

**THE POWER AND POTENTIAL OF JEWISH MOTHER-DAUGHTER
RELATIONSHIPS FROM ANTIQUITY TO THE MODERN DAY**

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*For my mother,
and my daughter*

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Introduction

Setting the Stage: It's a Mom Thing Capstone Project

As I child, I loved trying on my mother's wedding dress. I could barely walk amidst the layers of cotton fabric, yellowing from the passage of time, and my arms disappeared within the long, narrow sleeves, but what a thrill it was to dress up "like mommy" and imagine her on her wedding day. And so my parents' wedding album, which brought this image to life, became another favorite family relic. At regular intervals throughout my childhood and teenage years, I would pour over the pictures, marveling at my mother's beauty and studying the happiness emanating from her face. My mother's dress and album sparked within me the desire to get married someday, so that I, too, could be "like mommy" and wear an elegant white gown, and be beautiful and happy. It was therefore fitting, that in the weeks before my own wedding, I tried on my mother's wedding dress one last time. This final "dress up" seemed symbolic of my impending transition from "childhood" to "adulthood." Upon my upcoming marriage, I would no longer be the little girl dreaming about marriage through her mother's artifacts. Rather, I would become the beautiful, happy woman in the photographs, whose daughter would try on my gown and examine the pictures and dream of being "just like mommy."

My interest in the power and potential of the mother-daughter relationship, partially based on my experiences with my mother, inspired me to create a curriculum entitled "Rosh Chodesh: It's a Mom Thing," in partial fulfillment of my Master's Degree in Religious Education. "It's a Mom Thing" serves as a parallel learning experience for mothers whose teenage daughters are participating in Moving Traditions' *Rosh Chodesh: It's a Girl Thing*.

Since 2005, Moving Traditions has partnered with 397 institutions of all affiliations across North America to operate *Rosh Chodesh* and *Shevet Achim* (parallel boys programming) groups in 34 states and 5 provinces.¹ Through the five years of Moving Traditions' *Rosh Chodesh: It's a Girl Thing* curriculum, *Rosh Chodesh* groups help girls navigate the challenges of their pre-adolescent and adolescent years, while teaching them the "power of community, and the ability of Jewish wisdom and practice to foster personal expression and to inspire all people to work for a more just and inclusive world."² *It's a Girl Thing's* success in helping girls find their role and their voice amidst our turbulent world is well-observed and well-documented.^{3 4}

"Rosh Chodesh: It's a Mom Thing" broadens the focus of *It's A Girl Thing* by viewing parents (mothers specifically) as learners themselves while their daughters engage in *Rosh Chodesh* programming – a perspective Moving Traditions has not yet explored. Accordingly, it provides a parallel learning experience for the mothers whose adolescent daughters are participating in a *Rosh Chodesh: It's a Girl Thing* group. "It's a Mom Thing" mirrors the monthly themes of the *Rosh Chodesh* Year Three (Kol: Voice) curriculum that participants' daughters are exploring in their own *Rosh Chodesh* group, in order to help "bridge the gap" between the daughters' home and outside learning

¹ "Moving Traditions 2013 Annual Report." Moving Traditions. Web. 12/19/13.
<http://movingtraditions.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Moving-Traditions-Annual-Report-2013-14.pdf>

² "The Challenge for Girls." Moving Traditions. Web. 12/19/13.
<http://movingtraditions.org/programs/rosh-hodesh-its-a-girl-thing/the-challenge-for-girls/>

³ "Moving Traditions 2013 Annual Report." Moving Traditions. Web. 12/19/13.
<http://movingtraditions.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Moving-Traditions-Annual-Report-2013-14.pdf>

⁴ "Teen Girls Reflect." Moving Traditions. Web. 12/19/13.
<http://movingtraditions.org/perspectives-from-teens>

experiences.⁵ “It’s a Mom Thing” provides mothers with tools and strategies for exploring *Rosh Chodesh* topics and themes with their daughters, thereby deepening and expanding the impact of their daughters’ *Rosh Chodesh* experiences. “It’s a Mom Thing” uses Jewish wisdom and tradition to explore parenting strategies and perspectives; it provides mothers a safe and supportive community to discuss the joys and challenges of raising adolescent girls; and it fosters a greater sense of Jewish identity and belonging among mothers themselves, while empowering them to strengthen their relationships with their Jewish teenage daughters. Ultimately, “It’s a Mom Thing” aims to empower and enable Jewish mothers and daughters to foster stronger, healthier relationships, during a time in which daughters need their mother’s presence and support the most.

This past year, in partnership with a local psychotherapist who specializes in women’s issues across the lifespan, I piloted “It’s a Mom Thing” at Larchmont Temple. Overall, the pilot year was a success, and revealed important lessons and considerations for improving the program in the future. Over the course of a year, we held six sessions with a group of 6 mothers, whose daughters were concurrently participating in my *Rosh Chodesh: It’s a Girl Thing* group at the temple. By the end of the year, the mothers’ most notable reflection about the experience was the way in which it connected them with other mothers in the community, fostering a valuable network of support. Our biggest challenge centered around attendance and consistency of participation – though we had an interested and excited group of moms, the business of participants’ schedules often led

⁵ This curricular guide mirrors the “Kol” (Year 3) *It’s a Girl Thing* curriculum because I am currently using “Kol” with my 9th grade *It’s a Girl Thing* group at Larchmont Temple. However, five years of *It’s a Girl Thing* programming exists, warranting the creation of additional *It’s a Mom Thing* curricular units. Hopefully this curricular guide will spark the creation of more *It’s a Mom Thing* units in future years.

to last minute cancellations, resulting small group sizes at each meeting. The balance between the universal and the particular, as I will explain below, was another challenge we encountered, and, thus, a catalyst that prompted the creation of this thesis.

Thesis Goals and Intentions

“It’s a Mom Thing’s” connection with Jewish wisdom and tradition is an important, yet challenging aspect of the program. Though it engages mothers raising Jewish daughters, the mothers within our communities represent a wide variety of backgrounds and beliefs. Today’s Reform families contain mothers who may not have been born Jewish, who may not identify as Jewish or relate to their own or their family’s Jewish heritage, and/or who may have limited understanding of Jewish belief and practice. As these realities may dissuade some mothers from participating in “It’s a Mom Thing” – a Jewishly oriented group affiliated with a Jewish institution – “It’s a Mom Thing” must be sensitive regarding the presentation and depth of its Jewish content, so as to maintain the experience’s Jewish tenor while creating an atmosphere and a learning experience that is welcoming and accessible for non-Jewish mothers, as well as Jewish mothers with limited Jewish experience or background. The importance of this balance became clear as we embarked on launching the pilot year of “It’s a Mom Thing” and encountered some hesitation from mothers interested in joining the group, yet concerned that their lack of Jewish knowledge or affiliation would inhibit their ability to participate. Ultimately, these mothers did join the group, and remained comfortable throughout the experience. This, I suspect, was partially due to the highly universal nature of “It’s a Mom Thing” topics and themes. Issues such as mother and daughter body image, self-

esteem, relationships, and stress are ones all mothers can relate to and discuss with relative ease. Furthermore, an abundance of accessible, relatable, and highly engaging material exists – and continues to increase - within the media and popular culture on mother/daughter relationships and issues relevant to women’s lives. It takes much more digging, on the other hand, to discover applicable, useful and engaging perspectives on motherhood, daughterhood, adolescence and the female experience within the Jewish canon. Thus, the diversity of group participants, combined with the “sexiness” of the secular material available and the challenge of accessing interesting Jewish mother-daughter material often resulted in a clear group emphasis and inclination towards the secular and the universal. For example, a clip from a film, television show, or news story was usually met with much more interest, excitement and participation than a selection of Jewish text, resulting in frequent programmatic decisions to cut the “Jewish” components of a lesson when time was limited. As a result, I wonder how I might increase “It’s a Mom Thing’s” Jewish content in ways that are engaging, exciting, and appropriate for a diverse audience, as an enduring understanding of the program is the notion that Jewish tradition and the Jewish community can help mothers navigate the joys and challenges of raising a teenage daughter. The deeper “digging” into Jewish material and perspectives is, I think, a vital first step, and this thesis constitutes the beginning of such a process. Accordingly, I have delved into a variety of Jewish perspectives on mother-daughter relationships – ranging from antiquity to the present day – in order to explore how I might elevate and deepen the Jewish character of the “It’s a Mom Thing” experience in interesting and engaging ways. Accordingly, the intentions of this thesis are twofold: 1) To research and present a wide range of Jewish sources and perspectives on mother-

daughter relationships, and 2) To present possible ways of integrating such material into future “It’s a Mom Thing” sessions.

Why Mothers and Daughters?

Adrienne Rich writes that mothers are integral in shaping their daughters’ understandings of what it means to be female – beginning at the most primal, physiological levels. Just as my mother’s experiences shaped for me a picture of my own forthcoming womanhood, Rich recalls the ways in which her mother’s body informed her understanding of what was yet to come:

I saw my own mother’s menstrual blood before I saw my own. Hers was the first female body I ever looked at, to know what women were, what I was to be. In early adolescence I still glanced slyly at my mother’s body, vaguely imagining: I too shall have breasts, full hips, hair between my thighs – whatever that meant to me then, and with all the ambivalence of such a thought. And there were other thoughts: I too shall marry, have children...⁶

Such awareness and understanding that is passed from mother to daughter, knowledge that is “subliminal, subversive, preverbal,”⁷ can perhaps be attributed to the phenomenon of “two alike bodies, one of which has spent nine months inside the other.”⁸ This most fundamental feature of all biological mother-daughter relationships, on its own, renders the mother-daughter connection ripe for exploration and discussion. From this profound commonality between all biological mothers and daughters, endless questions emerge, such as: How do the prenatal and physiological experiences that all biological mothers and daughters share impact and inform their development of deep emotional ties? How

⁶ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as an Experience and Institution*, (New York: Norton), 1976, 219.

⁷ Ibid, 220.

⁸ Ibid.

does the biological experience of conceiving and birthing a daughter affect a mother emotionally and psychologically? How do mothers and daughters connect around the experience of being female in a male-oriented world?

And yet, despite the ability for the “deepest mutuality”⁹ between biological mothers and daughters, fostered from the “flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one of which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has labored to give birth to the other,”¹⁰ the experience that mothers and daughters share also “contains the materials for the most painful estrangement.”¹¹ In 1973 the poet Lynn Sukenick coined the term “matrophobia” to describe the common fear among daughters of becoming their mothers. Matrophobia, as Rich describes,

Can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers’ bondage, to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr. Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap with our mothers’; and, in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery...¹²

The “deep mutuality” and the “painful estrangement” that typifies the mother-daughter relationship thus creates a spectrum on which mothers and daughters oscillate:

But where a mother is hated to the point of matrophobia there may also be a deep underlying pull toward her, a dread that if one relaxes one’s guard one will identify with her completely. An adolescent daughter may live at war with her mother yet borrow her clothes, her perfume...¹³

Cultural cues indicate that mother-daughter dissonance is not merely theoretical. Within our American milieu – and our Jewish American milieu, in particular – conflicts between

⁹ Ibid, 226.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid, 236.

¹³ Ibid, 235.

mothers and daughters are pervasive. To start, the stereotypical image of the overbearing “Jewish mother,” who transmits psychological stress upon her family, in general, has reverberated throughout Jewish literature and film from the mid-twentieth century on.¹⁴

As Fishman writes in *Follow My Footprints: Changing Images of Women in American Jewish Fiction*,

The Jewish mother, like the Jewish American Princess, became a staple of American Jewish fiction. And, like the princess, the cartoon figure of the omniscient, omnipotent Jewish mother has enjoyed an amazingly long shelf life in the popular imagination...Jewish mothers were repeatedly caricatured as the apotheosis of the crippling “smothering mother,” absurdly exaggerating whatever dangers she might find on the mid-twentieth century American landscape. The Jewish mother as terrorist is a peculiarly American hybrid, very assimilated and yet very Jewish.”¹⁵

Philip Roth’s Sophie Portnoy, in *Portnoy’s Complaint*, is, perhaps, the best and most unforgettable example of the tyrannical Jewish mother figure within the twentieth century American Jewish psyche. This “hysterical mother par excellence” controls and overburdens her family to the point of satire, using her skills to “tame and terrorize.”¹⁶ Furthermore, complications and confrontations between Jewish mothers and daughters, in particular, became a frequent element of the Jewish literary imagination in the middle and late twentieth century.¹⁷ Within the mother-daughter dyads of such works, anger can be described as the “signature emotion” as Jewish daughters in “matrophobic” fashion fear and avoid intimacy with their mothers, lest they become too much like them, and yet experience guilt when such abandonment increases their mothers’ burdens and

¹⁴ Sylvia Barack Fishman, *Follow My Footprints: Changing Images of Women in American Jewish Fiction*, (Hanover: University of New England), 1992. 34-35.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid, 35-36, 257.

¹⁷ Ibid, 37.

oppressions.¹⁸ In Bernard Malamud's *The Assistant*, for example, Helen and her mother, Ida, clash over Helen's relationship with a non-Jew, leaving Helen torn between her mother's traditional values and the possibilities that await her in the "new world."¹⁹ Even comedic, seemingly innocuous representations of Jewish mothers and daughters tend to portray the mother as the domineering, inappropriately overbearing force in her daughter's life. In the 2001 film *Kissing Jessica Stein*, for example, Jessica's mother (and as well as her mother's mother) is so obsessed with her Jessica's love life, that any context is considered "fair game" for grilling her on her latest romantic affairs. In the film's opening scene, the mother's interest in her Jessica's love life surpasses her interest – and sensitivity – for the Yom Kippur davening occurring around her:

Rabbi: And the sin we have committed by gluttony...

Congregation: And the sin we have committed by irrationally judging others...

Mother: Sweetheart, do you see that guy in the corner, with the dark hair? With the yamaka? Absolutely gorgeous...

Grandmother: She has no chance!

Mother: Mother, be quiet. Recently separated from his wife, some shiksa from Idaho...

Grandmother: She could do better.

Mother: Mother, would you stop feeling her perfectionism? You did the same thing with Larry.

Grandmother: I didn't like him either

Mother: What's not to like the man was a prince!

Grandmother: I didn't care for him.

Mother: What's not to care for him?

Jessica: Mother, be quiet.

Grandmother: He had no sex appeal.

Mother: Mother, shhh he's right over there. She's 28 years old I'm afraid she'll be alone forever!

Jessica: Mom would you shut up, I'm atoning!²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid, 36-37.

¹⁹ Bernard Malamud, *The Assistant*, (New York: Avon), 1980.

²⁰ *Kissing Jessica Stein*, Dir. Charles Herman-Wurmfeld, Perf. Jennifer Westfeldt, Heather Juergensen, Fox Searchlight, 2001.

Though works of fiction may fabricate, overstate and exaggerate, the frequency of mother-daughter clashes and conflicts within works of popular culture²¹ suggests that they contain some element of truth: namely, the inherent complexity of the mother-daughter relationship, perhaps due to its profound ability to simultaneously foster both the “deepest mutuality” and the “most painful estrangement.” Despite my childhood fascination with my mother, I know for sure that I am not the only daughter whose relationship with her mother has oscillated between love and affection and anger and confrontation. Throughout my teenage years, in particular, my relationship with my mother was characterized by a seemingly endless cycle of arguing, stomping, crying, and door slamming.

The normalcy of mother-daughter dissonance might propel us to respond to such scenarios, real or imagined, with a shrug of the shoulder, an acceptance that mothers and daughters are destined for conflict. But as mothers, daughters, and those connected to mothers and daughters, it is worth examining what is at stake in working to maintain the health and well-being of the mother daughter relationship. Rather than responding to mother-daughter conflict with a passive acceptance, we might ask ourselves, what are the forces causing such conflict to occur? How can mothers and daughters mend broken ties, so that they are able to build relationships that are mutually beneficial and supportive of the other’s search for personal worth and fulfillment? And why does it matter?

²¹ Of course, positive models of Jewish mothers are not altogether absent in works of popular culture; the mother in *Kissing Jessica Stein*, for instance (as Chapters One and Three of this thesis will discuss), also exhibits behaviors that are sensitive, loving, and advantageous for her daughter. Thus, one intention of this thesis is to assuage the overall negative perception of the “Jewish mother” by bringing to the fore positive representations of Jewish mother/daughter relationships, so that they might be used to support contemporary Jewish mothers in raising healthy daughters.

Many adolescent girls today are in crisis, or are in danger of experiencing one. Our over-sexualized, media driven society transmits overwhelming and confusing messages about what it means to be a woman in today's world. The harmful effects of this reality are clear:

- 50% of 9 and 10-year-old girls have negative feelings about their bodies
- 30% of 9-year-old girls are afraid of being fat
- Close to 20% of 9th grade girls—and 51% of 12th grade girls—are sexually active
- 23% of 9th grade girls binge drink
- Over half of teenage girls use unhealthy weight control behaviors such as skipping meals, fasting, smoking cigarettes, vomiting, and taking laxatives – and they learn these techniques on the growing number of sites like prettythin.com that pretend to be about recovery but are not.²²

Girls today, more than ever, need constant and ongoing support as they confront the perplexities of living as a teenage girl in American society. Indeed, there are many outlets within a girl's life that can provide meaningful and positive support – teachers, friends, and guidance counselors, family members. But a girl's mother can serve, perhaps, as her daughter's most crucial and vital support system of all.

Secular research has demonstrated the necessity of mothers and daughters fostering healthy relationships, as mothers in particular have the power and potential to impact their daughter's emerging identities in potent and formidable ways. In 1992, the Harvard Project on Women's Psychology and Girls' Development, led by Carol Gilligan,

²² “The Challenge for Girls.” Moving Traditions. Web. 12/19/13.
<http://movingtraditions.org/programs/rosh-hodesh-its-a-girl-thing/the-challenge-for-girls/>

identified mother-daughter relations as a vital tool for nurturing girls' strength and courage during adolescence.²³ Girls' relationships with their mothers, the study showed, were key to their ability to "resist self-negating changes and to thrive."²⁴

Other studies and perspectives affirm the anecdotal evidence offered at the beginning of this chapter regarding a mother's supreme ability to shape her daughter's outlooks and perspectives. In her book *The Curse of the Good Girl* (2010), Rachel Simmons writes that, "It is difficult to overstate a mother's influence on her daughter. Mothers serve as models for daughters of how to talk, how to use language and negotiate relationships and the world."²⁵ Others agree that girls are highly susceptible to their mothers' behaviors and values. In 2008, a study by the Girl Scouts of America found "a close alliance between a mother's own ambitions and outlook on life with their daughters aspirations and motivations. In the same study, girls cited their mothers as their most important role models."²⁶ In her book *Your Daughter's Bedroom* (2011),²⁷ Joyce McFadden chronicles the myriad of subtle ways mothers influence – for better or for worse - their daughter's perceptions of womanhood and sexuality. She writes:

After more than two decades of practice, I know full well that it's what we learn in the homes we grow up in that most strongly determines the development of our personalities and our perspectives. And as mothers we need to understand that its there, in those seemingly mundane interactions with our daughters while we're getting dressed, or taking plates down from the cupboard, that their views of themselves and the world are shaped. We need to be mindful that our influence on our daughters comes not only from the things we say directly to them, but also

²³ Elizabeth Debold, Marie Wilson, and Idelisse Malave, *Mother-Daughter Revolution: From Good Girls to Great Women*, (New York: Bantam, 1994), xvi.

²⁴ Debold, Wilson, and Malave, xvi.

²⁵ Rachel Simmons, *The Curse of the Good Girl: Raising Authentic Girls with Courage and Confidence*, (New York: Penguin, 2010), 238.

²⁶ Ibid, ibid.

²⁷ Joyce T. McFadden, *Your Daughter's Bedroom: Insights for Raising Confident Women*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

from conversations or remarks our daughters overhear, like “I was good today, I skipped lunch....the more we observe about our mothers, the more we develop an understanding of them as women.”²⁸

Through their significant ability to influence and impact, mothers have the tremendous opportunity, McFadden concludes, to permanently impart positive and constructive messages about womanhood and sexuality, thereby shaping and transforming their daughters’ views, for the better:

If mothers change the message and strengthen themselves to be role models valued for their hearts, minds, and bodies, no matter the shape or size – as women who have the freedom to fully embrace their sexuality, then daughters will feel more grounded, confident and connected, making them less susceptible to suffering and damaging behaviors as well as more inclined to reenact positive behaviors with their own daughters when the time comes...As our daughters learn that they can trust us to be supportive and straightforward with them (about sexuality), they’ll gradually internalize this confidence and transform it into a deepening ability to understand and trust themselves. And that is exactly what they’ll need to make (sexually) healthy choices.”²⁹

Of course, mothers benefit as well when their relationships with their daughters are healthy and stable. When a mother approaches her daughter’s adolescence with thoughtfulness, support, and care, mothers can grow into “greater consciousness, even as their daughters go through the exercise of testing their wings by testing their mothers.”³⁰ Thus, there is much to be learned, Snyderman affirms, for daughters as well as for mothers, during the period of adolescence.³¹ For instance, adolescence can afford mothers the opportunity to “learn new skills as people and parents, and perhaps uncover new

²⁸ Ibid, 17, 29.

