the gaps: what is concealed spurs the reader into action, but this action is also controlled by what is revealed. As Bal has pointed out, the interpretation must exhibit plausibility, by being rationally well-founded in the text; but a text without the attribution of meaning is empty.

It is the feminist enterprise to reconstruct the female experience by filling in the blank pages and allowing the silences to speak. "What is needed is a more inclusive notion of history which is based on the recognition that women have always been essential to the making of history and that men and women are the measure of significance."[74] Literature has been made to function as part of a tradition which inscribes the dominant ideology and thereby marginalizes women. The critical tradition reinforces (even where the literature does not) certain images of women which

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[73] Eco, in The Reader in the Text (1980) p.110.

[74] Greene and Kahn, (1985) p.20.

encourage them to accept their marginalization, or praise them for such virtues as meekness and obedience. "Moreover, literary history has canonized, designated as 'great', certain texts which claim to embody 'universal human truths'; but such 'truths' only appear so because of their congruence with the dominant ideology."[75]

Feminist scholarship exposes the collusion between literature and ideology. It is alert to the omissions, gaps, and partial truths which ideology masks: it attends to the silences. Adrienne Rich suggests that "listening for the silences, the absences, the unspoken," is essential in understanding women's experience. In breaking those silences (which is to say: asking different questions) women make themselves present and define a new reality.

Methodology and the Gender Code

Narratology and the gender code will be used simultaneously in the interpretation which follows. Narratology will be employed as the method of interpretation, while the gender code will inform the work, determining the themes which will be examined. While narratology will be the primary instrument used in the analysis, description and subsequent interpretation of the text, I do not always employ Bal's narratological terminology. The instrument provides the interpreter with a

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[75] Ibid., p.22.

systematic approach to the text. The text, divided into its component parts, is described on the basis of fixed criteria. Each character and event is examined and described on the basis of the fixed criteria outlined above. The purpose of this textual description, in the end, is to provide the basis for interpretation--for the attribution of meaning.

The instrument, narratology, is an especially effective tool for use in conjunction with the gender code due to the attention it pays to all facets of a narrative: text, fabula and story. Narratology provides the framework for examining the text from a feminist perspective by 'opening' the text to its (as yet) less-examined facets. These facets include themes to which less attention has thus far been paid, such as motherhood and the role of women in the "patriarchal narratives." However, of equal or greater importance is the attention paid by narratology to the distinctions between the author of a text, its narrator, actors, and focalizors. The methodological use of focalization allows for the long-ignored point of view of female characters to come to light. An interpretation based upon the experience of those characters may prove to be dramatically different from a 'standard' interpretation.

Chapter Three

Rachel the Shepherdess: Chapter 29:1-20

As chapter 29 begins the narrator describes Jacob's arrival in the land of the "people of the east" (v.1). Jacob sees the scene at the well, and the process of watering the animals is described. Jacob begins a conversation with the gathered shepherds. In this first dialogue, Jacob asks the shepherds if they know his relative, Laban, and how he is (v.6). The shepherds tell Jacob that Laban is well, and that his daughter Rachel is presently approaching with the flock (v.6).

Jacob makes a suggestion to the shepherds as to how they might structure the rest of their workday (v.7). They disagree with him, and explain (as the narrator has just done) the watering process. However, they add the information that all the shepherds gather to do the job of rolling the stone from the mouth of the well <u>together</u> (v.8). The description of the watering process is important because this time it will be done in an uncustomary manner. As they continue to speak, Rachel approaches with the flock, "which is her father's, since she is a shepherdess" (v.9).

Commentators attempt to explain the information that Rachel is a shepherdess. Westermann suggests it "presupposes that at that period girls helped with the work." Jeansonne and Speiser indicate that it shows a (perhaps exaggerated)

measure of independence for women during this time period. It is of interest to note Ramban's comment on this verse:

> The intent of this is to relate that Laban's sheep had no shepherd other than Rachel, since her father turned over the flock to her alone. She alone tended them all the days, and Leah did not go with the flock at all....Perhaps due to Leah's eyes being tender, the rays of the sun would have hurt her, or because Leah was older and of marriageable age, her father was more concerned about her...but Rachel was young and there was no concern for her. This is the sense of the verse 'And Jacob kissed Rachel' (v.11). It may be as Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra said that where the Hebrew word for 'kissing' is followed by the letter lamed (as here), it means not on the mouth, but that he kissed her on her head or on her shoulder.

It appears that Ramban has no difficulty with the concept that Rachel is a shepherdess. He is concerned with why Rachel shepherds and Leah does not, and with propriety. One must be more careful with a daughter of marriageable age than a younger one, and even the young girl is not kissed on the mouth. Ramban's comment places everyone where they ought to be: Laban in charge, Leah of marriageable age at home, and Rachel still young enough to tend the sheep. His comment also indirectly protects Jacob from any hint of improper

behavior by determining that Rachel was not kissed on the lips.

The next few verses consist of fast-paced action. Despite all the times Rachel's name is mentioned, she does not speak. Rachel, in fact, does not speak at all until long after her marriage.

Jacob sees Rachel,
Jacob approaches,
He rolls the stone from the mouth of the well,
He waters Laban's flock, his mother's brother.
Jacob kisses Rachel,
He lifts up his voice and cries.
Jacob tells Rachel who he is,
She runs, and tells her father (vv.10-12).

Rashi comments that Rachel ran specifically to tell her father "since her mother had died." Although Leah and Rachel's mother is not mentioned in the narrative, Rashi and Ramban both compare this incident to Genesis 24:28. There Rebecca runs and tells "her mother's house" of the arrival of Abraham's servant.

These verses contain a significant word-play. The verbs "to water" and "to kiss" have the same consonantal sounds in Hebrew. Various forms of the verb "to water" appear in verses 2,3,7,8, and 10 as the procedure at the well is explained in detail. The amount of detail included in the description of the ordinary watering process is unusual in

the normally spare descriptions found in the Torah. According to Ramban, it indicates to the reader that the seemingly ordinary will today be extraordinary. The verb "to kiss" appears in verses 11 and 13, first when Jacob kisses Rachel, and then when Laban kisses Jacob. Jacob waters the flock: vayyashk (v.10), and then kisses Rachel: vayyishak (v.11).

The literary device of selecting two similar sounding words of dissimilar meaning connects several elements of the episode: the flock, the watering, kissing and establishing blood relations. Jacob sees Rachel with the flock, he waters the flock and kisses Rachel, establishing a relationship with both. Jacob knows he is watering Laban's flock and kissing his cousin, because the shepherds have given him information. Rachel does not know who is rolling the stone, watering the flock and kissing her. He does both of these things before he speaks and tells her who he is. It is safe to conclude that the incident is a strange and unusual one for Rachel. Jacob, a blood-relation, is connected to Laban through his mother. The flock is Laban's, and Rachel is Laban's. Just as Jacob waters the sheep, and kisses Rachel, shepherding will become his work, and Rachel his wife.

Jacob is the focalizor in this episode. What the narrator describes is Jacob's perception and experience upon his arrival in Haran. It is at this point that Westermann

describes Jacob as "happy and excited," and Von Rad suggests that Jacob "had to do something for the girl." One can understand that both of these interpretations may reflect Jacob's feelings. After leaving his home under difficult circumstances and making a long journey, he has met with the success of a safe arrival and finding his relatives.

It is when the commentators describe Rachel's feelings that they disagree. Westermann describes her as "all excited," while Von Rad believes she is "agitated." Clearly, the reason for this puzzlement is that the narrator does not tell us how Rachel perceives the situation. Rachel has worked, been kissed, and has run home to tell her father of the new arrival. She is an actor, but since she is not the focalizor of the events we are not informed of her perceptions.

When Laban hears the news, he runs out to meet Jacob and bring him to his house (v.13). It is Laban and not Rachel who brings Jacob home. Rachel only informs her father of the arrival. Jacob tells Laban his story, and Laban avows him as his relative (v.14). Jacob remains with Laban for approximately a month. It may appear on the surface as if Laban is offering Jacob hospitality, but Laban's motives are questioned by commentators. According to Rashi, who expresses deep suspicion about Laban, explains that Laban runs toward Jacob to greet him:

> ...thinking that Jacob was laden with money, for the servant of that household (Eliezer) had come there with ten camels fully laden. 'And embraced him'. When he saw that he had nothing with him, he thought, 'Perhaps he has brought gold coins and they are hidden away in his bosom!' 'He kissed him'. He thought, 'Perhaps he has brought pearls and they are in his mouth!'

Rashi's negative portrayal of Laban continues in his explanation of verse 14, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh:"

> Really, I have no reason to take you into my house, since you have brought nothing with you, but because of our relationship I will put up with you for' the space of a month'. Thus, indeed, he did, but even this was not for nothing, for he tended Laban's sheep.

Nehama Leibowitz explains that Rashi's comment is based on the word ach at the beginning of Laban's comment. It implies a qualification or opposition to that which has been stated previously. Since in this case there is no previous conversation Rashi supplies us with the undertone, suggesting what Laban felt but left unsaid. Rashi's comment also indicates that he understands va'avadtani as an imperfect, referring to the future. While this form could imply "you have worked for me" until now, with a past connotation, Rashi wished to rule out this meaning,

continuing his negative portrayal of Laban. Leibowitz explains that:

> Laban did not wish to pay him for past services at all but only referred to future ones. What had been was gone and done with. But how do we know that Jacob had at all worked for him? Because he did not discuss the work but only the payment. It is taken for granted that he was already working. Laban had long ago realized that Jacob's services were necessary and worth his while--so much so that he was willing to pay for them.[76]

The wage negotiations are interrupted by additional information supplied by the narrator: "Laban had two daughters, the name of the older one was Leah, and the name of the younger one was Rachel. Leah's eyes were rakkot, and Rachel was of beautiful form and fair to look upon" (vv.16-17). The reader is already aware that Laban has at least one daughter, Rachel, and that Jacob has already seen, kissed and spoken to her. The additional information supplied here about Rachel's lovely appearance may be intended to spark curiosity in the mind of the reader concerning Jacob's attitude toward this daughter. It is notable that Leah and Rachel are named, and are not simply "Laban's daughters." This is the first of several instances in which the differences between Leah and Rachel are stated.

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[76] Leibowitz, (1981) pp.319-20.

The difference which the narrator has noted here between the appearances of Leah and Rachel is not reiterated later in the narrative. However, it is significant that they are given names and different characteristics.

The narrator refers to Leah and Rachel in this digression not as the older (or: firstborn) and the younger, but as the "bigger" and the "smaller." According to Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi, in Ma'asei Hashem, this is intended to be reminiscent of Jacob's dealings with Esau. It is when the younger is given precedence over the firstborn (and his portion is taken away and given to the other) that the younger is called the "firstborn." While Leah is the firstborn, she is called "bigger." Jacob's request for Rachel, the second-born, will place her in the primary position because the firstborn Leah is unmarried. The narrator now adds the information that Jacob loves Rachel (v.18).

Jacob states that he will work for seven years "for Rachel, your daughter, the younger one" (v.18). It is Jacob who determines the amount of time he will work for Rachel. His threefold description of Rachel is significant. According to Rashi, Jacob was so specific because he knew that Laban was a deceiver:

> He said to him, 'I will serve you for Rachel', and should you say that I mean any other Rachel out of the street, therefore I say, 'your daughter'. Should you

say, 'I will change Leah's name and call her Rachel', I say, 'Your younger one'. In spite of this, however, all these precautions did not avail, for he did actually deceive him.

We are given no indication that Leah and Rachel are present during these negotiations. They have not spoken, nor has the reader been given any indication that Jacob's love is reciprocated by Rachel. Already, many questions arise. One wonders what a conversation between Leah and Rachel might have contained at this point, and how their lives change when their cousin comes to live with their family. It must be clear to them within a very short time after Jacob's arrival that their lives are changing radically.

Laban's response to Jacob's offer is that it will be better "to give her to you than to another man," (v.19) and so Jacob should stay with him. Jacob works for Rachel for seven years, but it seems like a very short time to him because of his love for her (v. 20). This certainly may be the famous biblical love story we hear so much about. It may be that Rachel is in love with Jacob, and that the seven years pass as quickly for her as they do for Jacob, because of her love for him. Support for reading this as a mutual love story may only be found in an androcentric interpretation of the text. The narrative states only that Jacob loves Rachel, and the seven years seem short in his

eyes, because of his love for her. Commentators have assumed that because Jacob loves Rachel, Rachel loves Jacob. The narrator does not tell us whether Rachel loves Jacob.

This episode is an excellent example of what Mieke Bal has termed an "ideo-story." An ideo-story is a collection of elements of a fabula. They are put together in such a way that the attribution of meaning is "open." This is to say that the story may have a number of different meanings. Where one specific meaning is selected, maintained and supported historically, the story becomes an ideo-story. A specific ideology becomes embedded in (and synonymous with) the story.

In the episode at hand, the narrator never suggests that Rachel loves Jacob, yet it has become a paradigmatic and famous love story. Since Rachel's perceptions and sentiments are not disclosed, this famous love story is one in which only Jacob's love is expressed. The story teaches that Jacob's perceptions are the ones worth describing, the important ones. This interpretation of the (love-) story entails another message: if the man loves the woman it is a love-story. If Jacob loves Rachel, then Rachel "must" love Jacob. This ideology, while not indicated in the text, is embedded in the way it is customarily read.

The marriage negotiations and the resulting work contract are decided upon by Laban and Jacob. Laban will decide who Rachel marries. Von Rad states: "it was the

common notion that daughters were a possession, an item of property that could be transferred from one owner to the other without further ado." However, it is unclear whether or not daughters had any say in the matter of whom they married. What is clear is that according to the narrative it is Laban's decision.

In anthropological terms, it is important to look at gift-giving customs. Rayna R. Reiter suggests that where women are transacted, it is the men who give and take them. The woman becomes a conduit which links them in a relationship, rather than herself becoming a partner in it. It is certainly clear here that Laban and Jacob become partners in the exchange of labor for women. Laban's language indicates that his daughters are his to "give" (v.19). There are other implications of this exchange. Jacob receives food and shelter, and the family group will likely become enlarged.

However, what is implied here is a distinction between gift and giver: if women are the gifts then it is men who are the exchange partners. Reiter states that:

> ...kinship systems do not merely exchange women. They exchange sexual access, genealogical statuses, lineage names and ancestors, rights and people - men, women and children - in concrete systems of social relationships.

These relationships always include certain rights for men, others for women.[77]

While the systems involve both women and men, the distinction between giver and given is an important one. We see here the differences between the rights of men and women. These differences in status and rights become amplified as the narrative develops. Questions arise as to just how much power the women have, and whom they really "belong to," father or husband. The fact happens to be that women were under the authority of men to be given in marriage. It is unclear just how far this authority extended in terms of more general decision-making (as I will discuss below). What remains important is the recognition that the marital arrangements concerning Rachel and Leah are the affair of Laban and Jacob. Being given in marriage, their roles begin as rather passive ones. As the narrative evolves, their roles enlarge. They acquiesce to the marriage; it is their custom. However, there is little in the narrative to indicate that they derive pleasure from it.

Summary

As I read and interpret the text I assume that the narrator's voice is a male one. It is easy to focus on Jacob because he is given a central position in the narrative. He

[77] Reiter, (1975) p.177.

moves, acts, speaks and his presence influences the course of the narrative. It is practical to attempt an interpretation of how Jacob feels and thinks because his feelings and thoughts are most often described by the narrator.

It is more difficult to focus on the characters who are female. While they may be central to the events in the narrative, their thoughts and feelings are less often described by the narrator. While the reader knows that Jacob has traveled to Haran, conversed with the shepherds, rolled the stone, watered the flock, spoken to Rachel and Laban, the reader is given less information about the women. The reader knows that Rachel is a shepherdess. She has spoken with Laban, and while we (may) know the content of that conversation, we do not 'hear' her speak. We have not yet met Leah.

It is my task to present an analysis of Leah and Rachel and how they perceive the events around them from the information provided in the narrative. As the narrative progresses this task will become easier. At this point, however, we discern more about Leah and Rachel from what is omitted than what is stated. The following questions illustrate the type of information which is <u>not</u> provided by the text with regard to Rachel and Leah: How does Rachel perceive Jacob? Has Leah seen or met Jacob? Is Leah also a shepherdess? Have Rachel and Leah spoken to each other of

the new arrival? Were Rachel and Leah present, or did they overhear the conversation between Jacob and Laban?

Answers to these questions are not found in the narrative, but guided my attempt to interpret it. Answers to these questions, though not definitive, place the focus on Leah and Rachel. While an androcentric reading may not deem these questions valuable, a feminist reading deems them invaluable.

Leah's Wedding: Chapter 29:21-30

Jacob informs Laban that he has fulfilled the agreed upon amount of time and makes his request havah et ishti (the choice of words in Hebrew becomes important later), "give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her" (v.21). Laban prepares a wedding feast, and it came to pass in the evening vayyikkach et Leah, "that he took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him, and he went in unto her" (v.23). The suspense of this moment is drawn out by the digression (v.24) that Laban gave Zilpah to Leah to be her maid.

The marriage consummated, "...it came to pass in the morning, behold, it was Leah" (v.25). The text is narrated so that we experience this event as something which has transpired between Laban and Jacob. The reader perceives the event as Jacob perceives the event. Something has happened to him, as he indicates by demanding of Laban: "What have you done to me?" There are two things "missing" from the description of this event in the biblical text and in the commentary. The first is: Does Jacob bear any responsibility for having sexual intercourse with the "wrong" woman? The second is: How do Leah and Rachel perceive this event?

From the androcentric perspective of the commentators, the story unfolds in this way: Jacob loves Rachel, Jacob and Laban made a deal, Jacob performs the agreed-upon service, Jacob is tricked by the shameless Laban and Jacob's response

is a logical question: "What have you done to me?" The only indication given by the commentators that Jacob is not entirely blameless in this event is the mention of a poetic justice. Jacob who tricked his father, is now the one tricked. As Von Rad states: "No one understood it better than Jacob, for he himself as the younger son had crossed the finishing line before his older brother."

The commentators feel free to speculate about how Jacob must have felt in the morning "the butt of a monstrous blow, a masterpiece of shameless treachery." They are (almost entirely) silent regarding how Leah must have felt. Although both Leah and Rachel are silent in the episode, some comments may be made on the basis of what is stated in the text.

Jacob loves Rachel. Jacob works for Rachel for seven years. This has been made abundantly clear from the first time the narrator informs us of his love, to the threefold description of precisely which daughter he is working for (v.18). Zvi Jagendorf describes Jacob's experience when he completes his seven years of work, turned into a few days by the "force of his expectant will" and demands his wages:

> Here, then, is an intended moment of perfect possession in which Jacob will finally know and taste the unique object of his desire and love. He does. Jacob knows Leah sexually, but he knows her as Rachel, for the

> image in his mind prevails over the presence of the woman at his side.[78]

One must question the substance of Jacob's love, since he is unable to distinguish the woman he loves even during sexual intercourse. It appears that love and lust are confused in this episode. Perhaps on his wedding night Jacob's response reflects the implication that he passed the last seven years in celibacy. According to Jagendorf, the male protagonist's role is reduced here "almost comically, to that of a blind creature of sense, a stumbler and a fumbler" in the very act of procreation. Although we cannot determine why Jacob could not or did not distinguish Leah from Rachel, it is reasonable to express surprise concerning his apparent inability to discern the woman he loves, and has loved for seven years. While it is understandable that he would be shocked and angry in the morning, it is less understandable that he would have sexual intercourse with the "wrong" woman. It is reasonable to interpret Jacob's lack of resistance to Laban's new terms for marriage to Rachel (v.27) as an acknowledgement of his misjudgment.

