Beyond a Patriarchal Interpretation

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BEYOND A PATRIARCHAL INTERPRETATION

by

Holly Nicole Schambar

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Senior Scholars' Program

COLBY COLLEGE
1989
Interreligious dialogue, as currently conducted, can best be described, metaphorically, as a dance--a dance choreographed and performed by men--by men who control not only the steps but the process, the content, the form, and the focus of the dance.

Because men have a vested interest in exclusivity, both theologically and institutionally, the dance, at best, takes the form of a minuet in which each side approaches the other very delicately. They barely touch, back away as if burned by a poker, take two steps forward, one step backward, do a fancy turn, and try again. Dazzled by the footwork, the people in the pews watch and wait for the next turn, not perceiving the way the limitations inherent in the form control the interaction between men and women.

=Annette Dawn= 
Unless otherwise indicated, all scriptural quotations are taken from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha* edited by Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962).
ABSTRACT

BEYOND A PATRIARCHAL INTERPRETATION

by

Holly Nicole Schamban

Important in understanding the significance of the Hebrew Bible is the knowledge of how societal and cultural realities affected the ways in which the Hebrew Bible was interpreted. The thesis begins with an examination of the societal and cultural conditions which led to interpretations portraying male supremacy. It theorizes that derogatory images of women, stereotyping them as evil, corrupt, and inferior to men, were in fact due to the masculine biases present in biblical texts as a result of societal and cultural tendencies and were not the intent of the original texts themselves. In fact, patriarchal interpretations of biblical narratives are not accurate because they fail to respect the integrity of the texts themselves.

Next comes a detailed analysis of the second creation narrative and God's oracle to woman in Genesis 3 in order to substantiate these preceding theories. The narratives are examined in their original Hebrew form in order to discover meanings and nuances which have been lost through translation and to provide alternative interpretations of the narratives avoiding masculine influences. Several fragments of Jewish mystical tradition which are related to the creation narratives are also investigated. Again, contextual realities during the time in which the tales were written are studied in order to gain an understanding of them unaffected by societal or cultural biases.

Finally, the question of the ordination of female rabbis is examined. The arguments supporting the restriction of women from the rabbinate are questioned and both the theological and substantiative evidence disputing these arguments explored. Concluding reflections challenge Judaism to undo the biases of masculine interpretations and to not allow patriarchy to hide behind biblical faith in a modern society which covets equality.
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INTRODUCTION

There is a parable by Franz Kafka\(^1\) about a man from the country who attempts to seek entry into the law. The doorkeeper who guards an open door which leads to the law tells the man that to enter is impossible. The man notices that there is a guard in front of each of the numerous open doors leading to the law, each guard larger and fiercer than the one before. The man chooses a door and sits before it. He begs and tries to bribe the doorkeeper to allow him to enter. The man rests in front of the open door for many years until he dies. As he is dying he asks the doorkeeper why he never saw anybody else seeking admission in all the years he had been waiting in front of the door. The doorkeeper responded that the door was intended solely for the man and then he shut it.

What is suggested by this parable is that even though the doorkeeper forbade entry into the law, in reality he could not have prevented the man from entering. Only when the man passively assumed that the authorities constituted obstacles to reaching the law did he fail to gain entry. The man could have taken the initiative and simply walked through the door. His error was twofold: he believed he could reach his goal through begging and bribing the guard and he blamed his failure to gain entry on the doorkeeper whose refusal was seen as unfeeling and evil.

The Jewish woman is like the man from the country and the parable applies to the situation of modern Judaism with its doors protecting traditional male roles, guarded by rabbis, institutions, and ideologies. However in reality, just the initiative for women to walk through the door to full participation in Jewish ritual is not sufficient. Some women may plead and argue for admission and even actively try to gain entry. They are offered counterarguments, warnings, barriers, and a few ameliorating changes. The goal of Judaism should be to seek to eliminate these obstacles to a woman interested in full participation in its ceremony. Rather, the

typically male dominated roles in Judaism should conform to the diversity and totality of Jewish tradition.
DEFINING THE PROBLEM

"... the depatriarchalizing principle [is] at work in the Hebrew Bible. Depatriarchalizing is not an operation which the exegete performs on the text. It is a hermeneutic operating within the scripture itself. We expose it; we do not impose it. Traditionally history teaches that the meaning and function of biblical materials is fluid. As Scripture moves through history, it is appropriated for new settings. Varied and diverse traditions appear, disappear, and reappear from occasion to occasion. We shall be unfaithful readers if we neglect biblical passages which break with patriarchy or if we permit our interpretations to freeze in a patriarchal box of our own construction. For our day we need to perceive the depatriarchalizing principle, to recover it in those texts and themes where it is present, and to accent it in our translations. Therein we shall be explorers who embrace both old and new in the pilgrimage of faith."

=Phyllis Trible=

The Hebrew Bible has been portrayed as literature providing the fundamental bases for male superiority and the deprecation of women. Perhaps one reason for these conjectures is that society from primitive times until now has been primarily patriarchal in organization. In fact, male control extended to the point where the writings were largely produced by men, the canon selected by men, and the narratives interpreted by men. These masculine interpretations of biblical texts have been the cause for claims of male dominance. The main purpose of this paper is to examine biblical texts in their original historical and literary contexts to try to eliminate the biases of masculine interpretations in the hope of discovering what the texts meant to the people reading them during the time in which they were written. By analyzing biblical texts in their proper contexts I shall attempt to prove that the texts themselves were not sexist, but instead that the subsequent interpretations of them were. This paper will not focus on why
these latter interpretations were sexist or how they became sexist although I have speculated on those issues in this first chapter.

In order to understand the historical and literary context in which biblical material was written, the changes in the historical circumstances surrounding the ancient Hebraic community which were reflected in the interpretations of biblical narratives will be examined over three general periods of Hebraic history: (1) The early biblical period which extended from the Patriarchs in the first half of the second millennium through the exodus from Egypt, the occupation of Canaan in approximately the thirteenth century, until the period of the Judges and the establishment of the monarchy from the twelfth to the eighth centuries B.C.E. (2) The pre-exilic period which included the latter part of the monarchy (seventh to sixth centuries B.C.E.) until just before the Babylonian exile in 587 B.C.E. (3) The post-exilic period which started with the return to Palestine in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E. and onward.¹

In the early biblical period certain gender-related, sexual, and conjugal norms shaped Hebrew society. Societal organization revolved around the family and groups of families or clans. Women had extremely important roles in this type of society. They prepared the food, gathered water, raised and cared for the family, and in general, were responsible for the well-being of the family or clan. Polytheism was the norm. Many Gods besides ירה were worshiped. Concerns about purity, impurity, and virginity were almost completely nonexistent. Bethulah meaning "virgin" only appears twice in the texts before Deuteronomy (approximately the seventh century B.C.E.). In addition, polygamy was widespread. Men were allowed to be intimate with one or more wives, concubines, or servants. For example, Sarah gave Abraham her handmaiden Hagar to have his child and Rachel and Leah were both promised for Jacob.

¹The discussion thusfar of the different historical periods, the continuing discussion, and the analyses of the "evil woman" are based on Léonie Archer, "Virgin and Harlot in the Writings of Formative Judaism," History Workshop: A Journal of Socialist and Feminist Historians, Issue 24 (Autumn 1987), pp 3-12.
These societal norms were altered during the pre-exilic period. The laws of adultery were strengthened and death became a penalty for adultery (Deuteronomy 22:22). There was also the introduction of virginity suits and laws regarding the seduction or rape of virgins (Deuteronomy 22:13-23ff). In addition, marriage was becoming more standardized with bills of divorce required (Deuteronomy 20:7, 22:23ff, 24:1). Hebraic society was still not monotheistic however; henotheism was being practiced and Gods other than יהוה were still being worshiped. In fact, there may have even been Hebrew goddesses at that time such as Anath, Asherath, and Ishtah.

The exile and return to the homeland had profound effects on Hebraic society. There was a tremendous change in Jewish religious and social order. The exile had been interpreted as the realization of divine prophecies and society was working to rid the community of all impurities so that Israel would become again the elect, holy community of God. Monotheism was reaffirmed and pagan practices banned. Israel separated itself from other peoples and became righteous again in God's eyes. Intermarriage with foreigners was no longer allowed. Special attention was given to the holiness of the priestly class. There was increased attention to genealogies. In Ezra and Nehemiah for example, those who claimed to be priestly returnees but could not trace their ancestry or declare their father's house were denied priesthood. Polygamy was eradicated. Purity laws were introduced to protect the integrity of a new nation. All these reforms were not without challenge and dissent but generally, they were accepted.