²⁹ Ibid, 18, 24.

³⁰ Nancy L. Snyderman, *Girl in the Mirror: Mothers and Daughters in the Years of Adolescence*, (New York: By the Bay, 2002), 3.

³¹ Ibid.

aspects of themselves.”³² Further, as a mother is able to become a “better caretaker” of her daughters’ development, she becomes a “better gardener” of her own inner self.³³

Research Methods and Ideology

The sources presented in this thesis constitute a broad spectrum of Jewish perspectives on mother-daughter relationships. Rather than studying the portrayal of the Jewish mother-daughter relationship within a specific body of literature or a specific period of time, I’ve consulted a range of sources from antiquity to the present day, in order to present a general survey of Jewish mother-daughter relationships across time, place and genre. A range of material, I believe, is most conducive for “It’s a Mom Thing” sessions, as not all mothers will find biblical viewpoints relatable, for example. I also consulted a spectrum of resources and genres as some contain more pertinent material than others. The Hebrew bible, to start, though bountiful when it comes to depictions of mothers and sons, references only a handful of mother-daughter relationships, and such references are often terse and incomplete. In some instances, rabbinic and midrashic commentary helps to further illuminate the biblical mother-daughter experience, and I’ve included rabbinic interpretations that provide compelling statements and ideas regarding the dynamics between a mother and her daughter. Material from the Medieval and Middle Ages seems to be the most lacking in descriptions of Jewish mothers and daughters; thus, this period is the least represented in this thesis. I suspect that this reality is not unique to Jewish sources, and is perhaps consequence of the lack of mother/daughter primary source material created, maintained and transmitted during

³² Ibid, 97.

³³ Ibid, 4.

periods in which the primacy of the patriarchy often silenced women's voices, abilities, and experiences. Accordingly, uncovering the mother/daughter experience during this time requires a more thorough investigation that is beyond the realm of this thesis. Contemporary sources (20th century onward) on the other hand, are abundant in portrayals of Jewish mothers and daughters. The mother-daughter relationship repeatedly surfaces in essays, memoirs, novels, poetry, movies and television shows that are by Jews, or are about Jews. From this rich contemporary cannon – as well as from the earlier sources and genres consulted – I selected recurring topics and ideas that relate to Jewish mothers and daughters, yet are universal enough in nature to appeal to a diverse group of mothers, and, thus, seem most compelling for an “It’s a Mom Thing” session. Therefore, this thesis is by no means meant to be a comprehensive portrayal of the mother-daughter relationship within the Jewish imagination. Rather, it aims to present and analyze a selection of noteworthy and thought-provoking mother-daughter themes that are traceable from the bible to the modern day and worth integrating into the “It’s a Mom Thing” experience.

Explanation of Thesis Structure

This thesis is divided into three sections, based on three recurring Jewish mother-daughter themes that can be traced from biblical to modern day material. Each section presents and analyzes the ways in which its given theme surfaces within examples of biblical/rabbinic, literary, and popular culture source material. Following the three narrative sections are three discussion guides, containing suggestions for the ways in which the three themes and their associated content might be integrated into “It’s a Mom

Thing” sessions. The first section, entitled “Giving Birth To Each Other: Mothers and Daughters Enabling the Other’s Personal Growth and Transformation,” explores how the variant dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship ultimately triggers greater self-satisfaction, self-realization, and self-actualization for both mother and daughter, so that together, mothers and daughters are able to grow into their best possible selves. Section two, “Like Mother, Like Daughter: A Closeness with Constructive and Destructive Powers,” demonstrates how the unique intimacy of the mother-daughter relationship has the ability to help and hinder, to build and destroy, in the lives of both mother and daughter. The last section, “And Miriam Prophesied: The Secret Language of Jewish Mothers and Daughters,” discusses the profound ways that mothers and daughters have communicated with each other throughout time, enabling the other to understand her deepest realities. Importantly, though none of these themes and ideas are exclusively “Jewish,” and may be universal to mothers and daughters in Western society, in general, an aim of this thesis is to explore the ways in which they have surfaced between Jewish mothers and daughters from antiquity to the modern day.

Chapter One: Giving Birth to Each Other - Mothers and Daughters Enabling the Other's Personal Growth and Transformation

In 1691, at the age of 46, Glückel of Hameln began transcribing her experience as a woman in seventeenth century German-Jewish society. Her memoir, which describes her remarkable roles as mother of fourteen and co-administrator of her family's economic affairs, provides a detailed illustration of her personal world and inner psyche. Towards the beginning of her chronicles, Glückel recounts birthing her first child alongside her mother, who was also in labor:

“Immediately on our arrival in Hamburg, I became with child, and my mother along with me. In good time the Lord graciously delivered me of a young daughter. I was still a mere girl, and unused as I was to bearing children, it naturally went hard with me; yet I rejoiced mightly that the Most High had bestowed on me a healthy, lovely baby. My good mother had reckoned out her time for the same day. However, she had great joy in my being brought to bed first, so she could help me a little, young girl that I was. Eight days later my mother likewise brought forth a young daughter in childbirth. So there was neither envy nor reproach between us, and we lay next to each other in the same room. But, Lord, we had no peace, for the people that came running in to see the marvel, a mother and daughter together in childbed.”³⁴

This incredible scene not only reflects the ways in which the formative processes of pregnancy and childbirth unite and reunite mother and daughter, but also the ability among mothers and daughters to support and instigate the other's rebirth and renewal, both literal and symbolic. While recounting the literal births of her daughter and her mother's daughter, Glückel's narrative reveals two other births: her emergence into motherhood, with the help and assistance of her mother, and her mother's new beginnings as a grandmother. Throughout the scene, both mother and daughter are intimately involved in every moment of birth and transformation that the other

³⁴ *The Memoirs of Glückel of Hameln*, Marvin Lowenthal, transl, New York: Schocken Books, 1977), 36.

experiences. There is perhaps no better image to suggest and symbolize the unique connection that mothers and daughters share in each other's personal processes of birth and transformation, than that of "mother and daughter together in childbed." Though all biological mothers and daughters share a birth experience, the powerful image that Gluckel describes prompts an exploration into other instances of Jewish mothers and daughters – past and present - instigating and aiding the other through processes of birth and renewal, in the metaphorical sense. The Hebrew bible, to start, encompasses several compelling descriptions of mothers and daughters helping each other to grow and transform, for the better. In biblical stories where mothers play prominent roles, daughters are often depicted as confident women who achieve agency and enjoy intimate love. Rebecca's courtship story in Genesis 24, Song of Songs, and The Book of Ruth, for instance, all feature mothers who support and enable their daughters to grow and transform into their best possible selves.

Biblical and Rabbinic Voices
Rebecca's Courtship (Genesis 24:42-68)

Rebecca's mother - though unnamed - assumes a quiet but powerful role in Genesis 24 upon her daughter's fateful encounter with Abraham's servant, on a mission to obtain a wife for Isaac. After meeting the servant at the well, we read that Rebecca "ran and told her mother's household"³⁵ the details of the encounter. Rebecca's decision to report the meeting to her "mother house" is significant, as the servant asks about her

³⁵ Genesis 24:28

father's – not her mother's - domain:³⁶ “Tell me, whose daughter are you? Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?” From Rebecca's choice to run directly to her mother - despite the servant's expressed interest in her father – it is possible to surmise a strong mother-daughter bond. The presence of the “mother's house” further indicates a closeness between Rebecca and her mother. Though the notion appears only four times throughout the biblical cannon, the “mother's house” is consistently associated with love and intimacy.³⁷ In her discussion on biblical mothers and daughters, Leila Leah Bronner notes that the biblical “mother's house” is, in all instances in which it appears, a “welcoming place where the daughter is cherished.”³⁸

It is worth noting that Rebecca's intimate relationship with her mother is coupled with her expressions of agency and her attainment of personal fulfillment and satisfaction. As the narrative progresses, Rebecca's mother and brother agree to her marriage with Isaac, but then express reluctance to let her go. They allow Rebecca to make the choice for herself, and she chooses to leave home – a noteworthy instance of female agency in a cannon in which women are often denigrated. Before Rebecca's departure, her mother and brother bless her. With memories of her mother's love, Rebecca leaves her childhood home and finds herself once again surrounded by love: the love of her husband, Isaac in his “mother's tent.”³⁹ It is perhaps a result of her mother's involvement in her life, and her mother's willingness to let her make own choice, that

³⁶ Andrea Weiss and Tamar Eshkenazi, *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, (New York: URJ Press, 2008), 119-120.

³⁷ See Genesis 24, Song of Songs 8:2, and the Book of Ruth

³⁸ Leila Leah Bronner, *Stories of Biblical Mothers: Maternal Power in the Hebrew Bible*, (MD: University Press of America, 2004) 72.

³⁹ Genesis 24:54-67

Rebecca finds the courage and the confidence to express her desires, become an active agent over her own destiny, and attain intimate and fulfilling marital love.

The Mother's House (Song of Songs 8:2)

Likewise, the Song of Songs depicts a strong mother-daughter duo concurrent with the daughter's ability to achieve love, agency, and personal satisfaction. The book, a composition of love poems, traces the passionate affairs between a young woman and her lover, who "perform a duet in which the woman usually leads, and her lover answers."⁴⁰ Though the compilation is often read allegorically as the love between God and Israel, a more literal read affords a powerful example of positive mother-daughter kinship. Twice within the Song of Songs the assertive, "unabashedly active"⁴¹ female narrator expresses her desire to bring her lover to her "mother's house."⁴² As we have seen, the presence of the "mother house" indicates a strong connection between mother and daughter. With such language, we can surmise that the relationship between this mother and daughter is "close and tender."⁴³ It is no surprise, then, that the daughter here "regards her mother's house as a place where love can and does reside, and believes she is honoring that familial love by bringing her lover home."⁴⁴ The text further suggests that the daughter's agency, independence and confidence in matters of love and intimacy are the result of the mother's commitment to the daughter's growth and well-being. The daughter desires to take her lover to her mother's house, "of her who taught me" – an indication that her

⁴⁰ Ibid, 70.

⁴¹ Robert Alter, *Strong as Death Is Love: The Song of Songs, Ruth, Esther, Jonah, and Daniel: A Translation with Commentary*, (NY: W. W. Norton and Co., 2015), 48.

⁴² Song of Songs, 8:2

⁴³ Chana Bloch, "Shulammite: Bible" *Jewish Women's Archive Encyclopedia*, Web, 04 Jan. 2016 <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/shulammite-bible>

⁴⁴ Bronner, 71.

mother has instructed her in the “art of love.”⁴⁵ Within the rabbinic imagination on Song of Songs, the “mother’s house” also represents the power and potential for birth, growth, and transformation. In Song of Songs Rabbah, Sinai is likened to the “mother’s house,” as “there Israel became like a newborn child.”⁴⁶ Indeed, such a metaphor is apt and evocative. Just as Sinai enabled Israel’s national rebirth and transformation into a holy people after years of desert wandering, so, too, can a “mother’s house” guide and support a daughter through the “wilderness” of childhood and adolescence, so that she might emerge matured and transformed, able to confront the world around her with confidence, self-awareness, and respect for her own holiness and self-worth. We can thus postulate a connection between Song of Song’s mother-daughter bond and the daughter’s ability to attain intimacy, love and joy. Perhaps the mother has supported and enabled her daughter to grow into an assertive, confident young woman, able to attain fulfilling love and intimacy. Perhaps the mother’s active involvement in her daughter’s life is the reason the daughter has reached happiness, satisfaction, and well-being.

Ruth and Naomi (The Book of Ruth)

The Book of Ruth arguably contains the Bible’s most detailed and concrete example of a mother-daughter relationship, though it is one of non-biological origins. As Bronner explains,

Embedded [in Ruth] is the story of a particular relationship between individuals, specifically the cross-generational relationship between two women – which closes with the strongest articulation of the love of a daughter for her mother and of a mother for her daughter that appears in the Bible.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Alter, 48.

⁴⁶ Song of Songs Rabbah, 8:2

⁴⁷ Bronner, 70.

The love and connection between Ruth and Naomi, Bronner further notes, is the book's "agent of transformation"⁴⁸ that drives the narrative, enables rewarding events to transpire, and allows Ruth and Naomi to experience growth and significant changes in identity from beginning to end. In fact, in her work on biblical women, Amy Kalmanofsky goes so far as to say that the entire book of Ruth may be viewed as a discussion on identity building and transformation: "The book seeks to find out who Ruth is, who Naomi is, and who Ruth is in relation to Naomi,"⁴⁹ Kalmanofsky observes. Throughout the narrative, the question of identity is raised through repeated inquiries relating to Ruth and Naomi's statuses and states of being, and the dialogues between Ruth and Naomi serve as a vehicle "for the destruction and reconstruction of identity and otherness."⁵⁰

Through their love and commitment for one another, Ruth and Naomi do indeed emerge transformed by the book's conclusion. To start, at the narrative's outset, Naomi is grief-stricken and embittered over the death of her husband and sons; so much so, that she insists the townspeople call her Mara, rather than Naomi, "for Shaddai has made my lot very bitter."⁵¹ However, over the course of the narrative, "Ruth's love enables Naomi to integrate goodness back into her life so that she can reclaim her name as Naomi."⁵² This change in Naomi is most apparent at the book's conclusion when the townswomen again refer to Naomi by name.⁵³

⁴⁸ Ibid, *ibid*.

⁴⁹ Amy Kalmanofsky, *Dangerous Sisters of the Hebrew Bible*, (MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 159.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ruth 1:20

⁵² Kalmanofsky, 168.

⁵³ Ruth 4:17

Furthermore, according to some commentaries, Naomi helps Ruth to undergo a considerable change shortly after the narrative begins. Some suggest that Ruth's refusal to leave Naomi, and her declaration of commitment to Naomi and her people, indicate Ruth's conversion to Judaism at the hands of her mother-in-law. In *Legends of the Jews* Ginzberg proposes that,

Ruth was determined to become a Jewess, and her decision could not be shaken by what Naomi, in compliance with the Jewish injunction, told her of the difficulties of the Jewish law....and when Naomi said: "We have one Torah, one law, one command; the eternal our God is one, there is none beside Him" Ruth answered, "Your people shall be my people, your God my God."⁵⁴

Naomi's possible facilitation of Ruth's conversion thus constitutes a powerful instance of a mother enabling her daughter's growth and transforming her identity.

As Naomi's commitment to Ruth deepens, we witness Ruth grow into an active, confident woman, who resolves to provide for herself and her mother-in-law, and enters into a marriage of consequence for herself, Naomi, and the Israelite nation. Naomi's instructions to Ruth in 3:3-3:5, for instance, on "how to obtain a worthy husband"⁵⁵ prompt Ruth's eventual marriage to Boaz - a marriage so significant that it "provides the lineage of King David, shapes the hope of the nation of Israel,"⁵⁶ and officially eliminates Ruth's outsider status. As Amy Kalmanofsky elaborates,

Naomi's acceptance enables Ruth to lose the attributes that defined her otherness...Ruth's designation changes to reflect who she is, and how she is perceived. At the book's start, she is "Ruth, the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, the one who returned with her from the fields of Moab." At its conclusion, Ruth is no longer seen as the one who comes from the outside. Instead, she becomes the woman who enters – the one within.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Louis Ginzberg et al, *The Legends of the Jews*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998), 32.

⁵⁵ Bronner, 69.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Upon Ruth's marriage to Boaz at the narrative's conclusion, the townspeople welcome her into Boaz's house and bless her to be like Rachel and Leah.⁵⁸ Though she is called "Ruth the Moabite" consistently throughout the narrative, her Moabite designation is removed following her official entryway into the community.⁵⁹ The next time we read of Ruth the text proclaims, "So Boaz married Ruth, she became his wife, and he cohabitated with her."⁶⁰

All these transformations that Ruth and Naomi experience, Alter notes, can be characterized as transitions from emptiness to fullness, from famine to abundance.⁶¹ When we first meet Naomi, she is emotionally, physically and biologically hollow over the death of her husband and sons: "I went out full, and came back empty,"⁶² she declares. Yet the commitment that Ruth and Naomi share for one another leads them both back to fullness and abundance, literal and figurative. The women's mutual dedication to one another that propels Ruth to glean in Boaz's fields, for example, results in Ruth's return to her mother-in-law with a shawl full of barley – an image that "hints at the fullness of offspring that Ruth will enjoy and bring to Naomi."⁶³ Indeed, by the book's conclusion, the two women are "filled" in more ways than one. Through her marriage to Boaz, Ruth once again becomes "filled" with the contentment and security that surrounds marriage, and the ensuing "fullness" of her womb revives Naomi, filling important voids in her life and lineage. As the townswomen declare to Naomi in regards to her grandson,

⁵⁸ Ruth 4:11

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ruth 4:13

⁶¹ Alter, 76.

⁶² Ruth 1:21

⁶³ Alter, 76.

“He will renew your life and sustain your old age; for he is born of your daughter-in-law...”⁶⁴ Ruth and Naomi’s relationship, then, is a powerful example of the positive effects that mothers and daughters can have on the other’s growth and well-being. As a result of their loving commitment to one another, both mother and daughter emerge from the depths of despair revitalized, fulfilled, and transformed.

Counter-Examples: Dinah (Genesis 34:1-2) and Tamar (2 Samuel)

The fate of biblical daughters who lack significant mother figures is further indication of a mother’s ability to support her daughter’s growth and well-being. Unlike biblical stories with close mother-daughter connections, those lacking intimate mother-daughter relations contain daughters who are stymied, oppressed, and abused. For instance, in the catastrophic tales in which daughters are victims of rape and violence – such as the rape of Dinah in Genesis 34 or the rape of Tamar in 2 Samuel – the mothers are neither active nor emotionally and/or physically present in their daughters’ lives. In her essay, “The Invisible Relationship Made Visible: Biblical Mothers and Daughters” (1999), Leila Leah Bronner observes,

Leah participates neither in protesting nor in revenging Dinah’s rape. Today the story of the rape of a daughter might well include the mother’s reaction, but this is not the case in the Bible. The mother participates indirectly and in only one way – she has produced the sons, Simeon and Levi, who negotiate with their sister’s rapist and ensure that he does not go unpunished.⁶⁵

Leah’s silence within her daughter’s narrative – both before and after her rape occurs – does not go unnoticed. A similar trope appears in Tamar’s story. “Neither the rabbis nor

⁶⁴ Ruth 4:15

⁶⁵ Leila Leah Bronner, “The Invisible Relationship Made Visible: Biblical Mothers and Daughters,” in Athalya Brenner, ed., *A Feminist Companion to the Bible: Ruth and Esther* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 178.

the Biblical narrator bring the mother into the narrative to comfort Tamar, as we might expect today,” Bronner writes. “Her brother Absalom is the first and the only one to speak to her.”⁶⁶ Furthermore, Tamar’s mother, Ma’acah, is mentioned only once, several chapters earlier, in reference to the birth of her son, Absalom.⁶⁷ Ma’acah is never referenced in connection to her daughter Tamar, as the text introduces Tamar as the sister of Absalom, son of David⁶⁸ enabling us to further postulate Tamar’s estrangement from her mother.

The absence of mother figures for Dinah and Tamar leads us to wonder if our biblical ancestors sought to demonstrate the power of mother’s presence in shaping her daughter’s life and destiny. Bronner, for one, believes that narratives with close mother-daughter relationships, in comparison to narratives without, reveal differences that are more than coincidental. “The stories of Dinah and Tamar are tragic ones, and this is, in part, because the mothers are missing,” she writes. “For both, there is no voice of loving kindness, for both, there is no refuge in the mother’s house.”⁶⁹ Regardless of its writers’ intentions, the Bible’s repeated pairing of mother-daughter relationships with love, agency, and fulfillment, and the absence (or direct inversion) of such notions when mothers are missing or silent, transmits a clear and consequential lesson. Close mother-daughter relationships, in which mothers are physically and emotionally present, shape and transform daughters into assertive, competent and thriving young women, who experience fulfilling love and intimacy and play significant roles in determining their own destinies.

⁶⁶ Bronner, 181.