Leah has been "taken" by her father and "brought" to her husband, who has had sexual intercourse with her (v.23). It appears to have been legal; as Laban explains to Jacob,

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[78] Jagendorf, (1984) p.190.

their custom is not to marry the younger before the older (v.26). It is significant to note a change in language here. Leah and Rachel were referred to earlier as the "bigger" daughter, haggedolah and the "smaller" daughter, hakketannah (v.16). They are now referred to as the younger, hatstseirah and the older, habbechirah (v.26). This legalistic explanation does little to console Jacob, and is of equally little solace to Leah. It will be suggested below that Leah struggled to gain love and solace from Jacob, despite the unpromising beginning of her marriage.

Jagendorf notes that Genesis is the book of all beginning, including the beginning of sex and love. Jagendorf outlines concepts which are useful in analyzing the present text. The command to "be fruitful and multiply" was addressed to both Adam and Eve.

> In them primal innocence is lost through the stealing of knowledge and clearly the first post-paradisal sexual act (called an act of knowing) is to be distinguished from the innocent, instinctual sexuality of Paradise by this new catastrophic element of awareness. In the first chapters of Genesis the same verb yada means to know and distinguish between moral categories, and to be aware of one's own and another's physical difference (nakedness).[79]

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[79] Jagendorf, (1984) p.187.

Jagendorf explains that the awareness of difference, in the awareness of sex, separates the sexual pair into a knower and known, a subject and an object, the male who acts and the female who is acted upon. He supports this by pointing out that the verb yada was used only in the plural until the phrase, "And Adam knew Eve his wife" (Gen. 4:1). The verb in the plural form represents mutuality, that two people are acting in the event, and the change to the singular form indicates that one partner is a "knower" and the other is "known." While in this first instance, it is the man who possesses the woman, the system "contains the seed of its own reversal." According to Jagendorf these "reversals" take place when the "knower" and the "known" exchange places in terms of what they "know."

The verb yada is pointedly not used here to indicate the sex act, Jacob, the subject, goes in and has sex "unto" Leah (elehah, v.23). Jacob is the one we would expect to "know" the object of his desire and he does not. Leah, the object, is the one who (implicitly) knows. Jagendorf points out that:

> ...there is no way this strict division into sexual subject and object can withstand the facts of human experience in the world, the deviousness and duplicity, the lies and illusions that mark the relations and especially the sexual relations between people.[80]

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[80] Jagendorf, (1984) p.188.

The episode of Leah and Jacob's wedding illustrates the deviousness and duplicity of the human experience. What appeared a straightforward transaction became a complex web of lies and illusion. If "knowing" denotes mutuality, its absence here is telling in respect to that fact. Indeed, subject and object are reversed when Leah (the object of Jacob's passion) is the subject of the real "knowing."

However, one must question Leah's role in the exchange of the women. We do not know if Leah acted in accord with Laban to accomplish the deception. While we do not know if Leah wished to marry Jacob, we can assume that she did nothing to disclose the deception, not even during the wedding night. It appears Leah had hope, despite the fact she is not the sister of choice, that she will be able to win her husband's love. This will become more obvious when she names her children.

Jagendorf suggests that the man is master in sex temporarily, only until his orgasm. Then his mastery is gone with nothing to show for it, while power goes to the woman "who bears the witness of the deed." She holds the seed in her womb. According to Jagendorf, the woman here exploits the man for "good reason and for natural ends. Substituting her purpose for his, she does nothing worse than conceive children, often righting a wrong and certainly peopling the world - which in those days was a good thing."[81] This,

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[81] Jagendorf, (1984) p.190.

according to Jagendorf, displays the woman's role as the "bearer of consciousness as well as seed." It is impossible to determine if Leah had a purpose of her own, or whether she was under the complete control of Laban. However, it is possible that in the face of Rachel marrying before her, Leah consciously agreed to the plan.

For the biblical woman, conceiving children is certainly considered praiseworthy and important work. "Peopling the world" with the "right" heirs of the "right" women (and men) is one of the most prominent themes in the patriarchal/matriarchal narratives. It often circumscribes a woman's realm of power. In this realm of childbearing, in fact, a woman's power may extend over her husband as well. This is only the first time in the narrative that Jacob's sexuality is manipulated by others. Here it is largely manipulated by Laban who substitutes brides. Later on, Jacob's sexuality will again be manipulated by Rachel and Leah.

Laban proposes a new deal. Without using his daughters' names, he tells Jacob to complete the wedding week for "this one" and then he will also be given "this one" if he stays for another seven years (v.27). Jacob has sexual relations with Rachel, and the narrator concludes by informing us that he loves Rachel more than Leah, and he works for another seven years (v.30). Von Rad writes that Laban is helping

Jacob to acquire Rachel and to make "the best of a bad bargain."

The choice of words used in Hebrew in this episode reflects Jacob's feelings for the two women. The three verbs used repeatedly are come (used also as go, and bring), give and take. Jacob begins the sexual language when he requests his wife and states that he will "go in unto her," v'avoah elehah (v.21). When Leah becomes Jacob's wife the verb vayyikkach is used. Laban "took" Leah, and "brought" her to him, and he went in "unto her," elehah (v.23). When Rachel becomes Jacob's wife the verb vayyitten is used (v.28). Laban "gave" Rachel to him "as a wife." When Jacob has sexual relations with Rachel, he does not go in "unto her" (elehah); rather, he goes in unto Rachel, by name (v.30). There is a different sense as Laban "takes" Leah (vayyikkach) and "gives" Rachel (vayyitten). There is a different sense as Jacob goes in unto an unnamed "her" as opposed to a named "Rachel."

When Zilpah is given to Leah (v.24) the verb vayyitten is used. When Bilhah is given to Rachel (v.29) the verb vayyitten is used. The differences are reflected again in chapter 30 when the maids are subsequently given by Rachel and Leah to Jacob. In her first mention of her plan to bear children through Bilhah, Rachel tells Jacob that he will "go in unto her," bo elehah (30:3). When Rachel gives Bilhah to Jacob (30:4) the verb vattitten is used, the same verb which

was used when Laban gave Rachel to Jacob, and Jacob went in unto her (elehah). However, when Leah gives Zilpah to Jacob (30:9) the verb vattikkach is used, the same verb which was used when Laban gave Leah to Jacob. Leah "takes" Zilpah and "gives" her to Jacob "as a wife."

Laban has authority over Leah and Rachel (and a certain amount over Jacob). Leah and Rachel have authority over Zilpah and Bilhah (and a certain amount over Jacob in the childbearing sphere). As Leah and Rachel are given by their father, they give their maids. As Leah and Rachel are the objects of verbs which reflect, respectively, Jacob's feeling toward them, these same verbs are then used by Leah and Rachel with respect to their maids. A hierarchy is established here, where Leah and Rachel have power over their maids. The maids were given to them by their father, perhaps even as nursemaids, making a clear connection between the maids and the childbearing activities. It is interesting to note that while the narrator states that Rachel is jealous of Leah, she is not described as jealous of Bilhah or Zilpah when they bear children.

By comparison to Rachel and Leah, the maids are depicted simply as "wombs" which produce (based on the orders of their superiors). Gerda Lerner explains that a slave woman owes sexual services to her mistress's husband and the offspring of such intercourse counts as though it

were the offspring of the mistress.[82] It appears that the maids had sexual relations with Jacob only at the request of Leah and Rachel, for the specific purpose of providing the matriarchs with offspring. The importance of names and naming in the Leah and Rachel narratives cannot be overemphasized. Consequently, this emphasis also influences my interpretation of the portrayal of Bilhah and Zilpah. Although they bear the children, those children are only brought into existence by the naming speeches made by Rachel and Leah.

It is important to note differences in the sexual language used by Rachel and Leah in later verses. In the episode concerning the mandrakes (30:15) Leah at first uses the verb we are familiar with from the incidents described above. She asks Rachel if it is no small matter that she has taken away (kachtech) her husband, and now would take away (v'lakachat) her son's mandrakes also (v.15). Rachel's response in the same verse offers Leah a night with Jacob in exchange for the mandrakes. Rachel uses a different verb to state that Jacob will "lie with" (yishkav immach) her tonight. The sexual language "to lie with" is different from all the previous references to "giving," "taking" and "coming in unto." Curiously, it appears only when the two women are speaking to each other. In the next verse when Leah informs Jacob that he will spend the night with her she

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[82] Lerner, (1986) p.92.

states: elai tavo, "you will come in unto me" (v.16). It is possible that the use of "to lie with" expresses mutuality in the sex act, or that it is the way Rachel and Leah refer to sexual relations. It is practical to infer that the women who are "given," "taken" and "come into" would view and refer to sexual relations differently from the men.

The verb "to lie with" appears two more times in the Rachel and Leah narratives. However, each of the next two times it is used it is not followed by the same preposition (im), but by et. In 34:2 Dinah goes out to see the young women and Shechem takes her and lies with her, vayyishkav otah. In 35:22 Reuben lies with Bilhah, vayyishkav et-Bilhah. In both of these instances the information is supplied by the narrator.

Summary

The wedding episode is full of suspense, and is a major event in terms of its effect on the entire narrative. It establishes the order of who controls whom in the story: Laban controls his daughters, he and his daughters control Jacob, and his daughters control the maids. It resolves the suspense of the earlier marriage negotiations, and increases the suspense of events to follow. How will two sisters be married to one man?

This episode may also be classified as an ideo-story both in terms of the biblical text and the later commentary.

In the text, Jacob's response in the morning is a telling: what have you done to me? It is the seed of the widespread interpretation that it is Jacob who was wronged, who is distressed, whose perceptions and sentiments matter. Neither the narrator nor the majority of the commentators have speculated on what Leah and Rachel felt. It is my contention that while they both followed Laban's dictates, they did not do so blindly or unthinkingly. This proposal will be explicated below, as the narrative unfolds.

Motherhood: Chapter 29:31-35

Leah's reaction to her pregnancy and the birth of her first son reflects the complexity of motherhood. Leah's reaction, coupled with Rachel's despair, mirrors recent psychological findings concerning women who mother. While most scholars will agree that childbearing is (one of) the primary role(s) for the biblical woman, meager attention is actually paid, even by feminist scholars, to motherhood itself. Questions concerning the role of the mother, as well as the roots of her need or desire to mother must be explored. These questions, which arise out of the biblical text, remain important today.

Feminist scholarship is divided on how much significance should be attributed to the maternal role in the Bible. This becomes particularly problematic when feminists attempt to find positive role models in the text, especially in relation to narrowly-defined social roles of women in society. Writers in many fields (psychology, anthropology, theology, literature and science, for example) produce arguments to defend or refute claims that motherhood is a function either of biology or of culture. The question remains a crucial one even today: does a woman's biology determine her role in the world, as mother? Or is that role a product of human culture?

An Anthropological Perspective

Elaine Heffner writes that a woman's anatomy, as well as her capacity and desire to bear and to rear children will remain "a source of conflict for her as well as for those who seek to impose upon her their own definition of her true destiny."[83] In her book on mothering, Sheila Kitzinger suggests that social anthropology has for the most part neglected the private world of women and communication within the family.[84] Rayna Reiter concurs that:

> ...what women do is perceived as household work and what they talk about is called gossip, while men's work is viewed as the economic base of society and their information is seen as important social communication....Marriage systems are analyzed in terms of the exchanges men make using women to weave their networks, evolutionary models explain the origin and development of human society by giving enormous weight to the male role of hunting without much consideration of female gathering....We need to be aware of the potential for a double male bias in anthropological accounts of other cultures: the bias we bring with us

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[83] Heffner, (1978) p.1

[84] Kitzinger, (1978) p.3

> to our research, and the bias we receive if the society we study expresses male dominance.[85]

Kitzinger argues that anthropologists have tended to discuss women as objects involved in transactions and relations between men. She points out that mothers not only bear and usually rear children not merely to give men descendants, but are people in their own right.[86] According to Gerda Lerner, the customary right of male family members to exchange female family members in marriage antedated the development of the patriarchal family. With the development of private property this right became of crucial economic significance:

> Women played an increasingly significant part in the family economy: not only as producers of economic goods, as producers of children and their caretakers, as domestic workers, but also as persons whose sexual services were turned into marketable commodities. It is the sexual and reproductive services of women which were reified, not women themselves.[87]

It is important to attempt to understand the underlying causes and motivations for the evolution of family relationships and mothering. Awareness of past and present

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[85] Reiter, (1975) pp.12-3

[86] Kitzinger, (1978) pp.3-5

[87] Lerner, (1986) p.111

cultural biases aids us in reinterpreting various representations of women in the narrative. It is important to remember that we are human beings studying other human beings, and we cannot leave ourselves out of the equation. In the delicate task of reconstructing the past the information we gather is a result of (conscious or unconscious) choosing to ask certain questions, and not others.

Childbearing

Helene Deutsch writes that the human desire for offspring has gone through cultural adaptations. In the religious commandment to multiply, it is closely connected with the belief in immortality. "The reproductive instinct is reflected in a spiritualized form and is connected with the deep longing to negate death and preserve life."[88]

Deutsch writes that a woman experiences a polarity between herself and the child. The child always presents a disturbance of her life, and at the same time a promise: an optimistic experience with regard to the future. The "reproductive instinct" and, more specifically the "maternal instinct" are difficult concepts to describe and defend. While we must reject biological determinism, especially where it is gleaned from the Bible, it is at the same time

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[88] Deutsch, (1945) p.23

critical both to understand and to valorize female reproductive capabilities and instincts.

In a helpful article in Mothering, Essays in Feminist Theory, Caroline Whitbeck discusses the extent to which "maternal instinct" may have biological roots:

> In the last month of pregnancy, women learn to take thought of their own bodily functions in much the same way that it is necessary to take thought regarding the newborn's. The stomach and the bladder are constricted and neither can contain very much. Three meals a day are likely to become five or six small feedings. Thus, she puts herself on a feeding schedule resembling the one her newborn child will require....An arduous labor and delivery can be seen as having adaptive value in preparing the mother to empathize with the infant. Nursing, which until recently was a requisite for infant survival, provides an experience that fosters a different sort of identification with the infant.[89]

The flow of the milk and the contractions of the womb, triggered by some action of the baby's, such as the cry, strengthen the mother's impression that her own body and her newborn baby's function as a unit. Whitbeck summarizes that

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[89] Whitbeck, C. "The Maternal Instinct" (1972) in Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory, edited by Trebilcot (Totowa: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), p.190.

parental attachment is influenced by this bodily experience which is:

> ...likely to enhance those feelings, attitudes and fantasies which induce people generally to care for their infants. Therefore, I conclude that there is a factual basis for the asymmetry in the expressions we apply to male and female parents.[90]

However, she is careful to note that this may or may not be termed "maternal instinct," since the experience enhances rather than supplies the feelings described. It is possible for parents of both sexes to display "maternal" behavior.

It is important to address the question of whether or not a "maternal instinct" is displayed in the matriarchal narratives. It would seem obvious that the matriarchs want to mother, since the issues of infertility and offspring are such central ones. However, there is essentially no information provided, nor descriptions given of the matriarchs mothering: being pregnant, delivering, nursing, rearing or loving their children. While in general they express a desire to bear (especially Rachel in 30:1), once they do bear children they are not depicted in the role of a mother.

This fact is especially significant in relation to our analysis of Leah's naming speeches. The narrator's apparent bias becomes evident as we realize that almost all of what

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[90] Ibid., p.191.

Leah expresses concerns Jacob's love and her relationship with him, not with her children specifically. The text manifests a bias in its respective attitudes towards what men do and what women do. For example, there are ten verses describing the watering process at the well (29:1-10), all leading up to Jacob's feat of strength. Genesis 30:25-31:12 describe Jacob's skillful animal husbandry as he transforms most of Laban's flock into spotted and speckled creatures for his own advantage. These are substantial accounts of the work of shepherding. There are no comparative portrayals of the work of parenting. This is to say that we might consider the role of matriarch as mother crucial, but left undetailed in the text.

The significance of attaining an heir is portrayed as the concern of both matriarch and patriarch. I suggest that the activities which take place between the struggle for conception and the fact of offspring are of little concern to the narrator. This private sphere of women, home and domesticity is not detailed. The only information we have in the text depicting the motherhood of Leah and Rachel are their naming speeches. These will prove to be remarkably valuable for a feminist interpretation of the story.

A Biblical Perspective

In Discovering Eve, Carol Meyers reviews the biblical woman's role in a new light. Meyers is particularly

concerned with the condition of "everywoman" in the book of Genesis before the establishment of the Israelite monarchy. She cautions that unlike the anthropologist, the biblical scholar does not have the methodological option of directly observing behavior. What is studied (the Bible), is a product of the ideology of the past. "Hence there is danger in equating ideology with daily reality, which can diverge from the normative expression contained in the biblical text."[91]

Much of the feminist discussion of male dominance in the Bible focuses on the difference between the public and private spheres of society. One revolves around the home, while the other includes everything outside of the home. Female identity is linked with the domestic sphere, while male identity is linked with the public sphere. Meyers argues that this dualistic model has its limitations, in that it is inadequate to describe most social action in many societies. Of great importance is her observation that our present-day values give primacy to the public sphere. Meyers questions whether it is legitimate to translate these values "to societies in which matters of kinship and family (the domestic realm) cannot be so easily separated or distinguished from economic and political matters (the public realm)."[92] At best, she writes, it is risky

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[91] Meyers, (1988) p.13.

[92] Ibid., p.32.

business, and at worst it means failing to grasp the important position of women in such societies.

Meyers questions the prevailing assumptions that male prerogatives and responsibilities are innately better than female ones: that the tasks performed by males have inherently more value than those performed by females. In the matter of gender valuation, we may tend to superimpose contemporary ideas on societies different from ours in fundamental ways. Meyers maintains that the:

> ...measure of female success or worth in most ancient societies cannot compare with what it is for most western women in the final quarter of the twentieth century. Consider the reflections of one feminist scholar dealing with classical antiquity: 'Is it really fair to imply, as some of us have done, that ancient women would have wanted to live differently had any had the opportunity? What if any evidence can be found to support such a claim? For many years I doubted whether intelligent women took pleasure in leading an anonymous life of service to husband and family, but now I wonder if I have not been judging ancient women as I judge myself, by male standards of accomplishment?'[93]

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[93] Ibid., p.33.

I use the problem Meyers presents, and this quote, to further illustrate and complicate the issue of interpretation. It transforms the double bias described above (interpreting a patriarchal text from within the framework of a patriarchal society) into a triple bias: that of being a twentieth-century feminist scholar. For Bal, the issue is not to be "presupposition-free," but to be aware of one's presuppositions. The issue is to admit that no scholarship is "void of interpretive acts, of historical and ideological biases."