As a reflection of changes in the Hebraic community from the early biblical period until after the return to the Promised Land, biblical narratives changed to mirror the cultural tendencies in society. There was movement from genderless references in the Hebrew Bible to female imagery reflecting the new concerns of the community and changes in societal organization. This movement becomes apparent in a comparison of how the word zonah was used throughout the Hebrew Bible. In early periods of Hebrew history, zonah meaning "harlot" was used simply to indicate the profession of an individual. Calling somebody a harlot was no different than calling a person a shepherd or a farmer. There was no negative or archetypal connotation of
the evil woman. It was not until later texts that evil was generalized and equated with woman.\(^2\) In the earlier periods, evil referred only to the specific sin of a specific person. Only with the changes in the post-exilic society came the new images of the evil woman:

But you trusted in your beauty, and played the harlot because of your renown, and lavished your harlotries on any passer-by. You took some of your garments, and made for yourself gaily decked shrines, and on them played the harlot; the like has never been, nor ever shall be. You also took your fair jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself images of men, and with them played the harlot; and you took your embroidered garments to cover them, and set my oil and my incense before them...at the head of every street you built your lofty palace and prostituted your beauty, offering yourself to any passer-by, and multiplying your harlotry...and I will judge you as women who break wedlock and shed blood are judged, and bring upon you the blood of wrath and jealousy...you bear the penalty of your lewdness and your abominations.\(^3\)

The harlot image had taken on a new significance. It appeared first in Proverbs with respect to alien women\(^4\) and then became the image of not just an impure woman but a malevolent one as well. The new harlot was dangerous; she tried to upset the new order of society.

And lo, a woman meets him, dressed as a harlot, wily of heart. She is loud and wayward, her feet do not stay at home; now in the street, now in the market, and at every corner she lies in wait. She seizes him and kisses him, and with impudent face she says to him:
'I had to offer sacrifices, and today I have paid my vows; so now I have come out to meet you, to seek you eagerly, and I have found you.

\(^2\)The information concerning the changing female imagery as reflected by the meaning of the word zonah from Archer, p. 8
\(^3\)Ezekiel 16:15-18, 25, 30, 58.
I have decked my couch with coverings,
colored spreads of Egyptian linen;
I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.
Come, let us take our fill of love till morning;
let us delight ourselves with love.
For my husband is not at home;
he has gone on a long journey;
he took a bag of money with him;
at full moon he will come home.'

With much seductive speech she persuades him;
with her smooth talk she compels him.
All at once he follows her,
as an ox goes to the slaughter,
or as a stag is caught fast till an arrow pierces its entrails;
as a bird rushes into a snare;
he does not know that it will cost him his life.

And now, O sons, listen to me,
and be attentive to the words of my mouth.
Let not your heart turn aside to her ways,
do not stray into her paths;
for many a victim has she laid low;
yea, all her slain are a mighty host.
Her house is the way to Sheol,
going down to the chambers of death.5

Now in the passages depicting woman as immoral and corrupt, "harlot" was not applied specifically to one woman but to women in general. All women--the wife, the unmarried woman, the virgin, the foreign woman, and the beautiful woman--had the potential to do evil. Men were warned about evil women and warned to avoid them because the penalties for coming into contact with such women could have resulted in death. Women were the source of danger for men. The author of the Testament of Reuben wrote:

For evil are women... since they have no power or strength over men, they use wiles by outward attractions that they might draw him to themselves. And whom they cannot bewitch by outward attractions, him they overcome by craft. For... women are overcome by the spirit ____________________
5Proverbs 7:10ff.
of fornication more than men, and in their heart they plot against men;
and by means of their adornment they deceive first the minds, and by
the glance of thy envy instill the poison and then through the
accomplished act, they take them captive. For a woman cannot force a
man openly, but by a harlot's bearing she beguiles him. (5:1-4)

This perceived capacity in women to do evil became one reason that
the male role was strengthened. Since all women had the potential to do evil,
they were to be controlled by men. Punishment for adulterous acts served as
warning for women to stay in the designated role of a good and obedient
wife. The images of the stereotypical good woman or the acceptable side of
womankind served the same purpose--to keep women in their designated
roles.

The emergence of the image of the evil woman was a direct result of
the changes in Jewish life and societal organization. No more harlots or
adulteresses existed at this point in Hebraic history than in earlier times. In
fact, there were probable less since the laws regarding such practices were
much more strict. The "evil woman" was an image created by men as a threat
to keep them behaving properly in the eyes of God. Since men could no
longer have more than one woman as a mate, they constructed a fear of
women in an attempt to help them stay faithful to that new societal
restriction. This was reflected in the interpretations of the time which saw all
women as potentially evil and thus helped to preserve patriarchy.

The masculine interpretations of the texts constructed to denigrate
women had a significant effect. It led people to ignore significant references
to women as well as feminine imagery in the Hebrew Bible. Interpretations
of the texts of the Hebrew Bible differentiated men and women, placing
women in subordinate roles, rather than presenting them with separate but
equal roles. However, female equality in the Hebrew Bible was in fact shown
by the feminine as well as the masculine imagery of God.6 The fact that there

6Discussion thusfar of feminine imagery of God from Letty M. Russell, ed., Feminist
Continuing discussion relating God to a mother based upon Russell, pp. 73-85.
is female imagery of God suggests that women were indeed important and esteemed.7

A great deal of the female imagery relates God to a mother. God is like a mother in the sense that mothers bring "liberation from oppression, provide protection, and ensure the well-being and security of her people."8 God's role was very similar—to provide all the essentials necessary for life for his chosen people. Numbers 11:12 implies that יהוה himself is Israel's mother.

Did I conceive all these people? Did I bring them faith, that they shouldst say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries the sucking child, to the land which thou didst swear to give their fathers?

Essentially, Moses is asking God why he should be responsible for the people which יהוה conceived. The conceiving of a child, or in the case of יהוה, the conceiving of a people, is most definitely a mother's role. The creation of babies who are to be part of God's chosen people is essential to the fulfillment of the LORD's promise to Abraham, that his descendants would be more in number than the stars. Women play a vital role in the fulfillment of this promise, the continuation of God's people. Sarah for example, was the mother of Isaac whose descendants it was said "would prosper." Isaac then married Rebekah whose son Jacob married Rachel who then bore twelve sons, the twelve tribes of Israel. If the mothers of these prosperous sons did not nurture them and ensure their existence, there would hardly be any substance to the promise of multiple descendants who would take possession of the Promised Land. Deborah who is stated in Judges 5:6-7 to be Israel's mother is also included in the list of Israel's mothers who ensured the survival of her people, not because she is a biological mother but instead because she worked to ensure the welfare and fortune of her people as a judge or ruler over Israel. In fact, the essential role that women played in Israel's

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7To be important and esteemed is not the same as being equal. However we shall see later in this chapter that women were indeed permitted to function in the same capacity as men.
8Russell, p. 85.
history may be related to the principle of the tracing of lineage in a matrilineal fashion, as Israel does and has done for millennia.

We see substantial feminine imagery for God in Exodus as well, in themes of hunger and thirst. Providing food and drink was a women's role in Hebraic society. Women fetched water for their families.

Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad a drink. (Genesis 21:19)

And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening, the time when women go out to draw water. . . Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. (Genesis 24:11,13)

'Before I had done speaking in my heart, behold, Rebekah came out with her water jar on her shoulder; and she went down to the spring, and drew.' (Genesis 21:45)

Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters; and they came and drew water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. (Exodus 2:16)

In the desert, the traditional role designated to women of providing water was assumed by נַחֲרָה who provided water for his children, Israel.

All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim; but there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people found fault with Moses, and said, 'Give us water to drink.' And Moses said to them, 'Why do you find fault with me? Why do you put the LORD to the proof?' But the people thirsted there for water, and the people murmured against Moses, and said, 'Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?' So Moses cried to the LORD, 'What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.' And the LORD said to Moses, 'Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand the rod with which you

struck the Nile, and go. behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, that the people may drink.' And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the faultfinding of the children of Israel, and because they put the LORD to the proof by saying, 'Is the LORD among us or not?' (Exodus 17:1-7)

Furthermore, prepared manna and quail for his children of Israel just as mothers feed their households:

Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law or not. When the LORD gives you in the evening flesh to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the LORD has heard your murmurings which you murmur against him'. In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning dew lay round about the camp. And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as hoarfrost on the ground. And Moses said to them, 'It is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat'. And the people of Israel ate the manna forty years, till they came to a habitable land; they ate the manna, till they came to the border of the land of Canaan. (Exodus 16:4ff)

Hence, is often compared to a mother whose role is vital, in providing food and water for her children, nurturing them, and ensuring their survival.