⁶⁷ 2 Samuel 3:3

⁶⁸ 2 Samuel 13

⁶⁹ Bronner, 187.

20th Century Jewish Literary Voices
***Leah* (1974), Seymour Epstein**

A comparison of biblical mother-daughter relationships with those of twentieth century Jewish literature suggests that Jewish mothers and daughters have continued to “give birth” to one another over time. Seymour Epstein’s *Leah* (1964)⁷⁰ and Edna Ferber’s *Fanny Herself* (1917),⁷¹ two distinguished works in the 20th century Jewish literary canon, are worthy of attention due to the ways in which they invert and reject the pervasive, stereotypical notion that a Jewish mother’s impact upon her daughter is exclusively harmful and problematic. Conversely, the daughters in *Leah* and *Fanny Herself* grow into their best fullest selves upon realizing, and embracing, the ways in which they bear resemblance to their mothers. Both stories chronicle a daughter’s physical and psychological separation from the mother, followed by a rekindling of mother-daughter intimacy, allowing the daughter to reach important gains in self-awareness and self-discovery. Set in the late 1950’s/early 1960’s, *Leah* features Leah, a young woman living in New York City, searching for love and stability. Leah’s perception of her mother as emotionless and uncaring informed by her father, and his desertion of her mother, which ruptures the physical and emotional bonds between mother and daughter. However, when Leah encounters strains in her personal and professional life, she turns to her mother for support, and discovers warmth, comfort and care that she never knew existed. Notably, not only does Leah’s newfound connection with her mother provide an important source of support during a difficult time, but their renewed relationship “increases Leah’s own sense of direction and self-esteem,” through

⁷⁰ Seymour Epstein, *Leah, a Novel*, (Boston: Little Brown, 1964).

⁷¹ Edna Ferber, *Fanny Herself*, (Urbana: U of Illinois, 2001).

which Leah “gains the emotional strength to confront realities about her father – and ultimately about herself – that she had previously denied.”⁷² Leah comes to understand, for instance, that despite their estrangement, she had developed an unconscious identification with her mother, causing her to apply her father’s perceptions both externally and internally, so that she viewed both her mother and herself as unlovable. For Leah, therefore, their reunification is liberating, enabling her to love and appreciate both her mother and herself, through which she is “empowered to respond to the one suitor capable of loving and nurturing her in return.”⁷³ Leah’s ability to confront her father also signifies the personal transformation that her renewed relationship with her mother engenders. While standing on a street corner, a conversation between Leah and her father reveals his materialism and hypocrisy as he tries to convince his daughter of the worthiness of a loveless marriage to his girlfriend, to which Leah uncharacteristically explodes, “I have a mother!” Her outburst is instructive, signifying that she is “capable at last of making her own life.”⁷⁴

Fanny Herself (1917) Edna Ferber

In a similar vein, Edna Ferber’s “quasi autobiographical”⁷⁵ work *Fanny Herself* chronicles a daughter’s maturation that is reliant upon a breakdown, followed by a reunification, of the mother-daughter relationship. Like the underlying message of Epstein’s Leah, Ferber’s novel “describes the female journey toward self-realization as a

⁷² Fishman, 39, 311.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Fishman, 39.

⁷⁵ Janet Burstein, *Writing Mothers, Writing Daughters: Tracing the Maternal in Stories by American Jewish Women*, (Urbana: U of Illinois, 1996), 53.

process in which daughters first leave and then return home.”⁷⁶ The story follows Fanny, a young Jewish girl growing up in the Midwest in the early twentieth century. The first part of the novel depicts a significant bond between Fanny and her mother, Molly, a self-sufficient, vigilant businesswoman compensating for her husband’s weaknesses and untimely death. The circumstances of their lives draw mother and daughter together, so that the bond they share is “nourished by shared deprivations as well as respect and love.” Fanny also adopts Molly’s resilience as Molly “prods her daughter, like herself, to toughness and self-denial.”⁷⁷ But Fanny’s subsequent rejection of her mother, followed by their ultimate reunification, is the narrative arc that most profoundly depicts a mother’s connection to her daughter’s attainment of self-awareness and self-understanding. Only upon leaving home, in determination not to “suffer her mother’s fate,” does Fanny realize the ways in which she and her mother are intimately alike. Resonant of Adrienne Rich’s suggestion that mothers and daughters share the “deepest mutuality,” Fanny’s rejection of her mother signifies a rejection of her own identity, as “the denial of the mother in oneself is also a denial of the self.”⁷⁸ Fanny denounces her mother’s “emotional style and spirit,” for instance, before realizing that emotional susceptibility is an intrinsic component her own persona. Thus, Fanny can only become “Fanny Herself” upon embracing her mother and the qualities that they share. Her ability to “grow into likeness to her Jewish mother” advances her growth into her fullest self.⁷⁹

Apples from the Desert (1986) Savyon Liebrecht

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 54.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Savyon Liebrecht's short story, "Apples from the Desert" ("Tapuchim min hamidbar") explores the theme of mother-daughter growth from an Israeli context, thereby showcasing that Jewish mothers and daughters can "give birth" to each other across cultural boundaries. First published in 1986,⁸⁰ the story is emblematic of a daughter's ability to affect growth and change in her seemingly static mother. The narrative focuses on Victoria, an Orthodox Jerusalemite, whose daughter, Rifka, in rebellion against her religious upbringing, left home and moved onto a secular kibbutz. The narrative recounts Victoria's journey to her daughter, with the initial intentions of "bringing her back even if I have to drag her by the hair."⁸¹ However, in her attempt to "move" her daughter – both physically and figuratively – it is Victoria who succumbs to the most change and transformation from beginning to end as exposure to her daughter's kibbutznik lifestyle stimulates her own processes of self-accounting and self-reflection. Victoria is initially astonished to learn that Rifka and her boyfriend, Dubi, are living together out of wedlock, united by love rather than the desire for children. Yet the sight of her daughter in love reminds Victoria of a forgotten time in which she, too, experienced the powers and enchantments of love – a memory which, if only slightly, enables Victoria to identify with her Rifka and understand her choices. Slowly, over the course of their visit, Victoria forsakes her judgments and assumptions and opens to her daughter's lifestyle. The transformation Victoria undergoes becomes most apparent in the story's final scene as she sits on the bus to Jerusalem, "her heart reconciled," pondering what to report to her family: "How could she describe to her sister, who had never known a man, or to her

⁸⁰ Savyon Liebrecht, *Tapuḥim Min Ha-midbar: Sipurim*, (Tel-Aviv: Sifriyat Po'alim, 1986)

⁸¹ Savyon Liebrecht, *Apples from the Desert*, Transl. Marganit Weinberger-Rotman, et. al (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1992), 66.

husband, who had never touched her with love – how could she describe the boy’s eyes on her daughter’s face?”⁸² Victoria’s resolution to tell her husband, “We don’t need to worry about Rifka – she’s happy there, thank God,”⁸³ is indicative of Victoria’s newfound acceptance of a value system separate from her own, as well as the “measure of freedom and independence”⁸⁴ that she has gained from her visit. Rifka challenges her mother when she arrives, “Why did it take a year and a half for you to come here?” “Your papa didn’t want me to come,” Victoria responds, in defeat. Rifka counters, “And you, you don’t have a will of your own?” to which Victoria has no response.⁸⁵ Yet by the end of the story, in her resolve to report the situation as she believes it to be, Victoria no longer appears constrained by her husband’s judgments and opinions. She has emerged transformed, akin to the apples that Dubi engineers and grows in his seemingly barren desert climate. Her desert experience is one of unexpected growth and change.

Anecdotes of Contemporary Mothers and Daughters
“Happy Birthday,” Alicia Suskin Ostriker
“Mother, I Hardly Knew You,” Letty Cotin Pogrebin

In their personal stories and accounts, contemporary Jewish women have continued to affirm the transformative power of the mother-daughter relationship. The writings and perspectives on Letty Cotin Pogrebin, and Alicia Suskin Ostriker, not only serve as powerful and important examples of contemporary feminist scholarship, but also depict actual mother-daughter relationships that are far more positive and nuanced than the familiar, stereotypical “Jewish mother” image in books and on screen, indicating that

⁸² Ibid, 71.

⁸³ Ibid, 72.

⁸⁴ Introduction, 29.

⁸⁵ Liebrecht, 69.

what is commonly depicted in fictional portrayals is highly limited and sensationalized. In her poem, "Happy Birthday,"⁸⁶ using language reminiscent of Gluckel's mother-daughter birth scene, Alicia Suskin Ostriker relates her relationship with her daughter to the experience of being born and reborn, through the ways in which she and her daughter participate in the other's processes of birth and growth. As the simplest of moments bring her back to the moment of her daughter's birth, she and daughter to grow and confront the world together, with shared hopes, dreams, and fears:

Happy Birthday, a gray day like the first one –
You were so brave to enter our world
With its dirty rain, its look of a sepia photograph.

I call you at college, early and drowsy.
I hear you describe the party last night,
How you danced, how dancing is one of the things

You love in your life, like thinking hard. You are
All right, then, and on the telephone
Hearing the high snaredrum of your voice

I can feel you about to be born, I can feel
The barriers yield as you slide
Along the corrugated glitter,

Like some terrible rubbery ocean built of blood
That parts at a touch, leaving a path.

"What should I do," you wonder, "after I graduate?"
Now I imagine you curled under your quilt
As a cold light begins to enter
Like a knife in a pirate's teeth. Dear salt flesh,

I am ready if you are, I am afraid if you are.
I still ask: will this hurt, will it give pleasure,
Will I survive it? On your mark, get set,

⁸⁶ Alicia Suskin Ostriker, "Happy Birthday," *Her Face in the Mirror: Jewish Women on Mothers and Daughters*, Faye Moskowitz, ed. (Boston: Beacon, 1994), 14.

We give birth to each other. Welcome. Welcome.⁸⁷

Anecdotes from a motherless daughter further affirm the roles that mothers play in helping daughters reach important gains in self-awareness and self-discovery. In her essay, “Mother, I Hardly Knew You,”⁸⁸ Letty Cottin Pogrebin describes the experience of losing her mother as a teenager, and the ramifications of that loss upon her self-awareness. She explains that mothers, as keepers of memory and history, have the unique ability to help a daughter appreciate how her past informs her present. Without these “memory banks,” it is more challenging for motherless daughters to understand who they are and from where they have come:

Mothers seem to be able to come up with these unexpected revelations about one’s child self, or to suddenly recollect a turning point experience that explains one’s adult obsession. Mothers save precious pre-school artifacts in shoe boxes at the top of the closet. Mothers remember a child’s first words, and quote them in tones usually reserved for Byron. Only a mother remembers her children’s landmarks as her own. Therefore, losing a mother when you are still a child cuts short your hindsight and historiography. Without my mother’s testimony, I know myself almost exclusively through myself...without my mother, I have almost no possibility of being surprised by my own history...⁸⁹

Contemporary Media and Pop Culture Voices
“Kissing Jessica Stein” and “Transparent”

In our contemporary twenty-first century milieu - in line with broader secular and popular trends – we are able to discern instances of Jewish mothers and daughters “giving birth” to each other on screen. Both *Kissing Jessica Stein* (2001) and *Transparent* (2014)

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Letty Cottin Pogrebin, “Mother, I Hardly Knew You,” *Her Face in the Mirror: Jewish Women on Mothers and Daughters*, Faye Moskowitz, ed. (Boston: Beacon, 1994), 221-226.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 226.

⁹⁰ are noteworthy not only because they depict mothers and daughters affecting the other's growth and change, but also because they reflect our culture's growing acknowledgment and acceptance of a wider range of relationships and gender expression. Both display instances of mothers and daughters helping each other to explore and express lesbian and transgender roles and identities. *Transparent*, in addition, presents a compelling illustration of a non-biological, non-normative mother-daughter relationship. Thus, both *Kissing Jessica Stein* and *Transparent* are worthy of incorporating within a learning experience aiming to be mindful and inclusive of the varieties of "mothers," family structures, and relationships among our families and within our communities.

Resonant of Letty Pogrebin's message, the Jewish mother in *Kissing Jessica Stein* employs her "memory bank" to aid daughter's quest for self-awareness and self-understanding, as demonstrated by her transition from a heterosexual to a homosexual relationship. Though Jessica's mother is stereotypically overbearing and obtrusive for most of the film, a tender moment prompts her to evoke the past, in order to help Jessica reach greater understanding regarding her difficulties with intimacy and her challenges with her lover, Helen:

Jessica: Sometimes I think I'm gonna be alone forever.

Mother: Sometimes I worry for you.

Jessica: I worry for me too.

Mother: Sweetheart, I will never forget when you were in the fifth grade and you were so excited when you got the lead in the play, "Really Rosie." You remember that? And you came back on the very first day of rehearsal and you said, "Mommy, I'm not gonna do it." Just like that. And I turned to you and I said, "Why?" And you said, "Because my co-star isn't good enough. And if my co-star isn't good enough, then the play won't be good enough. And I don't want to be part of any play that isn't good enough." And I thought to myself, "Oy. This child will suffer. How this child will suffer." And then they gave it to the girl with glasses.

⁹⁰ *Transparent*, Dir. Jill Soloway, Perf. Jeffrey Tambor, Amazon Studios, 2014.

Jessica: Tess Greenblatt, she was terrible.

Mother: Right! And you would have been great! And you didn't get to do it...we had to sit there and watch terrible Tess do it with that guy, who was actually quite excellent wasn't he.

Jessica: He was, he was quite good.

Mother: I always think that you would have been happier doing that play, even if it was just ok. Even if it was great, just not the best ever. And maybe, it would have been the best ever...you never know.⁹¹

Through her mother's recollections, Jessica grasps aspects of herself that she couldn't otherwise recognize: her fear of imperfection, and her tendency towards unrealistic expectations of others. By linking her fifth grade play to her relationship struggles, Jessica's mother reveals the ongoing behaviors and attitudes that have prevented Jessica from attaining happiness and satisfaction. Upon realizing the links between her fifth grade self and her present day struggles – with the help of her mother's insight - Jessica experiences greater success and satisfaction within her relationships. Following this conversation, she reunites with Helen, and their relationship thrives as a result of Jessica's increasing ability to surrender to the unpredictability and imperfections that accompany love and intimacy. Her mother's wise assemblage of the past with the present marks the clear turning point from which Jessica is truly able to give and receive love.

The hit Amazon series *Transparent* features a Jewish family struggling to find stasis following the father's revelation of his transition from Mort to Maura. As Maura embraces and displays her new identity, her grown children grapple with the ramifications of her transition. Upon meeting Maura, they wonder how to refer to her - a simple, yet significant question, as the answer reveals Maura's status vis a vis her children. The designation that Maura's daughters propose – “Moppa” – signifies their

⁹¹ *Kissing Jessica Stein*, Dir. Charles Herman-Wurmfeld, Perf. Jennifer Westfeldt, Heather Juergensen, Fox Searchlight, 2001.

openness to their father's new identity, tinged with hesitation to regard him as wholly female and maternal. This hesitation, however, slowly wanes as the series progresses and the daughters – Sarah, especially – become more accepting and comfortable with Maura's existence, which helps Maura grow into, and express, her new identity. When Sarah and Ali take Maura to the mall, for instance, they introduce her to the world of department store cosmetic counters and “free” makeup trials, and Maura is quickly enamored with the products and their ability to enhance her femininity.⁹² Further, a question Sarah later poses to Maura around the Shabbat table is even more telling, perhaps, of Sarah's readiness to aid and accompany Maura on her journey towards Jewish womanhood. As Sarah, her lover, and Maura gather around the table, Sarah stands at the head and asks, “Moppa, would you like to light the candles? It's a tradition that the mother of the family lights candles.”⁹³ The significance of this overture is twofold. It demonstrates Sarah's supreme acceptance of Maura's identity, and, perhaps more importantly, it enables Maura to exhibit her fullest and truest self.

Indeed, Jewish mothers and daughters – from antiquity to modern day – have played important roles in aiding and allowing each other to grow and transform and meaningful and significant ways. Though the examples discussed represent mother-daughter relationships covering a wide range of place and time, the ways in which they coalesce suggest that the ability to “give birth” to one another is an inherent component of the Jewish mother-daughter relationship. Intrinsic or not, however, the examples

⁹² “Moppa,” *Transparent, Season 1*, Dir. Jill Soloway. Perf. Jeffrey Tambor, Gaby Hoffman, Amy Landecker, Amazon Studios, 2014.

⁹³ “The Wilderness,” *Transparent, Season 1*, Dir. Jill Soloway. Perf. Jeffrey Tambor, Gaby Hoffman, Amy Landecker, Amazon Studios, 2014.

discussed in this chapter indicate that both mothers and daughters grow and thrive when they mutually supportive and present within each other's lives. "Real life" mothers and daughters, therefore, would benefit upon exploring how they might be able to affect positive transformation and change in one another, and how their presence can support the other's overall growth well-being. The material outlined in the lesson guide portion of this thesis intends to help mothers engage in such a conversation.

Chapter Two: Like Mother, Like Daughter: A Closeness with Constructive and Destructive Powers

Though the previous chapter indicated that the Jewish mother-daughter bond contains incredibly constructive capabilities, a look into other examples throughout time reveals the potential for toxicity between Jewish mothers and daughters, adding complexity and nuance to our overall perception of the Jewish mother-daughter relationship. An exploration of three biblical mother-daughter pairs - Yocheved and Miriam, Leah and Dinah, and Ruth and Naomi - indicates that mother-daughter resemblance can elicit a range of positive and negative outcomes. In the modern realm, mother-daughter likeness is often problematic. In Marge Piercy's poetry, Anzia Yezerska's Bread Givers; and the popular TV series "Transparent," daughters are stymied by mother-daughter enmeshment. These ancient and modern voices demonstrate the broad range and consequence of mother-daughter likeness and cohesion, suggesting that such a dynamic can be positive and beneficial, as well as harmful and destructive.

Biblical and Rabbinic Voices Yocheved, Miriam and Achsah

Notions of "like mother, like daughter" pervade the biblical imagination. Mothers and daughters bear striking similarities to one another in the cases of Miriam and her mother, Yocheved, and Miriam and her daughter, Achsah.⁹⁴ For these mother-daughter duos, mother-daughter resemblance yields outcomes that are positive and poignant. According to Exodus Rabbah, the Hebrew midwives in Exodus 1:15 (Shifra and Pu'ah)

⁹⁴ According to aggadic tradition, Miriam married Caleb (see Sotah 11b-12a). From the description of Caleb's daughter, Achsah, in Judges 1:12, we can infer that Achsah is Miriam's daughter.

who courageously defy Pharaoh's orders to kill every male baby are, in fact, Yocheved and Miriam, working together as productive mother-daughter team to perpetuate the Hebrew lineage.⁹⁵ Miriam, according to this account, was only five years old when she began assisting her mother, learning from her the art of midwifery and completing important tasks within birthing process:

The Hebrew midwives were Yocheved and [her daughter] Miriam. Miriam, who was only five years old then, went with Yocheved to assist her. She was quick to honor her mother and serve God... Their midwifery is embodied in their names: Shiphrah would cleanse (*meshaperet*) the newborn so it would be beautiful. Puah's role has lent itself to several interpretations. According to one opinion, she would bleat (*poah*) like a sheep to the woman in labor, which acted as a stimulus and aided the woman to deliver. Another view has her squirting (*nofat*) wine into the baby's mouth, or she would cause the newborn to cry out (*li-f'ot*) when it was thought to be stillborn.⁹⁶

Moreover, in an instance in which Miriam dangerously wavers from her mother's tutelage and exhibits her own individuality, Yocheved acts quickly to contain and refocus her daughter's image, thereby shielding her from harm:

She (Pu'ah) presented her face before Pharaoh, stuck up her nose at him, and said, "Woe is to the man (i.e., Pharaoh) when God punishes him!" Pharaoh was filled with wrath and would have killed her, but Yocheved appeased him, saying, "Will you pay attention to her? She is only a child, she has no understanding."⁹⁷

Thus, with Miriam and Yocheved, we receive a positive example of mother-daughter resemblance, in which Miriam becomes Yocheved's protégé in order to serve and protect the Hebrew people, and, in return, Yocheved protects Miriam when she dangerously oversteps her mother's bounds.