Meyers portrays the biblical "everywoman" in a very positive light. She sees the emphasis on childbearing as a function of women's production, equal to other functions of male production. Meyers places population increase in a tribal and nationalistic context.

> The canonical sanctions for human fertility reflect a situation in which the need to become numerous was part of the public or communal consciousness....In a household unit working its own land there was a high degree of integration of activities, for men as well as for women. The popular notion of the domestic realm as a female realm in such cases is a misconception; the household activities were the responsibility of both females and males working together.[94]

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[94] Ibid., p.167-8.

Meyers insists that gender equality existed in the farm household, and that we must not allow "androcentric biblical texts to obscure this fact of gender equality." According to Meyers, women play an especially prominent role in the Genesis narratives. The outcome of critical family decisions are determined by female activity and initiative, revealing that women exert power in charting the course of family and, by extension, national well-being.

Esther Fuchs portrays motherhood in a less favorable light. She describes a growing recognition, in the biblical context, of motherhood as an institution aimed at ensuring that the reproductive capacity of women would remain under male control:

> The institution of motherhood as defined by the patriarchal system guarantees that both the wife and her children will increase his property during his lifetime and perpetuate his achievements and memory after his death.[95]

Fuchs argues that the portrayal of women's "unmitigated desire for children" promotes patriarchal ideology.

Another feminist author describes women as "driven by patriarchy to reproduce," and the desire for immortality as "obsessive."[96] There is no woman in the Bible shown to be

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[95] Fuchs, E. "Motherhood" in Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship, edited by Collins (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985) p.129.

[96] Trebilcot, (1983) p.188.

capable of not desiring children. While Fuchs' position is far from that of Meyers', she is correct in her assessment that woman's parenthood in the biblical narrative is largely restricted to reproductive and protective functions; and that the motif of mother-daughter relationship is practically nonexistent. Fuchs has not effectively separated, as other feminist scholars have, the patriarchal ideology of motherhood as an institution, from the positive, natural attribute of women's childbearing function.

J. Cheryl Exum illustrates, for instance, that some stories of women in an admittedly patriarchal context, undermine patriarchal assumptions and biases, "often challenging the very patriarchal structures that dominate the narrative landscape."[97] She notes a paradox which emerges in stories of mothers where important events are set in motion and determined by women. "The barren matriarch is a common theme, since barrenness provides a threat that the needed son might not appear; barrenness also offers an opportunity for God to intervene."[98] Exum's survey centers on the recurrent theme that because of its mothers, Israel becomes a people numerous and blessed.

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[97] Exum, (1986) p.60.

[98] Ibid., p.64.

A Psychological Perspective

Attacking Freud's view that biology determines woman's nature and role, some feminists have asserted that behavior is determined by cultural factors alone.[99] The two views are not mutually exclusive, but continue to be in conflict:

> A woman's biological capacity to serve the species through reproduction has as its psychological counterpart the instinct or impulse to mother. However, her own need or desire to mother, which grows out of her biological capacity to do so, a need and desire that is built into her nature to ensure that she will reproduce, may conflict with other needs and desires within her.[100]

In essence, this statement gives credence to a combination of biological and cultural factors which together produce an ability and a desire to mother. More importantly, while biological factors enable women to bear children, those same biological factors do not define a woman's total capacity:

> The paradox is that by continuing to accept a constricted definition of femininity women are joined to their adversaries in assigning no power or value to the exclusively feminine components of women's personality. They are joined as well in a contemptuous

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[99] see Heffner, (1978) and Chodorow, (1978).

[100] Heffner, (1978) p.5.

> attitude toward motherhood since they are in agreement that all that is meaningful and valuable resides in male endeavors.[101]

Heffner continues by explaining that women have been told for a long time that the only way to be a real woman was through motherhood: in order to be whole, other parts of themselves would have to be sacrificed in favor of motherhood. Now, women are being told that in order to be whole they must sacrifice the impulse to mother: in order to be free, they must fight the trap of motherhood. Neither view alone addresses the full range of women's feelings.

This conflict has an important bearing on the current status of feminist biblical interpretation. In struggling against the narrowly-defined role of women-as-mothers in the Bible, commentators have indeed disparaged the maternal role, thus accepting the valorization of male endeavors. "It is truer now than ever before that women who are engaged in mothering do not highly value what they are doing....Having discovered the problems of motherhood, we accept as their solution the elimination of mother."[102] Another feminist author astutely addresses the same issue:

> To be forced into the role against your will because androcentric thought declares motherhood to be 'woman's destiny' is deplorable. Equally deplorable,

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[101] Ibid., p.8.

[102] Ibid., p.18.

> however, is the reverse notion that only women who engage in careers and relinquish motherhood are leading worthwhile, liberated lives. Furthermore, this supposedly feminist viewpoint is anything but the liberation it claims to be. Instead, it is an equally imprisoning viewpoint which, by inverting the original patriarchal dictum, is itself just as patriarchal. Instead of valuing the natural biology of women, this repudiation of motherhood thoroughly denigrates it....The only inequality involved in the two roles is the fact that women, unlike men, are biologically constructed in such a way as to be able to carry, bear and nurse children. Thus we have the luxury, so far denied men, of choosing both roles if we so desire.[103]

In our zeal to battle the notion that biology is destiny, in order to redefine the social roles for women, we have tended to devalue the most basic human relationship, that between mother and child.

It seems to me that because motherhood seems to be such a constricting role for women in the Bible, we have overlooked two important elements. The first is that those mothers are also people. As Heffner writes, the mother must be given human proportions, lest she be seen as an undifferentiated object, not a real person. If women are

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[103] Rabbuzzi, (1988) p.4.

mothers we are unable to see them as real people. If women themselves choose to underline the belief that personhood and motherhood are mutually exclusive, the mother who is left becomes even more of a nonperson.

The second oversight is that in our haste to ascribe to women an important role as the bearers of (male) heirs for their husbands we may have slighted their own desire to bear children. It is not difficult to imagine that just as some feminist, educated, twentieth-century career women have the desire, impulse or instinct to bear children, our biblical ancestresses may also have had that desire - despite the cultural environment in which they lived. We do ourselves, and our interpretation of biblical women, a disservice by disparaging motherhood, and by assuming that the only reason they bore children was to provide heirs for their husbands.

Heffner points out that regarding the mother, "no one suggests that it is permissible for her to consider herself, or indicates that she is as important as the child."[104] Although the text (in my opinion) deceives us as to the complexity of women, depriving us of a representation of the whole woman, biblical women obviously were more than mothers. They were multifaceted people, but most of those facets are concealed by the ideology of the text.

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[104] Heffner, (1978) p.27.

It is clear that motherhood is laden with conflict, and that it has not always been viewed as the source of female strength. Women do not have to sacrifice personhood if they are mothers, just as they do not have to sacrifice motherhood if they are persons:

> For woman to attain autonomy she need not renounce her biological capacities, but gain control over them....Women within western industrial society, at least, have come to regard Eve's inheritance as their unjust biological burden. To reclaim childbirth is to understand the conditions under which it can empower and enrich so that women do not regard their physiology as a prison, but as a source of strength.[105]

Naming

Deutsch writes that in the course of pregnancy a woman must find a harmonious compromise between her "identification with the child, which is directed toward the future, and her identification with her own mother, which is directed toward the past."[106] For Leah (and for Rachel), there is no mention of their mother, or any relationship they may have had with her. There is no mention of their relationship with their children: the basic, primal, mother/child relationship. It is in the names and naming of

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[105] Trebilcot, (1983) p.23.

[106] Deutsch, (1945) p.145.

her children that we meet Leah, when she speaks for the first time. As Ilana Pardes states: "one should bear in mind that biblical naming (especially when it is accompanied by a speech) usually reveals more about the character of the name-giver than the recipient."[107] The narrator in fact sets us up to recognize the connection for Leah between Jacob's feelings about her and her own reaction to bearing a child.

First we learn that "God saw that Leah was hated, so he opened her womb" (29:31). This is followed by the additional information that "Rachel is barren" (29:31). Rachel and Leah are opposites: one is loved and her womb is closed, the other hated, her womb opened. Just as Leah is the older and Rachel the younger, Leah's eyes are rakkot and Rachel is beautiful, Rachel was promised and Leah was given, here the opposition is further established.

Jacob's love for Rachel has been previously expressed. Now, not only is Rachel loved, but Leah is hated. These are the extremes of emotion expressed concerning the two sisters married to the same man, both given in marriage by their father. It is interesting to note the difference in the emotions described in verses 30 and 31. In verse 30 we learn that Jacob loves Rachel more than Leah. The next verse is far stronger - stating not simply a preference, but that "Leah was hated." This may indicate that what began as

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[107] Pardes, (1989) p.165.

preference turned into stronger sentiment. According to Luntshits in the Keli Yekar a change took place in the relationship. Jacob did love Leah even though he loved Rachel more. He then began to love Rachel for Rachel (for who she was), and the love he had for Leah began to be added to his love for Rachel (and taken away from Leah). According to Luntshits this happened because Jacob began to compare one to the other and he saw Rachel's superiority. The reason the verse states that Jacob loved Rachel "also" gam, is to show not that he did not love Leah, but that love was drawn from Leah and added to his love for Rachel.

We know who loves Rachel, but it is interesting to note (as Jeansonne does) that "by placing this description of the hated Leah in the passive, the narrator allows the reader to speculate on the identity of those who hate Leah."[108] It would appear most likely that it is Jacob who hates Leah, but it is also possible that Laban and/or Rachel hate Leah. It also leaves open the possibility (discussed below) that Jacob does not hate Leah.

Von Rad considers the explanation of Reuben's name "particularly hair-raising" because the obvious explanation is overlooked, "Look, a son!" to speak of looking, rather, upon an affliction. This single verse (v.32) is replete with action and meaning.

Leah becomes pregnant,

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[108] Jeansonne, (1990) p.74.

She gives birth to a son,
She names him Reuben since:
God saw (or perceived) her affliction
so that now my husband will love me.

Despite the fact that she is "hated," Leah has become wife and mother. Despite the fact that her husband had sexual relations with her as Rachel, she still claims: "Look, a son!" Von Rad considers this explanation overlooked, but on the contrary it remains in the text, part of the naming, part of Leah's testimony. I suggest that this is one part (the first part) of Leah's experience. First, in her pride and excitement (perhaps even empowerment, both personal and in gaining something over her sister) she calls his name (saying and naming): "Look, a son!" It is speech which is an act, announcing his presence, and thereby calling his name. Thus Leah speaks for the first time.

The commentary on Leah's "affliction" (v.32) is sparse. It appears to be a reference to her unloved status, but may contain even more significance. If Luntshits is correct that there has been a progression in the relationship between Leah and Jacob, then Leah's affliction may be a reference the new relationship between Leah and Rachel. Perhaps Leah's affliction is sharing her husband with her sister, especially in light of the change it causes in his attitude towards her. Perhaps the relationship between Leah and Rachel has been further strained (after the joint marriage)

by Leah's pregnancy, adding to Leah's affliction. Sforno's explanation of Leah's affliction is that Jacob suspected her of willfully deceiving him (and pretending to be Rachel on their wedding night). Her affliction is her husband's (unjust) suspicion, and now the vindication (by God) is the child born to her.

After her initial reaction, Leah reflects on the fact that it was God who opened her womb, providing her with this miracle: God saw my affliction. Here Leah not only expresses her recognition of what she perceives as God's help, or God's work, but it is also clear that having a child is positive. Implicit in the claim that God has seen her unhappiness, she indicates that having a child is a source of happiness.

Now that she has a child the effect will be: now my husband will love me! One cannot take away from her any facet of her feelings. One can empathize with Leah's recognition of what Reuben means to her: first with her pride, then with her acknowledgement of God's work, and finally with her realization that the birth of her child will cause her husband to love her. Implicit in this may be an assumption on Leah's part that naturally Jacob will take as much pleasure in this event as she has, and that the child will bind them together in their new role as parents. It may also indicate a hope which Leah has that if Jacob

does not love her as wife, perhaps he will love her as mother of his children.

When Jacob informs Laban that he has worked for the agreed upon amount of time and requests his wife, Jacob states: "Give me my wife" (v.21). He uses the word ishti. Jacob subsequently marries both Leah and Rachel without referring to either one as ishti, my wife. The narrator informs us that Jacob loves (vayye'ehav) Rachel (v.30). The language parallels that used in Leah's naming speech. Leah expresses that now her husband will love her: ye'ehavani ishi (v.32). She calls Jacob her husband - significantly - after she becomes the mother of Jacob's child. She expresses the hope that Jacob will love her using the language used to describe his love for Rachel. She calls Jacob her husband (ishi) again after Levi is born (v.34). Rachel and Jacob do not call each other husband or wife.

The sequence is perfect, because although the narrator does not tell us how Jacob feels about his son, the next thing that occurs is that Leah is again pregnant (v.33). We may assume that Jacob continued to have sexual relations with Leah whether he loved her or not. From the naming we learn that Leah's position (at least in her own perception) has not changed. The first time, God "saw" Leah's unhappiness, and this time God "heard" that she was hated. For this reason he gave her another son, and she called his name Shimon. Leah expresses recognition of God's help in

bearing another child but she does not express hope that Jacob will love her. The ambiguity surrounding Jacob's feelings for Leah will be discussed below. Leah is described as being pregnant again, od (v.33). The sense of od, again or yet, may indicate that although she is pregnant again, her husband still does not love her. It is the narrator who refers to Leah as "hated" the first time (v.31). This time Leah refers to herself as "hated" (v.33).

It is again useful to recognize parallels between the language used in Leah's naming speech and language used earlier in the narrative. Laban tells Jacob to fulfill the seven days of Leah's wedding and then he may marry Rachel as well, v'nittena lecha gam-et-zot (v.27). Leah expresses that God heard she is hated and gives her another son, vayyitten-li gam-et-zeh (v.33). Laban refers to his daughter who is "given" as "this one," and Leah refers to her son who is "given" as "this one." They both seem to have the same motives. Laban's motive is to placate Jacob and keep him around; Leah's motive may be identical. Laban's message is to remain, and receive the wife of Jacob's desire from him (Laban), while Leah's message is to remain and receive children from her. Laban's message is to remain attached to the family in exchange for wives. Leah's message is to remain attached to her in exchange for children.

As in the case of Reuben, we do not know Jacob's reaction to Shimon's birth. The next thing that occurs is

that Leah is pregnant yet again (v.34). We must assume that Jacob either enjoyed sexual relations with her, or that he liked becoming a father. The fact that Jacob and Leah were having sexual relations becomes important later since Leah did have a sexual life which she accuses Rachel of ruining (30:15).

Leah becomes pregnant a third time and bears a third son (v.34). This time she speaks again of her hope that her husband will be "joined" to her, because she has borne him three sons. Because of this, the third son was named Levi. For this child the text does not use the feminine "she called his name," but it is Leah who speaks explaining the name. Leah becomes pregnant a fourth time and bears a fourth son. This time she speaks again of thanking God for the birth of the child, so she names her son Yehudah. Then Leah (temporarily) stops bearing children.

While it is obvious that Leah is struggling with marriage and motherhood, the nature and content of the struggle are less obvious. Commentators note that one naming speech might express thanks to God and another the hope that her husband will love her, but little mention is made of a development or progression over the course of the four births (vv.32-35). The most helpful commentary on this progression is the Keli Yekar. According to Luntshits, Leah's comment after the first child is born that "now my husband will love me" (v.32) is very significant. He

explains that Jacob did not hate Leah, as she herself expresses (v.33), but only that she thought this would be the case. According to Luntshits:

> ...it is possible that at the time the first son was born, he loved her. Only as time went by this changed and he reverted to his hatred because this is the way it is: at the time of the birth the father is happy about his offspring, and on account of it (the birth) he is also happy about his wife whom he married. Then, in the fullness of time this is forgotten, and he stops his love and she does also. She said when (the first child) came: 'Now my husband will love me'. Davka, now, at the time of the birth and the time near the birth, and not afterwards. And she knew this great pride of his (regarding the birth of the child), that this love would not be (last) since it was because of the time (the event), because of this she said: 'So now' (my husband will love me). So at the time when the second son was born she said: 'Since I am hated'. And when the third son (was born) it is written: 'Because of this he called his name Levi'. Jacob named him, to show that he agreed with her words, and that it was his desire to cleave to her. But with the children who came afterwards she named them names (which showed the) change concerning the love. But we still don't see his agreement until she bore the third son, then he

revealed his opinion that he stopped his hatred after all.

This is to say that Leah thought Jacob hated her because his happiness after Reuben's birth had waned. It was only because of this that she said "I am hated" when Shimon was born (v.34). However, when Jacob named Levi (because it is written kara, "he named" in v.34) it showed that he agreed with Leah, and that he loved her, or "was joined to" her (v.34). According to Luntshits we do not realize this until the birth of the fourth son. When Yehudah is born Leah thanks God. Since Leah again expresses thanks concerning this birth, it is presumably for the change in Jacob.

It is now helpful to examine the four names as a sequence, in light of the progression outlined by Luntshits.

1. "She named him Reuben, because she said: 'God has seen my affliction, so that now my husband will love me'" (v.32). The use of attah, now, means: at the time of this event. Her hope is fulfilled, there is been a change due to the shared parenthood of their first child and her husband does love her because of it.

2. "Then she became pregnant again and bore a son, and she said: 'Since God heard that I am hated so he gave me this one also' and she named him Shimon" (v.33). Leah's perception is that she is (still) hated because of the change in Jacob since Reuben's birth.

3. "Then she became pregnant again and bore a son, and she said: 'Now, this time, my husband will be joined to me since I have borne him three sons'. Therefore he named him Levi" (v.34). Leah uses attah, now, to refer to the event of the birth, the following word is happa'am, this time. Perhaps the additional description indicates that there is something different about "this event" (the third birth) "this time" (as opposed to the other two times). If there is something different it might be, as Luntshits explains, Jacob's feeling towards Leah. In addition Leah refers to Jacob as "my husband" for a second time (vv.32, 34). She calls Jacob "my husband" when she hopes he will love her (v.32); she does not when she thinks he hates her (v.33), and then she calls him "my husband" again when it appears there has been a change in the relationship (v.34).

4. "Then she became pregnant again and bore a son, and she said: 'This time I will thank God.' Therefore she named him Yehudah" (v.35). The same happa'am is used here, indicating the continued change in Leah's marriage, for which she expresses thanks. Luntshits' explanation that Jacob loves Rachel, as illustrated by the progression of the naming speeches, will be developed further as the narrative continues.

In the act of naming her children, Leah's life is at once prescribed by her environment, and described from her

own perspective. Her cultural environment prescribes in the first place her marriage, and in the second place her marriage to a man who (presumably, or in the beginning) does not love her. Her cultural environment prescribes her role as mother, a role which is a consequence of her marriage, with or without love. The major thrust of the portrayal deals with Leah's role as Jacob's wife, and her concern about his feelings towards her. There is little depiction of her as a woman or a person outside of her relationship to Jacob. This portrayal makes Jacob's love all-important. We must not assume from this that there is no more depth to her character than what the narrator considers central. Leah does describe in her own words and from her own point of view what it is like to be a woman in that environment, to be given in marriage to a man, and to become a mother. In spite of the admittedly patriarchal text and the admittedly prescribed role for women, we have in the birth stories valuable information about Leah's life and self-perception. This illustrates J. Cheryl Exum's observation that some depictions of women in the patriarchal context undermine patriarchal assumptions, "often challenging the very patriarchal structures that dominate the narrative landscape."