In the discussion of the very important nature of a mother's role in ensuring the survival of her family, it is important to note particularly the special contributions of several women or mothers whose actions led to the deliverance of Israel from bondage. Moses's mother made a basket that saved Israel's future leader. Then Pharaoh's daughter saved Moses from the river and protected him. These actions determined Israel's future. Moses's sister as well as all the servants of Pharaoh's daughter also played roles in raising him from childhood. Thus, women had a vital role in Jewish life and

10Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," p. 32.
11Russell, Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, p. 80 and Trible, "Depatriarchalization in Biblical Interpretation," p. 34.
it was due to the courageous actions of them which were decisive in the deliverance of the Israelites.

Although it was true that the ancient Jewish community was patriarchal in composition, women held their place and did play a vital role in Jewish life. They were scholars. For example, when a scroll similar to the scroll of the Torah was found in the Holy Temple twenty-six hundred years ago, King Josiah sent his men to inquire of Huldah, the prophetess whether the scroll was holy. Upon Huldah's advice, Deuteronomy was added to the Torah. Huldah is not an isolated example of women in scholarly roles. Women have made decisions affecting Jewish law and tradition throughout Jewish history and this phenomenon was much more common than history has led us to believe. Rabbinical literature indicates that women like Huldah, Deborah, or Rashi's scholarly daughters were not singular women in their generations. Women learned, taught, decided law, and served as queens who had the same rights and duties as kings during the period of the Supreme Court of Jewish law, the Sanhedrin. These women affected Judaism for future generations. For example, Baile Edels (mid-sixteenth to mid-seventeenth century) left her mark on Jewish history. She was an expert in the niddah laws which concerned menstruation and sexual contact. Chana Bat Yoheved (twelfth century), who was the eldest daughter of Rashi, taught the law. Miriam bat Reb Shlomo who was another descendant of Rashi taught law as well. Furthermore, in Hasidism, Malka, the wife of the first Belzer Rebbe (fifteenth century), made all decisions with her husband. Dulche, the wife of Eliezer Rokeach (end of the nineteenth century), taught the laws of keeping kosher. And the Maid of Ludomir (Hannah Rachel Werbemacher [1805-92]) taught her followers each Sabbath.

Even with women in important roles in Jewish life, the Hebraic community is thought of and seen as it comes before God in the house of prayer or study as a community of men. This notion is somewhat

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12II Kings 22:14; II Chronicles 34:22.
surprising and must be a result of later interpretations of biblical texts because in the Hebrew Bible itself, the community is never presented in terms of a community of men. In fact, the community spoke of itself using feminine terminology: Knesset Yisrael. In Song of Songs the community is presented as a bride. Israel itself is presented as the daughter of God in the Midrash on Song of Songs 3:7. Other references to Israel being the daughter of God can be found as well:

"King Solomon made a palanquin for himself" (Canticles 3:9) Rabbi Azariah in the name of Rabbi Judah the son of Simon interpreted this verse as speaking of the Tabernacle. The Palanquin is the Tabernacle. Said Rabbi Judah the son of Ilai, this may be compared to a king who had a young daughter. Before she grew up and the signs of puberty were found in her, the king would see her in the market place and speak to her openly, in the courtyard or in the alleyway. When she grew up, however and she reached puberty, the king said: 'It will not be proper for my daughter that I speak to her in public. Rather make her a pavilion, and when I need to speak to her I will speak to her in the pavilion.'

This quotation is a reflection of proper behavior; the daughter has the right to the protection of her virtue. A casual approach to her, even by her father is demeaning. This situation is analogous to God's relationship with Israel; God does not take a casual approach to Israel. God feeds his people Israel, provides for their needs, and protects them. There is something that is present in a father/daughter relationship or the relationship between God and Israel that is not present in a father/son relationship. A father is generally more protective towards a daughter than towards a son. Furthermore, "fathers and sons can be very competitive. Fathers and daughters can collaborate much more easily. That removes some tension." Colette A. Dumas, an assistant professor at the University of Quebec at Montreal has done empirical research on fathers and daughters and has concluded that

15 Heschel, p. 250.
16 The quotation and its analysis based on Heschel, p. 252.
17 Thomas D. Davidow, a Brookline psychologist, quoted in Mary Sit, "When Father's Pride Goes to a Daughter," Boston Globe, April 16, 1989, Sec. A, p. 6.
there is a certain intimacy in a father/daughter relationship which is not found with fathers and sons. "Women tend to seek their identity through intimacy while men usually seek their identity through independence."\(^{18}\)

We have seen that the traditional, masculine interpretations of the Hebrew Bible are not value free. They are culturally biased, based upon societal organization and the sexual relationships which were present in the past. But as we move towards the twenty-first century, society and the male/female relationships are drastically changing and the interpretation of creation in which God made man stronger, smarter, and generally better than woman, is no longer valid. Contemporary interpretations of the Hebrew Bible should not neglect biblical evidence which refutes the patriarchal principle. In turning to an analysis of Genesis 1-3 we shall attempt to follow the themes of depatriarchalization and to expound on them in new interpretations devoid of masculine biases through an analysis of the historical and literary context in which these Genesis narratives were written.

\(^{18}\)Dumas quoted in Sit, p. 6.
The Creation Narratives
Analysis of Genesis 1 - 2:25

Rabbi Shim'on said, "High mysteries are revealed in these two verses (Genesis 5:1-2). 'Male and female He created them' to make known the Glory on high, the mystery of faith. Out of this mystery, Adam was created. Come and see: With the mystery by which heaven and earth were created Adam was created. Of them it is written: 'These are the generations of heaven and earth (Genesis 2:4). Of Adam it is written: 'This is the book of the generations of Adam. Of them it is written: 'when they were created.' Of Adam it is written: 'on the day they were created.' 'Male and female He created them.' From here we learn: Any image that does not embrace male and female is not a high and true image. We have established this in the mystery of our Mishnah. Come and see: The Blessed Holy One does not place His abode in any place where male and female are not found together. Blessings are found only in a place where male and female are found, as it is written: 'He blessed them and called their name Adam on the day they were created.' It is not written: 'He blessed him and called his name Adam.' A human being is only called Adam when male and female are as one."

=Zohar on Genesis=

Biblical texts were first written with the idea that man and woman were equal. However as societal conditions changed, man's role in society was emphasized. Although woman's role did not lose its importance, it was no longer stressed as it was during the time in which societal organization revolved around the familial unit and women had the responsibility for the well-being of that unit. With the changes in society, man's role became more and more prominent until biblical interpretations started reflecting this importance by emphasizing passages referring to men and similarly, de-emphasizing those passages pertaining to women, and finally, reinterpreting the narratives in a biased manner which depicted male superiority in society. Biblical literature became a tool to reshape cultural norms, to redefine the
relationship between men and women with men becoming the dominant sex. Today, cultural norms are changing. Women are becoming the equals of men in all fields: business, education, and even politics. Biblical texts are being re-examined to shed the biases of masculine interpretations and to see them in their true context. One example of this is how the creation narratives are being studied today; they are being analyzed in order to determine their original literary and cultural significance. In this chapter both the Priestly and the Yahwist creation narratives will be examined with focus on the Yahwist creation narrative as it provides the basis for the deprecation of women. To begin the analyses of the texts dealing with creation, let us start with Genesis 1-2:4.

*Genesis 1-2:4: The Priestly Story of Creation*

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day. (Genesis 1:26-31)

This account of creation understands man and woman to have been created simultaneously. In the Priestly account of Genesis plural pronouns are used which indicate the idea of the coexistence of man and woman as equals over the idea of the dominance of man. ". . . And let them have dominion . . . male and female he created them . . . and God blessed them . . . ." With this idea, the commandment to have dominion over all living things does not imply that man alone has dominion over the earth or that man has
dominion over woman but that both woman and man have an equal part in the
dominion. Genesis 1 does not limit the female part of סבה. סבה is
created as two sexes, male and female, which are both entrusted to dominion
over all living creatures on earth.2

Thus there is absolutely no hint of subordination in this Priestly
narrative of creation; סבה is created as male and female where neither is
superior or subordinate to the other. Male and female are both elevated
equally above all other forms of life. Sexuality in this narrative is a
fundamental part of creation. Nowhere is it suggested that it is evil, nor is it
suggested that one of the two sexes is evil because of gender. If such motifs
emerge later in Judaism, they find no justification here.3 This narrative is
not used as a basis for the traditional interpretations of male superiority.
From the Yahwist narrative, Genesis 2, come the claims for the deprecation
of women. Hence, following will be a detailed examination of the second
Genesis narrative, the traditional interpretation of it, and a reinterpretation
of it eliminating cultural biases.