The touching likeness that emerges between Miriam and her own daughter suggests that mother-daughter resemblance is passed from one generation to the next. The biblical

⁹⁵ Exodus Rabbah 1:13

⁹⁶ Exodus Rabbah 1:13, Eccl. Rabbah 7:3, Midrash Samuel 23:2

⁹⁷ Exodus Rabbah 1:13

account describes Achsah's marriage to Othniel the Kenizzite, and her request that her father provide springs of water as dowry:

Achsah dismounted from her donkey and Caleb asked her, "what is the matter?" She replied, "Give me a present, for you have given me away as Negev-land; give me springs of water." And Caleb gave her Upper and Lower Gullath."⁹⁸

Achsah's desire is reminiscent of Miriam's connection with water, strengthening the proposal that she is Miriam's heir. As Rabbi Jill Hammer writes, "It appears that Achsah is asking not for territory, but for access to her mother's spiritual gift of abundant water."⁹⁹ From this request, it is possible to infer that the presence of water brings Achsah the memory of her mother, a source of comfort during a time of unease and uncertainty in her life.

Leah and Dinah

In stark contrast to Miriam and Yochaved and Miriam and Achsah, the likeness between Leah and her daughter, Dinah - according to the rabbis - produces devastating consequences. The frustratingly vague recollection of Dinah's rape in Genesis 34:1 refers to Dinah as "daughter of Leah" - a curious designation, as the bible normally orients children vis a vis the paternal rather than the maternal line: "Now Dinah, the daughter whom Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daughters of the land. Shechem, son of Hamor the Hivite, chief of the country, saw her, took her, and lay with her by force."¹⁰⁰ Rashi explains Dinah's unique designation as evidence of her resemblance to her mother: "Because of her going out, Dinah was called the daughter of Leah, since she

⁹⁸ Judges 1:14-15

⁹⁹ Rabbi Jill Hammer, "Omer Calendar of Biblical Women, *Ritualwell*, 05 Jan 2016. <http://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/omer-calendar-biblical-women>

¹⁰⁰ Genesis 34:1-2

(Dinah), too, was in the habit of going out, as it is said, “and Leah came forth toward him.” And so concerning her, they devise the proverb, *Like Mother, Like Daughter*.¹⁰¹ By linking Dinah’s behavior with a scene in Genesis 30:16, in which Leah “went out” to inform Jacob “I am the one you will lay with tonight,” Rashi implies Dinah’s rape as consequence of her mother’s earlier behaviors. In Genesis Rabbah, Rav Kahana and Resh Lakish corroborate and intensify Rashi’s proposition, adding an extra measure of promiscuity to Leah and Dinah’s conduct:

Kahana says: According to the garden so is its gardener...Resh Lakish exclaimed, What is really the meaning of this verse?’ Kahana replied, ‘A cow does not gore herself unless her calf kicks; a woman is not immoral until her daughter is immoral.’ If so, Resh Lakish replied, then our mother Leah was a harlot! Even so, Kahana replied, because it says, “And Leah went out to meet him” which means that she went out to meet him adorned like a harlot; therefore, “and Dinah the daughter of Leah went out.”¹⁰²

By linking a woman’s “going out” with “harlotry,” Kahana seeks to increase Leah and Dinah’s culpability in her downfall, insisting that Dinah’s adoption of her mother’s apparent promiscuity leads her to violence and degradation. While this message is limited and disturbing to our 21st century sensibilities, (and, arguably, an offshoot of the “she was asking for it” adage that is still far too pervasive today), the text contains another, far more compelling message: mother-daughter resemblance has the potential to be destructive for both mother and daughter alike, as “a woman is not immoral until her daughter is immoral.” Thus, though Leah was perhaps “immodest” in her going out to meet Jacob dressed as a harlot, it was Dinah’s “immorality,” through her emulation of her mother’s behaviors, that caused Leah, as well, to become “immoral” - a strong statement regarding a daughter’s capability to tarnish her mother’s image. Regardless of the way in

¹⁰¹ Rashi on Genesis 34:1

¹⁰² Genesis Rabbah 80:1

which a mother conducts herself, the midrash suggests, she is ultimately judged by her daughter's behaviors, and it is her daughter's inheritance of her undesirable traits that leads to her own downfall. Accordingly, through this lens, Dinah's rape not only serves to punish Dinah for acting akin to her mother, but also to punish Leah, for her previous indiscretion. The messages here are clear: a mother's transgression has ramifications for both her and her daughter. Daughters inherit, and pay for, their mothers' past iniquities, and as punishment for their previous offences, mothers bear the repercussions of their daughters' behaviors.

Ruth and Naomi

Finally, the relationship between Ruth and Naomi adds nuance to the notion of mother-daughter likeness, suggesting that it is not always so polarized as to one extreme or another. As discussed in the previous chapter, Ruth and Naomi's relationship enables mother and daughter to grow and transform alongside one another. However, according to another perspective, Ruth and Naomi's relationship is so transformative that it actually fuses their individual identities, erasing the markers indicating where one ends and another begins. This merger becomes apparent, for instance, in the scene in which Naomi prepares Ruth for her intimate encounter with Boaz: "Bath, anoint yourself, dress up, and go down to the threshing floor...When he lies down, go over and uncover his feet and lie down."¹⁰³ Though the JPS translation clearly affirms that Naomi is instructing Ruth to "go down" and "lie down," an examination of these commands in their original Hebrew reveals ambiguity regarding their intended subject. While the verbs for "go down" and "lie down" are conjugated in first person singular, they are vocalized in the second

¹⁰³ Ruth 3:3-4

person,¹⁰⁴ making it possible to translate them either as Naomi's command to Ruth (i.e. "you go down to the threshing floor, and "you lie down") or, as Naomi's declaration of her future actions (i.e. "I will go down to the threshing floor, and "I will lie down"). Though scholars have attributed the curious first person conjugations to an archaic form of the second person feminine singular¹⁰⁵ – thereby clarifying Ruth as the subject of these commands - Kalmenofsky embraces the discrepancy in the Hebrew text, suggesting that the ambiguity is meant to reveal the synthesis that has occurred between Ruth and Naomi's identities:

By writing the verbs one way and reading them another, I contend that the text intentionally preserves the confusion in the intended subjects of these verbs. Although narrative context supports Ruth as the subject and that is how the verbs should be read and understood, the text wants its readers to think about Naomi and recognize the intimacy that has formed between them. Naomi's use of the first person to direct Ruth communicates their connection to one another. It also blurs their identities...¹⁰⁶

Naomi's use of the first person while instructing her daughter-in-law thus signifies and emphasizes her "deep presence" with Ruth while she seduces Boaz.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, Naomi's fate also changes when Ruth encounters Boaz on the threshing floor. By sleeping with Boaz, Ruth secures the future for herself and her mother-in-law. In this way, both women, in effect, "marry" Boaz, which further fuses their individual identities:

When Boaz sleeps with Ruth, he effectively redeems both women...Ruth and Naomi share one patriarch who will provide them with land, food, and support in their old age. They also share one identity. The confusion preserved in Naomi's command to Ruth to seduce Boaz conveys this. When Ruth goes down to the threshing floor, it is as if Naomi was there; it is as if Naomi and Ruth both marry Boaz.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Kalmenofsky, 169.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Kalmenofsky, 169.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Kalmenofsky, 170.

Naomi's earlier designation of Boaz as "our redeemer"¹⁰⁹ therefore foreshadows the "shared" marriage that will later ensue. What is more, by sharing one husband, the two women also "share" the child that is produced from the union between Ruth and Boaz. Ruth and Naomi's "joint" motherhood becomes apparent in the book's final scene as the townswomen's declare, "a son is born to Naomi," suggesting that it is Naomi, rather than Ruth, who is the child's "real mother."¹¹⁰ Kalmenofsky believes that the increasing resemblance between Ruth and Naomi – which culminates in an erasure of individual boundaries by the book's conclusion – is highly fruitful and beneficial for both women, and for the future of the Israelite nation:

Naomi's recorded use of the first person captures the empathy and gratitude she finally feels towards Ruth...Naomi is not only bound to Ruth by gratitude and obligation, they have become sisters...in remarkable ways, Ruth and Naomi's sisterhood is not only ideal, it is redemptive...it provides Israel with an actual redeemer as imagined by the prophet Isaiah...¹¹¹

However, though it is possible to view Ruth and Naomi's supreme likeness as highly rewarding and constructive, another interpretation of their relationship is possible. Ruth and Naomi's story raises questions regarding the merit of a mother-daughter intimacy that it erases individual boundaries. While their fusion produces measures of safety and security that are indisputably beneficial for both women, it is also conceivable to wonder what emotional and psychological ramifications such a merger has upon Ruth and Naomi's individual psyches. How does Ruth feel about sharing a husband and a child with her mother-in-law? How is it for Naomi, who will never enjoy the benefits of a biological relationship with her child? Though the narrative leaves these questions

¹⁰⁹ Ruth 2:23

¹¹⁰ Kalmenofsky, 170.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 171.

unanswered, Kalmenofsky also acknowledges the ways in which Ruth and Naomi's enmeshment can be seen as concerning and problematic. The events at the end of the narrative, she admits, can signify not only a mere union of Ruth and Naomi's identities, but also a complete erasure of Ruth's narrative presence:

With the birth of Ruth's child...the women noticeably focus on Naomi in their blessing. Everything happens for Naomi's benefit. God does not deny *her* a redeemer. The child sustains *Naomi* in her old age. Naomi's daughter-in-law loves and is good to *her*. Their focus on Naomi effaces Ruth from the narrative as a distinct character, erasing Ruth's identity.¹¹²

Esther Fuchs goes one step further, terming Ruth's erasure a "narrative death" that reveals her one-dimensional function for the narrative as a whole:

Having served her maternal function, Ruth no longer is of use and is effectively eliminated from the patriarchal narrative. In the final scene, the women do not even refer to Ruth by name, but identify her in relation to Naomi as "your daughter-in-law." Their reluctance to name Ruth is particularly noticeable, since, as we have seen, the women consistently appear invested in names and engaged in naming.¹¹³

Though we might wish for more clues regarding the emotional dynamics behind Ruth and Naomi's relationship, the text's terseness is valuable, as it reminds us that "like mother, like daughter" is neither a straightforward nor static concept. As Ruth's various interpretive possibilities reveal, mother-daughter resemblance can produce both constructive and destructive outcomes. Examples of mother-daughter likeness in works of early modern and contemporary literature further reveal the complexities that such a dynamic entails.

A 20th Century Literary Voice: Bread Givers, Anzia Yezierska

¹¹² Ibid, 161.

¹¹³ Ibid, 161.

In works of early twentieth century American Jewish literature, many writers explore the effects of the Jewish immigrant experience on mothers and their daughters. Propelled by their own experiences of living as a woman within a patriarchal society, the mothers of this genre tend to model and transmit values that both limit and empower their daughters who struggle to achieve a sense of self and agency while coming of age in the American milieu:

Mothers model the womanly energy, strength and generosity that will empower their daughters. But as they defer to their husbands, obeying their orders and seeking their confirmation of their value, mothers transmit also the sense of subjective impairment and the compensatory habit of idealizing love...thus they (the daughters) become both proud achievers and dependent, clinging lovers of powerful men.¹¹⁴

Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers* (1925),¹¹⁵ a well-known work in the Jewish literary canon that is an accessible and captivating read, powerfully captures the ways in which systemic, patriarchal norms and values, common to the immigrant experience, were transmitted from mother to daughter. The story's protagonist, Sara Smolinsky, inherits her mother's zeal and assertiveness - through which she is able to replace the traditional expectations of an immigrant daughter with an education and a career - but also her mother's internalized subordination, so that neither mother nor daughter truly break free from the patriarchal bounds of which they are a part. Throughout the novel, Father tyrannizes, insults, and ridicules Mother, constantly reminding her of her subordinate role. Early in the story, Sara recounts a conversation between Mother and Father in which father "pushes Mother away" yelling, "Woman, stay in your place! I'm the head of this

¹¹⁴ Burstein, 32-33.

¹¹⁵ Anzia Yezierska, *Bread Givers*, (New York: Persea Books, 1925).

family.”¹¹⁶ To these attacks, however, Mother consistently and passionately stands her ground, firmly devoted to her daughters’ well being as Father’s religious fanaticism threatens the family’s security: “Woman! When will you stop darkening the house with your worries?” Father implores, to which Mother retorts, “When I’ll have a man who does the worrying! Does it ever enter your head that the rent was not paid the second month? That today we’re eating the last loaf of bread that the grocer trusted me? You’re so busy working for heaven that I have to suffer here such bitter hell.”¹¹⁷ Yet Mother’s adoring idealization of Father, almost akin to worship, only buttresses the patriarchal system that Father demands. During Father’s stories, Sara recalls Mother “licking up Father’s every little word, like honey,”¹¹⁸ as Father’s touches “turn Mother’s sad face into smiles.”¹¹⁹ Even as Mother lay dying, “the touch of Father’s hand was like magic. Her whole face softened. A beautiful look came into her eyes as she gazed at Father, undying worship on her face.”¹²⁰ Such idealization indicates Mother’s recognition of Father as a “powerful subject,” and “demonstrates to her daughters her own inability to achieve such status for herself - she requires his touch, his glance, his voice to bring her to life.”¹²¹ Witnessing these dynamics between her parents, Sara learns and internalizes the lesser role of women within her patriarchal religious framework:

The prayers of his daughters didn’t count because God didn’t listen to women. Heaven and the next world were only for men. Women could get into Heaven because they were wives and daughters of men. Women had no brains for the study of God’s Torah, but they could be the servants of men who studied the Torah. Only if they cooked for the men, and washed for the men, and didn’t nag

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 13.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 10.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 12.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 11.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 248.

¹²¹ Burstein, 31.

or curse the men out of their homes; only if they let the men study the Torah in peace, then, maybe, they could push themselves into Heaven with the men, to wait on them there.¹²²

Yet as the novel progresses, Sara's ability to stand her ground against Father, in order to pursue her own educational and vocational goals, signifies her inheritance of her

mother's assertiveness and willpower: "My will is as strong as yours. I'm going to live my own life. Nobody can stop me. I'm not from the old country. I'm American!"¹²³

However, Sara's perpetual idealism of Father, and her ongoing need for his recognition and approval - as learned from Mother - tempers the extent to which she is able to break from the yoke of his patriarchy. Though she creates a life for herself outside the strictures of her childhood home, her longing for Father's validation in the midst of a love affair indicates that her life is still, to some extent, governed by his presence. As she reflects, "A sudden longing to see my father came over me. I felt that my refusal to marry Max Goldstein was something he could understand. He had given up worldly success to drink the wisdom of the Torah. He would tell me that, after all, I was the only daughter of his faith."¹²⁴ From Sara's yearning for her father, "as a person is drawn to a person"¹²⁵ we can glean that "having demonstrated her ability to exist as a subject beyond her father's control, she needs him to recognize her as a subject like himself."¹²⁶ Even by the novel's conclusion, despite her attainment of love and success and independence, Father's presence still looms large over Sara's psyche, as she takes him into her home and accommodates herself to his care. Her closing words are telling: "But I felt the shadow

¹²² Yeziarska, 9-10.

¹²³ Ibid, 138.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 202.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Burstein, 30.

still there, over me. It wasn't just my father, but the generations who made my father whose weight was still upon me."¹²⁷ Though her concluding statement implies the survival of the patriarchy by way of the male lineage, Sara's story suggests that women, too, have a role in its endurance, as a mother's acquiescence to traditional gender roles and norms teaches her daughter to do the same.

Anecdotes of a Contemporary Mother and Daughter: "Putting the Good Things Away" and "My Mother's Body," Marge Piercy

Marge Piercy (b. 1936), the American born novelist, poet and social activist, whose poetry on liturgical and holiday themes has enriched the Jewish literary canon, offers perspectives and insights on her own relationship with her mother that deepen this discussion on mothers and daughters. Notably, by exposing the ways in which she and her mother have united in body and soul, her poetic reflections suggest that mother-daughter closeness can transcend the physical and existential bounds of time and space, thereby intensifying the complicated and problematic consequences of mothers and daughters existing in close tandem with one another. In "Putting the Good Things Away," for example, her mother's milk permanently fuses mother and daughter, resulting in intertwined emotions and the ability to effortlessly impact the other:

The anger turned inward, the anger
turned inward, where
could it go except to make pain?
It flowed into me with her milk.

Her anger annealed me.
I was dipped into the cauldron
of boiling rage and rose
a warrior and a witch

¹²⁷ Yeziarska, 297.

but still vulnerable
there where she held me.
She could always wound me
for she knew the secret places.

She could always touch me
for she knew the pressure
points of pleasure and pain.
Our minds were woven together.¹²⁸

The intimacy described here is fraught with complexity. Though the anger that she absorbed from her mother toughened and strengthened her character, their closeness left the daughter vulnerable to her mother's harmful whims. The daughter's individuality and agency appears to be tempered by her mother's ultimate control and authority. A similar sentiment emerges in "My Mother's Body," in which the mother molds and shapes her daughter by "pushing and pulling" and "kneading, shaping, and pounding:"

You pushed and you pulled on my rubbery
Flesh, you kneaded me like a ball of dough.
Rise, rise, and then you pounded me flat.¹²⁹

By evoking imagery from Genesis 2, in which God "forms Adam from the dust of the earth," the poem imbues the mother with divine-like power over her daughter. The daughter appears ambivalent towards this dynamic, vacillating between acceptance and discontent. Though she acknowledges the power and permanence of their bond, she expresses a desire for detachment:

My mother is my mirror and I am hers.
What do we see? Our face grown young again,
Our breasts grown firm, legs lean and elegant...

¹²⁸ Marge Piercy, "Putting the Good Things Away" in *My Mother's Body*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 20-22.

¹²⁹ Marge Piercy, "My Mother's Body" in *My Mother's Body*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 26-32.

Give me your dress so I can try it on.
Oh it will not fit you, Mother, you are too fat.
I will not fit you, Mother.

I will not be the bride you can dress,
The obedient dutiful daughter you would chew,
A dog's leather bone to sharpen your teeth.¹³⁰

Ultimately, however, an intense cohesion prevails, indicated within the descriptions of the mother's death that open and close the poem. Though she is miles away, the daughter senses her mother's pain and detects her deterioration:

then hawk-faced pain seized you
threw you so you fell with a sharp
cry, a knife tearing a bolt of silk.
My father heard the crash but paid
no mind, napping after lunch,

Yet fifteen hundred miles north
I heard and dropped a dish.
Your pain sunk talons in my skull
and crouched there cawing, heavy
as a great vessel filled with water,

oil or blood, till suddenly next day
the weight lifted and I knew your mind
had guttered out like the Chanukah
candles that burn so fast, weeping
veils of wax down the chanukiyot...

Pelicans with pregnant pouches
flapped overhead like pterodactyls.
In my mind I felt you die.
First the pain lifted and then
you flickered and went out...

...My twin sister, my lost love,
I carry you in me like an embryo
As you once carried me...¹³¹

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

With her mother's death, a poignant role reversal develops, as the daughter carries her mother in her "like an embryo" - an image that evokes themes from the previous chapter of this thesis. With her mother now inside her "like an embryo," the daughter "gives birth" to her mother, so that her mother exists and endures through her physical form and worldly presence. No longer is it merely her mother's milk that flows within her, but rather, her mother's whole being:

...This body is your body, ashes now
and roses, but alive in my eyes, my breasts,
my throat, my thighs. You run in me
a tang of salt in the creek waters of my blood,

you sing in my mind like wine. What you
did not dare in your life you dare in mine.¹³²

Even after the mother's death, the daughter is unable to achieve agency and separation from her mother. Rather, they remain intertwined, both physically and existentially. The daughter's life continues to be shaped and governed by her mother's influence; her existence becomes an embodiment and a fulfillment of her mother's unrealized goals and aspirations. In this instance, mother and daughter are so interconnected, that they have, ultimately, fused into one.

A Contemporary Media Voice: "Transparent"

The contemporary television series *Transparent*, introduced in the previous chapter, contains another compelling example of mother-daughter likeness between mothers and daughters who subscribe to LGBTQ identities, suggesting that daughters, to some degree, adapt their mothers' tendencies and behaviors relating to relationships,

¹³² Ibid.

gender, and sexual identity. Throughout “Transparent,” recurrent patterns of gender and sexual exploration and fluidity cascade down the Pfefferman family system, as both mothers and daughters wrestle with questions of identity and defy traditional gender roles and stereotypes. As explored in the previous chapter, with Mort’s transition to Maura, the family receives another mother, who has long struggled to define her gender and sexuality.¹³³ Flashbacks throughout the series disclose her illusory marriage to Shelly, and their eventual separation, driven by Maura’s secret excursions to transgender retreats and getaways and her escalating physical and emotional absence from the family. When Ali decides she wants to cancel her Bat Mitzvah, for instance, Maura (then Mort) gladly consents, viewing the cancellation as an opportunity to attend a transgender retreat occurring the same weekend.¹³⁴ In addition, Shelly – who, in many ways, presents as traditionally “masculine” – also offers a non-normative model of womanhood in her own right: her short hair, boyish features, abrasive speech patterns and no-nonsense personality all offset Maura’s highly feminized presence and personality. The implications of Shelly and Maura’s behaviors and identities become clear as the series develops their daughters’ struggles, questions and behaviors, which, in many ways, parallel their own. Sarah, for instance, who embodies all the traits of stereotypical female attractiveness, appears at the series inception as a model of hetero-normativity, with three children and a seemingly stable relationship with her husband, Len. Yet her marriage

¹³³ As noted earlier, the increasing presence and normativity of non-biological and non-traditional mothers and mother figures – and our society’s increasing acceptance of them – suggests that they be viewed as “mothers” in their own right, and thus, deserve attention and exploration within this thesis.