Rachel's Infertility: Chapter 30:1-24

Samuel Dresner describes Rachel's romance with Jacob as:

> ...immediate and decisive, exceptional and persistent, and contrary to the then normal pattern whereby marriage precedes love. Jacob's love for Rachel was the love of passion, a mutual passion which is necessarily exclusive.[109]

This description is inaccurate. While the reader is informed of Jacob's love for Rachel, nowhere are we informed that the love is reciprocated, or that the passion is mutual. When Rachel demands children from her husband, Dresner considers her demand "out of character, unless we see it as the outburst of a woman who could no longer restrain her pent-up frustration, heightened over years of watching one son after another born to Leah, while she had none."[110] It is extremely difficult to describe what is "out of character" for Rachel - especially at this point, since this "outburst" is the first time she speaks in the entire narrative. This is the first time we have met Rachel, where she is the focalizor, and information is given from her perspective.

Dresner's comments indicate a dualistic portrait of women. In his view, one has love, the other has children, and each one is incomplete. Further, the distinction between

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[109] Dresner, (1990) p.26.

[110] Ibid., p.26.

love and children may point to a deeper contrast between sexuality and motherhood. Rachel, the object of Jacob's passion, is unable to conceive. Leah, unloved, is prolific. Each woman is depicted as wanting what she does not have, what the other has. Each woman is depicted as incomplete, lacking what the other has. Dresner's is an androcentric view of women. It suggests that what a woman wants is both love and children (perhaps only love and children), and that both elements are connected to and provided by her husband. However, the characters, Leah and Rachel, are far more complex than this reading might indicate. The interpretation offered above, according to which Jacob loved Leah after Reuben's birth, would indicate that Leah now has both love and children. This love may, nonetheless, be insufficient to fill the void she repeatedly feels as she names her children. The namings continue to reflect the hope that Jacob will love her. Additionally, I will suggest below that Rachel's desire for children is not motivated by any feelings for Jacob or by feelings on Jacob's part. Together, these two proposals lead us to a more complex interpretation of the disparate characters of Leah and Rachel.

Rachel sees that she has not borne children and she is jealous of her sister (v.1). She demands children from her husband, using the expression: havah, "give me children" (v.1). It is the same verb that Jacob uses when he demands

his wife from Laban, havah et-ishti (29:21). The result of that demand is an unexpected woman as his wife; as a result of this demand will be an unexpected mother of his children. The demand havah li vanim (30:1) surprises Jacob, just as (despite their agreement) Jacob has to remind Laban that his time of service is over. Here Jacob responds by becoming angry at Rachel and asking her what her infertility has to do with him (v.2), just as on the morning after Leah's wedding Jacob responds to the situation by becoming angry and asking what Laban has done to him (29:25).

Commentators offer varied explanations of Jacob's angry response. Von Rad ascribes it to Jacob's understanding that only the "Giver of Life" denies children; Fuchs terms Jacob's response "self-righteous." Ramban suggests that Jacob does not care about it "since it is from her that children were withheld and not from him." Jacob already has children. Ramban suggests further that the meaning of "God heard her" (v.22) indicates that Rachel saw she could not rely upon Jacob's prayer and so went to pray on her own behalf to "Him Who hears the cry of those in trouble." Jeansonne seems closer to the mark in suggesting that Jacob's response comes from a feeling of "frustration." Dresner writes that:

> ...the central event in Rachel's life, that later writers focus on in a hundred different ways to laud her character, is her quite remarkable silence at the

> time of Leah's substitution for herself in the marriage chamber - at the very moment when Rachel's dreams of marriage were to be consummated after seven long years of waiting.[111]

Dresner adds that Rachel's silence "could not have been without anguish then or torment later," but that we are given "no hint as to Rachel's inner feelings."

We are indeed given no hint as to Rachel's inner feelings. Having acknowledged this fact, however, it seems to me that the text must be interpreted in light of it, rather than in spite of it. I suggest that Jacob's anger has to do with his unrequited love for Rachel. If Rachel does not love Jacob, then her seemingly "laudable" silence after seven long years of waiting is comprehensible. In just the same way, if Jacob's love for Rachel is not reciprocated now, even after several years of marriage (judging by the number of children Leah has borne), Jacob's angry response is comprehensible. His anger may actually be an expression of pain: he has loved Rachel all this time, yet he seems incapable of pleasing her. The text, as opposed to the commentators, never says that Rachel loves Jacob. Mutuality is thus a mere inference. In other cases (Ruth, Michal) the Bible does explicitly describe women "loving." Whether the fundamental issue is Rachel's love (or lack of love) for Jacob, or her disappointment at not being his first wife, it

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[111] Ibid., p.41.

remains that his angry response is comprehensible only in the light of emotional upset between them. What his anger portrays is pain.

Rachel is "jealous" of her sister (30:1). Rachel may be jealous for any number of reasons. She may be jealous of the status achieved by women in her cultural environment who bear children. She may be jealous because Jacob enjoys fatherhood and she has not provided him with children. It may be because she herself urgently wishes to have children. Rachel may also be jealous of Leah for an additional reason. Presumably the characters in the story know that Leah feels "hated" while Rachel is "loved" by Jacob. Leah is unhappy with her lot because of the perceived lack of love from her husband. Rachel is also unhappy with her lot, either because of her infertility, or (like Leah, but for a different reason) because of her emotional relationship with her husband. Perhaps Rachel is jealous of the consolation that childbearing seems to provide Leah.

If Leah sees positive aspects of children, perhaps this is what Rachel is jealous of. If Rachel sees her sister's children as a source of strength which allows Leah to survive, then she may desire this same source of strength for herself. Further, I suggest that Rachel's desire is illustrated in the names that she chooses for her children. While the names Leah chooses express her relationship to God and her husband, the names Rachel chooses express her

relationship to God and her sister. Leah never mentions her sister, and Rachel never mentions her husband.

There is also a striking difference in the way Rachel refers to wanting and having children. Several of Leah's naming speeches refer to the love she hopes to receive (29:32 and 34), and her impression of how her husband feels about her (29:32 and 33). All four of the sons borne of the maids, Bilhah and Zilpah, are born leya'akov, "to Jacob" (30:5,7,10 and 12). In contrast, when Rachel speaks of having children she refers to herself. Rachel says havah-li vanim, "Give me children" (30:1). When Joseph is born Rachel says yosef adonai li ben acher, "God will add another son to me" (30:24). When Benjamin is born the midwife says to Rachel ki-gam-zeh lach ben, "since this one also is a son for you" (35:17). What is significant about each of these three instances is the use of li and lach. These references to Rachel's children are children for Rachel, not for Jacob. This point will be taken up in greater detail later in my discussion of Rachel's naming speeches.

Rachel is (so far) infertile. Deutsch writes that bearing children is psychologically connected to immortality in that it negates death and preserves life. She considers childbearing an "optimistic experience with regard to the future." Lerner concurs that reproduction is the only immortality to which human beings may aspire.[112] Jeansonne

[112] Lerner, (1986) p.197.

points out that akarah, usually translated as "barren" has the connotation of destitution, and of being uprooted.[113] According to Sforno one who is childless may be regarded as dead. "This is the intent of Rachel's remark. If she was childless, it is as though she was dead." The implication, once again, is that there is a connection between infertility and death, or conversely between childbearing and at least some type of immortality. This establishes a context and sheds light on Rachel's cry that without children she will die.

Rachel cries out powerfully and emotionally to her husband: "Give me children and if not (if there are none) I will die" (30:1). The message is one of despair. For Rachel, her child and her death will later be connected. For Rachel and for all women who desire but are unable to bear children her words express extreme agony. It is not sufficient here to interpret the story from the perspective of the patriarchal ideology that focuses exclusively on women bearing male heirs for men.

It is curious that this androcentric reading of Rachel's cry parallels some feminist readings which state that Rachel is desperate for children only for Jacob's sake. I suggested above that the language used by Rachel indicates that she wanted children not for Jacob but for herself. This suggestion will be developed below. An androcentric

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[113] Jeansonne, (1990) p.75.

interpretation eliminates Rachel as an autonomous agent in the story, and precludes a positive view of motherhood:

> It is a problematic position to present the often desperate needs of infertile women for a child as a 'product of socialization'. This view is consistent with some early feminist analysis that motherhood was exploitative and not a condition to which women should aspire. Women who take this position seem to be saying to infertile women that what they really need to focus on is not how to get a child, but to realize that there are many other ways for women to live full lives. The overwhelming message is that all infertile women need is to 'get over' this desire for a child and their emotional trauma will be ended.[114]

One cannot overlook Rachel's <u>own</u> perspective within the admittedly patriarchal framework. When modern women relate their experiences of infertility, they mirror Rachel's. One woman relates: "The sight of pregnant women and the presence of friends' small children became unbearable. More and more frequently, I had days in which, out of sheer despair, I simply did not want to live any more."[115] A second relates: "I can't hide it, I am jealous of the mothers with their children. When they cuddle, play with one another and laugh,

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[114] Klein, (1989) p.204.

[115] Ibid., p.17.

it hurts me. Although I know they aren't trying to provoke me, I still nourish bitter thoughts: why them and not me?"[116] Another woman writes that "for infertile women, motherhood has even more significance. It becomes a central force in our lives, all the more necessary for not achieving it. We have no choice, really, other than to have the pursuit of motherhood take over our lives because so much--self-identity, self-esteem, self-image--depends on it."[117] Finally, a woman describes the treatment she received from her own parents who reacted to her infertility with shock and disappointment that they would not have grandchildren: "ever since I told them, they've treated me very condescendingly, with a mixture of pity and contempt, somehow along the lines that I was now a sick person who could not be taken seriously."[118]

If infertility, then and now, is taken seriously, then Rachel's cry: "Give me children and if not I will die," is equal in power and significance to the far more famous phrase: "And it came to pass in the morning that, behold, it was Leah" (29:25). Each verse is climactic, representing years of waiting: Rachel waiting for children, and Jacob waiting for his wife. In each verse the respective actors give vent to that which is unfulfilled: Rachel continues to

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[116] Ibid., p.31.

[117] Ibid., p.121.

[118] Ibid., p.10.

be infertile, and Jacob has married the wrong woman. The latter verse has become legendary. It speaks at once of Jacob and Laban. Jacob who is tricked, and Laban who is the master deceiver. The former verse (30:1) has not become legendary. Where it also should speak at once of Rachel's pain and infertility, it is passed over too easily. It is taken for granted by androcentric commentators and disparaged even by some feminist commentators.

Bilhah and Zilpah

In a second instance of manipulation of Jacob's sexuality, Rachel determines that she will give Bilhah to Jacob so that she herself will be "built up" through Bilhah. Exum argues: "that this particular means of obtaining children is for the woman's sake and not for the man's is clear from Genesis 29-30. There Rachel and Leah give their maids to Jacob, even though he already has sons."[119] Exum's comment further substantiates the notion that Rachel has a personal stake in the procreative process.

When Bilhah bears a son for Jacob, Rachel says: "God has judged me and has also heard my voice, and has given me a son" (v.6). God has done these three things, answering Rachel's despair. There is no mention of her husband, which is unsurprising since Jacob himself had observed that Rachel's infertility was in God's hands. It is interesting

[119] Exum, (1986) p.64.

to note, as well, that what God "heard" with regard to Leah was "I am hated". What God "heard" with regard to Rachel was "my voice." Leah is responding to the way others feel about her. Rachel, on the other hand, is voicing her personal feelings about her situation; she "voiced" her problem to Jacob, she spoke up and determined to do something about it, and God "heard" her "voice." Again it may be noted that Rachel's own words reflect her personal stake in the procreative process. We will never know for sure if Rachel wanted children in order to please her husband, to please God, to rival her sister, or for herself; but to decide that it is one of these reasons without giving credence to the others is to do insufficient justice to Rachel in her complexity.

Bilhah ("Rachel's maid") becomes pregnant again, and bears a second son ("for Jacob"). Rachel's naming speech is even more interesting than the previous one. Where God judged her last time, she has wrestled with her sister this time. Rachel states: "I have wrestled the wrestling of God, (or: mighty wrestling) with my sister, I am also able, (or: I have prevailed), so she named him Naphtali" (v.8). The niphal of p-t-l, here rendered by "wrestle" is related to a root that also connotes "being torturous and twisted;" (the noun form patil means "[twisted] cord," or "thread by which things are hung and fastened" [Exodus 39:3]). Ibn Ezra

explains the name based upon the noun derived from p-t-l. He suggests that it signifies "a man who wrestles with another and twists in order to overcome him and make him fall." He also cites II Samuel 22:27 where the same root means "subtle." Ibn Ezra is likely pointing to the "subtlety" that while Rachel has succeeded in producing offspring it is only through arranging for Jacob to have sexual relations with Bilhah. He continues by explaining the significance of Rachel mentioning God in the context of this struggle with her sister: "For the glory of God I gave my maidservant," or "God aided me when I wrestled." Rashi explains that p-t-l means "perverse and crooked" (as in Deut. 32:5). He explains that Rachel has been persistent and "made many importunities and wrestlings with God that I may become like my sister." Rachel goes on to say that she has "prevailed" (30:8) and Rashi explains that God yielded to her importuning.

I suggest that in Rachel's use of the verb there may be several associations: the torturous, twisted emotional relationship between Rachel and Leah due to their respective marriages to Jacob and their different childbearing abilities. It is an emotional relationship that nevertheless "twists" and "fastens" them together. It may also have a similar physical connotation in that Rachel and Leah are sisters, connected by blood and, at one time, by the "cord" to her mother. By extension, her own child is connected to her by the "cord." (It may be noted that in modern Hebrew

the same: patil is used in combinations which mean connecting cord, thread of life, test cord, cord fastener and interweaving.) The fact that Rachel uses this verb may indicate her desire to provide an association with the umbilical cord, for the purpose of expressing connectedness, and by this association the fact that although Naphtali is not her biological son, he is indeed her son. She has proven in her wrestlings that she too is able to produce children.

Now that these verses (1-8) have been examined in detail, it is critical to view them in the context of their relationship to each other and to the narrative in general. Chapter 30 begins on an interesting note. It indicates that there is a big difference between the process of childbearing and the fact of having offspring; perhaps the former is the concern of women and the latter of men. We are informed that Rachel saw "that she had not borne for/to Jacob" (v.1). The narrator states that "she has not borne" and not that she has not borne a son, a child, or children. It is written ki lo yaledah where we would perhaps expect ki lo yaledah ben, indicating that the concern is as much about the lack of conception and bearing as it is about the lack of particular offspring. It is interesting that the narrator consistently refers to Bilhah and Zilpah as: shifchah, "maid," and specifically as "Rachel's maid" (v.7), or "Leah's maid" (v.9). It is the narrator who relates that

Leah gives Zilpah to Jacob leishah, "as a wife" (v.9). This is in contrast to Rachel, who (herself) speaks of giving her maid to Jacob to bear children.

The narrator goes on to inform the reader that "Rachel is jealous of her sister." There is no reason stated for the jealousy. It has the obvious association with childbearing, but we may question which of the various aspects is referred to. What is stated is that Rachel is jealous of "her sister." She is jealous of Leah, hinting at but not stating, the possibility that Rachel is jealous of Leah's capacity to bear as much as Leah's children. This distinction between the ability to bear and the fact of offspring may be further illustrated by the next four births. In the instances where Bilhah and Zilpah bear sons the children are born "to Jacob," leyaakov, "to/for Jacob" (vv.5,7,10 and 12), but the maids are described as belonging to Rachel and Leah. This may imply that the wombs and conceptions are more significant for the women, while the offspring are more significant to the men. The suggestion that Rachel is more concerned with her ability to conceive is revealed in Yosef's naming speech (discussed below).

In Jacob's anger (v.2) he asks: hatachat elohim anochi, "Am I in the place of God who has withheld from you fruit of the womb?" When Bilhah bears her first son (v.6), Rachel states: dananni ehlohim, "God has judged me." It appears that this naming speech is a retort to Jacob. It is highly

questionable whether Rachel believes Jacob, especially since she goes on to try mandrakes, and does not trust in Jacob's God to open her womb. However, Jacob told her that childbearing is in the hands of Elohim, and she responds (as if speaking to him on his terms, in his language) that Elohim has judged her. The first part of the verse is Rachel's seemingly cynical retort: "You said it was up to God, and God responded." The second part of the verse, hinged on the critical and telling vegam, "and also" supplies Rachel's true feelings: "and also he heard my voice." Rachel first responds to Jacob, and then discloses her own opinion. Rachel's statement, "and also he heard my voice," may be interpreted as a very powerful comment. Rachel is acknowledging her own part in the events which have transpired. She is acknowledging that she took matters into her own hands, made the decisions and, legitimately, her voice was heard. It might also be added here that in the context of the narrative Rachel has been silent, and now her voice is suddenly and certainly heard.

Significantly, the same pattern is repeated when Bilhah bears her second son (v.7). Again, the first part of the verse can be seen as a response to previous events. Rachel says: naftulai elohim, "wrestlings/strugglings of Elohim" (v.8). These wrestlings represent the struggle for conception, God's opening and closing wombs. This "wrestling" comes in between the pronouncement that "Rachel

saw" (v.1) that she had not borne, and that "Leah saw" (v.9) that she had ceased to bear. The sisters "wrestle" with God, each other, and Jacob in the area of procreation. In this first part of the verse the struggle with God is acknowledged. In the second part of the verse the struggle with Leah is acknowledged: "I have wrestled with my sister." The next words are, (as above) hinged on the critical and telling gam, "also." Rachel says: "I am also able" (v.8).

It is interesting to explore this use of yacholti, "I am able" (v.8). Following Rachel's declaration that her voice was "heard," here she makes another equally strong statement. It is possible to translate y-ch-l as "be able," "have power," "prevail," or "endure." Once again, Rachel is stating that she was responsible for what had transpired. Bilhah's giving birth represents Rachel's own solution to her problem. Once again, she acknowledges Jacob's God, as if to describe the event in an "acceptable" way, and then she goes on to disclose her "real" opinion. The comments about elohim indicate only a part of the struggle; the real struggle is with achoti, "my sister."

Leah is now in the position of watching Rachel produce offspring (v.9). Leah sees that she has stopped bearing; the narrator does not tell us why at this point. It turns out later (30:15-18), when she accuses Rachel of taking her husband away (and subsequently bears Yissachar), that it

must have been because Jacob stopped having sexual relations with her. Leah "takes" Zilpah and gives her to Jacob as a wife (v.9) with no cry of despair or explanation of a plan (unlike Rachel). Although there appears to be competition between the sisters, there is no indication that Leah has reverted to seeing herself as "hated." It is possible that the competition has shifted in nature and is now more concerned with sheer numbers of children born. Zilpah, too, becomes pregnant (v.10).