*Genesis 2:5-2:25: The Yahwist Story of Creation*

... then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and
breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living
being. And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and

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1 סבה is commonly rendered "man" in translations. In Hebrew however, סבה actually
means "mankind" or "humanity" which embodies both male and female.

2 The Hebrew words used to denote male and female are רכיב and רבקה. These two
words have a more subtle connotation than simply "male" and "female." They actually
refer to the male and female reproductive organs, which are both a part of God's image (... in the image of God he created him [humanity], male and female he created them). Thus
God's image is all encompassing, embracing both the masculine and feminine sexual
organs. The reason why there is both feminine and masculine imagery used with respect to
the LORD is because God is incomplete without both the masculine and feminine
manifestations of gender.

3 Analysis of the priestly creation narrative from Mary Evans, *Women in the Bible* (South
p. 15.
there he put the man whom he had formed. . . . (Genesis 2:7-8)

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." So out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed. (Genesis 2:18-25)

The second Genesis narrative or the Yahwist narrative is understood by many to provide a basis for the deprecation of women. There are many claims which are based on this narrative of man's domination and woman's subordination. These claims include: (1) Woman was created for man as his helper. (2) Contrary to nature, woman came out of man; she is denied her natural function of birthing and that function is given to man. (3) Woman is made from the rib of man. She is dependent on him for her life and is therefore subservient. (4) Woman has a derivative not an autonomous existence because she was taken from man. (5) Since man names woman he has power over her. (6) Man leaves his father's family to establish another patriarchal unit through his wife. (7) God created man first and then woman meaning that man is superior because he came first and woman is inferior and subordinate because she came last. All of these claims are cited as support for male superiority. However not only are these claims inaccurate, they are not even present in the second Genesis creation narrative and

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4This is one of the stronger arguments for male superiority since naming is related to creation. In the Priestly account of creation, as soon as something new was formed by God, it was named. In the Yahwist account, Man named every breathing thing upon the earth.
furthermore violate the rhetoric of the story. These interpretations fail to respect the integrity of Genesis 2.5

The first claim, that woman is inferior because she was created as man’s helper can be refuted by an analysis of the word "helper" in its original Hebrew form יָּתֵרֵר and not in its translation.6 In the Hebrew Bible the word יָּתֵרֵר is not used solely to describe the relationship between man and woman. It can also be a proper name for a male. I Chronicles 4:4 for example reads, ". . . and Penu'el was the father of Gedor, and יָּתֵרֵר the father of Hushah." And I Chronicles 12:9 reads, ". . . יָּתֵרֵר the chief. . . ." In several passages in the Hebrew Bible יָּתֵרֵר characterizes Deity. God is the helper of Israel and as a helper He creates and saves.

The God of my father was my help and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh. (Exodus 18:4)

And this he said of Judah: "Hear, O LORD, the voice of Judah, and bring him in to his people. With thy hands contend for him, and be a help against his adversaries." (Deuteronomy 33:7)

But I am poor and needy; hasten to me, O God! Thou art my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not tarry! (Psalms 70:5)

Thus alone, יָּתֵרֵר does not specify inferiority or superiority since no designation of positions within the relationships are implied. In the case of God being the helper of Israel for example, the relationship is one of superiority; God is superior to Israel and all other things on earth. However this superiority is not in the same sense as a master/slave relationship. The relationship between God and Israel is beneficial and one of mutual respect.

יתָּרֵש יָּתֵרֵר can imply inferiority as well, as in the case of the relationship between humans and animals. This relationship has no more a negative

5 The seven bases for the deprecation of woman were taken from Phyllis Trible, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 73.

implication than does the relationship between God and Israel. Humans are responsible for the animals which God put on this earth just as God is responsible for Israel. Thus רָאָה is a term which designates a beneficial relationship and alone does not imply inferiority or superiority. To determine the positions within the relationship, the context surrounding it must be studied. Therefore, to find the position within the man/woman relationship, additional content must be examined.

In Genesis 2:18 the Hebrew word רָאָה עֹז joins רָאָה. There are three parts to the word רָאָה עֹז: the root, a prefix, and a suffix. רָאָה is the root meaning "before," "in front of," or "facing." עֹז is the prefix meaning "like" or "as" and ע is the suffix meaning "him." Thus the meaning of the entire word becomes "as before him" or "like in front of him." Therefore in examining רָאָה עֹז in the context in which it appears in Genesis 2:18, the phrase reads "a helper like [the one] in front of him." God is saying that he shall create another being equal to man who is standing before him for man's helper. Taken in context, רָאָה עֹז denotes a helper who is a counterpart, not a subordinate. רָאָה can therefore imply equality as with the relationship between man and woman. In fact, the phrase רָאָה עֹז probably has sexual connotations referring to the face to face physical union of male and female. In summary, רָאָה עֹז implies that man's helper must be fit to help him. Animals are not chosen because there are no fit helpers among them. Woman is chosen because she is the only one worthy of the position of helper, making her man's helper in the sense of a partner, not a servant. Since "helper" implies a partnership, Eve is made equally responsible for the dominion of all other living creatures on earth. This relationship leads to the conclusion that God is the helper superior to man, animals are the helpers inferior to man, and woman is the helper equal to man.

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8 Christ and Plaskow, p. 75.
The next three claims are all related and provide the basis for a patriarchal interpretation of the second creation narrative: the function of birthing is given to man because woman comes out of him, woman is dependent on man because she was created from his rib, and woman's existence is derivative and not autonomous because she was created from man. Traditionally interpreted, all these claims stem from the fact that woman was made from man's rib and are indicative of woman's subordination to man. But man himself did not create woman from his rib. He had no part in the making of woman. Both man and woman had the same creator, God. It was a divine act that made woman from man's rib, just as it was a divine act of God that created man from dust. To say that woman owes her existence to man therefore, is like saying that man owes his existence to dust.9

Man was taken from the earth like woman was taken from man. However man is never portrayed as being inferior to the earth. On the contrary, he is given power over the earth; He becomes dominant over it. Thus by strict analogy, this should mean that woman is superior, not subordinate to man because she came from him. This interpretation is misleading however because the nuances of the statement are taken out of context. A word or idea must be analyzed in the context in which it appears. For this purpose the context is "bones of my bones and flesh of my flesh." The connotation of woman's superiority is not valid because the relationship is one of mutuality and equality. Just as there is no connotation of woman's superiority, nowhere is there any kind of stated or implied connotation of the inferiority of woman in this narrative either.10

Moving back to the point about the inferiority of woman because she came from man's rib, one must remember that the rib was only raw material which was used to create woman.11 The differentiation of man from earth

9Discussion of the third and fourth claims for the deprecation of woman from Evans, p. 15 and Trible, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality, pp. 101-102.
10Evans, p. 15.
11The following discussion involving the processing of the rib and the connotations of קַדִּישָׁה taken from Samuel Terrien, "Toward a biblical Theology of Womanhood," Religion in Life, Volume 42, Number 3 (Autumn 1973), p. 325.
and of woman from man implies neither derivation nor subordination. The rib required processing before it became woman just as the dust from which man was made required processing. The LORD made the rib into woman. She is not simply molded of clay but she is architecturally 'made.' The intended meaning of the Hebrew word to make or to build (יניב) has been lost in the translations. The Hebrew verb suggests an aesthetic intent and has the connotation of reliability as well. The Hebrew word יִנְבִּים is used of towns, towers, altars, fortifications, and of woman. It therefore denotes hard work which results in something solid, permanent, and reliable. So woman is not a weak creature; She has all of the characteristics implied by the original Hebrew verb יִנְבִּים. She is not an opposite sex, a second sex, or a derived sex.

The emphasis of this narrative is on the unity of the two sexes who both owe their life to Divine creation. The narrative establishes the unity of with woman coming from the same substance as man or at least sharing the same substance. This is reflected when man says, "This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." There could not be such unity if man and woman were created separately from dust. To be taken from man implies differentiation and at the same time mutuality since man and women are of the same bone and flesh. One must not assume that differentiation suggests the derivation of woman from man or subordination.

In the verse describing the marriage of man and woman (Genesis 2:24), the connotation is of a physical and symbolic union. Man and woman become both literally and ideologically "one flesh."

The next traditional interpretation claims that woman is subordinate to man because he named her. This interpretation is based upon the opinion that naming in the Hebrew Bible denoted power and domination. Gerhard von Rad reiterated this view when he wrote, "Let us remind ourselves once more that name giving in the ancient Orient was primarily an exercise of

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sovereignty, of command..." and "The man names the woman and thereby has power and authority over her." Von Rad is not entirely mistaken; there were times when name giving expressed authority or dominion as in the example of the capture of the royal Ammonite city in II Samuel 12:26-28.