¹³⁴ “Best New Girl,” *Transparent, Season 1*, Dir. Jill Soloway. Perf. Jeffrey Tambor, Gaby Hoffman, Amy Landecker, Amazon Studios, 2014.

quickly unravels as she reconnects with Tammy, her college roommate, and they begin a secretive affair. Ultimately, Sarah's questioning and exploration leads her to divorce Len and begin a relationship with Tammy. Together, they navigate the complicated world of divorce, custody and living arrangements. Accordingly, much like Maura, Sarah finds herself unfulfilled with her traditional, heterosexual lifestyle, and thus, constructs and chooses an alternate reality that, ultimately, engenders pain and heartache for the family she leaves behind. Ali, too, engages in her own processes of gender and sexual exploration that resist traditional boundaries and are, to some degree, physically and emotionally dangerous for herself and for those involved. On the one hand, her appearance – her short haircut, her masculine style of dress – resembles Shelly's rejection of traditional femininity. Her sexually deviant forays involving drugs and multiple partners, her sudden fixation on the transgender community following Maura's revelation, and her fetishized, disingenuous attraction to a transgender man with whom she enters into a relationship, suggest her attention and susceptibility to Maura's choices and behaviors. Clearly, not only do Maura and her daughters share LGBTQ interests and identities, but, more significantly, a propensity to engage in processes of identity formation and exploration that inflict harm upon the self or others.

These examples, and probably many more, demonstrate the complex impact that mothers and daughters can have upon each other's lives and identities, by way of the unique closeness that they share. Mothers and daughters might benefit, therefore, when mothers explore and consider the traits and behaviors that they embody and transmit (either consciously or unconsciously) to their daughters, as well as the impact that their daughters' behaviors have upon their own lives. The implications of such dynamics are

certainly worth considering. Thus, the discussion guide for this chapter uses the sources outlined to help mothers consider how they influence - and are influenced by - their daughters, for better or for worse, as well as the ways in which mother-daughter closeness and cohesion can be utilized to help mothers and daughters become their best and healthiest selves.

Chapter Three: And Miriam Prophesized: The Spoken and Unspoken Language of Jewish Mothers and Daughters

Amidst all their varying capabilities and complexities, Adrienne Rich posits one, unwavering outcome of all biological mother-daughter relationships, generated by the unique and profound phenomena of one woman conceiving, carrying, and birthing another:

Mothers and daughters have always exchanged with each other-beyond the verbally transmitted lore of female survival – a knowledge that is subliminal, subversive, preverbal: the knowledge flowing between two alike bodies, one of which has spent nine months inside the other.¹³⁵

Undoubtedly, the prenatal and bodily connections exclusive to all biological mothers and daughters have the potential to generate powerful consequences that are inimitable within other types of relationships. However, based on other writings and perspectives, I also would suggest that non-biological mother/daughter relationships, by virtue of their close familial relations, combined with their shared physical and emotional experiences as women in a male-oriented society, are also capable of generating a specific kind of closeness that results in an equally significant exchange of knowledge and language. In her expose on mothers and daughters, for instance, Rich acknowledges the supreme power and potential of the non-biological mother/daughter bond:

Many of the great mothers have not been biological...For centuries, daughters have been strengthened and energized by non-biological mothers, who have combined a care for the practical values of survival with an incitement toward further horizons, a compassion for vulnerability with an insistence on our buried strengths. It is precisely this that has allowed us to survive...(252-3)

¹³⁵ Rich, 220.

Furthermore, though likely speaking in biological terms, Carl Jung writes that, “Every mother contains her daughter within herself, and every daughter, her mother.” Arguably, this statement – through its figurative, imaginative, language – is referring to the formidable social, rather than biological, experiences of motherhood and daughterhood, and thus, is applicable to the non-biological mother/daughter experience. (209) And as we have seen, the story of Ruth and Naomi confirms that non-biological mothers and daughters are, indeed, capable of sharing a subliminal knowledge and language that is exclusive to their relationship.¹³⁶

Accordingly, through their bonds of biological and sociological significance, Jewish mothers and daughters share a “secret language” and a “subliminal knowledge,” formed and nurtured in the clandestine confines of the womb and/or the home, performed and employed in an equally covert and intimate fashion. Such knowledge, passed back and forth, can foster a deep recognition and awareness about the other’s innermost thoughts and feelings, so that one can simply intuit the other’s needs and experiences. Examples throughout time suggest that this covert way of communicating with one another enables a variety of consequential outcomes, all of which, to varying degrees, are redemptive and liberating. In biblical and rabbinic illustrations, a daughter’s instinct allows her to foretell and shape her mother’s destiny, which has critical consequences for her family and for the Jewish people. In the early modern and modern eras, the life and works of Hava Shapiro, and the contemporary film *Kissing Jessica Stein*, showcase the ways in which mothers communicate with their daughters through their biological intuition and their daughters’ non-verbal cues; thus, they are deeply aware of their

¹³⁶ See Chapters One and Two on “Ruth and Naomi.”

daughters' realities, which enables their daughters to feel known, understood, protected, and safe. The redemptive, liberating effects of feeling known and understood confirms the value and importance of mothers' and daughters' abilities to communicate intimately and effectively with one another.

Biblical and Rabbinic Voices: Miriam and Yocheved

When Miriam watched as her mother placed her newborn baby in an ark made of bulrushes, and sent him floating down the Nile, we can only speculate what such an experience was like for both mother and daughter. The rabbis, too, pondered Miriam's role in Moses' birth and his transfer over to the Egyptians. In midrashic retellings of the Exodus narrative, Miriam foretold her mother's impending pregnancy, and Moses' destiny as the redeemer of the Israelite people, long before the child was conceived. Thus, when Miriam "stood far off, watching her mother place her baby in basket on the Nile,"¹³⁷ it was to ascertain the validity of her predictions:

"And his sister stood far off." Why did Miriam stand afar off? R. Amram in the name of Rav said: Because Miriam prophesied, 'My mother is destined to give birth to a son who will save Israel;' Now that she was casting him into the river, her mother struck her on the head, saying: 'My daughter, what about thy prophecy?' This is why it says: "And his sister stood afar off" – to know what would be the outcome of her prophecy.¹³⁸

Though we can only surmise the origin of Miriam's prophetic abilities, Adrienne Rich's illustration of the "subliminal, subversive, preverbal" knowledge shared by mothers and daughters suggests that Miriam's ability to foretell her mother's destiny arose from their deep comprehension of one another, nurtured by their primal, biological bond. What is more, Miriam's subsequent scheme, ensuring Yocheved's continued connection with her

¹³⁷ Exodus 2:4

¹³⁸ Megillah 14a

baby, signifies Miriam's insightful awareness of Yocheved's needs, amidst what was likely a highly traumatic experience for mother and baby:

And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the river, and she saw the ark among the flags...And she opened it, and saw it, even the child; and behold, it was a boy that wept. And she had compassion on him, and said: This is one of the Hebrews' children. Then Miriam said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you? And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." And the maiden went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away, and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages." And the woman took the child and nursed him.¹³⁹

From a relational standpoint, Miriam's idea is quite remarkable. Though she is still a young girl who has not yet birthed a child of her own, Miriam senses her mother's primal need to nurture and be close to her newborn baby – as well as the baby's need to be with his mother. From a customary standpoint, proposing Yocheved as nursemaid demonstrated Miriam's commitment towards her brother's survival, so that he would live to fulfill her prophecy. But such a scheme was just as important for Yocheved's well being, as it was for Moses'. Between the lines of the terse biblical text, we can surmise Yocheved's pain and agony as she makes the heart wrenching decision to give up her newborn child for the sake of his survival. Miriam's manipulation of the situation, enabling Yocheved to remain connected with Moses as his nursemaid, signifies her empathic awareness of her mother's experience. The text's brevity suggests that Yocheved never verbalized her feelings and her desires with her daughter. Rather, her insightful observations, and her innate bond with her mother, clued Miriam to her mother's needs, and, thus, prompted her to do what she could to help.

¹³⁹ Exodus 2:5-9

The notion that Miriam's prophecy arose from her intrinsic bond with her mother is, indeed, subversive, as it undermines her prediction as a result of her direct contact with the divine. Yet Martin Buber might argue that such an interpretation is not subversive at all. Buber's I-It/I-thou relationship spectrum posits relations of the deepest mutuality as instances in which God's presence is made manifest. Miriam's supreme ability to empathize with her mother and advocate for her needs indicates that their relationship is one of "I-thou" proportions. In "Buberian" terms, their sacred connection that began in the womb, and persisted with the passing of time, brought the realm of the holy into their lives. Accordingly, if Miriam's ability to foretell her mother's future resulted from their sacred mother-daughter partnership that enabled God's presence to dwell between them, then Miriam's prophecy did, in fact, emanate from an experience with the divine.

A 20th Century Jewish Literary Voice: "Passover Nights," Hava Shapiro

While Miriam and Yocheved's story serves as a speculative tale envisioning the existence and the implications of a shared language between a mother and her daughter, the life and writings of 20th century Hebraist Hava Shapiro (1878-1943) function as concrete examples of the images and ideas imagined in the Miriam/Yocheved text. Hava Shapiro's biography and writings are especially compelling as they demonstrate her deep internalization, and formidable application, of the literal and figurative "languages" that she and her mother shared, which quite literally nurtured and inspired her literary abilities and contributions, and, ultimately, her reputation as the most prolific 19th century female

Hebrew writer in the Diaspora.¹⁴⁰ In their essay “The Reproduction of a Maskilah: The Mother-Daughter Bond Between Menuhah and Hava Shapiro,”¹⁴¹ Balin and Zierler discuss Shapiro’s mother as a scholar of language in her own right, who served as Hava’s “muse” by transmitting her own literary legacy to her daughter. They write,

Menuhah Shapiro functioned as a model for her daughter in an era when literary or intellectual Jewish women were educated and groomed generally by male relatives or acquaintances...Shapiro specifically depicts her mother as a scholar and a Hebraist with an intellectual and spiritual life that, in turn, inspires and edifies her children.¹⁴²

Further, the literal, scholarly language passed between Hava and her mother engenders significant implications not only for Hava herself, but also for the domain of women’s writing, as well as the entire Hebrew literary enterprise. As Balin and Zierler explain,

Shapiro’s dedication of *Kovets Tsiyyurim* (A Collection of Sketches, 1909), to her own mother, Menuhah, adds yet another dimension to her effort to create a new female literary line. While the Menuhah-Hava link is biological in nature, it also takes on a metaphorical aspect, forged as it were by intellectual and literary affinity...Metaphorically speaking, Hava Shapiro, after being fed the fruit of the tree of knowledge by her Hebraist mother, accords herself the name ‘mother of all the living,’ to signify her newly acquired capacity to engender the rebirth of Hebrew at the turn of the twentieth century...Shapiro’s repeated invocation of her own mother as a source of inspiration, coupled with the adoption of the biblical name “Eim kol hai” (Hava), demonstrates two different ways in which this pioneering female Hebraist imaginatively conjured up a female Hebrew precursor tradition, one that explicitly revolted against traditional conceptions of women.¹⁴³

What is more, in circular fashion, Menuhah’s literal transmission of language, written and verbal, enabled Hava to compose writings showcasing another mother/daughter phenomenon of which she was personally aware: the powerful effects of covert, non-

¹⁴⁰ Carole B. Balin, “Havvah Shapiro,” *Jewish Women’s Archive*, web 05 Jan. 2016. <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/shapiro-havvah>

¹⁴¹ Carole B. Balin and Wendy I. Zierler, “The Reproduction of a Maskilah: The Mother-Daughter Bond Between Menuhah and Havah Shapiro,” in forthcoming publication on motherhood, edited by Marjorie Lehmann, used with permission by authors.

¹⁴² Ibid, 1.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 8.

verbal awareness and understanding between mothers and daughters. Hava and her mother shared language that was both verbal and written, and unspoken and discreet; thus, her stories and writings implicitly illustrate the ways her mother's intuitive awareness of her inner psyche nurtured her personal growth and development:

She (Menuhah) appears regularly in Shapiro's writings as the one figure who understood her daughter's aspirations; allowed her to depart from convention for the sake of self-actualization, even at the risk of peril; and served all the while as a kind of psychological safe haven and beacon during her daughter's professional maturation into a writer of repute.¹⁴⁴

Shapiro peppers her stories with mothers who nourish their children's bodies as well as their minds, who *understand their children's psychology* and who nurture their spirit. Based on heartening experiences with her own mother, "Passover Nights," (1925) showcases the subtle development of a daughter's sense of self.¹⁴⁵

Thus, "Passover Nights,"¹⁴⁶ in particular, exemplifies a mother-daughter relationship in which a mother's primal intuition of her daughter's emotions and needs offers her daughter a measure of comfort, protection and assurance amidst a male-oriented domain. A rich illustration of religious life in the Pale of Settlement, the story focuses around a family's preparations and observations surrounding their Passover celebrations. In general, much of the story accentuates female characters and their purview, as "female relatives undertake the arduous (household) tasks performed in anticipation of the feast celebrating liberation."¹⁴⁷ In this female-centric narrative, the first indication of a covert, unspoken awareness between mother and daughter occurs during the Seder, as the brother recites the four questions. Though the daughter is welcomed and included in the women's processes of cooking, baking, and prepping for the Seder, her exclusion during the male-

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 2.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 9.

¹⁴⁶ Hava Shapiro, "Passover Nights (In Memory of My Mother)," in *Ha'olam*, 13.14-15, 3 April 1925, 137-45.

¹⁴⁷ Balin and Zierler, 9.

dominated ceremony leaves her frustrated and angry – sentiments that are perceivable only to her mother. In an interaction in which no words are spoken, her mother recognizes and acknowledges her daughter's experience:

I also know the questions by heart, but no one pays any attention to me, the main attraction is my brother. Inside I am seething. I would have asked them even better than he did. But me they send to sit with the women. Only my mother sees my pain and consoles me with the wonderful caresses of her eyes.”¹⁴⁸

Literally and figuratively, the unspoken language between mother and daughter allows the daughter to be seen, and her experience to be known. The tender, loving way in which they communicate – through furtive glances and wordless expressions that contain a thousand words – assuages the daughter's pain and provides a measure of comfort. Though her mother cannot lessen the patriarchal norms that engender her daughter's discrimination, her knowing looks validate her experience, and thus, perhaps provide the daughter with a token of self-confidence, knowing that her pain is justified. The notion of the mother being the only one to “see” her daughter's experience, in all senses, emerges again in the story, in the context of Shapiro's later experiences in post-revolutionary Kiev. In this section of the story, Shapiro, who is chair of a Zionist organization, discovers the need to go into hiding with a Gentile family when she finds her life is at risk. On Passover Eve, Shapiro emerges from hiding, dressed in masculine priestly garb, to safely journey to the home where her mother is staying. When she arrives, she is

¹⁴⁸ Hava Shapiro, “Passover Nights,” in *To Tread on New Ground: Selected Hebrew Writings of Hava Shapiro*, Carole B. Balin and Wendy I. Zierler, eds., (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014), 127.

unrecognizable to her relatives, and thus greeted by “confused and terrified stares.”¹⁴⁹ Yet her mother identifies her immediately, evoking the earlier scene at the Passover table:

Here, too, like the Passover eve so many years ago at her childhood home, her “mother recognized her immediately” for who she is and “charged” over to greet her. If the sketch begins with Shapiro’s desire to “cross” over into the realm of Jewish masculine ritual practice, it culminates in tangible signs of identity “crossings,” as she assumes a most unconventional leadership role and wraps her Jewish femininity in masculine Christian garb, a disguise Menuhah nevertheless knows how to uncover and decode.¹⁵⁰

Again, her mother’s ability to “see” her, especially when others cannot, offers Shapiro comfort, but also, safety and protection from the outside world. Balin and Zierler’s commentary further infers a mother’s ability to “know” her daughter even when her daughter’s true identity is masked by external disguises. Though, in this scene, the daughter’s actual persona is concealed under a literal disguise, this instance, combined with the unspoken interactions that we observed earlier in the story, signifies a mother’s ability to penetrate façades that are both literal and figurative. From this mother-daughter example, it is possible to conclude more broadly that mothers “see” their daughters’ truths, even when they are conveyed nonverbally, or concealed by false personas and behaviors.

A Contemporary Media Voice: “Kissing Jessica Stein”

The film “Kissing Jessica Stein,” already presented as an example of a mother’s ability to facilitate her daughter’s growth and transformation, serves as a compelling, contemporary example of a mother’s ability to “see” her daughter’s realities and struggles, despite her daughter’s best efforts to conceal them. When Jessica finds herself

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 130.

¹⁵⁰ Balin and Zierler, 10.

frustrated and dissatisfied with men, and decides to explore a relationship with a woman, she makes a concerted effort to hide her interests in women from her family - and, in particular, her mother - whom she fears will be unsupportive of her lesbian orientation. When her family probes her about the woman with whom she has been spending so much time, she introduces Helen as a close friend she recently met. Yet Jessica's ruse does not mislead her mother, who sees through Jessica's deception, and in the scene previously examined in chapter one, reveals to Jessica that she has known all along that Helen is more than just a "friend:"

Jessica: Sometimes I think I'm gonna be alone forever.

Mother: Sometimes I worry for you.

Jessica: I worry for me too.

Mother: Sweetheart, I will never forget when you were in the fifth grade and you were so excited when you got the lead in the play, "Really Rosie." You remember that? And you came back on the very first day of rehearsal and you said, "Mommy, I'm not gonna do it." Just like that. And I turned to you and I said, "Why?" And you said, "Because my co-star isn't good enough. And if my co-star isn't good enough, then the play won't be good enough. And I don't want to be part of any play that isn't good enough." And I thought to myself, "Oy. This child will suffer. How this child will suffer." And then they gave it to the girl with glasses.

Jessica: Tess Greenblatt, she was terrible.

Mother: Right! And you would have been great! And you didn't get to do it...we had to sit there and watch terrible Tess do it with that guy, who was actually quite excellent wasn't he.

Jessica: He was, he was quite good.

Mother: I always think that you would have been happier doing that play, even if it was just ok. Even if it was great, just not the best ever. And maybe, it would have been the best ever...you never know. (pause) Jessie, I think she's a very nice girl.

Her mother's last statement is of few words, yet speaks volumes about her awareness and her support of her daughter's choices and needs. As learns of her mother's insight, Jessica looks at her, stunned and tearful, astonished that she uncovered her deception, and truly relieved to be "seen" without having to say a word. Notably, her reaction is wordless; her

facial expressions, alone, convey to her mother all that she is feeling upon learning that she is known and understood. Here, as in “Passover Nights,” mothers see and understand their daughter’s thoughts and experiences, and daughters to indicate to their mothers how they are feeling, through a language that is unspoken, driven and enabled by perception and intuition.

The examples presented in this chapter showcase the ability, and the range, of a “secret” mother-daughter language that can engender powerful effects on both micro and macro levels. While all three examples demonstrate the ways in which such a language enables mothers and daughters to know, understand, and advocate for the other’s needs, the Miriam/Yocheved narrative suggests that covert mother/daughter communication elicits redemptive outcomes. In the case of Miriam and Yocheved, Miriam’s ability to intuit her mother’s destiny as the mother of the Israelite redeemer, and actions she undertook to ensure the actualization of her insight, enabled the redemption of an entire nation. Yet we can also posit from this narrative the ability of mothers and daughters to engender smaller (but no less significant) “redemptions” for one another, when they perceive and understand the other’s needs and experiences, as feeling known and understood by another is not only comforting, but also quite liberating. In the above scene in *Kissing Jessica Stein*, for instance, upon learning that her mother truly knows her, sees her and accepts her for who she is, we can see in Jessica’s face the dissolution of the metaphorical shackles of shame and secrecy that had been plaguing her for so long. With her mother’s revelation, Jessica experiences a newfound sense of freedom vis a vis her relationship with Helen, and thus, brings their intimacy into the open, publicly declaring and displaying their relationship among family, friends, and the broader world.