One cannot help but wonder what this process is like for Jacob. He has sexual relations, presumably for purposes of procreation, with whomever Rachel and Leah designate for him. This perspective makes the subsequent negotiations for the mandrakes (vv.14-18) much easier to understand. While commentators regard that as the first (or perhaps the only) occasion on which Jacob's sexuality is manipulated, such manipulation has actually been going on for some time. It is interesting to note that from the time Rachel suggests that Bilhah will bear children in her stead (v.3) until Joseph is born (v.23), Rachel and Leah are the exclusive speakers, actors and focalizors. The reader is completely involved in the experiences of the two women, in stark contrast to the previous focus exclusively upon Jacob and Laban. The full significance of this observation becomes even more important when one examines the "popular religion" that seems to be embedded in this portion of the narrative.

When Zilpah bears a son, Leah refers to "fortune" and names him Gad. Zilpah bears a second son, and Leah expressing happiness, names him Asher. It is likely that in naming these two sons borne to Zilpah, Leah expresses her thanks to the two deities Gad and Asherah. The information concerning the deity Gad is sparse. It appears that Gad is identified with "fortune" and his cult was particularly popular in Haran.[120] There is far more information concerning Asherah. Early studies rejected the idea that the Asherah was a goddess. However, with the discovery that the name was used as the name of a goddess in the Ras Shamra Texts where she appears to be the mother-goddess, it became evident that Asherah was the Hebrew name for a Canaanite goddess who was worshipped in various parts of the ancient Near East. It appears that Asherah was an important fertility deity of the Phoenicians and Canaanites.[121] According to C.F. Burney:

> There can be little doubt that, as has often been remarked, the tribal name Asher was originally connected with the deity of good fortune, just as the name Gad is derived from a similar deity. Indeed, it seems highly probable that just as the latter name is explained as 'with the help of Gad' (30:11), so the

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[120] Gray, in Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, (1962) vol.1 p.335.

[121] Reed, in Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (1962) p.251.

> somewhat strange expression beashri (v.13) is an intentional alteration of an original: 'with the help of Asherah'. This passage, then, would suggest that part of the 'good fortune' brought by Asherah was connected with success in child-bearing.[122]

These verses are also of special interest to W.L. Reed, who connects the goddess Asherah with childbearing. Reed states that it "seems likely that she was worshipped and that her sphere may have had to do with human reproduction."[123] According to Reed:

> Genesis 30:13 shows Asherah to have been a deity to whom a woman might appeal for help at childbirth. In this passage Leah rejoiced when Zilpah, Jacob's concubine, gave birth to two sons, Gad and Asher, and her words of joy over the birth of Asher seem to suggest that she was expressing gratitude to Asherah. If this were the only instance of a connection between women and the goddess Asherah it would have to be viewed with considerable suspicion. One recalls, however, that the deity was a favorite with Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, and that four hundred prophets of Asherah ate at Jezebel's table. (I Kings 18:19) Furthermore, at an earlier period in the Southern Kingdom it was not Asa but his mother, Maacah, who made

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[122] Burney, (1970) p.197-8.

[123] Reed, W.L. (1949) p.226.

> an image of the goddess. (I Kings 15:13; II Chrn. 15:16) Moreover, at the time of Josiah there were women in the temple at Jerusalem who were weaving battim (houses, or garments) for Asherah. (II Kings 15:13) In this connection the Aramaean incantation from Arslan Tash is instructive; it illustrates the appeal made by women of Upper Syria in the seventh century B.C. to the goddess Asherah from whom they expected help in warding off demons at child-birth.[124]

It may be noted, additionally, that the use of b in be'ashri (v.13) is an oath particle which indicates the translation "by" or "with the help of" Asherah. This use of b indicating the translation "by" or "with the help of" may be illustrated by other examples. The b indicates instances:

> when the mental action is to be represented as extending to some one or something, such as: kara b 'to call on someone', nishba b 'to swear by someone', sha'al b 'to enquire of some one', or shama b 'to hearken to'. Closely related to this use of b is to introduce the person or thing which is the object of a mental act, such as: he'emin b 'to trust in' somebody or something.[125]

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[124] Ibid., p.238-9.

[125] Gesenius, (1988) p.379-80.

It is helpful to reiterate the importance and significance of naming and names in these episodes. We have already seen that the act of naming is an event in itself which is replete with meaning. We see also that the names themselves are significant in portraying aspects of the lives and emotions of Leah and Rachel. A person's name is inextricably bound up with its existence. There is an additional facet of the namings here, where Gad and Asher are likely named after deities. There are other examples of persons (as well as places) named after deities, or having the name of a deity as part of their name. The name of Hagar and Abraham's son Yishmael (Gen. 16:11) is understood as "El hears." Similarly the name Yisrael (Gen. 32:29) is understood as "Let El persist," or "Let El contend." The most numerous compounds are those containing the divine names El and Yah, such as Elijah, Elimelech, and Nathaniel. Names compounded with Yah number over 150, including names such as Adonijah and Obadiah.[126]

In all probability, both Leah and Rachel practiced what is commonly known as "popular religion," and that this practice comprises some of the "background" of the biblical narrative. While popular religion is difficult to define in exact terms, it is clear from biblical descriptions and archeological evidence that rituals existed apart from the

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[126] Abba, in Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (1962) vol.1 p.505.

official, national religion. Carol Meyers proposes reasons for the paucity of information about popular religion. Archeologists until recently have been drawn to large, urban settings. Additionally, the prevailing interest of the biblical text itself is to present the official and institutional manifestations of national religious life, and to downplay and suppress that which was not "officially" accepted.

Another barrier to the recovery of popular religion has been the influence of modern orthodoxy which works from preconceived ideas about Israelite monotheism. There has been a reluctance to concede that Israel's monotheism was hardly pure and pervasive from the start or that Israelite worship was slow to do away with forms of worship involving images and symbols that had been part of the Semitic religious tradition since time immemorial.[127] Meyers writes that archeology and biblical scholarship have been:

> ...consistently and enthusiastically concerned with the monumental and the official aspects of biblical religion....little attention has been directed to private religion and its cultic expression, that is, to the ceremonies and rituals that allowed ordinary people to meet their human need to connect with the

[127] Meyers, (1988) p.158.

supernatural or transcendent power or powers in which they believed.[128]

Based on his examination of biblical sources, Saul Olyan argues that while the importance of the goddess is difficult to assess, Asherah "was a legitimate part of the cult of Yahweh both in the north and in the south, in state religion and in popular religion."[129] According to Gerda Lerner:

> ...in the very centuries in which we have been tracing changes in the direction of patriarchal god-figures, the cult of certain goddesses flourished and diffused ever more widely. The Great Goddess may have been demoted in the pantheon of the gods, but she continued to be worshipped in her manifold manifestations. All Assyriologists testify to her enormous popularity and the persistence of her cult, in various guises, in all the major cities of the Near East for nearly two thousand years....Statuaries in her likeness and with her symbols are widespread, testifying to her popularity. Many of these were found not only in temples but in homes, indicating the important place of her worship in popular religion.[130]

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[128] Ibid., p.158.

[129] Olyan, (1988) p.13.

[130] Lerner, (1986) pp.158-9.

Lerner describes the profusion of archeological finds of female figurines, all emphasizing breasts, navel and vulva, usually in a squatting position, which is the position commonly adopted in childbirth in this region. Such a figure has been found in the excavations of Catal Huyuk at the level of the seventh millennium B.C.E. in the form of the pregnant, birthing goddess. Her legs are parted, and her navel and belly protrude. While such findings do not prove that there existed a widespread fertility cult, they do speak to the continued existence of a popular religious practice which coexisted or stood in contrast to official religion.[131] For Meyers, the fact that the leadership of the establishment religious cults was male, and women were largely excluded from public religious leadership, adds credence to the possibility that women participated in popular and family religious practice. According to Meyers:

> Anthropological research shows that important aspects of religious activity take place in domestic settings. Such a context often constitutes the core of women's religious experience and also the major part of her participation in religious life. This situation would certainly have been the rule in the monarchic period, when women were largely excluded from public religious leadership; moreover, it must also have been the case

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[131] Ibid., pp.146-7.

> earlier, when the household was the predominant area of human organization.[132]

Lerner continues by pointing out that:

> ...as we trace changes in the position of male and female god figures in the pantheon of the gods in a period of over a thousand years, we should keep in mind that the power of the goddesses and their priestesses in daily life and in popular religion continued in force, even as the supreme goddesses were dethroned. It is remarkable that in societies which had subordinated women economically, educationally, and legally, the spiritual and metaphysical power of the goddesses remained active and strong.[133]

The proposal outlined above requires the following translation of Leah's naming speeches (30:11-13): "Leah said, 'With the help of Gad', and she named him Gad. Then Zilpah, Leah's maid gave birth to a second son to (for) Jacob. Leah said, 'With the help of Asherah' so that the young women will (call) me happy (will rejoice with me), and she named him Asher." The scholarship and recent discoveries outlined above add clarity to these otherwise difficult naming speeches. Furthermore, Mark Smith describes the

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[132] Meyers, (1988) p.161.

[133] Lerner, (1986) pp.141-2.

Israelite adaptation of the imagery of Asherah, citing scholars who compared Asherah to the figure of Wisdom:

> The 'tree of life' which recalls the asherah, appears in Israelite tradition as a metaphorical expression of Wisdom (Prov. 3:18, 11:30, 15:4; Gen. 3:22). Like the symbol of the asherah, Wisdom is a female figure, providing life and nurturing. Proverbs 3:18 is especially pertinent: 'She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are made happy' (m'ushshar). This verse closes a small unit consisting of verses 13-18 and forms with verse 13 a conspicuous chiasm....Verse 13 opens with 'Happy is the one who finds wisdom' (ashrei). The unit begins and ends with the same root, to be happy....The inside terms of the chiasm are 'wisdom' and 'tree of life'. Finally, the terms, ashrei and m'ushshar, perhaps allude to the asherah, the tree symbolizing life and well-being.[134]

Smith's argument bolsters the possibility that Asher is named for the goddess Asherah. Asherah is connected with childbearing. There is evidence for women calling upon her for help and/or protection when giving birth. Finally, it is significant that the translation "happy" is derived from the same root. This explains the common (but forced and

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[134] Smith, (1990) p.95.

difficult) translation of be'ashri as "Happy am I" (v.13).

Reuben's Mandrakes (30:14-18)

Reuben finds mandrakes in the field and brings them to his mother, Leah. The narrator is very specific in reiterating that "Reuben brought them to Leah, his mother" (v.14). If Jacob is having sexual relations with Rachel and neglecting Leah, it makes sense that Leah wanted the mandrakes - apparently both as an aphrodisiac and an aid to conception. There is a great deal of commentary concerning the significance of the dudaim. According to Ramban, the correct interpretation is that Rachel wanted the dudaim (only) for delight and pleasure, for Rachel was visited with children (only) through prayer, and not by medicinal methods. "And Reuben brought the branches of dudaim or the fruit, which resemble apples and have a good odor. The stem, however, which is shaped in the form of the human head and hands he did not bring, and it is the stem which people say is an aid to pregnancy." Ibn Ezra reinforces the position that Rachel did not believe in medicinal or folk remedies, but that conception occurs through the will of God only. According to Ibn Ezra, the mandrakes are in human shape, "for they have the likeness of a head and hands." He notes their good fragrance, quoting Songs of Songs 7:14: "The mandrakes give forth fragrance." Nahum Sarna comments that:

> Chemical analysis shows it to contain emetic, purgative, and narcotic substances, which explains its widespread medicinal use in ancient times. Because the fruit exudes a distinctive and heady fragrance, and its sturdy, forked or intertwined root has torsolike features, the mandrake appears as a widely diffused folkloristic motif associated with aphrodisiac powers....The Hebrew term dudaim is close in sound to dodim, 'love'. Indeed, the two are associated in The Song of Songs: 'There I will give my love (dodai) to you. The mandrakes (dudaim) yield their fragrance...my beloved (dodi)' (7:13-14).[135]

Robert Graves notes that the mandrakes ripen at the time of the wheat harvest. The agricultural emphasis of the harvest and the ripe fruit is unusual in this narrative which is overwhelmingly concerned with the work of shepherding. Graves' detailed discussion of the mandrakes elucidates the context of Rachel and Leah's barter:

> The mandrake...about a foot long, resembles a human body with two legs; sometimes a short subsidiary root supplies the genitalia. Its stem is hairy; its flowers cup-shaped and a rich purple in color; its apples, which ripen at the time of the wheat harvest, are yellow, sweet, palatable and still believed by

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[135] Sarna, (1989) p.209.

> Palestinian Arabs to cure barrenness....Its anti-spasmodic virtue explains why it was held to cure barrenness - involuntary muscular tension in a woman might prevent complete congress.[136]

Rachel politely asks Leah for some of her son's mandrakes. It is the first dialogue between the two women (v.14). In Leah's hurt and hurtful response she asks Rachel if it isn't enough that she has taken her husband, does Rachel want to take her son's mandrakes as well (v.15)? Leah is comparing or equating Jacob with the mandrakes. Rachel goes on to make the same equation as she suggests: "So let him lie with you tonight, in exchange for your son's mandrakes" (v.15). Rachel uses the word tachat, to express "in exchange," or "in place of." The same word is used in chapter 30:2. When Rachel demands children Jacob becomes angry and says: hatachat elohim anochi, "Am I in place of God?" It is interesting to note that Jacob uses tachat in connection with his own relationship with God: it is God (and not he) who opens and closes the womb. In this episode Rachel uses tachat connecting Jacob and the mandrakes: it is not solely Jacob, but Jacob helped by the mandrakes which will open the womb. Where Jacob objected to being "in the place of" God, earlier, he is now "in the place of" the mandrakes. Rachel, in complete control, exchanges her

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[136] Graves, (1964) pp.219-20.

husband (the man) for the mandrakes (whose shape is like a little man). The mandrakes (in the shape of little men) were found by Reuben, a child or "little man" himself, and are desired for the purpose of producing children, or "little men."

In this episode, the difference in attitude between Rachel and Leah is again apparent. While Leah's reaction embodies pain and resentment (v.15), Rachel seems entirely pragmatic (vv.14-15). Leah's agreeing to share the mandrakes seems surprising at first. Apparently she will do anything in exchange for a night with Jacob - in the hope of resuming sexual relations with him. (That she achieves her goal is witnessed by the births described in vv.19-21). Rachel's matter-of-fact attitude here is reminiscent of the plan she had devised for Bilhah: she has a plan, a goal to achieve, and acts accordingly. Characteristically, she appears completely unaffected by the idea of Jacob spending the night with Leah. Her desire to acquire the mandrakes in hope of conceiving takes precedence over any possible feelings of jealousy or love.

It is important to note Rachel's use of the words: yishkav immach, "let him lie with you" (v.15). Until this point the word used in the narrative to indicate sexual relations is yavo, "coming in (unto)." Jacob "came in unto her" (Leah), vayyavo eleha (29:23). Jacob "also came in unto

Rachel," vayyavo gam el-rachel (29:30). Jacob "came in unto her" (Bilhah), vayyavo eleha (30:4). In each of these instances, it is the woman who is the object of the verb "to come." In each case it is the man who is acting and the woman who is acted upon. In this episode of the mandrakes, yishkav, "to lie with" is introduced. Where yishkav is used (vv.15,16), it is followed by im, "he will lie with you." The use of el, to do something to a person is very different from the use of im, to do something with a person. Rachel uses the word yishkav in her conversation with Leah (v.15). Leah then tells Jacob: "you will come in unto me," elai tavo (v.16), using the more common terminology. When Jacob complies, the narrator then concludes: "and he lay with her on that night," using the newly introduced yishkav (v.16). Perhaps the most important thing to be said about the use of yishkav is that it is very ambiguous. While there is no ambiguity about the sexual implication of yavo, "to come in (unto)," yishkav may describe "lying with" someone sexually or not sexually. It may mean "lying down to sleep," (Gen. 19:4); "two lying together for warmth," (Ec. 4:11); "lying down in death," (Is. 14:8); or "lying down with his fathers," (I Kgs. 1:21, 2:10). The same verb may also be used in the sense of getting rest (Lev. 26:6), or getting no rest (Jb. 30:17, "My gnawing pains do not sleep").

In the context of the bargain between Rachel and Leah, both the ambiguity of yishkav and the use of im, "with"

(rather than el, "to"), are important. Rachel may be expressing "to lie with" in a sexual or even a non-sexual way. Leah's words, however, are unambiguous; she is quick to translate the offer into the explicit sexual language of elai tavo, "you will come in unto me" (v.16).

The events which follow contain fascinating parallels to Jacob's arrival in Haran. When Jacob arrives in Haran, he waits at the well until Laban "runs to meet him," (likrato, 29:13). Now, Jacob comes in from the field in the evening. Leah "goes out to meet him," (likrato, 30:16). Leah tells Jacob that he will come (tavo) to her, because she has paid Rachel for his hire (sachor secharticha, 30:16) with her son's mandrakes, "so he lay with her that night." Similarly, Laban brings (vahvi'eihu) Jacob to his house, and shortly thereafter asks Jacob to name his wages, using the same verb: maskurtecha (29:15). After Laban asks Jacob to name his wages, we are informed that Laban has two daughters. In this first instance when sachar is used with respect to Jacob, the negotiations (between Laban and Jacob) will result in his having an unexpected sexual union with Leah. This second instance when sachar is used with respect to Jacob, the negotiations (between Rachel and Leah) will result in his having an unexpected sexual union with Leah. The result is the birth of another son. Leah says that God has given her sechari, her own "wages" for giving Zilpah to her husband, and she names him Yissachar. Whereas in the

earlier episode, Jacob receives a wife as his sachar, here Leah receives a child as her sachar.

Leah's naming speech for Yissachar has several important elements. The announcement of Leah's pregnancy begins with the information: "and God heard Leah" (v.17). It is not clear what God heard, nor is the precise significance of the wording in Hebrew: "God heard (el, to) Leah." It is possible that Leah answers this question herself in the next verse: "God gave (me) my reward, in that I gave my maid to my husband" (v.18). Leah's comments once again expose the contrast between the sisters. Whereas Rachel gave her maid to her husband and Rachel did not get pregnant as a result, Leah points out that she gave her maid to her husband and she was "rewarded" with a pregnancy - not to mention renewed sexual relations with her husband. Leah trades her son's mandrakes for a night with Jacob and delivers another son; Rachel receives a portion of the mandrakes but does not yet become pregnant. Leah grows into the position of possessing both children and the affection of her husband. Rachel has no children and appears unconcerned with her husband's affections. The manipulation of Jacob by Rachel and Leah is the vehicle through which their relationship to each other is represented. Their animosity has apparently escalated with Leah's expression of being "rewarded," which implies that Rachel has not been.

Westermann describes Jacob's role in the mandrake episode as "lamentable;" Exum finds an invitation to laugh. "There is something ludicrous in the preoccupation with producing sons. But the real butt of our laughter is none other than the patriarch himself."[137] She imagines Jacob coming in from a day's work in the field, to be met by his triumphant and unloved wife telling him that she has paid for his hire with her son's mandrakes. Exum asks: "Is this any way to treat the great patriarch of Israel?" What Westermann finds lamentable is what Exum finds humorous: the sexual manipulation of Jacob. I suggest that there is a lamentable side, namely the desperation of both Leah and Rachel to have their respective needs met: Leah continues to feel a lack in her relationship with her husband and to settle for sex and children as compensation; Rachel is desperate for a child, irrespective of her husband's love.