Now Jo'ab fought against Rabbah of the Ammonites, and took the royal city. And Jo'ab sent messengers to David, and said, "I have fought against Rabbah; moreover, I have taken the city of waters. Now, then, gather the rest of the people together, and encamp against the city, and take it; lest I take the city, and it be called by my name.

However to determine the circumstances around a particular act of naming, the specific context of that act must be examined. The context here is of one person naming another. Generally, in the Hebrew Bible, when a person named another and this implied domination, a specific formula was used. The verb "to call" was used, followed by the noun "name." For example, in Genesis 4:25 Lamech's wife bore a son and called his name Seth. She is clearly the dominant figure in this relationship since an infant is dependent upon his mother for biological reasons. Another example of this formula, the verb "to call" plus an explicit object "name" appears in Genesis 4:17 when Cain built a city and called the name of the city after the name of his son Enoch. This formula also occurs in Genesis 2:9 when man gives names to animals. In calling the animals by name, man establishes his supremacy.

Thus, generally, when the formula with the verb "to call" appears with the direct object "name" there is an implication of superiority. This is not the case in the naming of woman. "She shall be called Woman." The object 'name' is not found in the citation. There is only one instance where the

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15 Orwell, p. 17
17 The following discussion of the significance of naming based on Evans, pp. 16, 20; Christ and Plaskow, p. 77.
formula denoting superiority is found in the naming of Eve. In Genesis 3:20
the formula is used when "man calls his wife's name Eve," implying that
Adam dominates over Eve. We shall see in the next chapter in a discussion of
Genesis 3 that Adam was given power over Eve but not in a way indicative of
oppression or denigration. There was a specific purpose and specific
circumstances commanding his dominance which actually emphasized the
duality of man and woman.

The sixth argument that man was the dominant figure because he left
his family to establish another patriarchal unit through his wife is no more
accurate than the first five arguments calling for the deprecation of woman.
Man leaves his parents to go to his woman. She is called "his woman" which
does not signify that she is his possession but rather that he finds fulfillment
in her. Man does not possess her; he needs her and goes to her for union.
This is the last act of creation before The Fall and justly so. Creation is
consummated with this union. Man is not leaving his family to form
another patriarchal unit. There are no procreative characteristics about this
sexual union; children are never mentioned. "Sexuality is viewed for the
exclusive sake of the mutuality of communion between woman and man, and

18The unity and harmony existing between man and woman is expressed in Genesis 2:25
(And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed). Being naked is a
sign of vulnerability and generally, in order to show one's nakedness to another, there
must be trust. A person does not normally stand naked in front of somebody he/she does
not know or trust. Thus, both man and woman were naked and vulnerable yet there
existed a mutual confidence in each other which signified their unity. By extension, this
harmony in man's and woman's nakedness represents equality as well. The perception of
being naked in a harmonious relationship based upon mutual respect and equality is not
similar to the notion of nakedness in a relationship of dominance and subservience. In the
former relationship, both people equally share vulnerability. However when superiority is
an issue, the nakedness of the subservient person becomes a weakness to be exploited.
For example, in the past in order to punish soldiers, officers would have them stand naked
in public to embarrass them. In interpretations of Genesis 3, the difference between man's
and woman's nakedness from Genesis 2 is that they were ashamed; being naked was no
longer a natural, harmonious phenomenon. This reflected the relationship between man
and woman after they left the Garden of Eden which was one where man dominated
woman. Thus while in Genesis 3 nakedness can be interpreted to represent the disjunction
of man and woman in a relationship depicting male supremacy where woman's
vulnerability becomes her weakness, the nakedness in Genesis 2 points to a relationship
based upon equality where man and woman are united in their vulnerability.
not in the function of biological reproduction." Creation is being transformed here. Before two sexes came from one being or oneness became differentiation. Now the two sexes become one again in sexual union and differentiation becomes wholeness.

Finally comes the most important and complex argument, that woman is not inferior to man because she was created after him. In fact, woman is not a mere afterthought. She is, from the outset, the planned and deliberate culmination of creation. In the creation of woman, the creation process is at last complete. By looking at Hebrew literary structure this becomes apparent. Generally, all important things come at the beginning and the end, where all beginnings and ends are parallel or complimentary. The order of events in Genesis 1 support this conclusion. First light was created, then heaven which was followed by land, vegetation, the sun and moon, birds, animals, and then man and woman who were created simultaneously. Since beginnings and ends were equally important, man and woman could not be considered unimportant because of their position in the first creation narrative. Indeed, aside from the Sabbath, the was the peak of creation. Similarly, in the second creation narrative, land was created, then water, man, vegetation, animals, and woman. If it is maintained that woman is inferior to man because she was created after him then it must be admitted that man is inferior to dust because it existed before man was formed.

Hebrew literary structure in which beginnings and ends of narratives are points of emphasis therefore suggests that the creation of woman can be seen as an equally important event as the creation of man, if not more so. However in order to base an assumption such as this on the principle of parallel beginnings and ends in Hebrew literary structure, the content of the two events must be similar. We see that they are in fact similar: both times, God alone creates. God created man from the earth. In the creation of

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19 Terrien, p. 325.
20 The discussion of man leaving his family to join with woman is based on Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 102.
woman, God first caused a deep sleep to fall upon man. Man played no part in the creation of woman and therefore did not exercise any control over her existence. "He was neither participant nor spectator nor consultant at her birth."22 Man's life is completely controlled by God. God puts man in Eden. Man does not create space; he is given a place. And man does not make pleasure; he is assigned pleasure. Man is a product and a recipient of creation, not a participant. So woman owes her creation solely to God just as man does. Furthermore, they were both created from raw materials: dust and a rib. God creates humankind from these materials, shaping dust by breathing into it to create man and building the rib into woman.

Finally, there is the similarity and differentiation of man and woman during creation. Before the differentiation only the general term was used. There was no exclusively male reference. Only with the specific creation of woman is there a differentiation: (man) and (woman). Sexuality is simultaneous for man and woman. Man as male does not precede woman as female; man's sexuality and identity depends on woman's sexuality just as woman's depends on man's. So instead of viewing woman as a mere afterthought, she should be thought of as the perfection of.

We should understand woman not as an addition to the humankind that already was in the person of Adam (man in the generic sense); Rather, Adam himself is built up into woman. Adam becomes a person, aware of himself, reaching consciousness as humankind with the disclosure of woman. For woman also is humankind. She is not other than Adam; but she is Adam as bringing to perfection what had first been imperfect. She is humankind as fully aware of its status, as the goal and perfection of man. Thus, woman is not made to be Adam's helpmate just because he is lonely; she is created as the perfecting element, to the revelation of which he aspired when he refused companionship with the animal world.23

22Christ and Plaskow, p. 76. Discussion concerning content of parallel events also from Christ and Plaskow, p. 76 and Trible, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality, pp. 80, 81.
Thus after examining the various theories for the deprecation of women and determining that they are not valid interpretations because they fail to respect the integrity of the text, we find that woman is not subordinate to a more dominant man. In fact, "superiority, strength, aggressiveness, dominance, and power do not characterize man in Genesis at all. By contrast, he is formed from dust; his life hangs by a breath which he does not control; and he himself remains silent and passive while the Deity plans and interprets his existence."24

Several conclusions can be drawn from these analyses: Man is not superior because he named woman or because he was created before her. This line of reasoning would make woman subservient to all animals and reptiles which were all created before her which is clearly not the author's intent nor the intent of most interpretations. Furthermore, woman is not subordinate because she was man's helper. "Helper" implies "partner" in the context in which it is used, giving Eve equal responsibility in maintaining order on earth. Finally, Eve is not subordinate because she came from Adam's rib. His rib was only the raw material used in the formation of Eve just as dust was the raw material used in his creation. Adam had no part in the process of creating Eve; it was the divine act of God alone which was responsible for both of their creations. Hence, as we attempt to delineate woman's role in Reform Judaism, we see that a re-examination of Genesis 2:4-25 is required. Also essential is an examination of traditional renderings of Genesis 3 which will be studied in the third chapter, as they also contain bases for the deprecation of women.