Accordingly, an exploration of the “secret language” that they share with their daughters would be a rich and valuable component of a learning experience for mothers. Examining how they overtly and covertly communicate with their daughters, and considering how they can use overt and covert communication to enable their daughters to feel known, comforted, protected, and liberated, supports the mother-daughter relationship, and supports mothers in nurturing and raising happy and healthy daughters. The discussion guide for this chapter aims to facilitate such a conversation.

Discussion Guides

Introduction and Outcomes

The following three lessons aim to engage “It’s a Mom Thing” participants in discussions and activities surrounding the themes and content presented in the previous narrative sections. Upon examining the three themes and their associated sources, participants will gain greater insight into their roles as mothers of teenage daughters, as well as how they might best support and nurture their daughters’ growth into happy and healthy young women. Each lesson is intended for one, hour and a half to two hour long “It’s a Mom Thing” session. However, in light of the richness and abundance of material that I’ve analyzed and explored, as well as the extent to which mothers can talk about issues relevant to their lives (as I’ve learned from conducting several It’s a Mom Thing sessions), these lessons should be treated as rough guides for “It’s a Mom Thing” gatherings. Each lesson contains much more material than a single “It’s a Mom Thing” session can (and should) bear, and group facilitators should use their discretion to pick and choose discussion points and activities that are most appropriate for their group’s members and dynamics. I suspect, and hope, that groups of moms will express deep engagement over single discussion points. Thus, facilitators of this guide should value discussion over activity, and should primarily use this curriculum as a tool for generating rich and impactful conversations. To aide facilitators in selecting an appropriate amount of material to cover in one session, I’ve divided each lesson into the following four sections, based on Joyce Norris’ “Learning Task Force Model:”¹⁵¹ 1) Anchor: grounding the topic in the learners’ lives; 2) Add: providing new information; 3) Apply: having

¹⁵¹ Joyce Norris, *From Telling to Teaching*, (Learning By Dialogue: SC, 2003), 86.

learners do something with the information; and 4) Away: allowing learners to move into the future. In general, each section presents at least one “text” (drawn from the bible, the literature, and/or the media) and an associated discussion or activity, thereby providing facilitators with multiple options of addressing each of the 4 “steps” towards meaningful learning and engagement. I suggest that facilitators choose one-two texts/discussions per section, as time allows. In general, facilitators should allot thirty-five minutes for each of the “Anchor, Add, and Apply” sections, and fifteen minutes for the “Away” sections. The criteria that facilitators can use when choosing texts can and should vary according to individual group interests and dynamics, and/or connectivity to the Jewish calendar. For instance, facilitators might choose the text that most closely correlates with the week’s Torah portion; the text that contains themes and ideas of particular interest and relevance for their group; or, the text reflecting a medium (bible, literature, television/film) that draws particular engagement and excitement among group members.

It should also be noted that “It’s a Mom Thing,” in its original iteration, mirrors the monthly themes of the “It’s a Girl Thing” experience. This creates a parallel learning opportunity for mothers whose daughters participate in “It’s a Girl Thing,” so that mothers may help to deepen and expand the impact of their daughters’ “It’s a Girl Thing” experiences. While I still maintain that an “It’s a Mom Thing” program that mirrors the experience of participants’ daughters is an important and valuable endeavor, I offer these lessons, which don’t necessarily directly parallel the girls’ discussions, as an equally valuable alternate, or additional, direction for “It’s a Mom Thing” groups. As I have learned, timely, thematic correlations between “It’s a Mom Thing” and “It’s a Girl Thing” are not always possible due to scheduling and other logistical issues, and these

lessons provide additional content and direction that mothers may find useful and worthy.

Again, the material presented here, and in the earlier guide, is meant to provide the facilitator with multiple options and pathways, so that she might craft an “It’s a Mom Thing” experience that is the most compelling and appropriate for her particular group.

“It’s a Mom Thing” Enduring Understandings:

- Who I am as a person influences how I parent my Jewish teenage daughter
- My ability to reflect on my own life experiences helps me strengthen my relationship with my daughter
- Caring for my daughter necessitates caring for myself
- Jewish tradition and my Jewish community can help me navigate the joys and challenges of raising a teenage daughter

“It’s a Mom Thing” Essential Questions:

- What are my hopes and dreams for my teenage daughter?
- What challenges do I face as a mother of a teenage daughter?
- How do my own experiences influence my daughter’s emerging Jewish identity?
- How does my participation in this program strengthen my daughter’s Jewish identity and my own sense of Jewish communal belong?

Lesson One: “Giving Birth to Each Other”

Core Concepts:

- Mothers and daughters can instigate and aid the other’s figurative processes of birth, growth and renewal
- Both mothers and daughters grow and thrive when they are mutually supportive and present in each other’s lives

Essential Questions:

- How can I affect positive transformation and change in my daughter?
- How can my daughter and I help each other to grow into our best possible selves?

I. ANCHOR

Set Induction: Mothers and Daughters “Giving Birth” To One Another

(Prior to this session, ask each mother to bring to the session an artifact that depicts a formative way in which her mother helped her to grow and develop into who she is today).

1. Together, read the following excerpt from *The Memoirs of Glückel of Hameln*. Before reading, introduce: In 1691, at the age of 46, Glückel of Hameln began transcribing her experience as a woman in seventeenth century German-Jewish society. Her memoir, which describes her remarkable roles as mother of fourteen and co-administrator of her family’s economic affairs, provides a detailed illustration of her personal world and inner psyche. Towards the beginning of her chronicles, Glückel recounts birthing her first child alongside her mother, who was also in labor:

“Immediately on our arrival in Hamburg, I became with child, and my mother along with me. In good time the Lord graciously delivered me of a young daughter. I was still a mere girl, and unused as I was to bearing children, it naturally went hard with me; yet I rejoiced mightly that the Most High had bestowed on me a healthy, lovely baby. My good mother had reckoned out her time for the same day. However, she had great joy in my being brought to bed first, so she could help me a little, young girl that I was. Eight days later my mother likewise brought forth a young daughter in childbirth. So there was neither envy nor reproach between us, and we lay next to each other in the same room. But, Lord, we had no peace, for the people that came running in to see the marvel, a mother and daughter together in childbed.”¹⁵²

Discuss:

- What are all the “births” – literal and metaphoric – that are taking place in this scene?

¹⁵² *The Memoirs of Glückel of Hameln*, Marvin Lowenthal, transl, New York: Schocken Books, 1977), 36.

- When viewed metaphorically, what does this scene suggest about the variety of ways that “birth” can transpire between a mother and a daughter?
- How has your mother “birthed” you, in ways that are more than just biological? Ask each participant to share the artifact that she brought with her, and explain how it depicts a formative way in which her mother helped her to grow and develop into who she is today.
- Once each participant has shared, discuss the range, and the similarities and differences, between participants’ stories. What do all of our stories suggest about the roles that mothers can play in their daughters’ lives?

II. ADD: Biblical Voices: The Power of a Mother’s Presence

(Chose one of following biblical texts to discuss: Rebecca’s Courtship, “The Mother’s House” in Song of Songs, or excerpts from the Book of Ruth. Additionally, based on time, interest and appropriateness, discuss either the rape of Dinah text, and/or the rape of Tamar).

1. Rebecca’s Courtship (Genesis 24:15-68)

Read the following text together. Before reading, introduce: the following excerpts portray the events leading up to Rebekah’s marriage to Isaac. Prior to the scene we are about to read, Abraham employs his servant on a mission to find a wife for his son, Isaac, and the servant subsequently prays for a successful mission. Finding himself by a spring, he determines that whichever woman offers water to him and his camels will be a suitable wife Isaac, and, thus, will demonstrate that his mission has been successful and that God has “dealt kindly” with him.

And it came to pass, before he (the servant) had finished speaking (to Adonai) that Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, with her pitcher upon her shoulder. And the maiden was very beautiful, a virgin, whom no man had known. She went down to the spring, filled up her jar, and came up. The servant ran toward her and said, “Please, let me sip a little water from your jar.” “Drink, my lord,” she said, and she quickly lowered her jar upon her hand and let him drink. When she had let him drink his fill, she said, “I will also draw water for your camels, until they finish drinking.” Quickly emptying her jar into the trough, she ran back to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels. The man, meanwhile, stood gazing at her, silently wondering if Adonai had made his errand successful for not. When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold nose-ring, weighing a half-shekel, and two gold bands for her arms, ten shekels in weight. “Pray, tell me,” he said, “whose daughter are you? Is there room in your father’s house for us to spend the night? She replied, “I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor.” And she went on, “There is plenty of straw and feed at home, and also room to spend the night.” The man bowed low in homage to Adonai and said, “Blessed be Adonai, the God of my master Abraham, who had not withheld his steadfast faithfulness from my master. For I have been guided on my errand by Adonai, to the house of my master’s kinsmen.” The maiden ran and told all this to her mother’s household...

...Then Laban (Rebekah's uncle) and Bethuel answered, "The matter is decreed by Adonai, we cannot speak to you bad or good. Here is Rebekah before you, take her and go, and let her be a wife to your master's son, as Adonai has spoken. When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed low to the ground before Adonai. The servant brought out objects of silver and gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah; and he gave presents to her brother and her mother. Then he and the men with him ate and drank, and they spent the night. When they arose the next morning, he said, "Give me leave to go to my master." But her brother and her mother said, "Let the maiden remain with us some ten days; then you may go." He said to them, "Do not delay me, now that Adonai has made my errand successful. Give me leave that I may go to my master." And they said, "Let us call the girl and ask for her reply." They called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" And she said, "I will." So they sent off their sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham's servant and his men. And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, "O sister! May you grow into thousands of myriads; May your offspring seize the gates of their foes." Then Rebekah and her maids arose, mounted the camels, and followed the man. So the servant took Rebekah and went his way.

Isaac had just come back from the vicinity of Beer-lahai-roi, for he was settled in the region of the Negev. And Isaac went out walking in the field toward evening, and, looking up, he saw camels approaching. Raising her eyes, Rebekah saw Isaac. She alighted from the camel and said to the servant, "Who is that man walking in the field toward us?" And the servant said, "That is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself. The servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he took Rebekah as his wife. Isaac loved her, and thus found comfort after his mother's death.

Discuss:

- What role does Rebekah's mother play in Rebekah's courtship and marriage to Isaac?
- How can we tell that Rebekah's mother is a formative figure for her?
- In what ways does her mother enable Rebekah's growth and development?
- What does this story teach us about the power of a mother's presence in her daughter's life?
- What elements of this story do you recognize in your own relationship with your mother and/or your daughter?

2. Song of Songs: The Mother's House

Read the following excerpts and their associated commentaries together. Before reading, provide the following introduction: The Song of Songs, also called the "Song of Solomon," is a composition of love poems that traces the passionate affairs of a young woman and her lover. Though the compilation is often read allegorically as the love between God and Israel, a more literal read renders it "one of the most positive representations of young womanhood in the Hebrew Bible," and a "celebration of young love." It also serves as a powerful example of positive mother-daughter kinship. Twice within the Song of Songs narrative, the assertive female narrator expresses her desire to

bring her lover to her “mother’s house,” suggesting the close and formative relationship between the young woman and her mother:

*Upon my couch at night
I sought the one I love –
I sought, but found him not.
I must rise and roam the town,
Through the streets and through the squares;
I must seek the one I love.
I sought but found him not.
I met the watchmen
Who patrol the town.
“Have you seen the one I love?”
Scarcely had I passed them,
when I found the one I love.
I held him and would not let him go,
until I brought him into my mother’s house,
and into the chamber of her that conceived me (Song of Songs 3:1-4)*

*“Scarcely had I passed them, when I found the one I love;” this refers to Moses.
“I held him and would not let him go, until I brought him into my mother’s house;” this refers to Sinai.
“And into the chamber of her that conceived me;” this refers to the Tent of Meeting. (Song of Songs Rabbah, 3:4)*

*If only it could be as with a brother,
As if you had nursed at my mother’s breast:
Then I could kiss you
When I met you in the street,
And no one would despise me.
I would lead you, I would bring you
To the house of my mother,
Of her who taught me –
I would let you drink of the spiced wine,
Of my pomegranate juice (Song of Songs 8:1-2)*

*“And bring you to the house of my mother:” This refers to Sinai.
Said Rabbi Berekhiah, “Then why call Sinai ‘the house of my mother?’ For from there the Israelites were transformed into a babe a day old” (Song of Songs Rabbah 8:2).*

Leilah Leah Bronner: “The daughter regards her mother’s house as a place where love can and does reside, and believes she is honoring that familial love by bringing her lover home.”¹⁵³

¹⁵³ Bronner, 71.

Robert Alter: “The daughter desires to take her lover to her mother’s house, ‘of her who taught me,’ an indication that her mother has instructed her in the art of love.”¹⁵⁴

Discuss:

- What role does the mother play in the narrator’s life? How can we tell that her mother is a formative figure for her?
- In what ways does her mother enable her growth and development?
- Why are “a mother’s house” and “Sinai” linked, in the midrashic imagination? Do you agree with this analogy? In what other ways are they worthy of association? (Note: might need to give an overview of the Mount Sinai narrative before posing this question)
- What does this story - and its associated commentary - teach us about the power of a mother’s presence in her daughter’s life?
- What elements of this story do you recognize in your own relationship with your mother and/or your daughter?

3. Ruth and Naomi (The Book of Ruth)

Read the following excerpts together. Before reading, provide a brief summary of the book of Ruth as a whole. Add: the Book of Ruth arguably contains the Bible’s most detailed and concrete example of a mother-daughter relationship, though it is one of non-biological origins. Leilah Leah Bronner asserts that it conveys the “strongest articulation of the love of a daughter for her mother and of a mother for her daughter that appears in the Bible.”¹⁵⁵ Through their love and commitment for one another, Ruth and Naomi emerge transformed by the book’s conclusion – and the following selections highlight they ways in which they enable each other’s growth and transformation. The following scene is from the beginning of the narrative, in which Naomi tries to convince her daughters-in-law to leave her, following the death of her sons:

But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Turn back, each of you to her mother’s house. May Adonai deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me! May the Lord grant that each of you find security in the house of a husband!” And she kissed them farewell. They broke into weeping and said to her, “No, we will return with you to your people.” But Naomi replied, “Turn back, my daughters! Why should you go with me? Have I any more sons in my body who might be husbands for you? Turn back, my daughters, for I am too old to be married. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I were married tonight and I also bore sons, should you wait for them to grow up? Should you, on heir account, debar yourselves from marriage? Oh, no, my daughters! My lot is far more bitter than yours, for the land of Adonai has struck out against me.” They broke into weeping again, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law farewell. But Ruth clung to her... “Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and

¹⁵⁴ Alter, 48

¹⁵⁵ Bronner, 70.

your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus and more may Adonai do to me if anything but death parts me from you.” When Naomi saw how determined she was to go with her, she ceased to argue with her; and the two went on until they reached Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole city buzzed with excitement over them. The women said, “Can this be Naomi?” “Do not call me Naomi,” she replied. Call me Mara, for Shaddai has made my lot very bitter. I went away full, and Adonai has brought me back empty.” Thus Naomi returned from the country of Moab; she returned with her daughter-in-law Ruth the Moabite (Ruth 1:8-21)

The Legends of the Jews: Ruth was determined to become a Jewess, and her decision could not be shaken by what Naomi, in compliance with the Jewish injunction, told her of the difficulties of the Jewish law....and when Naomi said: “We have one Torah, one law, one command; the eternal our God is one, there is none beside Him” Ruth answered, “Your people shall be my people, your God my God.”¹⁵⁶

“Naomi, her mother in law, said to her, “Daughter, I must seek a home for you, where you may be happy. Now there is our kinsman, Boaz, whose girls you were close to. He will be winnowing barely on the threshing floor tonight. So bathe, anoint yourself, (I will) dress up, and (I will) go down to the threshing floor. But do not disclose yourself to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he lies down, and go over and uncover his feet and lie down.” (Ruth 3:1-5)

“So Boaz married Ruth, she became his wife, and he cohabited with her. The Lord let her conceive, and she bore a son. And the townswomen said to Naomi, “Blessed be the Lord, who has not withheld a redeemer from you today!” May his name be perpetuated in Israel! He will renew your life and sustain your old age; for he is born of your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons. Naomi took the child and held it to her bosom. She became its foster mother, and the women neighbors gave him a name, saying, “A son is born to Naomi!” They named him Obed; he was the father of Jesse, father of David.” (Ruth 4:13-17)

Amy Kalmanofsky: Naomi’s acceptance enables Ruth to lose the attributes that defined her otherness...Ruth’s designation changes to reflect who she is, and how she is perceived. At the book’s start, she is “Ruth, the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, the one who returned with her from the fields of Moab.” At its conclusion, Ruth is no longer seen as the one who comes from the outside. Instead, she becomes the woman who enters – the one within.¹⁵⁷

Discuss:

- What roles do Ruth and Naomi play in each other’s lives?
- In what ways do they enable each other’s growth and development?

¹⁵⁶ Louis Ginzberg et al, *The Legends of the Jews*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998),

32.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

- What does this story teach us about the power of a mother's presence in her daughter's life, and vice versa?
- What elements of this story do you recognize in your own relationship with your mother/and or your daughter?

4. Counter-examples: Dinah (Genesis 34:1-2) and Tamar (2 Samuel)

Read together the account of Dinah's rape (Genesis 34:1-2) and/or rape of Tamar, daughter of King David (2 Samuel 13:1-22)

Before reading the account of Dinah's rape, provide the following information to contextualize: Jacob had twelve sons, with his wives Rachel and Leah, and their handmaidens, Bilhah and Zilpah. He also had a daughter, Dinah, born to Leah. Her birth and the following, brief mention of her rape, serve as the bible's only, brief description of her life:

"Now Dinah, the daughter whom Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daughters of the land. Shechem, son of Hamor the Hivite, chief of the country, saw her, took her, and lay with her by force. Being stringly drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and in love with the maiden, he spoke to the maiden tenderly. So Shechem said to his father, Hamor, get me this girl as a wife. Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah; but since his sons were in the field with his cattle, Jacob kept silent until they came home. Then Shechem's father Hamor came out to Jacob to speak to him..."¹⁵⁸

(Provide a brief summary of the subsequent violent events that Dinah's rape engenders, and/or read together the entire narrative, Genesis 34:1-32)

Discuss:

- Leilah Leah Bronner asserts that the story of Dinah is a tragic one, in part, because her mother is missing, declaring, "there is no voice of loving kindness, there is no refuge in the mother's house."¹⁵⁹ Why is it noteworthy that the formative figures in this narrative are all men?
- Where is Leah in this story? Of course, just because she is not written into the story, doesn't mean she wasn't there. If you were to "fill in the gaps," how would you write her into the narrative?
- In what ways do you agree that, in part, tragedy befalls daughters whose mother's are absent? In what ways does this notion resonate with your own experiences with your mother and/or your daughter?

Alternatively or in addition, read together the account of the rape of Tamar, daughter of King David (see 2 Samuel 13:1-22)

Discuss:

- Leilah Leah Bronner asserts that the story of Tamar is a tragic one, in part, because her mother is missing, declaring, "there is no voice of loving kindness,

¹⁵⁸ Genesis 34:1-2

¹⁵⁹ Bronner, 187.

there is no refuge in the mother's house."¹⁶⁰ Why is it noteworthy that the formative figures in this narrative are all men?

- Where is Tamar's mother in this story? Of course, just because she is not written into the story, doesn't mean she wasn't there. If you were to "fill in the gaps," how would you write her into the narrative?
- In what ways do you agree that, in part, tragedy befalls daughters whose mother's are absent? In what ways does this notion resonate with your own experiences with your mother and/or your daughter?

III. ADD: The Power of a Daughter's Presence

Based on time and interest, choose one of the following sources to read/watch and discuss: The short story "Apples from the Desert;" the poem "Happy Birthday" by Alicia Suskin Ostriker; or Episode 4 ("Moppa") of "Transparent," Season 1.

1. "Apples from the Desert," (1986) by Savyon Liebrecht

Read the story together. Prior to reading, introduce Liebrecht, an Israeli author, who's "intense, lyrical, and emotionally complex stories have made her a best-selling writer in her native Israel, and whose stories reveal the impact of larger social and political conflicts within the private worlds of home and family."¹⁶¹ "Apples from the Desert" is found in Liebrecht's collection of short stories, *Apples from the Desert*.¹⁶²

After reading, discuss:

- What role does Rifka play in her mother's life?
- In what ways does she enable her mother's growth and development?
- What does this story teach us about the power of a daughter's presence in her mother's life?
- What elements of this story do you recognize in your own relationship with your daughter? In what ways has she helped YOU to grow and transform, for the better?