The humor in Jacob's position also has its serious side. Jagendorf notes instances in which a family is saved through a woman's initiative, where the woman's combination of "cunning and instinct dwarfs the male, whoever he may be, into a role of passive dronelike service."[138] This situation may seem comical, particularly the role reversals of men and women in sexual relations, but it has a serious side. Modern research on infertility suggests that "the

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[137] Exum, (1986) p.66.

[138] Jagendorf, (1984) p.189.

experience of infertility sharpens the differences which always have to be negotiated in any heterosexual relationship. The woman was held responsible for the success or failure of conception; the man was reduced even more swiftly than usual to the momentary provider of sperm."[139] Just as I would argue against an interpretation that views biblical women as mere wombs, I would also reject an interpretation that portrays men as sperm banks.

It is significant that after being hired by Leah with her son's mandrakes (v.16), Jacob continues to have sexual relations with her, as witnessed by the birth of more children (vv.17,19, and 21). When her sixth son is born Leah says: "God has endowed me with a good dowry, this time (happa'am) my husband will dwell with me because I have borne him six sons" (v.20). When Reuben is born Leah expresses her hope that "now" attah her husband will love her (29:32). When Levi is born Leah expresses her hope that (both) "now, this time," attah happa'am her husband will be joined to her (29:34). When Yehudah is born Leah says that "this time" happa'am she will thank God (29:35). At this point, when Zevulun is born Leah expresses her hope that "this time" happa'am her husband will dwell with her (30:20). It is significant to examine the different instances in which Leah uses "now" and those in which she

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[139] Klein, (1989) p.53.

uses "this time" in an effort to elucidate Leah's experiences.

Before Reuben's birth Leah is described as "hated" (29:31). She hopes that as a result of the birth, Jacob will love her. It is possible (as discussed above) that by the time Levi (her third son) is born, Leah is no longer hated. At this transitional time Leah uses both "now" and "this time." When Yehudah is born, Leah uses "this time" as she expresses her gratitude. This might indicate that Leah is more confident about her position. Perhaps her situation has changed in that Jacob loves her (as she wished for, v.32), or in that God heard her (v.33), or in that Jacob has indeed been joined to her (v.34). It appears from these instances that "now" expresses her seemingly elusive hopes, while "this time" expresses their fulfillment.

It is therefore significant that Leah says: "this time" when Zevulun is born (30:20). Leah has become more confident as a result of the intervening events. Zilpah has borne two sons, and as a result Leah has been rewarded by the birth of Yissachar. Rachel remains infertile. Leah's position is now strengthened considerably by Zevulun's birth. Jacob is not having sexual relations her maid, nor has his hire been paid for with mandrakes, but "this time" (<u>happa'am</u>) Leah bears a sixth son because she and Jacob have resumed sexual relations. Leah may even feel that she has not gained complete security from Jacob in a love-relationship, but

that "this time" Jacob will dwell with her because she has borne him six sons (and not necessarily because he loves her).

If Leah has not achieved the marital relationship she has desired, she may nevertheless win Jacob over through her childbearing. Perhaps this, ultimately, is the meaning of Leah's naming speech for Zevulun. As Rashi comments, "From now on [Jacob's] real home will be with me since I have as many children as all of his (other) wives together." It is possible that Leah has moved from being the mere object of Laban's deception to the status of primary wife by virtue of her childbearing. This transformation may be further indicated by an additional element of the naming speeches. Leah sometimes refers to her husband in those speeches (29:32, 34, and 30:20), and at other times refers to God (29:32, 33, 35, 30:18 and 30:20). In only two of the naming speeches does she refer to both her husband and God: the births of Reuben (29:32) and Zevulun (30:20). In the first, she is considered "hated" and expresses her hope with attah "now." When Zevulun is born Leah may be expressing her subsequently-developed confidence through the use of happa'am "this time." The episode ends with the birth of Dinah. Judgement (din) is implied in her name just as Rachel expresses that she has been "judged" when Bilhah gives birth (30:6). For Rachel the judgement reflects the attainment of her overwhelming desire for offspring. It is possible that

its use here reflects the attainment (even if only through childbearing) of Leah's overwhelming desire for improved marital relations; this is to say the vindication of her value (whether as wife or as person).

While it is suggestive to draw parallels between Rachel's naming of Dan and Leah's naming of Dinah, there is in fact no naming speech for Dinah. Ibn Ezra comments that Dinah "was together with Zevulun in the womb," indicating that they were twins. Rashi cites a midrash which explains Dinah's name:

> Our rabbis explained that Leah set herself up as a judge (dinah) against herself (saying): 'If this be a son, my sister Rachel cannot be even the equal of any of the handmaids'. She therefore offered prayer regarding it, and its sex was changed (Ber.60a). Leah knew by prophetic insight that twelve sons were to be born to Jacob. She had already given birth to six and each of the handmaids to two. Consequently if she were to give birth to another son, Rachel could at most become the mother of only one, and she would consequently be inferior in this respect to any of the handmaids.

What is implied by Rashi is fully stated by Rashbam: "One does not offer thanks for a daughter in the same way that does for a son."

Rachel's Pregnancy (30:22-23)

In chapter 29:31 God "sees" that Leah was hated and as a result "opens her womb." Leah had become pregnant a second time, with Shimon, because God "heard" that she was hated (29:33). When Leah bears her fifth son, Yissachar, it is because God "heard" her (30:17). It does not come as a surprise, therefore, that when "God remembers Rachel, and God hears her," that God "opens her womb" (v.22). Rachel becomes pregnant and bears a son, saying: "God has gathered in my reproach" (v.23). In general, the interpretation of "my reproach" is similar to Ibn Ezra's explanation: "God saw the insults that the women were heaping on me because I was childless, and it is as though they had been assembled and collected next to God."

According to Webster's Dictionary, "to reproach" means "to accuse of and blame for a fault, so as to make feel ashamed; rebuke, or reprove." The noun reproach means "shame, disgrace, discredit, or an object of blame or scorn." I suggest that there are two ways to interpret Rachel's words "God has gathered in my reproach" (v.23). The first is Ibn Ezra's explanation, cited above. Rachel is the object of the reproach, the rebuke, the disgrace and scorn. She has been shamed and blamed (reproached) by others for her (disgraceful) inability to conceive. The second interpretation is the possibility that Rachel is the subject of the reproach. By referring to "my reproach" she refers to

her own feelings of blame and scorn towards others - Jacob and Leah, specifically. Perhaps what God has "gathered in" is the reproach (blame and scorn) Rachel felt when she said to Jacob: "Give me children or, if not, I will die" (30:1). Perhaps what God has "gathered in" is the reproach Rachel felt over the years when Leah was bearing child after child, and her own womb was closed up. Perhaps there is even shame over her resorting to her maid as a womb, and to the mandrakes to aid conception, when the other women in the narrative conceive without difficulty. This, from Rachel's perspective, might be the essence of "my reproach."

Rachel names her son Yosef, saying: "May God add for/to me another son" (v.24). The name has two possible etymologies due to the similarity of the words asaf, "to gather in," and yosef, "to add." However, the two words are basically opposite in meaning. God simultaneously "gathers in" reproach, and "adds" another son. Rachel's comments fit into the pattern already observed in her previous naming speeches. She first refers to elohim who has acted: "gathered in" (v.23), "judged" (v.6), or "wrestled" (v.8), and then she continues with a comment which appears to be her own opinion or explanation. Rachel begins with: "God has gathered in my reproach" (v.23), and continues: "May God add for/to me another son" (v.24). The former reflects the external world, and her experience of infertility, while the

latter reflects her internal world, the desire for another child. The name Yosef comes from the latter, her internal world. It is a reminder of what will be added, and not what has been taken away.

It is interesting to note that Rachel's emphasis leads us to conclude that what is "added" is more significantly the capacity to bear a child, and not the child itself. Rachel's terse comments lead us directly from the acknowledgement that she is capable of conception: "God has gathered in my reproach" (v.23), to her desire: "May God add another child" (v.24). The force of wanting another child may indicate that this one is connected to the pain of infertility and it may also be a chance or fortuitous occurrence. Having another child would vindicate her completely.

This may be further illustrated by previous verses. When Bilhah bears Dan, Rachel says: God has given me; when Naphtali is born Rachel says: I also am able; and now when Yosef is born Rachel says: may God add to me another son. These expressions indicate not only that the focus on Rachel (as opposed to the infant or Jacob), but also that Rachel immediately turns her attention away from this infant and towards the "other." This immediate turning away is profoundly significant. It is troubling that Rachel's naming speech does not portray the expected joy after the years of infertility. The enthusiasm of Leah's response to her first

child - "Look, a son!" - is entirely lacking. In addition, there is no indication that anyone is happy. This episode displays a frightening lack of maternal concern. If Rachel and Leah care for their children as anything more than trophies in their competition, the reader is not informed of it. We are given no indication that a mother-child bond exists.

I suggest that there is a story beneath the surface, one that will never be told. While Leah suffers, one feels that she experiences some consolation through her children that Rachel will never have. God opens Rachel's womb, and her immediate hope is that there will be "another son." Yet her story is foreboding because Rachel does not express the hope for many more children, but specifically for one more son. Painfully, one more son is exactly what she has, whereupon she dies. Rashi attributes Rachel's comment to prophecy, explaining that:

> She knew prophetically that Jacob would rear only twelve tribes. She therefore prayed: 'May it be God's will that the tribe which he is yet destined to rear may issue from me'. For this reason she prayed only for one other son.

I propose that Rachel's hope for another son in the naming speech foreshadows her theft of Laban's teraphim. Rachel's consolation may come as she attempts, seriously and

dangerously, to protect the future for her own son, and perhaps for her yet-unborn second son. This will be discussed in detail in the following pages.

Rachel and Leah Leave Home: Chapter 30:25-31:18

In this next episode time is marked by the birth of Yosef. The narrator informs us that "it came to pass after Rachel gave birth to Yosef, that Jacob said to Laban, 'Send me (away), so that I may go to my own place and to my own land' (v.25). It is significant that Jacob's request to leave takes place "after Rachel gave birth to Yosef." The birth is obviously important, marking a change in Jacob's circumstances. Perhaps it indicates that Jacob considers his family to be complete since the thus far infertile Rachel has given birth. The narrator does not refer simply to the fact of Yosef's birth, but states that "Rachel gave birth." When Jacob requests of Laban to be "sent away," he does not mention his God. It is only later (31:3), when Jacob speaks with Rachel and Leah (after the animal trickery) that he mentions having communicated with his God. This is significant because the reader assumes that Jacob is devising the plan and acting on it by himself. However, when he tries to convince Leah and Rachel to leave Haran with him he identifies and introduces <u>his</u> God to them, and informs them of his God's guidance and protection.

There ensues a conversation in which Jacob tries to convince Laban that everything he has and wants to take with him belongs to him because he has earned it all. At the same time, Laban would like to convince Jacob that everything Jacob has and would like to take with him actually belongs

to Laban (vv.26-30). They are both solicitous, each having a large stake in the outcome. Jacob stands to lose wives, children, animals and possessions, while Laban stands to lose daughters, grandchildren and all of the animals and possessions which Jacob's work has multiplied for him. According to Von Rad: "It is the conversation of two men who are on their guard before each other, who know from the start exactly what they want, but who still slowly specify precisely their demands."[140]

Laban suggests that Jacob name his wages, and then remain with him (v.28). Laban uses the word scharcha, "your wages" which alludes intertextually to other parts of the narrative. When Jacob arrives in Haran Laban asks him to name his wages, maskurtecha (29:15); and later Leah pays Rachel for Jacob's hire, sachor s'charticha with the mandrakes (30:16). The issue of wages, indicated by the same root in each instance, comes up repeatedly. It begins with Jacob's arrival in Haran (29:15), reappears in the episode of the mandrakes (30:16), and here in Jacob's current negotiations with Laban (30:28, 32, 33). Jacob later tells Rachel and Leah how many times his wages have been changed (31:7-8), and then he describes the situation concerning his wages again at his departure (31:41). It is clear that throughout the narrative the issue of wages is connected in the various episodes to issues of trickery and deception.

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[140] Von Rad, (1972) p.300.

When Laban asks Jacob to name his wages, Jacob offers a different suggestion. He reminds Laban that the "little you had before I came is now increased to a multitude" (v.30). Jacob also asks: "when shall I make also for myself a house?" (v.30). Jacob then proposes an elaborate plan for tending the animals, and he offers to account to Laban any animal which is not spotted or speckled as stolen (vv.32-33). Jacob refers to his "wages" (or: hire) s'chari in each of these two verses. In this episode Jacob appears to be in control, deciding for himself what his wages will be. Von Rad explains that:

> Jacob's answer to Laban's question about his demand is very surprising, in fact it is the 'climactic moment' in the structure of the narrative. Every reader is expecting a very high price after this preliminary skirmish....And when Jacob proceeds to say that he would under certain conditions continue to be Laban's shepherd, it actually seems that he is ready to rescind his application for release....To this point the negotiation appears to have taken a favorable turn for Laban....Laban can only perceive advantage for himself in this proposal, and he agrees, but not without first inserting a safety clause for himself. He himself (and not Jacob) separates all spotted and striped animals from the flocks which are now to be under Jacob's observation, and he makes them graze under the

supervision of his sons at a distance of three days travel from his own flocks.[141]

What follows these negotiations between Jacob and Laban is a detailed and complex description of Jacob's process of causing the animals to bear speckled and spotted offspring (vv.37-43). This elaborate description is rare among the typically sparse descriptions found in the Torah. This episode also contains significant literary allusions to other parts of the narrative. As a result of Laban's original trick Jacob marries both Leah and Rachel who subsequently engage in a competition of producing offspring (29:23-30:24). Here Jacob will engage, essentially, in a competition of producing as many spotted and speckled offspring as possible from among Laban's flocks. Having built up a family through producing offspring, Jacob now attempts to build up his "house" (people and possessions) through animal husbandry.

In the previous episode Jacob asks for the beautiful Rachel, and ends up with the unlovely Leah. Here Jacob suggests that he will take all of the spotted and speckled (unlovely) offspring for his own "house." However, this time Laban will not be able to trick Jacob into accepting the marred (unlovely) animals, as he did with Leah. Jacob will actually take the lovely ones (the strong, hearty ones) for

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[141] Ibid., p.310.

himself, in the guise of spotted and speckled ones (30:41-42). To make this comparison is ironic since it is Leah, the less beautiful daughter, who has turned out to be the more prolific in producing offspring. While Jacob's "husbandry" is first played out through fatherhood, it will now be played out in producing animal-offspring. The reader assumes, due to the detailed description of the process, that he will once again be successful. Commentators suggest that the elaborate description of Jacob's plan shows his mastery of techniques of animal husbandry. Furthermore, the detailed description of peeling the rods, placing them where the animals come to drink and to mate, and the attempt to influence their mating (30:37-38) is an ironic allusion to Jacob's own sexual experience. His manipulation of the animals is like Rachel and Leah's manipulation of him as they decided who he would have sexual relations with, and bartered for him with mandrakes.

In the previous episode, Jacob is tricked into marrying Leah. He asks Laban: "What have you done to me?" (29:25). Laban appears to be confident that his plan will succeed as he offers Jacob a simplistic solution: "Complete the wedding week for this one, and you will be given this one also" (29:27). Now, as noted above by Von Rad, Laban seems equally as confident that events will unfold to his benefit, and that he is negotiating as effectively as before. However, as Von Rad continues:

> He did make it impossible for Jacob to take any of the spotted animals, but Jacob does not need them. And furthermore by removing the flocks so far from each other Laban created a situation which soon worked to his disadvantage. Thus the cunning man was betrayed by his own caution.[142]

The previous episode (30:1-24) concludes with the birth of all of the children, except Benjamin, describing clearly the growth of Jacob's family. The episode presently being discussed begins by marking time based on the birth of Yosef (30:25), and ends with a clear description of the growth of Jacob's animals and possessions: "So the man increased a great deal, and he had many flocks, female and male servants and camels and asses" (30:43). Jacob built up his family and then his possessions during his stay in Haran.

When Jacob hears Laban's sons discussing that Jacob is taking what belongs to their father (31:1), Jacob decides to leave. Jacob gets a threefold message: the sons of Laban (who formerly seemed to have only daughters) mistrust him, Laban's attitude toward him has changed, and God has told him to return to Canaan, saying: "I will be with you" (31:3). Jacob sends for his wives. Jacob's lengthy speech to Leah and Rachel (31:5-13) contains an indication of the fundamental difference between his past and theirs

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[142] Ibid., p.301.

and his God and theirs, when he tells them that "the God of my father has been with me" (31:5). Jacob explains to Leah and Rachel that this (his) God has been with him during his entire stay in Haran, protecting him from their father (31:7). Jacob attributes to his God the transfer of wealth from Laban to him (31:9). Jacob goes into even greater detail telling the women that an angel of God came to him with a message (31:11), and then he identifies his God to them in very direct terms: "the God of Beth-El, to whom you anointed a pillar there, to whom you vowed a vow to me there" (31:13). Jacob is compelled to describe his God to them, to introduce his God to Leah and Rachel. His God, clearly, is not (necessarily) their god. This distinction between Jacob, and Leah and Rachel is likely illustrated both in Leah's naming-speeches for Gad and Asher (30:11-13) and in Rachel's theft of the teraphim (31:19, discussed below).

Jacob has tried to convince Leah and Rachel not only that he has worked hard and done the right thing in the face of their father's trickery, but also that his God is with him, guiding him. Rachel and Leah answer in one voice. According to Von Rad, Jacob is not sure whether his wives will follow him to his homeland, and notes that even though they were Jacob's wives, they still belonged to Laban's family. Jeansonne suggests that they demonstrate courage by "disowning" their powerful father, and it is they who

"allow" Jacob to return to Canaan. It is clear that Leah and Rachel have an important role here; otherwise Jacob would not consult them. It is difficult, however, to determine what that role is. While it seems doubtful to me that Jacob would have left without them, it seems that he sought their assent rather than their permission. It appears that Leah and Rachel's voluntary compliance was desired, as opposed to their consent being legally required.

When Rachel and Leah respond to Jacob's proposal to leave they refer to themselves, their children, and compliance with Jacob's God's will. They do not refer to Jacob or Jacob's will, nor to any particular preference or desire of their own. Rachel and Leah begin by asking whether they still have any portion or inheritance in their father's house (31:14). They continue by describing his treatment of them as "strangers" and indicate that he has devoured their money (31:15). They go on to make a claim regarding "all of the wealth which God has taken away from our father," lanu hu ulevaneinu (31:16). It is translated ambiguously as: "that is ours and our children's" (Old JPS), and less ambiguously as: "belongs to us and to our children" (New JPS). It may mean that whatever wealth their father had no longer belongs to them (because of the way he has treated them and devoured what was theirs); or that whatever wealth their father had does indeed belong to them because what Jacob has produced, multiplied, earned and/or swindled was

once Laban's, and now it is theirs. Rashi interprets the phrase in accordance with the latter translation, explaining that Leah and Rachel have nothing of their father's property, except what has been taken away from him and given to Jacob.