As a commentary on Genesis 2:4-25 it is interesting to note Song of Songs because of its expansion of the basic themes and motifs in the Yahwist narrative.25 In the Yahwist creation narrative, הַנַּבּ is not alone in Israel. His companions are man and woman who celebrate the joys of sensuous

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24Christ and Plaskow, p. 76.
25All analyses of Song of Songs based on Trible, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality, pp. 148-154.
delight. Song of Songs complements this narrative; the paradise in Genesis 2 is reattained and amplified. As we said in the analysis of the second creation narrative, in accordance with Hebraic tradition, two stories are parallel if both the framework of time and content of the two stories coincide. In order to draw a comparison between Song of Songs and Genesis 2:4-25 then, an analysis of its literary content is necessary.

The first verse of the first poem in Song of Songs (1:2) reads "O that you would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth! For your love is better than wine . . . ." Later in the poem she calls herself "keeper of the vineyards" (1:6). In the last poem the same motif of lovers and vineyards appears: "Make haste, my beloved" (8:14); "My vineyard, my very own, is for myself" (8:12). The overall structure of Song of Songs is that the beginnings and ends are parallel. If we visualize this parallel structure, it produces a ring, circling Song of Songs. Within this ring composition are other, smaller rings which have their own parallel structures. For example, the daughters of Jerusalem open and close the second poem: "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem" (2:7 and 3:5).

Notice the symmetry in the two texts: Genesis 2 encloses a garden just as the ring composition in Song of Songs is built around a garden. In Song of Songs 4:10-15, woman is depicted as a garden. Her physical characteristics are described as nectar, pomegranates, henna, saffron, frankincense, and aloe among other trees, spices, and fragrances found in gardens. Her lover comes to this garden in 5:1; 6:2, 11. There are many trees which are aesthetically pleasing in addition to being nourishing just as there are in the Yahwist story of creation (Genesis 2:9). There are apple trees (2:3, 7:8, 8:5), fig trees (2:13), pomegranates (4:3, 13, 6:7), cedar trees (5:15), palms (7:8), and frankincense (4:14). There are spices as well: meadow saffron (2:1), lilies (2:1ff, 16, 4:5, 5:13, 7:2), and mandrake (7:13). The fountains in Song of Songs (4:12, 15) can be compared with the subterranean stream in Genesis 2:6 and with the rivers in Genesis which water the garden (2:10-14).

Other textual similarities include the animals in both Song of Songs and Genesis 2. There are mares (1:9), foxes (2:15), turtledove (2:12), and lions and leopards (4:8). In Song of Songs, animals participate both
contextually and metaphorically in the encounters of man and woman. Examples of this are found when the woman says, "My beloved is like a gazelle, or a young stag" (2:9) and "His head is the finest gold; his locks are wavy, black as a raven. His eyes are like doves beside springs of water, bathed in milk, fitly set" (5:11-12). Man describes his lover in the following verses: "Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats, moving down the slopes of Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them is bereaved" (4:1-2) and "Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that feed among the lilies." (4:5)

Work is also a part of the world of Genesis 2 and Song of Songs. In Eden, the man works the ground and the woman implicitly partakes in productive labor and procreation. In Song of Songs, the woman expressly works. She keeps the vineyards and pastures the flocks. Phyllis Trible writes in her article Depatriarchalization in Biblical Interpretation, "together Genesis 2 and Song of Songs affirm work in the gardens of joy, and together they suggest fluidity in the occupational roles of woman and man. In Canticles nature and work are pleasures leading to love . . . ." Furthermore, in both stories, there is a mutuality of the sexes; woman is equal to man and there is no dominance or subordination. Both man and woman also have to contend with the dangers of the gardens. In Eden there is the danger of the words of the serpent and the consequences of eating from the tree of knowledge. In Song of Songs there is the danger of the sterile winters (2:11), the foxes which spoil the vineyards (2:15), the knowledge of jealousy (8:6), and the suffering in the hands of the watchmen (5:7). Finally, parental references occur in both Genesis 2 and Song of Songs as well. In Genesis 2:24 man leaves his father and his mother to cleave to his wife. This is reflected in Song of Songs in the matriarchal images. Man speaks of his lover as the "darling of her mother" (6:9) and describes when her mother gave birth to her (8:5).

In conclusion, Song of Songs can be studied as midrash on Genesis 2:4-25 because of their similar structure and content. Some of the major themes and motifs represented by both narratives are man's equality with woman,
their shared love, their home in a garden, their enjoyment of the various fruits, trees, and spices which grew in their garden, their propensity to work, and their confrontations of danger. Phyllis Trible concludes, "whatever else it may be, Canticles is a commentary on Genesis 2. Paradise Lost is Paradise Regained." Trible feels however that the midrash on Song of Songs is not complete as there is no mention of sin or disobedience nor are there any actions of punishment from a Deity. We shall see in our examination of Genesis 3 that the reason sin, disobedience, and punishment are not part of the midrash on creation is because it is not actually a part of the narrative itself. Let us turn now to Genesis 3.
GENESIS 3: A NEW PERSPECTIVE

"Lo, sons are a heritage from the LORD,
the fruit of the womb a reward."
=Psalms 127=

"You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands;
you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you."
=Psalms 128=

Just as the Yahwist creation narrative has been interpreted as a tale of male superiority and female subordination, so the story in Genesis 3 has been reduced to a tale of sin, suffering, and punishment. According to traditional interpretation, Eve was a temptress, responsible for all sin in the world as well as the destitute condition of humanity as a result of God’s punishment. However upon close examination of the narrative, a different meaning and purpose becomes evident. To define this new meaning and purpose, the type of analyses used in Genesis 2:4-25 must be performed on Genesis 3; the biases of traditional interpretation discarded and the narrative examined in its own historical and literary context. Since original meanings of words and verses have in many instances been lost through translation, examining Genesis 3 in its original Hebrew form is important to a complete understanding of its contextual significance.

Genesis 3:

Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of
the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die." But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate."

The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all cattle,
and above all wild animals;
upon your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.
I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your seed and her seed;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."

To the woman he said,
"I will greatly multiply your pain in
childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children,
yet your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you."

And to Adam he said,
"because you have listened to the voice of
your wife,
and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,
'You shall not eat of it,'
cursed is the ground because of you;
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of
your life;
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
you are dust,
and to dust you shall return."
The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them.

Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever"--therefor the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

Included in the various claims that woman is responsible for sin in the world are: Woman is a temptress; she is untrustworthy, gullible, and simimpleminded; she is cursed by pain in childbirth, a punishment more severe than man's punishment thereby making woman's sin greater than man's; her desire for her husband is to keep her faithful and submissive to him; God gives man the right to rule over woman. Interpretations such as these try to link moral weakness with sexual attraction, making woman directly responsible for sinning and seducing. None of these renditions however, are included in the narrative and to read Genesis 3 in this light would be erroneous. There is absolutely no evidence that woman is weaker, more cunning, or more sexual than man.

Traditional renderings of this narrative place the responsibility of sin on woman because she presented the fruit from the tree of knowledge to man and he ate it. Herbert Haag writes, "The moment the snake called the woman's attention to the forbidden tree, desire immediately awoke within her, and the act was committed without delay. There is not the slightest trace in the story of qualms of conscience, of an inner conflict or of hesitation to sin. Sin became practically inevitable for the first man when he played with temptation." Woman thus becomes a temptress who deceives man.

However, it is neither stated nor implied that woman tempted man. Adam is not reluctant to take the fruit nor does he contemplate his action. Eve's act was one of sharing, not one of temptation. In response to God's inquiry man said, "the woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." First the man betrays the woman, then he blames God, and finally accepts responsibility. However the betrayal is actually an admission of solidarity with the woman in the transgression. Man does not mention that he was tempted by the woman. She gave him the fruit just as God gave the man woman. In fact, the same verbal root is used, עָלַל (to give) with respect to God's giving of woman to man and to Eve's giving the fruit to man. There is also a Hebrew verb meaning "to give" which has the connotation of deceit, but it is not used here.

Next the woman answered God's interrogation, "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate." She does not blame God like man does and she does not implicate man like man implicated her. She speaks only for herself; "The serpent beguiled me," not the serpent beguiled us. Here the serpent is most definitely the tempter. He does not give the fruit to the woman like God gives (עָלַל) woman to man but deceives the woman into eating it. The Hebrew verb used in this instance is from the verbal root נָשִּׁיר which means "to lift up," "to bear," "to bear guilt," "to deceive." Thus the Hebrew verb נָשִּׁיר only characterizes the action of the serpent, and the verb עָלַל characterizes woman's actions.