2. "Happy Birthday" by Alicia Suskin Ostriker

Together, read the following poem by twenty-first century feminist poet and author, Alicia Suskin Ostriker:

"Happy Birthday"

*Happy Birthday, a gray day like the first one –
You were so brave to enter our world
With its dirty rain, its look of a sepia photograph.*

¹⁶⁰ Bronner, 187.

¹⁶¹ "Apples from the Desert," *The Feminist Press*. Web 20 Jan. 2016.

<http://www.feministpress.org/books/savyon-liebrecht/apples-desert>

¹⁶² Savyon Liebrecht, *Apples from the Desert*, Transl. Marganit Weinberger-Rotman, et. al (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1992), 65-72.

*I call you at college, early and drowsy.
I hear you describe the party last night,
How you danced, how dancing is one of the things*

*You love in your life, like thinking hard. You are
All right, then, and on the telephone
Hearing the high snaredrum of your voice*

*I can feel you about to be born, I can feel
The barriers yield as you slide
Along the corrugated glitter,*

*Like some terrible rubbery ocean built of blood
That parts at a touch, leaving a path.*

*“What should I do,” you wonder, “after I graduate?”
Now I imagine you curled under your quilt
As a cold light begins to enter
Like a knife in a pirate’s teeth. Dear salt flesh,*

*I am ready if you are, I am afraid if you are.
I still ask: will this hurt, will it give pleasure,
Will I survive it? On your mark, get set,*

*We give birth to each other. Welcome. Welcome.*¹⁶³

- How is Ostriker affected by her daughter’s entrance into college and young adulthood? In what ways are they having parallel experiences?
- How does this poem convey the ways in which mothers and daughters continue to “give birth” to each other over time?
- In what ways do the ideas described in this poem resonate with your own experiences with your daughter, and the ways in which she has helped you – either intentionally or inadvertently – to grow, expand, and/or transform?

3. “Transparent”

Watch Episode 4 (“Moppa”) of “Transparent,” Season 1. Before viewing “Transparent,” provide the following information: the hit Amazon series “Transparent” features an upper middle class, Los Angeles Jewish family struggling to find stasis following the father’s revelation of his transition from Mort to Maura. The following episode portrays the dynamics between Maura and her daughters following her “coming out” to them. Note: we are regarding Mort/Maura as a “mother” in this series – in recognition of the presence and increasing societal acceptance of the variety of non-traditional, non-normative “mothers” in our midst.

¹⁶³ Alicia Suskin Ostriker, “Happy Birthday,” *Her Face in the Mirror: Jewish Women on Mothers and Daughters*, Faye Moskowitz, ed. (Boston: Beacon, 1994), 14.

Discuss:

- What is especially powerful or significant about Maura's trip to the mall with her daughters, and the scene around the Shabbat table at the end of the episode? What impact do these moments have upon Maura?
- In these scenes, how do Maura's daughters help her to grow into, and express, her female identity?
- In what ways has your daughter helped you to express an aspect of yourself that you have been inclined to hide, enabling you to express your fullest and truest self?

IV. APPLY: How can we "birth" our daughters into their best possible selves?

Choose to read the excerpt from the essay, "Mother, I Hardly Knew You" (1992) by feminist author and activist Letty Cotin Pogrebin, or view the scene, from "Kissing Jessica Stein," before moving to the third part of the section, "Letters to our Daughters"

1. Excerpt from "Mother I Hardly Knew You," by Letty Cotin Pogrebin:

*Mothers seem to be able to come up with these unexpected revelations about one's child self, or to suddenly recollect a turning point experience that explains one's adult obsession. Mothers save precious pre-school artifacts in shoe-boxes at the top of the closet. Mothers remember a child's first words, and quote them in tones usually reserved for Byron. Only a mother remembers her children's landmarks as her own. Therefore, losing a mother when you are still a child cuts short your hindsight and historiography. Without my mother's testimony, I know myself almost exclusively through myself...without my mother, I have almost no possibility of being surprised by my own history...*¹⁶⁴

Discuss:

- What is the important role that mothers play in their daughter's lives, according to this excerpt?
- What aspects of your daughter's "history" have you collected over the years, and how have you archived this knowledge?
- How might you use your historical knowledge of your daughter's life to help her grow, develop, and expand her understanding about who she is?

2. Kissing Jessica Stein, Fox Searchlight (2001)

Together, watch Chapter 21 ("Heartbreak") at 1:10:45 from the film "Kissing Jessica Stein." Before viewing, introduce the film and scene: "Jessica Stein is a sensitive but neurotic New York journalist who also happens to be at the end of her emotional rope. Her brother's engaged, her best friend's pregnant, she hasn't dated in a year, and she can't sleep. After an optimistic but nightmarish dating spree, she happens upon an intriguing personal ad...whose only drawback is that it's in the "women seeking

¹⁶⁴ Letty Cotin Pogrebin, "Mother, I Hardly Knew You," *Her Face in the Mirror: Jewish Women on Mothers and Daughters*, Faye Moskowitz, ed. (Boston: Beacon, 1994), 221-226.

women” section. On a daring whim, she decides to answer it, and meets funky downtown hipster Helen Cooper. A lively evening of banter, connection and heated debate culminates in a kiss that confounds and intrigues even the reluctant Jessica. *Kissing Jessica Stein* is a modern romantic comedy that breaks all the rules, blurring the lines between friendship and romantic love, and finding the funny, surprising and ultimately poignant overlap between the two.” For most of the film, Jessica performs great lengths to hide her relationship with Helen from her family, and, in particular, her overbearing “stereotypical” Jewish mother. In the following scene, Jessica and her mother share a rare, tender moment that showcases the important role Jessica’s mother plays in her daughter’s life, and her mother’s knowledge of her relationship:

Jessica: Sometimes I think I’m gonna be alone forever.

Mother: Sometimes I worry for you.

Jessica: I worry for me too.

Mother: Sweetheart, I will never forget when you were in the fifth grade and you were so excited when you got the lead in the play, “Really Rosie.” You remember that? And you came back on the very first day of rehearsal and you said, “Mommy, I’m not gonna do it.” Just like that. And I turned to you and I said, “Why?” And you said, “Because my co-star isn’t good enough. And if my co-star isn’t good enough, then the play won’t be good enough. And I don’t want to be part of any play that isn’t good enough.” And I thought to myself, “Oy. This child will suffer. How this child will suffer.” And then they gave it to the girl with glasses.

Jessica: Tess Greenblatt, she was terrible.

Mother: Right! And you would have been great! And you didn’t get to do it...we had to sit there and watch terrible Tess do it with that guy, who was actually quite excellent wasn’t he.

Jessica: He was, he was quite good.

Mother: I always think that you would have been happier doing that play, even if it was just ok. Even if it was great, just not the best ever. And maybe, it would have been the best ever...you never know. Jessie, I think she’s a very nice girl.¹⁶⁵

Discuss:

- In this scene, how does Jessica’s mother use her historical knowledge of Jessica’s life to help Jessica gain self-awareness and self-understanding?
- What aspects of your daughter’s “history” have you collected over the years, and how have you archived this knowledge?
- How might you use your historical knowledge of your daughter’s life to help her grow, develop, and expand her understanding about who she is?

3. Letters to our Daughters

Write a letter to your daughter, detailing an important moment or time in her life (perhaps one that she might not remember or might have forgotten, but one that you have

¹⁶⁵ *Kissing Jessica Stein*, Dir. Charles Herman-Wurmfeld, Perf. Jennifer Westfeldt, Heather Juergensen, Fox Searchlight, 2001, Chapter 21: “Heartache.”

remembered), and explain its importance, due to the way in which it exemplifies an important strength or aspect of her identity. Encourage mothers to save their letters and give them to their daughters at a time in which they are struggling with “big” decisions, milestones, and/or questions of identity (i.e. before leaving for college, before getting married, before having children, etc), so that the letters provide daughters with comfort, personal insight, and/or strength when they might need it most.

V. AWAY: Closing Circle

Ask participants to stand and form a circle. Give each participant a taper candle or a tea light candle. Ask participants to imagine the following: If your daughter were asked to share an artifact depicting a formative way in which YOU helped her to grow and develop into who she is today, what artifact would you hope she would chose, and why? Ask one participant to begin by lighting her candle and sharing her answer. After she has shared, she should use her lit candle to light the next participant’s candle, who will then share her response to the prompt, and so on. Once all participants have shared, wish each other a “hodesh tov” (a good month) and blow out the candles together.

Lesson Two: “Like Mother, Like Daughter”

Core Concepts:

- Mothers and daughters can have a complex impact upon each other’s lives and identities, by way of the unique closeness and likeness they are capable of sharing
- Daughters benefit when mothers explore and consider the traits and behaviors that they embody and transmit (either consciously or unconsciously) to their daughters.

Essential Questions:

- How do influence my daughter - and how am I influenced by her - for better and for worse?
- How can the closeness and likeness my daughter and I share be utilized to help us both become our best and healthiest selves?

I. ANCHOR

Our Resemblance to our Mothers: Affinity Mapping¹⁶⁶

1. Hand out to every participant a “block” of post-it notes (perhaps 5-10 maximum). Pose the following question to participants: “How are you and your mother alike, and what effect has it had on your life, and/or on hers?” Request that participants write one idea in response per post-it note. Instruct them to work silently on their own.
2. Depending on group size, divide into small groups of 3-4. Or, remain as one group. In small groups, working in silence, put all their post-it notes on the chart paper.
3. Reminding participants to remain silent, have them organize ideas by “natural” categories. Directions might sound like this: “Which ideas go together? As long as you do not talk, feel free to move any post-it note to any place. Move yours, and those of others, and feel free to do this. Do not be offended if someone moves yours to a place that you think it does not belong, just move it to where you think it does belong — but do this all in silence.”
4. Once groups have settled on categories, have them place post-it notes on chart paper in neat columns. At this point, ask them to converse about the categories and come up with a name for each one.
5. If working in small sub-groups, have the groups pick a “spokesperson” to report their ideas to the larger group.
6. Discuss:
 - What themes or ideas emerged about mother-daughter likeness? Were there any

¹⁶⁶ Harmony Education Center, “Affinity Mapping,” web 11 Jan. 2016.
http://www.nsrfharmony.org/system/files/protocols/consultancy_0.pdf

- surprises?
- What dimensions are missing from our “maps”? Again, any surprises?
- How did this expand your knowledge or your perception of what “like mother, like daughter” means, entails, or engenders?
- What now comes to mind for you, when you hear the term “like mother, like daughter?”

Biblical and Rabbinic Voices: The Spectrum of Mother-Daughter Likeness

Introduce/Explain: just as we came up with a variety of images and outcomes of mother-daughter likeness vis a vis our relationships with our own mothers so, too, does the bible and associated rabbinic commentaries paint a multi-faceted picture of this idea

1. Yocheved, Miriam, and Achsah (Exodus 1:15, Judges 1:12)

(Read the following texts together. Before reading, provide information to contextualize: The following excerpt is from the beginning of the book of Exodus, with its associated commentary from the Midrash, Exodus Rabbah. In fear of the increasing multitude of Hebrew slaves, Pharaoh orders to the Hebrew midwives to throw every boy born to a Hebrew slave. The following excerpt portrays the midwives’ response to this decree)

“The Egyptians ruthlessly imposed upon the Israelites the various labors that they made them perform...The king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Pu’ah, saying: “When you deliver the Hebrew women, look at the birthstool – if it is a boy, kill him, if it is a girl, let her live.” The midwives, fearing God, did not do as the king of Egypt had told them; they let the boys live.” (Exodus 1:13-17)

“The Hebrew midwives were Yocheved and [her daughter] Miriam. Miriam, who was only five years old then, went with Yocheved to assist her. She was quick to honor her mother and serve God... Their midwifery is embodied in their names: Shiphrah would cleanse (meshaperet) the newborn so it would be beautiful. Puah’s role has lent itself to several interpretations. According to one opinion, she would bleat (poah) like a sheep to the woman in labor, which acted as a stimulus and aided the woman to deliver. Another view has her squirting (nofat) wine into the baby’s mouth, or she would cause the newborn to cry out (li-f’ot) when it was thought to be stillborn.”¹⁶⁷

“She (Pu’ah) presented her face before Pharaoh, stuck up her nose at him, and said, “Woe is to the man (i.e., Pharaoh) when God punishes him!” Pharaoh was filled with wrath and would have killed her, but Yocheved appeased him, saying, “Will you pay attention to her? She is only a child, she has no understanding.”¹⁶⁸

Discuss:

- How are Yocheved and Miriam alike, according to these texts?

¹⁶⁷ Exodus Rabbah 1:13, Eccl. Rabbah 7:3, Midrash Samuel 23:2

¹⁶⁸ Exodus Rabbah 1:13

- What are the outcomes of their likeness? How does it effect both mother and daughter?
- How does Yocheved and Miriam's relationship resonate, or not, with your relationship with your mother, and/or your daughter?

2. Leah and Dinah (Genesis 34:1)

(Read the following texts together. Before reading, provide the following information to contextualize: Jacob had twelve sons, with his wives Rachel and Leah, and their handmaidens, Bilhah and Zilpah. He also had a daughter, Dinah, born to Leah. Her birth and the following, brief mention of her rape, serve as the bible's only descriptions of her life. The rabbinic commentaries provide some more insight on the events leading up to her rape).

*"Now Dinah, the daughter whom Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daughters of the land. Shechem, son of Hamor the Hivite, chief of the country, saw her, took her, and lay with her by force."*¹⁶⁹

*Rashi: "Because of her going out, Dinah was called the daughter of Leah, since she (Dinah), too, was in the habit of going out, as it is said, "and Leah came forth toward him." And so concerning her, they devise the proverb, Like Mother, Like Daughter."*¹⁷⁰

*Genesis Rabbah: "Kahana says: According to the garden so is its gardener...Resh Lakish exclaimed, What is really the meaning of this verse?' Kahana replied, 'A cow does not gore herself unless her calf kicks; a woman is not immoral until her daughter is immoral.' If so, Resh Lakish replied, then our mother Leah was a harlot! Even so, Kahana replied, because it says, "And Leah went out to meet him" which means that she went out to meet him adorned like a harlot; therefore, "and Dinah the daughter of Leah went out."*¹⁷¹

Discuss:

- In the bible, children are usually labeled according to the paternal, rather than the maternal, line. How do the commentaries justify Dinah's designation as "daughter of Leah?"
- How are Leah and Dinah alike, according to the commentaries?
- According to the commentaries, how was their likeness destructive for *both* mother and daughter? How did Leah contribute to Dinah's downfall, and how did Dinah's behavior impact her mother's "image?"
- The notion that Leah caused her daughter's rape is, of course, highly problematic and disturbing. But, we might find resonate with the idea of a daughter's ability to tarnish her mother's image (i.e. "a woman is not immoral until her daughter is

¹⁶⁹ Genesis 34:1-2

¹⁷⁰ Rashi on Genesis 34:1

¹⁷¹ Genesis Rabbah 80:1

immoral.”) What are your thoughts on this notion? In what ways might you relate to this dynamic, vis a vis your relationship with your daughter?

3. Ruth and Naomi (The Book of Ruth)

Read the following excerpts together. Before reading, provide a brief summary of the book of Ruth as a whole. Add: the following passage highlight’s Naomi’s role in Ruth’s seduction, and ultimate marriage, to Boaz, a kinsman who Ruth meets while gleaning barely in the fields. As the commentary will indicate, the Hebrew verbs blur the lines between Ruth and Naomi’s identities vis a vis their relations with Boaz, suggesting that it is Naomi who will seduce Boaz, not Ruth.

“Naomi, her mother in law, said to her, “Daughter, I must seek a home for you, where you may be happy. Now there is our kinsman, Boaz, whose girls you were close to. He will be winnowing barely on the threshing floor tonight. So bathe, anoint yourself, (I will) dress up, and (I will) go down to the threshing floor. But do not disclose yourself to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he lies down, and go over and uncover his feet and lie down.” (Ruth 3:1-5)

Amy Kalmanofsky: “When Boaz sleeps with Ruth, he effectively redeems both women...Ruth and Naomi share one patriarch who will provide them with land, food, and support in their old age. They also share one identity. The confusion preserved in Naomi’s command to Ruth to seduce Boaz conveys this. When Ruth goes down to the threshing floor, it is as if Naomi was there; it is as if Naomi and Ruth both marry Boaz.”

“So Boaz married Ruth, she became his wife, and he cohabited with her. The Lord let her conceive, and she bore a son. And the townswomen said to Naomi, “Blessed be the Lord, who has not withheld a redeemer from you today!” May his name be perpetuated in Israel! He will renew your life and sustain your old age; for he is born of your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons. Naomi took the child and held it to her bosom. She became its foster mother, and the women neighbors gave him a name, saying, “A son is born to Naomi!” They named him Obed; he was the father of Jesse, father of David.” (Ruth 4:13-17)

Amy Kalmanofsky: “With the birth of Ruth’s child...the women noticeably focus on Naomi in their blessing. Everything happens for Naomi’s benefit. God does not deny her a redeemer. The child sustains Naomi in her old age. Naomi’s daughter-in-law loves and is good to her. Their focus on Naomi effaces Ruth from the narrative as a distinct character, erasing Ruth’s identity.”¹⁷²

Discuss:

- In what ways do Ruth and Naomi become “like one,” according to the text and its commentary?
- How is this “oneness” helpful and/or harmful for both mother and daughter?

¹⁷² Ibid, 161.

- What does this text offer about the ways in which mother-daughter likeness can be potentially complicated or problematic for both mother and daughter?
- What elements of Ruth and Naomi's relationship do you see in your relationship with your mother and/or your daughter? What lessons or messages does it engender for you about how you impact your daughter, consciously or not?

II. ADD: The Impact on our Daughters

The following three texts offer specific examples and ideas regarding the ways in which mother/daughter closeness and resemblance effects a daughter, in particular.

1. Bread Givers (1925) Anzia Yezierska

Read the following excerpt together. Before reading, provide an overview of the novel and it's relevance to this discussion: *Bread Givers* portrays the life of a Jewish immigrant family living in New York City in the 1920's, and their economic and financial hardships, captures the ways in which systemic, patriarchal norms and values, common to the immigrant experience, were transmitted from mother to daughter. The story's young protagonist and narrator, Sara Smolinsky, inherits her mother's zeal and assertiveness - through which she is able to replace the traditional expectations of an immigrant daughter with an education and a career - but also her mother's internalized subordination, so that neither mother nor daughter truly break free from the patriarchal bounds of which they are a part. Throughout the novel, Sara's father tyrannizes, insults, and ridicules her mother, constantly reminding her of her subordinate role. Her mother's adoring idealization of her father, almost akin to worship, only buttresses the patriarchal system that her father demands. Witnessing these dynamics between her parents, Sara learns and internalizes the lesser role of women within her patriarchal religious framework.

"All faces turned to Father. Eyes widened, necks stretched, ears strained not to miss a word. The meal was forgotten as he began his story:

"Rabbi Chanina Ben Dosa was a starving, poor man who had to live on next to nothing. Once, his wife complained: 'We're so good, so pious, you gave up nights and days in the study of the Holy Torah. Then why don't God provide for you at least enough to eat?... 'Riches you want?!' Said Rabbi Chanina Ben Dosa. 'All right, woman, You shall have your wish.' ... That very evening he went out into the fields to pray. Soon the heavens opened, and a Hand reached down to him and gave him a big chunk of gold. He brought it to his wife, and said: 'Go buy with this all the luxuries of the earth.' ... She was so happy, as she began planning all she would buy the next day. Then she fell asleep. And in her dream, she saw herself and her husband sitting with all the saints in Heaven. Each couple had a golden table between themselves. When the Good Angel put down their their wine, their table shook so that half of it was spilled. Then she noticed that their table had a leg missing, and that is why it was so shaky. And the Good Angel explained to her that the chunk of gold that her husband had given her the night before was the missing leg of their table. As soon as she woke up, she begged her husband to pray to God to take back the gold he had given them... 'I'll be happy

and thankful to live in poverty, as long as I know that our reward will be complete in Heaven.”