Ultimately Leah and Rachel express their consent to leave only by affirming that Jacob should do as he has been instructed. This is the climax of their answer, that Jacob should do all that God has told him to do (31:16). Rachel and Leah have explained how their father has treated them, claimed that they did, or (possibly) do have entitlements to his property, and they have concluded by counselling Jacob to obey God's will. Leah and Rachel do not take Jacob's God's instruction upon themselves. It is also important to note what Rachel and Leah do not say. They do not say: we will do what God says, we will do what you tell us to do, we will leave the decision to you, we will follow you, we will ask our father. The narrator troubles to include the women's response, but it reveals only their emotional confusion and ambivalence. Leah and Rachel take no course of action on their own behalf until Rachel steals the teraphim (31:19). What is portrayed is a lack of genuine options for the two women.

I suggest that although we (once again) do not have a full story, this is an important moment for several reasons. It is significant that Jacob sends for Leah and Rachel, not

simply to demand that they leave Laban and come with him, but to try to convince them of the soundness of his course of action. Their response is recorded, and it illustrates their dilemma. It is Leah and Rachel, in one voice, who review their own options and decide to comply with Jacob as the better of their two choices: to remain with Laban, or journey with Jacob. Finally, the episode is important because it illustrates the religious difference between Jacob and Leah and Rachel. Jacob introduces and identifies his God to his wives, and almost immediately Rachel steals the teraphim, suggesting her continued attachment to them.

Rachel and Leah are portrayed as significant because they are consulted about Jacob's decision to leave, they speak and act. It is also possible, despite the fact that Leah and Rachel simply comply, rather than actively deciding to leave Haran, that they wield some power. Without Leah and Rachel Jacob would have no offspring and his family would not have been built up. Without his daughters, Laban likewise would not have such a vested interest in Jacob's journeying from Haran. It is Leah and Rachel who kept Jacob in Haran, working for Laban, and causing him to prosper for many years. Leah and Rachel are central in this episode either because of, or in spite of, the narrator's intention. However, it remains another example of a gap through which we glimpse a different side (the typically less highlighted

side) of the women's characters. The episode ends as Jacob leads all of his family, animals and possessions together, towards Isaac, his father, in Canaan (31:17-18).

Rachel Steals the Teraphim: Chapter 31:19-54

The narrative continues by describing Jacob's departure from Haran, and Rachel's theft of the teraphim. While Laban went to shear the sheep, Rachel stole the teraphim which belonged to him (31:19). Without telling Laban, Jacob and "all that was his" fled (31:20-1). Laban was told of the departure after three days and set out to catch up with Jacob (31:22-3). Laban's bad mood is tempered since God appears to him in a dream warning him to guard against what he might say to Jacob, whether good or bad (31:24). Laban sets up camp, he and Jacob meet, and Laban asks Jacob what he has done to him: stealing his heart, and conducting his daughters away like captives (31:25-6). Laban explains that if Jacob had not fled in this manner he could have been sent off with proper ceremony. He further points out that denying him the opportunity to kiss his family was foolishness on Jacob's part (31:27-8). Laban informs Jacob that although it is in his power to do something bad to him, the God of Jacob's father warned him not to (31:29). This mention of "the God of your father" is followed by the accusation that Jacob has stolen "my gods." This is another illustration of the distinctions which are made between Jacob's God, and Laban's (and Leah and Rachel's) god as indicated in the previous section (31:16).

Jacob declares that if Laban finds his gods, the thief will not live (31:32). The narrator informs us

parenthetically that Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them (31:32). The verses which follow describe Laban's search for the teraphim, and Rachel's success in preventing them from being discovered (31:33-35). Laban searches the tents of Jacob, Leah and the maids (v.33). Rachel places the teraphim in the camel bags and sits upon them. Laban feels around the whole tent, but finds nothing (v.34). Rachel asks her father not to be angry with her, and explains that she cannot rise up because "the way of women" is upon her. It is then reiterated that Laban did not find the teraphim (v.35). Before examining the teraphim in order to determine what they are and what their significance is, it is useful to examine the whole episode (from the theft to the search, 31:19-35) in relation to two other episodes.

Commentators often suggest a connection between Jacob's trickery in obtaining the blessing from his father (27:6-29), and Jacob being the object of Laban's trickery when he delivers the wrong bride (29:23-26). Both are sensual, although, as Jagendorf describes: "the episode of the blessing is able to put into words the actual interplay of sensuality, awareness and illusion that cannot out of modesty be described in the wedding night....Isaac's gift of blessing via kissing, smelling and touch is so akin to the sexual gift."[143] Jacob imitates his brother's sensual presence in his smell, hair, clothes, and even in the taste

[143] Jagendorf, (1984) p.190.

of the food. Similarly, Jacob thinks that Leah is Rachel on his wedding night. Both scenes are very physical. The sense of touch is used, but despite its use, secrets are not discovered.

I suggest that the parallel described in these two episodes (27:6-29 and 29:23-6) extends to this episode in which Rachel hides and Laban searches for his gods (31:19-35). In the sensual scene which follows, Laban goes in and out of tents, first Jacob's tent, and then the tents of all four women. At first Laban looks for the teraphim by "coming into" the tents (31:33), but as the search continues he "feels all around" Rachel's tent (31:34) and does not find his gods. Rachel has taken the teraphim, placed them in her saddle-bags and is sitting on them (31:34). Laban's gods are between her legs, and underneath her. This parallels the physical, sensual aspects of the two previous episodes. The placement of the gods also illustrates the differentiation between a husband and a father. Only the husband may touch "his" woman in this private, genital area. Laban would have to commit incest to recover his gods.

This hiding/searching episode also includes the familiar motif of "seeing." In the blessing episode, Isaac's failing sight (supposedly) allows for the mistaken identity of the brothers: one character (Jacob) knows the genuine details and the other (Isaac) does not. In the wedding episode, the inability to see in the darkness of night and

tent, or behind the wedding veil, (supposedly) allows for the mistaken identity of the bride. There again, while one character (Leah) knows the genuine details, the other (Jacob) does not. In the search for the gods, while Laban is both 'looking' and 'feeling' he can neither find the gods, nor discover the identity of the thief. One character, in this case Rachel, knows the genuine details while the other does not. Tension mounts (in all three scenes this tension has a physical connotation involving the tactile sense) until Rachel speaks and the sensuality of the scene plainly becomes sexuality. She volunteers the information that the "way of women" is upon her. The props that masked the truth in the two previous scenes were food, hair, clothes, darkness and veil; here it is Rachel's pure womanhood. The "prop" in this episode is Rachel's genuine or feigned menstruation. Further interpretation of Rachel's actions will be discussed (below) and assisted by an examination of the teraphim.

There is additional element of physical positioning which is important in this episode. Rachel, the woman, is seated above the men on her camel, in the self-proclaimed state of derech nashim (31:34). Laban, her father is below, going in and out of tents - an interior, female-associated space (31:33-35). Rachel, physically above, is "in the know," while Laban, physically below, is searching. Rachel is calm, Jacob is angry and Laban is distressed (31:36). I

suggest that the risk which Rachel takes to steal the teraphim is far too significant and too great to justify the interpretation that Rachel did not in fact value the teraphim. In addition to the connections made here, this episode also links a final theme. In 30:2 Rachel herself associates childbearing with death when she states: give me children or else I will die. This association is made again, unknowingly, when Jacob states that the thief of the teraphim shall not live (31:32). The same association is made for the last time, painfully, when Benjamin is born and Rachel dies in childbirth (35:18).

Teraphim

In "Another Look At Rachel's Theft of the Teraphim," Moshe Greenberg surveys the most commonly accepted views of the teraphim. He begins by citing Genesis Rabba which credits Rachel with the desire to purge Laban of his idolatry. Modern scholars suggest that Rachel sought the protection of the hearth gods while away from home. A more common view held by many modern scholars deals with the connection between the teraphim and issues of inheritance. Greenberg cites H. H. Rowley who summarizes:

> It has been conjectured that Laban had no sons at the time of Jacob's marriage to Leah, but that he subsequently became the father of sons, who were now superior in legal standing to Jacob. By carrying off

> the teraphim, however, Rachel preserved for Jacob the chief title to Laban's estate.[144]

Greenberg refutes this view by arguing that Jacob would not have needed the gods to ensure his title to Laban's property. All he needed was Laban's statement that he was entitled to a share. Without going into the details of Greenberg's argument concerning the laws of inheritance as understood from biblical and extrabiblical material, he poses these questions:

> Does anything in the story suggest that, now or ever after, Rachel (through Jacob) pressed a claim against Laban on the strength of having these gods? What was the mood of Jacob's household when they fled?...Their chief desire was quickly to put as large a distance between them and him as possible. Later Jacob and Laban agree to set up a permanent boundary between them; and we never again hear that they had anything to do with each other afterward. Is all this consistent with the supposition that Jacob's family had designs on Laban's estate?[145]

Greenberg concludes that the view held by Flavius Josephus is far more probable. Near Eastern women were in the habit of taking along their household gods when going

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[144] Greenberg, (1962) p.240.

[145] Ibid., p.245.

into a foreign land, concealed if need be. According to Greenberg:

> Rachel's particular concern to have the teraphim may be illuminated by the fact that, in common with the one other biblical woman whom we know to have had teraphim, Michal, wife of David (I Sam. 9:13; cf. II Sam. 6:23), Rachel was anxious for children.[146]

Greenberg argues further that Rachel was only one of many in Jacob's household who carried their gods from Haran (35:2ff.). Greenberg asks if all of the others were motivated by a "misconceived purpose to stake out an absentee claim to family-headship?" Greenberg treats Rachel's theft of the teraphim very seriously. He clearly indicates that she was motivated by her (popular and common) religious convictions. It is also clear from his argument that Rachel was motivated by more than a desire to protect Jacob's claim to Laban's property. These points are further substantiated by Karel Van Der Toorn's recent interpretation of the teraphim, and they are critical to my own discussion of the episode.

According to Van Der Toorn, the teraphim are more likely to have been ancestor figurines than household deities. Van Der Toorn suggests that the word teraphim refers to a concrete object, and that it is relatively small since it could be hidden in a saddle-bag (31:34). The data

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[146] Ibid., p.247.

concerning teraphim in Gen. 31 and I Sam. 19 provide enough information to conclude that the teraphim were statuettes which belonged to household effects. Van Der Toorn further surmises that they stood in a rather inconspicuous place in the household since their absence would otherwise have been noticed immediately. Although Laban noticed their absence, one suspects that Rachel had hoped that her action would go unnoticed for some time. Similarly, Michal's transfer of the teraphim from their usual location to the bed did not strike Saul's messengers as a change from the normal appearance of the house.

Van Der Toorn concludes that while the exact location of the teraphim remains unknown, the images belonged to the sphere of "family devotion" or "domestic piety." Wellhausen cites the predilection of women for the cult of the teraphim based only on the two examples cited here. While Van Der Toorn implies that this conclusion, based only on two examples, is not convincing, he does note that:

> ...women certainly had access to the teraphim, and the story of Rachel's theft is suggestive of an emotional attachment to the images. The description of Laban's indignation in the same story, however, makes it clear that the cult of the teraphim was by no means the exclusive business of women.[147]

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[147] Van Der Toorn, (1990) p.210.

Van Der Toorn goes on to inform his interpretation of the teraphim with the fact that the term "gods" was subject to various definitions. In the ancient Near East, ancestors were believed to be endowed with powers denied to the living. According to Van Der Toorn:

> They were, so to speak, semigods....As semidivine beings, the Israelite dead could at times be subsumed under the category of elohim, without losing their human character. Therefore, while the teraphim are certainly numinous images, they need not have represented gods strictly speaking.[148]

Van Der Toorn argues that the teraphim played a role in divinatory practices. He further proposes that perhaps they were ancestor figurines, expected to relay messages from God to the living. Van Der Toorn describes the teraphim as cultic images, usually of modest proportions. They appear in two categories, either as religious items belonging to the household, or as items used in divination, although "the actual method of obtaining an oracle from the teraphim eludes us." Understanding the teraphim is further complicated by the difficulty in deciding whether they represented deities (strictly speaking), or ancestors raised to "the status of semidivine, spiritual beings."

In the sphere of family devotion, ancestor figurines would not be out of place. In addition, the popularity of

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[148] Ibid., p.211.

necromancy persisted in ancient Israel as witnessed by the attacks against it by prophets and deuteronomistic authors. Although the biblical material is not sufficient to identify the teraphim as ancestor statuettes beyond all doubt, Van Der Toorn's interpretation is convincing. In the remainder of his article, Van Der Toorn goes on to cite relevant extrabiblical evidence which supports this interpretation. If the teraphim are ancestor figurines, Rachel's theft may be understood as her genuine attempt to secure their protection. While she tells Jacob to do as his God instructs him (31:16), Rachel provides for her own religious protection.

Derech Nashim

Rachel states: "Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise up before you, for the way of women is upon me" (31:35). Commentators have dealt harshly and negatively with this statement. Admittedly, even where interpretation grants Rachel's "ingenuity," I have found no commentary which reaches beyond a negative association with menstruation, or female bodily functions in general, in order to sufficiently explicate the episode. According to Westermann, Rachel steals the teraphim to right a wrong done to her by her father in the area of family law. Speiser writes that Rachel may have been motivated by a whim, resentment or greed, but if not, then the description that she "stole" the teraphim

is not even accurate. Greenberg suggests that she stole the gods to accompany and protect her on the journey. Westermann, Von Rad and Jeansonne all agree that the scene contains "mockery." The gods have a "laughable powerlessness," and Rachel's act a "fruitlessness."

According to Von Rad, the gods are unholy, proven by the fact that a woman sat upon them "in her uncleanness." Speiser is impressed by the "pretense of female incapacitation" as a "literary gem." Jeansonne concurs that Rachel's "own reference to her ritual impurity implies that she shows little deference to the gods." She goes further, stating that it is "difficult to believe that Rachel valued the gods for their own sake if she would sit upon them in her genuine or feigned ritually impure state." I would argue that not only does Rachel value the gods, but that her own reference to derech nashim is significant and comprehensible in the context of the entire story. I suggest that the commentaries noted above stem from a bias against menstruant women that finds no support from the text.

The teraphim are like children at the moment of birth. Rachel places them where her father cannot get at them, and also where (in her yearning for offspring) they are likely to do the most good. In addition, the use of derech nashim is likely to be intentionally ambiguous, since it could refer to her pregnant rather than menstruant condition. I propose that this ambiguity serves Rachel's purpose. She

conceals the teraphim successfully, while not yet disclosing the true nature of her condition. Commentators have interpreted derech nashim exclusively as menstruation. This fact, combined with the negativity associated with menstruation itself has led to a superficial reading of this episode. By suspending several assumptions and examining the episode closely, it will be possible to interpret the text differently. The assumptions which must be suspended are: 1) that derech nashim necessarily means menstruation, 2) that there is negativity or shame associated with female bodily functions in the narrative itself and 3) that Rachel herself does not value the teraphim.

Menstruation

Kitzinger writes that "almost universally woman is seen as having a threatening power which can weaken and emasculate men, her sexuality and the products of her body are considered potent and dangerous."[149] In recent studies conducted with newly or pre-menstrual girls, many had concerns which they felt were secrets and could not discuss with anyone. Some girls reported that they were too embarrassed to ask anyone about these private matters and other girls did not know who to ask. Some expressed fear of being rejected once they began menstruating, and explained that they expected to feel "gross and slimy," or "ugly, gross and sometimes mad." There seemed to be an unwritten

[149] Kitzinger, (1978) p.126.

law that "nice" people do not talk about menstruation. There is a wide gap between the secrecy about menstruation and the attitude toward other topics that used to be unmentionable such as sex, religion and politics.

Over the ages women have had to cope not only with the practical aspects of menstruation but also with an attitude of blame and shame toward menstruation. In some cultures, the men are afraid of menstruating women, and especially of menstrual blood. It is important to note that bleeding from other places in the body is not considered in a negative way. Consider for instance that a bleeding warrior or prize fighter is regarded with awe.[150]

According to one study:

> In the days of our grandmothers and great-grandmothers, little was known about how a woman's body functioned; consequently there were many myths and misconceptions surrounding this event. Very often the happiness and pride which should be evident upon reaching this milestone on the path toward becoming an adult were distorted by the secrecy surrounding menstruation and the fear caused by insufficient knowledge of normal bodily processes. Many girls quickly learned that most adults, including mothers and doctors, felt very

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[150] Doan and Morse, (1985) p.1.

uncomfortable discussing menstruation. Their questions went unasked and unanswered.[151]

In fact, throughout most of history, menstruation has been regarded with apprehension, shame, embarrassment, and distress. It has been the cause of innumerable social rules that have restricted the lives of women everywhere, and:

> ...the subject of all sorts of ridiculous folk tales, beliefs, and scare stories, virtually all of them untrue. What is more, many of these restrictive rules, practices, and foolish stories remain active even today....Just as there are many names for menstruation that suggest it is something shameful or disgusting, there are any number of strange and curious beliefs about this natural bodily function that suggest there is something wrong with a woman who is menstruating. Even today there are people who believe that a menstruating woman would cause milk to sour, wine to turn to vinegar, the leaves of a houseplant to droop, or cut flowers to wilt. Innumerable girls believe that they smell bad during menstruation, which is totally untrue as long as they pay normal attention to their physical cleanliness.[152]

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[151] Nourse, (1980) p.9.

[152] Ibid., p.18.

The way a woman feels about menstruation will affect her emotional growth and development, her self-image and her sense of self-esteem. In a 1989 publication entitled: Life Blood, A New Image for Menstruation, Margaret Sheffield describes menstrual blood as "the special blood in which all our lives started." She continues with the fact that during pregnancy women do not have periods. Instead of passing away as menstrual blood, the lining of the uterus develops into the placenta. "Before we were born, each of us needed this placenta to keep alive. It nourished us with food and oxygen."[153] While this recent publication may be an effort to reverse the negativity connected with menstruation and childbirth, Bruno Bettelheim has speculated on why these functions came to be viewed negatively in the first place.

According to Bettelheim, scholarly discussion of circumcision has been "far too engrossed in what looks like destruction (damage to the genitals) and have overlooked the more hidden fascination with pregnancy and birth."[154] He suggests "that childbearing and menstruation were once viewed as so elevating that men, out of envy, imposed unpleasant taboos."[155] Bettelheim claims that as ancient societies "came to recognize the erect penis as the male organ of procreation, the phallus could not be admired and

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[153] Sheffield, (1988) p.6.

[154] Bettelheim, (1962) p.10.