More important than the responses of man and woman to God's query in understanding the intent behind Genesis 3, is God's oracle to man and woman. Contrary to traditional beliefs that Genesis 3 depicts woman as being responsible for sin in the world, the narrative is not one which deals with sin either on woman's part or man's. In fact, there is no explicit

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5The previous paragraphs concerning man's and woman's answer to God's accusation taken from Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, pp. 119-120.
6All the following material on God's oracle to man and woman taken from Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 87-119 unless quoted otherwise.
reference to sin in the narrative at all.\(^7\) In the Hebrew account of Genesis 3, the words sin or transgression never appear. The act of eating the forbidden fruit has been labeled by traditional interpretations as a sinful act of disobedience but God provides no such judgement. Nor does the Hebrew Bible associate any of the later sins of the children of Israel with the earlier behavior of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. In fact, the first time sin appears in the Hebrew Bible is in the Cain and Abel narrative (Genesis 4:7). Even there, the sins are not linked with Adam and Eve. It would seem that the prophets, whose writings are filled with admonishments against the sinful behavior of the children of Israel, would cite the Eden story. In their concern for judgement and punishment they could have convincingly drawn a parallel yet they do not.

To show that sin is not a basic thematic element in the Eden tale, a lexical analysis of key verses is essential. Just as the absence of the word sin in Genesis 3 is significant, the presence of other words is also significant. The repetition of words or phrases is a characteristic way in which Hebrew emphasizes certain ideas and motifs. This emphasis might not be apparent to the reader of a translation of the Hebrew text. In English translations for example, it is consistent with the stylistic norms to vary vocabulary whereas in Hebrew the same word may occur many times. This is partially due to the fact that in Hebrew the same roots occur for both the verbal and nominal forms of a word. For example, in Hebrew the words "eat" and "food" are derived from the same root, שָׁלַב. Words from the same root in Hebrew constitute a repetition. The Eden narrative is replete with such repetitions. The failure to take them into consideration is a serious shortcoming of traditional interpretations. Martin Buber who worked with Franz Rosenzweig on a German translation of the Bible was particularly concerned with the dynamic quality of recurring Hebrew roots and went to great lengths to preserve their repetition in his German translation.

I call it "dynamic" because between combinations of sounds related to one another in this manner a kind of movement takes place: if one imagines the entire text deployed before him, one can sense waves moving back and forth between the words. The measured repetition that matches the inner rhythm of the text, or rather, that wells up from it, is one of the most powerful means for conveying meaning without expressing it.  

One of the most prominent word themes in Genesis 3 is in fact the repetition of the root לְבָנָה. There is only one root which occurs more frequently in the entire narrative: לֶבֶן. What can be deduced from the numerous occurrences of לְבָנָה is that human existence coincided with a concern for food. As we shall discuss later, the narrator of the tale was acutely aware that the availability of crops directly influenced survival. The struggle for sustenance was an immediate concern and consequently, the first time God addressed man was to tell him that fruit from the trees was to be eaten (Genesis 2:16). Carol Meyers in her book Discovering Eve aptly states that "the daily, central, interminable concern of the farmer in the highlands of Palestine has shaped the movement, focus, and vocabulary of the Eden narrative."

By looking closely at the context in which Genesis 3 was written, its original purpose seems to be that of a wisdom tale, addressing the realities of life and the difficulties involved in it, not a tale of sin and punishment as traditionally viewed. Genesis 3 is a fragment of wisdom literature among the many in the Hebrew Bible. Like the aphorisms in Proverbs, the story of Job, and certain Psalms, the Eden narrative belongs to the kind of pragmatic, instructional wisdom dealing with the paradoxes and harsh realities of life.

We begin the complex examination of God’s oracle to woman (Genesis 3:16) with the first line, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing." This first sentence has a very intricate verbal structure. In Hebrew, the words "greatly multiply" are composed of a verb which is accompanied by an

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8Meyers, p. 90 from Volume 2 (Schriften zur Bible), p. 1131 of Buber’s collected works.
9For more information on wisdom literature see Meyers, p. 90 from Murphy, Wisdom Literature (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishers, 1981).
infinitive absolute which is a different form of the same verbal root רָבָּה (to become many). There is no syntactical equivalent in English of the doubling of the verb in Hebrew which serves to emphasize this action of becoming many. In English the doubling of the verb is represented by an adverb which modifies the verb and intensifies the action.

The Hebrew verb itself, רָבָּה contains a nuance having the connotation of a numerical increase—the increase of a quantity such as people, money, or animals. Even in its rare usages such as when a person becomes great, the verb implies that the person's status was magnified because of the increase of his or her possessions (money, land, sheep). In Genesis the construction of the verb רָבָּה with its infinitive absolute occurs three times: Genesis 3:16, 16:10, and 22:17. In Genesis 16:10 and 22:17 the verbal root and its infinitive absolute refer to a population increase; the multiplication of a people. Since both times the root רָבָּה is used in reference to things which can be counted, its usage in reference to pain in God's mandate to woman is surprising. Pain is subjective and defies quantification so that an interpretation of רָבָּה where a verb which suggests quantification (multiply) appears in conjunction with a direct object suggesting subjectivity (pain) should be suspect.

Another important word to examine is "childbearing" which comes from the Hebrew word אֶחְיֵהוֹד. Hebraic vocabulary concerning pregnancy, conception, and birth is much more developed than the English vocabulary concerning these processes and אֶחְיֵהוֹד has a more subtle meaning than simply "childbearing." אֶחְיֵהוֹד actually refers to the earliest stages of pregnancy and not the process of childbirth. In its verbal form it means to become pregnant and not to be pregnant. In English the closest equivalent is "to conceive." In looking at the Genesis narrative, we see that pain is not an accurate or suitable description of pregnancy. Becoming pregnant is highly desirable. Furthermore, there is a close association between sexual intercourse and conception which makes the possibility of pain being a part of conception even more remote.
Thus, in the first line of God's oracle to woman something is multiplied. God can not multiply something unless it already exists. Therefore something in its natural, existing state was intensified. There is no reason to believe that pain was an aspect of the natural state of conception. If God did not increase pain what did he multiply? Saint Jerome recognized that what God augmented were conceptions. Saint Jerome's Latin translation reads, "I will multiply your toils and your conceptions."

From where does the word "pain" originate? It is derived from the Hebrew word קֵלֶב which is a noun form of the verbal root כֹּלֶב meaning "to upset," "to pain," or "to grieve." There are fifteen places in which this verb is used in the Hebrew Bible. Fourteen refer explicitly to psychological or emotional distress and not to physical pain. In the fifteenth place (Ecclesiastes 10:9) in which a physical state is indicated, the verb refers to the action of injuring and not the accompanying pain of that injury: "He who quarries stones is hurt [pained] by them."

The actual noun קֵלֶב occurs only three times. The first time is in Genesis 3:16 where קֵלֶב is translated "pain." The second occurrence is in Genesis 3:17 where man will only eat from the ground through toil (כֹּלֶב). The final occurrence of the noun קֵלֶב is in Genesis 5:29 when Lamech refers to the work and toil of his hands. In Genesis 3:17 and 5:29 קֵלֶב refers to physical labor and not to pain and furthermore, none of the verbal forms of כֹּלֶב in the Hebrew Bible refer to physical pain. Logically, the noun קֵלֶב should be translated "toil" and not "pain." God increases something that already exists and toil is already present in the Hebrew Bible, pain is not. Genesis 2:5 implies that the purpose of human life is to till the ground and Genesis 2:15 states that when man was first placed in Eden, it was for the purpose of working the ground. Meyers summarizes the entire analysis of the first line of God's oracle to woman writing, "God's oracle to woman does not assign her a new aspect of existence but rather intensifies what was seen as
an intrinsic part of existence, namely, human labor."\(^{10}\) Meyers proposes the following translation of the first line:

\[
I \text{ will greatly increase your toil and your pregnancies [conceptions].}
\]

The two ideas which stem from Meyers's interpretation of line one of God's edict are that woman's role in productive or agrarian tasks has been augmented as well as her role in procreation. The female contribution to society is thus increased twofold by the increase in these two important aspects of female existence.

The second line in Genesis 3:16, "in pain you shall bring forth children," necessitates a closer look as well. The verb in Hebrew used for "the bringing forth of children" refers to the childbirth process itself. The verb רעָנָה is used in two ways: transitively and intransitively. In its transitive form, רעָנָה can signify "to bear children" and can be applied to both the mother and the father. Men do not give birth but they do become parents. When רעָנָה is used to refer to the birth process itself and not the notion of having offspring, it becomes an intransitive verb. Line two of Genesis 3:16 has a transitive usage signifying to beget children or to have offspring. Thus the emphasis is not on labor and childbirth but on the notion of becoming a parent. There is no connotation of physical childbirth.