Mother licked up Father’s every little word, like honey. Her eyes followed his shining eyes as he talked. “Nu, Shenah?” He wagged his head. “Do you want gold on earth, or wine in Heaven?” “I’m only a sinful woman,” Mother breathed, gazing up at him. Her fingers stole a touch of his hand as if he were the king of the world. “God be praised for the little we have. I’m willing to give up all my earthly needs for the wine of Heaven with you. But Moisheh” – she nudged him by the sleeve – “God gave us children. They have a life to live yet, here, on this earth. Girls have to get married. People point their fingers on me – a daughter, twenty-five years already, and not married yet. And no dowry to help her get married.” “Woman, stay in your place!” His strong hand pushed her away from him. “You’re smart enough to bargain with the fish peddler. But I’m the head of this family. I give my daughters brains enough to marry when their time comes, without the worry of a dowry.” (Bread Givers, pages 11-13)

“Of course, we all knew that if God had given Mother a son, Father would have permitted a man child to share with him his best room in the house. A boy could say prayers after his father’s death – that kept the father’s soul alive for ever. Always Father was throwing up to Mother that she had borne him no son to be an honour to his days and to say prayers for him when he died. The prayers of his daughters didn’t count because God didn’t listen to women. Heaven and the next world were only for men. Women could get into Heaven because they were wives and daughters of men. Women had no brains for the study of God’s Torah, but they could be the servants of men who studied the Torah. Only if they cooked for the men, and washed for the men, and didn’t nag or curse the men out of their homes; only if they let the men study the Torah in peace, then, maybe, they could push themselves into Heaven with the men, to wait on them there. And so, since men were the only people who counted with God, Father not only had the best room for himself, for his study and prayers, but also the best eating in the house. The fat from the soup and the top from the milk always went to him.” (Bread Givers, pages 9-10)

Discuss:

- What are the values – Jewish and otherwise – that are expressed and upheld in this family?
- What role does Mother play in supporting these values and transmitting them to her daughter?
- What are the problematic, patriarchal values in our own time that are potentially harmful for women?
- As mothers, how are we responsible – consciously or not – for internalizing and embodying these values, and transmitting them to our daughters? In what ways can we see in our daughters’ behaviors, indications that they have internalized a “lesser” role vis a vis men? In what ways can we ascribe our own behaviors to this internalization?

- In light of the patriarchal world in which we live, how might we embody and transmit to our daughters norms and ideas about what it means to be a woman that are healthy and positive? (Can be used to segue into “APPY” section).

2. Poetry by Marge Piercy: “Putting the Good Things Away”/“My Mother’s Body” (1985)

Read the following excerpts from Marge Piercy’s poems. Before reading, provide the following information: Marge Piercy (b. 1936), an American born novelist, poet and social activist, whose poetry on liturgical and holiday themes has enriched the Jewish literary canon, offers perspectives and insights on her own relationship with her mother that deepen this discussion on mothers and daughters. Notably, by exposing the ways in which she and her mother have united in body and soul, her poetic reflections suggest that mother-daughter closeness can transcend the physical and existential bounds of time and space, thereby intensifying the complicated and problematic consequences of mothers and daughters existing in close tandem with one another.

“Putting the Good Things Away”

*The anger turned inward, the anger
turned inward, where
could it go except to make pain?
It flowed into me with her milk.*

*Her anger annealed me.
I was dipped into the cauldron
of boiling rage and rose
a warrior and a witch*

*but still vulnerable
there where she held me.
She could always wound me
for she knew the secret places.*

*She could always touch me
for she knew the pressure
points of pleasure and pain.
Our minds were woven together.¹⁷³*

“My Mother’s Body”

*...then hawk-faced pain seized you
threw you so you fell with a sharp*

¹⁷³ Marge Piercy, “Putting the Good Things Away” in *My Mother’s Body*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 20-22.

*cry, a knife tearing a bolt of silk.
My father heard the crash but paid
no mind, napping after lunch,*

*Yet fifteen hundred miles north
I heard and dropped a dish.
Your pain sunk talons in my skull
and crouched there cawing, heavy
as a great vessel filled with water,*

*oil or blood, till suddenly next day
the weight lifted and I knew your mind
had guttered out like the Chanukah
candles that burn so fast, weeping
veils of wax down the chanukiyot...*

*Pelicans with pregnant pouches
flapped overhead like pterodactyls.
In my mind I felt you die.
First the pain lifted and then
you flickered and went out...*

*...My mother is my mirror and I am hers.
What do we see? Our face grown young again,
Our breasts grown firm, legs lean and elegant*

*Our arms quivering with fat, eyes
set in the bark of wrinkles, hands puffy,
our belly seamed with childbearing*

*Give me your dress so I can try it on.
Oh it will not fit you, Mother, you are too fat.
I will not fit you, Mother.*

*I will not be the bride you can dress,
The obedient dutiful daughter you would chew,
A dog's leather bone to sharpen your teeth.*

*You strike me sometimes just to hear the sound.
Loneliness turns your fingers into hooks
barbed and drawing blood with their caress.*

*My twin sister, my lost love,
I carry you in me like an embryo*

*As you once carried me...*¹⁷⁴

Discuss:

- How are mother and daughter alike/intertwined in these texts?
- What impact does this closeness have upon the daughter?
- In what ways do you see elements of your own relationship with your daughter (or mother?) depicted in these texts?
- In what ways are you and your daughter united in “body and soul,” and what effect has this unification had on you and/or her?

3. “Transparent” (2014)

Together, view Episode 8 (“Best New Girl”) of “Transparent” Season 1 (watch as much of the episode as time permits, but at minimum, the beginning of the episode to the opening credits, which happen a few minutes into the show). Before watching, provide the following information: The hit Amazon series “Transparent” features an upper middle class, Los Angeles Jewish family struggling to find stasis following the father’s revelation of his transition from Mort to Maura. In this episode, consisting mostly of flashbacks, Maura (then “Mort”) lies to his wife about a business trip so that he can attend a transgender retreat with a friend. In a previous episode, we learn that Mort permits his daughter, Ali, to cancel her Bat Mitzvah, scheduled for the same weekend, so that he can attend the retreat. The series, and this episode, in particular, chronicles the deceptive, dangerous behaviors that begin among the mothers and trickles down the family system. Note: we are regarding Mort/Maura as a “mother” in this series – in recognition of the presence and increasing societal acceptance of the variety of non-traditional, non-normative “mothers” in our midst. Though this episode portrays Maura before her “official” transition, widely accepted notions of LGBTQ identities as innate, rather than elective, justify a consideration of Mort/Maura as a “mother,” regardless of the moment at which her “transition” becomes known to herself and to others.

Discuss:

- What is deceptive and/or risky about the behaviors of parents and children in this episode? How does deception and risk taking play out in this family?
- How do the behaviors of the Pfefferman children reflect those of their parents?
- How are deceptive, dangerous behaviors passed from mothers to daughters (and to a son, too, in this case)?
- What does this familial portrait suggest about the ways in which norms, values and behaviors are sustained and passed from generation to generation?
- In what ways have risky, deceptive values and behaviors been passed down from mother to daughter in your own family? Though it might entail some significant soul searching, how might you see elements of your own (past or present) risky choices within your daughter’s behaviors, and, if so, what does such insight reveal to you?

III. APPLY

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

1. Affinity Mapping, Round Two

Ask: How do the sources we consulted add new insights for us into the notion of mother/daughter likeness? How does it deepen/expand our understanding of the phenomenon, and its consequence? Ask participants to record, one idea per post-it, the ways in which mothers and daughters are alike, for better or for worse, based on the sources studied. Ask participants to place their post-its in the appropriate categories from the first affinity mapping activity, or, make a new category, if needed.

Discuss:

- What did you add, and why? How does it deepen/expand our understanding of the phenomenon, or the consequence, of mother/daughter likeness?
- If you made a new category, why?

2. Closing Journaling/Partner Conversations: Our Resemblances to Our Daughters

Ask each participant to think about her own relationship with her daughter, and to identify a post-it (does not have to be her own, but can be) that exemplifies/represents a way in which she and her daughter are alike. In journals or in pairs, ask participants to reflect on how they and their daughters might support, strengthen, or address, the dynamic described on the post-it, to help support one another's overall health and well-being.

For example:

Overall idea on post-it: "Mother/daughter shared determination and work-ethic."

In journals or with a partner, consider:

- What can I do, to help my daughter find a healthy work/life balance? What can she do, to help me do the same?

Encourage participants to have conversations with their daughters in the coming month about the ways in which they can help each other be their best and healthiest selves.

V. AWAY

Closing Circle: Ask participants to stand and form a circle. Give each participant a taper candle or a tea light candle. Ask one participant to begin by lighting her candle and sharing one insight from the previous journaling or chevruta activity. After she has shared, she should use her lit candle to light the next participant's candle, who will then share her response to the prompt, and so on. Once all participants have shared, wish each other a "hodesh tov" (a good month) and blow out the candles together.

Lesson Three: And Miriam Prophesized

Core Concepts:

- Through their unique, shared physiological and sociological experiences, mothers and daughters are capable of a specific closeness that enables profound knowledge and understanding about one another
- By intuiting and acknowledging their daughters' experiences, mothers can help their daughters feel known, understood, and liberated

Essential Questions:

- How can I communicate with my daughter in ways that are positive and healthy?
- How can I use my “motherly” wisdom and intuition to help my daughter feel known, understood and liberated, while remaining sensitive and aware of her needs and boundaries?

I. ANCHOR

Set Induction - Journaling Activity

In their journals, ask participants to reflect upon the following questions:

Think of a time that your mother, or your daughter, knew something about you that you didn't disclose to her verbally. How did she make her knowledge known? What effect did it have upon you?

Discuss:

- Ask a few volunteers to share their reflections.
- Even if the experience was a negative/challenging one, how has the experience influenced/inform the ways in which you communicate with your daughter?

II. ADD

The Power of Mother/Daughter Communication: “And Miriam Prophesized”

1. Read the following excerpts together:

(Before reading, introduce the scene and set the stage: The following excerpt is from the beginning of the book of Exodus. In fear of the increasing multitude of Hebrew slaves, Pharaoh orders that every boy born to a Hebrew slave woman be thrown into the Nile. The following excerpt portrays the birth of Moses and his mother's role in saving him from Pharaoh's decree)

“A certain man of the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw how beautiful he was, she hid him for three months. When she could hide him no longer, she got a wicker basket for him and caulked it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child into it and placed it among the reeds by the

bank of the Nile. And his sister stationed herself at a distance, to learn what would befall him.”¹⁷⁵

*“And his sister stood far off.” Why did Miriam stand afar off? R. Amram in the name of Rav said: Because Miriam prophesied, ‘My mother is destined to give birth to a son who will save Israel;’ Now that she was casting him into the river, her mother struck her on the head, saying: ‘My daughter, what about thy prophecy?’ This is why it says: “And his sister stood far off” – to know what would be the outcome of her prophecy.*¹⁷⁶

*“And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the river, and she saw the ark among the flags...And she opened it, and saw it, even the child; and behold, it was a boy that wept. And she had compassion on him, and said: This is one of the Hebrews’ children. Then Miriam said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and call a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you? And Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Go.” And the maiden went and called the child’s mother. And Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child away, and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages.” And the woman took the child and nursed him.”*¹⁷⁷

2. Discuss:

- How does Miriam’s ability to intuit her mother’s needs and her mother’s destiny facilitate outcomes that are redemptive and liberating?
- When has your daughter intuited and actualized YOUR needs, and what was that experience like for you? What lessons can you take away from the experience?
- In what ways are you able to intuit/foretell your daughters’ needs and your daughters’ future?
- In what ways does the mother-daughter relationship facilitate such knowledge and understanding about one another?

“The Knowledge Flowing Between Two Alike Bodies”

(Note: Depending on the make-up of the group, this discussion may not be appropriate. For instance, if mothers of adopted daughters are present, and if this is a sensitive issue for them, use the alternative discussion below instead)

1. Together, read the following excerpt from Adrienne Rich’s book Of Woman Born:

*Mothers and daughters have always exchanged with each other-beyond the verbally transmitted lore of female survival – a knowledge that is subliminal, subversive, preverbal: the knowledge flowing between two alike bodies, one of which has spent nine months inside the other.*¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Exodus 2:1-4

¹⁷⁶ Megillah 14a

¹⁷⁷ Exodus 2:5-9

¹⁷⁸ Rich, 220.

2. Discuss:

- What are your reactions to this image?
- How has the experience of conceiving, carrying, and birthing a female child enabled a sense of closeness between you and your daughter, at any point in her life?
- In what ways have you and your daughter, throughout her lifetime, shared knowledge that is “subliminal, subversive, preverbal?”
- How has this sharing of knowledge changed with her entry into adolescence? What are the challenges of trying to communicate with your adolescent daughter?
- How can we restore the sense of closeness and connectivity – and the sense of shared, subliminal knowledge - that you might have experienced with her when she was younger? (use this last question as a trigger/segue into the next section)

“Every Mother Contains Her Daughter, and Every Daughter, Her Mother”

1. Together, read the following quote:

“Every mother contains her daughter within herself, and every daughter, her mother”
- Carl Jung

2. Discuss:

- What are your reactions to this image?
- Whether or not your relationship with your daughter is biological, in what ways does (or has) your daughter exist “inside” of you, and you “inside” you daughter? How has this reality enabled a sense of closeness with her, at any point in her life?
- How has this closeness changed with her entry into adolescence?
- How can we restore the sense of closeness and connectivity that you might have experienced with her when she was younger?

III. APPLY

(Choose either “Passover Nights” or “Kissing Jessica Stein” to read/view and discuss)

1. Hava and Menuhah Shapiro and “Passover Nights”

Read the following excerpts from “Passover Nights:”

(Introduce the life and works of Hava Shapiro, and give a brief summary of “Passover Nights” to provide context for the following excerpts)

“On the eve of the actual holiday the doors and shutters of the special Passover kitchen, which is closed off all year and which no person enters, are opened. Now the servants, wearing their special uniforms, are busy in there with their work, their faces shining. The work is considerable and rushed. They take out the sideboard designated for Passover and bring it into the dining room, along with the dishes, the glasses, and the bottles. They pour wine into the latter and seal the openings with clean pieces of cloth. They bring the crate of shemurah matzah (matzah prepared according to exact legal specifications) into the dining room and crack open nuts for the charoset (fruit, nut and spice mixture used at a seder) and a special kind of grace, the Shechinah (Divine Presence) prevails over all.

*And here it is, the eve itself – Passover night! I also know “the questions” by heart, but no one pays any attention to me; the main attraction is my brother. Inside I am seething. I would have asked them even better than he did. But me they send to sit with the women. Only my mother sees my pain and consoles me with the wonderful caresses of her eyes.”*¹⁷⁹

*“All that reached my ears was the faint tumult of moving chairs, bottles and glasses that had been upended, the hurried sound of footsteps, some distant door that swung on its hinges and closed from despair. My heart beat frantically but there was no turning back. After all, the people in the house would not calm down until it was made known to them who had come knocking at the door. I called out my name in a whisper outside the door, but my muffled voice sounded to them in their agitated state, of course, like that of a disguised “Cossack.” Footsteps were heard. I raised my voice slightly. The door opened, and confused and terrified stares fastened upon me – in my confusion, I forgot that all my clothes would likely frighten my relatives. Only my mother recognized me immediately and charged toward me; then the others also recognized me. Joy and gladness, hugs and kisses.”*¹⁸⁰

2. Discuss:

- What does Menuhah Shapiro know about her daughter, that others don’t?
- How does Menuhah make her knowledge known - how does she make use of body language, spoken and unspoken language?
- What does she do that is effective? How does her knowledge, and the way she discloses it, offer her daughter a sense of safety, protection, and liberation?
- How have you, or are you, struggling to effectively convey/communicate to your daughter your knowledge, understanding, and/or support of her needs? (Pose this question as a segue into the “small group protocol” activity)

2. “Kissing Jessica Stein”

Watch Chapter 21 at 1:10:45 (“Heartache”) from “Kissing Jessica Stein.”

Before viewing, introduce the film and scene: “Jessica Stein is a sensitive but neurotic New York journalist who also happens to be at the end of her emotional rope. Her brother’s engaged, her best friend’s pregnant, she hasn’t dated in a year, and she can’t sleep. After an optimistic but nightmarish dating spree, she happens upon an intriguing personal ad...whose only drawback is that it’s in the “women seeking women” section. On a daring whim, she decides to answer it, and meets funky downtown hipster Helen Cooper. A lively evening of banter, connection and heated debate culminates in a kiss that confounds and intrigues even the reluctant Jessica. Kissing Jessica Stein is a modern romantic comedy that breaks all the rules, blurring the lines between friendship and romantic love, and finding the funny, surprising and ultimately poignant overlap between the two.” For most of the film, Jessica performs great lengths to hide her relationship with Helen from her family, and, in particular, her overbearing

¹⁷⁹ Balin and Zierler, 127.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 130.

“stereotypical” Jewish mother. In the following scene, Jessica and her mother share a rare, tender moment, that showcases the important role Jessica’s mother plays in her daughter’s life, and reveals to Jessica her mother’s knowledge of her relationship.

Jessica: Sometimes I think I’m gonna be alone forever.

Mother: Sometimes I worry for you.

Jessica: I worry for me too.

Mother: Sweetheart, I will never forget when you were in the fifth grade and you were so excited when you got the lead in the play, “Really Rosie.” You remember that? And you came back on the very first day of rehearsal and you said, “Mommy, I’m not gonna do it.” Just like that. And I turned to you and I said, “Why?” And you said, “Because my co-star isn’t good enough. And if my co-star isn’t good enough, then the play won’t be good enough. And I don’t want to be part of any play that isn’t good enough.” And I thought to myself, “Oy. This child will suffer. How this child will suffer.” And then they gave it to the girl with glasses.

Jessica: Tess Greenblatt, she was terrible.

Mother: Right! And you would have been great! And you didn’t get to do it...we had to sit there and watch terrible Tess do it with that guy, who was actually quite excellent wasn’t he.

Jessica: He was, he was quite good.

Mother: I always think that you would have been happier doing that play, even if it was just ok. Even if it was great, just not the best ever. And maybe, it would have been the best ever...you never know. Jessie, I think she’s a very nice girl.¹⁸¹

(Provide brief summary of movie and plot to contextualize scene before watching)

2. Discuss:

- What does Jessica’s mother know about her daughter, that others don’t?
- How does she make her knowledge known - how does she make use of body language, spoken and unspoken language?
- What does she do that is effective? How does her knowledge, and the way she discloses it, offer Jessica a sense of comfort, protection, and liberation?
- How have you, or are you, struggling to effectively convey/communicate to your daughter your knowledge, understanding, and/or support of her needs? (Pose this question as a segue into the “small group protocol” activity)

3. Small Group Protocols

In small groups, use the following protocol¹⁸² to allow participants (as many as time allows) to share their current mother/daughter communication dilemmas, and draw upon the wisdom of the group and the text examined to gain greater insight and clarity:

¹⁸¹ *Kissing Jessica Stein*, Dir. Charles Herman-Wurmfeld, Perf. Jennifer Westfeldt, Heather Juergensen, Fox Searchlight, 2001.

1. A participant gives an overview of a struggle she is having in communicating to her daughter her support, awareness, and understanding of her daughter's needs. (5-10 minutes)
 2. The group asks clarifying questions of the presenter — that is, questions that have brief, factual answers. (5 minutes)
 3. The group asks probing questions of the presenter. These questions should be worded so that they help the presenter clarify and expand his/her thinking about the dilemma presented to the group. The goal here is for the presenter to learn more about the question s/he framed or to do some analysis of the dilemma presented. The presenter may respond to the group's questions, but there is no discussion by the group of the presenter's responses. At the end of the ten minutes, the presenter re-states his/her question for the group. (10 minutes)
 4. The group talks with each other about the dilemma presented. The presenter doesn't speak during this discussion, but instead listens and takes notes. (15 minutes)
- Questions to frame the discussion:
- What did we hear?
 - What didn't we hear that might be relevant?
 - What assumptions seem to be operating?
 - What questions does the dilemma raise for us?
 - How does this situation relate – or not – to the one that we examined in the text/movie?
 - What lessons/ideas/values from the text/movie can be applied to this dilemma?
 - What might we do or try if faced with a similar dilemma? What have we done in similar situations that have worked?
5. The presenter reflects on what s/he heard and on what s/he is now thinking, sharing with the group anything that particularly resonated for her during any part of the discussion. (5 minutes)

IV. AWAY

Closing Circle: Ask participants to stand and form a circle. Give each participant a taper candle or a tea light candle. Ask one participant to begin by lighting her candle and sharing one way she might help her daughter feel known, understood, and/or liberated in the coming month. After she has shared, she should use her lit candle to light the next participant's candle, who will then share her response to the prompt, and so on. Once all participants have shared, wish each other a "hodesh tov" (a good month) and blow out the candles together.

¹⁸² Harmony Education Center, "Consultancy Protocol," web 11 Jan. 2016.
http://www.nsrfharmony.org/system/files/protocols/consultancy_0.pdf

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