[155] Ibid., p.138.

venerated enough."[156] As it is described in Motherself, paternity was not really self- evident:

> After all, the logic of cause-and-effect relationship is usually only apparent when the two are closely connected in time. When an effect takes as long as nine months to occur, even the most observant individual is unlikely to think: Aha! pregnancy and childbirth result from coitus. Furthermore, the most obvious sign of pregnancy, the swelling body, only becomes visible long after the time of insemination....it is scarcely surprising then that motherhood should be so highly venerated by prepatriarchal humans. For some unfathomable reason women, and women alone, could reproduce themselves. Even more astonishing, women could reproduce those unlike themselves, males, as well. Childbirth was unique to women.[157]

Perhaps there was a connection between the mysterious monthly blood and new life that sometimes emerged. Women also produced fluid from their breasts which sustained the new life. In these two secretions must lie the secrets of reproduction and maintenance of life. In other words, in the beginning there was mystery and awe surrounding menstruation and childbirth. The discovery of the role of the penis in

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[156] Ibid., p.131.

[157] Rabbuzzi, (1988) p.27.

procreation resulted in a shift in emphasis from the female to the male function in reproduction. This shift is described and illustrated in great detail by Gerda Lerner in The Creation of Patriarchy. An additional result of both the mystery of reproduction, and the shift in emphasis to the male was the tragic negativity later attached to the female functions.

This negative attitude is reflected in the interpretations of Rachel's theft and concealment of the teraphim. This negativity has damaged the understanding of the story both because it demeans Rachel's actions, and because this attitude has resulted in insufficient examination of the text. It appears that while the term derech nashim is intentionally ambiguous in the narrative, it has a standard interpretation assigned to it by commentators. According to the narrative, neither Jacob nor Laban react to Rachel's statement derech nashim li. They do not suggest that she get up, they do not do or say anything in direct response, they simply go about the business of searching for the teraphim. This is important because it supports the thesis that the term derech nashim is ambiguous. We have no way of knowing how Jacob and Laban understand derech nashim. Perhaps it is clear to them that Rachel is menstruating and they therefore accept her statement without response. Perhaps it is clear to them that she is pregnant, and therefore do not insist that she rise.

However, despite this ambiguity, commentators interpret derech nashim as menstruation. This interpretation ultimately proves questionable and biased since we do not know what Rachel meant by stating: derech nashim.

My analysis so far suggests that Rachel and Leah are entirely familiar with the laws of inheritance, and how those laws affect them. There is, furthermore, a parallel between the three stories of Isaac's blessing, Leah's wedding and Laban's search. Rachel's theft and concealment of the teraphim has a sensual and a sexual component. These components of the story - woman's sexuality, menstruation and childbearing - have not been given adequate attention. I propose that Rachel's motivation for stealing the gods was the protection of her child Yosef, and of her as yet unborn son Benjamin. I also suggest that Rachel is most likely pregnant when she sets out from Haran.

I have pointed out that when Jacob attempts to convince Rachel and Leah to leave Haran, they respond with an assessment of their legal situation which has less to do with Jacob (directly) and more to do with their father and their children. This is the first indication that they are concerned with their offspring and their inheritance, and that the two matters are connected. The next time Rachel is mentioned, which is only two verses later, it is to inform us that she has stolen the teraphim. Greenberg, in passing, mentions that she was "anxious for children." This passing

mention must be amplified, especially in support of the connection between Rachel's actions and her reproductive capacity. When Rachel tells her father that she cannot rise before him, she explains her condition as derech nashim (v.35). This is different from the language that had been used to explain that Sarah's menses had ceased: chadal lihyot lesarah orach kannashim (Gen. 18:11). Here the context is quite clear since the "manner of women" which has ceased is explicitly connected with the advanced age of both Sarah and Abraham. In addition, we know from the context that Sarah is not yet pregnant. Only later does Sarah become pregnant and bear a child (Gen. 21:2). This does not prove that Rachel is pregnant (as opposed to menstruating), but it does signal the possibility that derech nashim and orach kannashim may be different. This is to say that Rachel's use of the term derech nashim may or may not denote pregnancy to Jacob and Laban, although it has been consistently and debatably interpreted as menstruation.

The language of reproduction in the teraphim narrative must be examined in greater detail. In 35:16-17 the narrator informs us that the group has left Beit-El, but that there is still a way to go before they will reach Efrat. This information is significant in relation to the rest of the verse: vatteled Rachel vatkash b'lidtah, and the following verse: vayhi v'hakshotah b'lidtah. Suggested translations of this verse include: "and Rachel travailed, and she had hard

labor. And it came to pass, when she was in hard labor...." (Old JPS). Or: "Rachel was in childbirth, and she had hard labor. When her labor was at its hardest...." (New JPS). I propose that the narrator found it significant to mention that there was still some distance to travel towards Efrat because Rachel was in the advanced stages of pregnancy, and fear is being expressed that she will deliver on the way. I interpret the verses in this way: Rachel (who had conceived several months ago) was in the difficult stage of pregnancy, (v.16) and it came to pass when she went into labor, that the midwife said to her....(v.17).

It is important to compare the language used here, in the case of Rachel's second child, with that used in other descriptions in Genesis of conception, pregnancy and birth. When God outlines Eve's future to her in Genesis 3:16 there is a difference between conception/pregnancy (heron), and childbirth (teled). This difference appears throughout the subsequent narratives. After Abraham "goes in unto" Hagar she becomes pregnant (vattahar, 16:4)). During her pregnancy she and Sarah have a great deal of trouble; and it isn't until eleven verses later (after she has been thrown out, heard God's messenger, and returned) that she delivers her son (vatteled, 16:15). Sarah becomes pregnant, and later delivers (vattahar vatteled, 21:2). Rebecca becomes pregnant (vattahar, 25:21), and only after the description of her difficult pregnancy and prophecy does she deliver (laledet),

three verses later. Leah becomes pregnant and then bears her first four sons (Reuben, Shimon, Levi and Yehuda), each described by: vattahar vatteled (29:32-35). The distinction is also made in 29:34 when Leah says yaladti, that she has "borne" three sons (and not that had three pregnancies). Rachel despairs of not having "borne" children (30:1) and of wanting Bilhah to "bear" on her knees (30:3), both using the verb yalad. "Becoming pregnant" and subsequently "bearing a child" are both used in the descriptions of the births of Dan (30:5), Naphtali (30:7), Yissachar (30:17), Zevulun (30:19) and Yosef (30:23). In all of these examples there is a clear distinction made between pregnancy and childbirth.

There are three exceptions where yalad alone is used, with no separate description of a pregnancy. These are the births of Zilpah's two sons Gad (30:10) and Asher (30:12), and the birth of Dinah, the only daughter (30:21). It is possible that this change in the language used to describe these three births is indicative of the circumstances surrounding these births. All other births contain a reference either to Jacob "going in unto" the women, or to God's intervention in the womb, or to both. The descriptions of these three births, Gad, Asher and Dinah, contain no reference to Jacob "going in unto" Zilpah or Leah, nor of God's intervention. This may indicate that the end result, which is the birth, is of greater significance (in these instances) than the act of conception. In other cases the

act of conception is also significant. The act of conception is most significant where it demonstrates God's work of "opening a womb" (29:31, 30:22).

In Discovering Eve, Carol Meyers pays a deserved amount of attention to the critical importance of the biblical language of reproduction and its implications for the biblical "everywoman." She considers the language well developed, including terms for the various phases of conception, pregnancy and childbirth. Meyers carefully and completely distinguishes between the use of harah, to be pregnant, and yalad, to bear. She cites Jeremiah 20:14-18 as an example of this distinction. Jeremiah laments the day of his birth, and wishes that his mother's womb would have always remained pregnant, harath olam. This distinction is as easily made in the texts cited above, where a woman becomes pregnant (tahar), and other events happen after pregnancy and before birth (teled). According to Meyers, heron might refer equally to any or all of the nine-month gestation period, but shows a tendency to be more associated with the initiation of pregnancy - becoming pregnant or conceiving. She argues that it "indicates the physiological condition that was the desired result of intercourse in Israelite society."[158]

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[158] Meyers, (1988) p.102.

Meyers further concludes that the verb yalad refers to the childbirth process itself, and not to the preceding stages of intercourse, conception, and gestation. The verb yalad is applied to females and to males bearing and begetting children, and becoming parents.

As Rachel appears in the narrative, God remembered her, heard her and opened her womb (30:22). She became pregnant and then bore a son (30:23). She claimed that God thereby removed her shame (30:23). Rachel expressed her hope (or prophecy) that God would add another son for her (30:24). After Rachel has borne Yosef (30:25) the discussion of leaving Haran ensues. The next time Rachel appears in the narrative she is discussing her inheritance, and voicing her compliance with Jacob's plan to leave her father and her homeland (31:16). Three verses later we are informed that she has stolen her father's teraphim (31:19). The next time Rachel appears in the narrative she conceals the teraphim between her legs and beneath her, in the saddle bags (31:34). She claims that she cannot rise because derech nashim li (31:35).

The next time she appears Rachel and Yosef are positioned in the safest place in a formation to meet Esau (33:1-2). The journey continues and then the group stops for an unspecified amount of time in Sukkoth or Shechem (33:17-18). After the description of what happens when Dinah

"goes out to see the young women of the land" (34:1ff.), the group continues on to Beit-El. This may indicate that the stay in Shechem was to be more permanent, but the incidents which transpired there caused the stay to be cut short. Although my focus here is on presenting the information which is given concerning Rachel as she appears in the narrative, it is necessary here to discuss, tangentially, the episode concerning Dinah and the Shechemites (34:1-31).

The episode focuses on Dinah, because of whom all the events occur. However, Dinah is not the primary actor, nor the focalizor of the events. The story is not related from her perspective. The reader never knows how she feels about the events which take place around her. The primary actors are her brothers, Shechem, and their respective fathers. They are the characters who speak, make decisions and act. The reader has heard nothing of Dinah since her birth. Now she appears and is introduced as "Leah's daughter" (34:1). Rashi writes that Dinah is called "Leah's daughter" because she "went out" (34:1), since this is what Leah did also. In the episode of the mandrakes it is written that "Leah went out to meet him" (30:16). According to Rashi this is an allusion to the proverb: "Like mother, like daughter." While it is tempting to comment upon the possible similarities between Leah and Dinah, it would be speculation. The text offers no information about Dinah, except that she "went out," upon which to base such a comparison. Ramban observes

that "Scripture does not mention what happened to her after her rescue from Shechem's house." He speculates that she lived shut up in her brother's house, as she was considered defiled in their sight.

The sons of Jacob refuse to give Dinah to Shechem in marriage because they cannot give their sister "to one who is uncircumcised, since it would be a disgrace for us" (34:14). The root for "disgrace" (h-r-p) used here concerning Dinah is the same root used to describe Rachel's disgrace which God gathers in after Yosef is born (30:23). In both instances it refers to women in circumstances which are considered unusual or unnatural. Dinah loses her virginity out of wedlock, and Rachel is infertile. In Dinah's case, Sforno interprets the disgrace to mean that if she married someone who was uncircumcised, it would imply that there was no fitting man among the circumcised who would marry her.

Jeansonne points out that Jacob's role in the episode is somewhat confusing. When Jacob is informed of what has happened to Dinah, he does not respond immediately but is silent until his sons come in from the field (34:5). According to Jeansonne, this delay raises questions. Is Jacob not concerned about Dinah? Does he fear a more serious confrontation with the local people? Jacob does not prevent Shimon and Levi from their revenge, but rebukes them only at the end of the episode (34:30). It is possible that Jacob

sees both sides of the confrontation: revenge must be taken, and revenge would be terribly dangerous for their small group. In the brothers' answer to Jacob's rebuke they ask if he, Shechem, may do with their sister as with a harlot (34:30). According to Rashi, the meaning of "harlot" here is a woman who has no one to protect her. Sforno interprets "harlot" similarly, asking: Is she a harlot who is not worthy to have her humiliation avenged?

This episode is complex. What is important to note in the context of my interpretation is that Dinah's action ("She went out" 34:1) is all that the reader knows of her. The rest of the episode focuses upon the motivations, rules, norms and actions of the male characters. The reader does not know why Dinah went out to see the young women of the land, if she accomplished her goal, nor how she felt about any of the subsequent events which resulted from her initial action. From the perspective of this paper, these questions are important to ask, and yet remain unanswerable based upon the material which is presented in the narrative.

After the Shechemites are destroyed God instructs Jacob to go to Beit-El to dwell there (35:1). Then Jacob tells his household and everyone who is with him to put away the strange gods which are among them, and to purify themselves (35:2). The reader is informed that "they gave to Jacob all the strange gods which were in their possession (hand)" and Jacob hid them under an oak which was near Shechem (35:4).

It seems clear that since the people carried these "strange gods" with them, that they were an important part of the Haranian religious practice. Now, having left Haran with Jacob, these gods must be abandoned, likely in favor of Jacob's God. The narrator does not specify whether or not Rachel, along with the others, gives up the teraphim at this time. It will be important to recall this incident in connection with Rachel's death (discussed below).

There are several indications in the narrative that there is a religious difference between Jacob and his Haranian relatives. These include the theft of the teraphim, the possibility that Leah called upon the goddess Asherah ("with the help of Asherah" 30:13) when Asher was born, and Jacob's instruction to his household to give up their "strange gods" at Shechem (35:2). These are important references to the religious practices of Leah, Rachel and the Haranian household. It is particularly poignant that after leaving Haran Jacob instructs them to abandon their gods.

On the way to Beit-El, God appears to Jacob and reiterates the promise of offspring and land (35:11-12). The narrator informs us of the distance still to be covered in order to arrive at Efrat "while Rachel's pregnancy is entering a very advanced stage" (35:16). These details make perfect sense if Rachel is already pregnant: there is warranted concern that unexpected events are now going to

cause Rachel to deliver en route. These details and the concern which they express make even more sense if the group did leave Shechem unexpectedly. Furthermore, it is significant that God appears and reiterates the promise. It not only points to the imminent birth, but perhaps also foreshadows the possibility that the tragedy of Rachel's death will be mitigated by the child's life: the offspring, the promise. It is important to note that the reiteration of the promise of offspring and land comes after Jacob's household are instructed to give up their "strange gods" (35:2). By carrying out the instruction of his God, Jacob acts to make his the God of his whole household.

The significance of Rachel's theft and concealment of the teraphim is fully apparent if Rachel was pregnant when she left Haran. The connection between the theft, the concealment and the childbirth is well-grounded. It appears that Rachel stole her father's teraphim in order to protect Yosef and the child with whom she was pregnant. If Van Der Toorn is correct that the teraphim were ancestor figurines, it supports the proposal that Rachel sought their protection. Van Der Toorn notes that the close relationship in biblical citations[159] between teraphim and avot, ancestors, "may well have preserved something of the original meaning of teraphim" especially in light of the

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[159] Van Der Toorn, (1990) pp.215-6. Deut. 18:10-14, I Sam. 19:13, 16, I Sam. 28, Mic. 3:6,11, 2 Kgs. 23:24.

persisting popularity of necromancy in ancient Israel. He notes that the images belonged to the sphere of domestic piety to which women had access, although not exclusive access. Van Der Toorn suggests that in the realm of domestic piety the teraphim might have stood inside a heder, a "dim bedroom at the back of the house." This bedroom might have had a secondary religious function.

> The relative seclusion of the bedroom made it an ideal spot for ritual activities, and, one may add, for the installation of religious images....It must be stressed, though, that with the data at our disposal this cannot be more than an informed guess. Regardless of the specific location of the teraphim, however, the images belonged to the sphere of what may be described as 'family devotion' or 'domestic piety'.[160]

Rachel's theft of the teraphim and Laban's attempt to retrieve them demonstrate the prime importance of the teraphim. Rachel told Jacob to do what as his God instructed him (31:16) while she provides for her own religious needs by stealing the teraphim.

When Rachel goes into labor and delivery (35:17) the midwife says to her: "Do not be afraid, because also this one is a son for you." Her words echo the hope which Rachel stated earlier, that God would "add" another son "for me" (30:24). The use of "add" (30:24) parallels "also" (35:17),

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[160] Van Der Toorn, (1990) p.209-210.

while "for me" (li in 30:24) parallels "for you" (lach in 35:17). The two parallel incidents comprise Rachel's entire childbearing life. As her life is leaving her, in a very brief remark, Rachel names her son Ben-oni (35:18). It is usually interpreted as "son of my trouble or sorrow." However, "ben-oni" is an unusual example of this particular meaning which shows the noun in this particular form. Almost every other example which illustrates this meaning shows the word as aven, (as opposed to on).

Another meaning also ascribed to the noun on is vigor or wealth. The examples given in the lexicon of this word meaning "vigor" have to do with "manly vigor" and (its implied physical) strength. In the context of an interpretation of on as "vigor," a parallel exists between Rachel's naming in 35:18, and Jacob's blessings in Gen. 49:3. Jacob refers to Reuven as his first-born, his might and reishit oni, "the first-fruits (or: beginning) of my strength" (49:3). Rachel and Jacob each refer to a child (Benjamin and Reuven, respectively) as oni, and each child brings distress. Rachel dies in giving birth to Benjamin. Jacob continues his speech by remembering that Reuben went up to his father's bed, and defiled it.

I suggest that here too (35:18), at Benjamin's birth, "vigor" is far more appropriate. The journey tested Rachel's strength and endurance, made more difficult due to her pregnancy. The name she chooses for her son reflects the

satisfaction of her great accomplishment. She achieved another pregnancy, she was successful in her theft of the teraphim, and she survived the pregnancy despite the journey, delivering a second child. All of this demanded 'vigor' and (its implied physical) strength. In her eyes, she accomplished feats of bravery and courage. The saga of Rachel's infertility and childbearing is far more faithfully concluded "son of my vigor."

It is significant that Rachel's death is preceded by Jacob's forcing his retinue to give up their strange gods as they set out for Beit-El (35:2). It is not specified in the narrative if Rachel herself gives up her teraphim. This question suggests two possible answers. If Rachel did not give up the teraphim, then her death may be viewed as a consequence of Jacob's earlier threat, "Anyone with whom you find your gods shall not live" (31:32). It is also possible that Rachel did indeed give up her teraphim, along with other members of the group. Her death might then be viewed as a consequence of the removal of the protection Rachel sought from her teraphim. Rachel's death results because she is left exposed and unprotected.

Rachel is buried on the way to Efrat, where Jacob set up a pillar to mark her grave (35:19-20). Leah is mentioned a last time by Jacob when he gives Joseph his own burial instructions. Jacob later requests a burial in the cave in the field of Machpelah. "There they buried Abraham and Sarah

his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebecca his wife, and there I buried Leah" (49:31).

In conclusion, I have attempted to demonstrate that asking new questions of Genesis 29-35 results in filling in gaps left both by the narrative itself and by prior interpretations. A close narratological study of the text informed by the gender code comprises an instrument for interpreting the narrative. This instrument has provided a framework for examining the text from a feminist perspective, "opening" the text to its less-examined facets. These facets include the themes to which less attention has been thus far paid, such as motherhood, infertility, popular religion and the role of women in the "patriarchal narratives." Despite the difficulty of removing oneself from a patriarchal bias, it is possible to reconsider the narrative from the perspective of the biblical women. This change in perspective reveals a dramatically different reading and understanding of the narrative; it serves to make the biblical women present. Filling in the gaps advances a "more inclusive notion of history which is based on the recognition that women have always been essential to the making of history and that men and women are the measure of significance."[161]

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[161] Greene and Kahn, (1985) p.20.

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