The Hebrew word pain in this line comes from בָּשָׁם which is found in fewer than ten passages in the Hebrew Bible, most of them in wisdom literature. It appears in four places in Proverbs, two in Psalms, and one in a prophetic passage. In five of these passages בָּשָׁם clearly refers to productive, physical labor.\(^{11}\) For example Proverbs 14:23 states that "in all toil (בָּשָׁם) there is profit." In Isaiah 14:3 however, בָּשָׁם carries the connotation of both physical

\(^{10}\)Meyers, p. 105.  
\(^{11}\)Proverbs 14:23, 5:10, 10:22; Isaiah 58:3; Psalms 127:2
pain and mental anguish: "When the LORD has given you rest from your pain and turmoil (לֶעַב) the hard service with which you were made to serve . . ." In two more instances לֶעַב is derived from the normal usage of its verbal root meaning "to upset" or "to grieve." For example, in Proverbs 15:1 לֶעַב means to upset: "... a harsh word stirs up anger [upsets--לֶעַב]."

Thus לֶעַב has a variety of meanings. It may mean "toil," "emotional distress," or in its verbal form, "to upset" or "to grieve." In line two of Genesis 3:16, לֶעַב has a double meaning. There is the nuance of toil but there is also the nuance of turmoil as in Isaiah 14:3. These nuances emphasize the idea from line one that woman is involved in productive labor, bearing children which is her maternal role, and at the same time alludes to the difficulty of life and the fact that multiple childbirths were not without times of distress. Hence in line two, Hebrew combines both the physical and mental aspects of לֶעַב. As a translation for the second line of God's oracle to woman Meyers proposes:

(Along) with travail shall you beget children.12

In summation of line two Meyers states: "The audience of the oracle is not simply being reminded that women work and have children. Rather, they are learning that the work is unremitting and is not mitigated by the procreative demands placed on female existence. Moreover, they are learning via the different shadings of meaning expressed by the second term that the fulfillment of God's charge does not automatically entitle one to bliss and joy, that anguishes inevitably are an accompaniment to the carrying out of life's tasks."13

12There is no English equivalent for the word לֶעַב. Meyers proposes "travail" because it has the connotation of very hard work which is parallel to "toil." She does not suggest the word "labor" because of the connotations of the processes leading up to birth. The preposition which introduces "travail" is normally rendered "with" or "in." However here, since the idea is of two things accompanying each other or going together, "along with" is more appropriate than "in."

13Meyers, p. 108.
Less lexical analysis is needed for line three. The rendering "yet your desire shall be for your husband" of English translations is fairly close to its original meaning. What is important in understanding the significance of the line three is grasping the thematic connection between lines one and two and the third line. The first two lines of the divine mandate depict the two main aspects of female existence: her responsibilities for productive labor and procreation. The reasons for the importance of these tasks can be explained by the findings of archaeological studies of ancient Palestine.

The demographic conditions discovered in Ancient Israel show that nearly fifty percent of the population did not survive until the age of eighteen. In addition, the mortality rate for females during their childbearing years greatly exceeded the mortality rate for males of the same age. Finally, a woman's life expectancy was only thirty years while a man's was forty. In response to the high loss in population, women produced many children. In normal times when outbreaks of plagues did not decimate the population, women would have to bear twice the number of children to compensate for the numerous deaths. In ancient Palestine reproductive strategies were created to meet the needs of an ever decreasing population. Genesis 3:16 must be read in light of this situation, the mortal risks of childbearing. The natural sexual and emotional desire for her husband was the way in which a woman overcame an understandable reluctance to have many children, a necessity which greatly increased the probability that she would die.

The last line, "and he shall rule over you," is more difficult to understand due to the many nuances of the verb "to rule" or לְלַעֲפֹת in Hebrew. The author of an entry on לְלַעֲפֹת in a theological dictionary was aware of the difficulty in giving a single definition of the word. R. D. Calver writes that "the precise nature of the rule is as various as the real situations in which the action or state so designated occur. It seems to be the situation in all languages and cultures that words for oversight, rule, government must be

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defined in relation to the situation out of which the function arises. The
range of meanings of הָלָּס in the Hebrew Bible is enormous. It can express
divine dominion as in the case of God ruling Israel. הָלָּס also implies self-
control as in Proverbs 16:32 when the author states that "he who rules his
spirit" is better than a person who has no self-control. Furthermore, הָלָּס
can have political connotations as in Judges 14:4 and 15:11 which tells of the
Philistine rule over the Israelites. In Genesis 3:16, the dominion of man can
not be taken as an example of hierarchical control because of the situation to
which the oracle was addressed. In light of the social and economic necessity
for women to have children and the understandable reluctance for them to do
so, man's will was imposed on woman in the hope that conception would
result. However, since the woman experiences desire for her husband, his
control is not seen as oppressive. To comprehend this concept, an analogy
relating the phenomenon to contemporary times might be helpful.

In nineteenth-century France, depopulation due to the falling birthrate
was perceived as a grave threat to the role of France as a world power. The
solution to the depopulation problem was legislation promoting natality. The
solution in ancient Palestine was a divine ruling giving men the power to
overcome female reluctance. This was encouraged in national interest just as
natality legislation was encouraged in France in the national interest.

Thus, line four is lexically correct if its context is kept in mind.
Meyers proposes the word "predominate" instead of the word "rule" as it
preserves the concept of rule but not the absolute imposition of male will.
Together, the four lines in God's oracle to woman as advanced by Meyers
read:

I will greatly increase your toil and your
pregnancies [conceptions];

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15Meyers, p. 115 from R.D. Calver, "Mashal: definition III: Rule, have dominion,
16For a detailed analysis of the intersection of depopulation, feminism, and nationalism see
K. Offen, "Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in End of the Century France;"

46
(Along) with travail shall you beget children. 
For to your man is your desire, 
And he shall predominate over you.

There are essentially three notions to remember when reading Genesis 3:16. 
(1) Woman is productive in her labor and also produces many children. 
(2) Woman had a natural reluctance to bear children. (3) Woman's reluctance 
had to be overcome to ensure the survival of her people and the way in which 
this reluctance was overcome was by the passion she felt towards man, 
allowing for sexual intercourse which resulted in pregnancies and 
consequentially, many children. God's oracle to woman must be read in the 
context of these biological and socio-economic realities in ancient Palestine. 
If there are any doubts as to the context to which Genesis 3:16 was addressed, 
the oracle to man that follows should eliminate them.

God's reply to man (Genesis 3:17) contain words such as "toil," 
thorns," "thistles," and "sweat." To interpret the original message and 
function of these words and the implications of them as parts of wisdom 
literature we must again examine them within the contextual reality of the 
Israelites. The oracle depicts the difficult nature of farming in ancient 
Palestine. Information from archaeology, historical geography, and 
anthropology shows that in premonarchic Palestine, life was more difficult 
than in most other areas in the Near East. An enormous effort was required 
for survival; the soil was inhospitable and not suitable for crops. Man's job 
was his labor to produce the crops. Woman's job was to increase the 
population by bearing many children and to add to the productivity of the 
land in response to demographic and environmental conditions.17 The 
purpose of the oracle was to help the Israelites accept an aspect of reality and 
to cope with it. Life had its limitations yet was worth living. One was 
obliged to face the harsh realities, accept what could not be changed, and 
enjoy the good things in life.18

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17For a more detailed analysis of the demographic and environmental conditions in ancient 
Israel see chapter three in Meyers, Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context. 
18Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger, The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the 
Genesis 3:16-19 deals with the harsh realities of life and does not have any positive aspects. Perhaps this is why the tale is seen as having inherent connections with disobedience and sin. The positive aspects do come however, in other wisdom literature such as in Psalms 127 and 128 which are thematically related to Genesis 3 in their concern with labor and procreation.

Even those interpretations which depict Genesis 3 as a tale of sin and punishment, placing the fault on Eve for committing the ultimate sin of eating the fruit and then tempting man, seem to have analyzed the narrative on a superficial level. In looking at the immediacy of the prohibition we see that God first spoke directly to man telling him not to eat of the tree. Eve heard God's word indirectly through her husband. To the serpent, God's command was only hearsay, related by the woman who only had secondhand knowledge of it. Thus, there is a decreasing immediacy in the prohibition; man heard of the restriction directly from God and woman heard of it indirectly. Man becomes more guilty than woman in the crime of eating the fruit because he disobeyed a commandment which he heard directly from God. To illustrate this point, an analogy might be helpful. If a fireman told you to move your car because there was a fire and there were no cars permitted within a two block radius of the fire, you would move the car even though you were two blocks away from the fire and could not see it. After you moved the car and were walking towards your apartment, you saw somebody else parking in the same place from which you were instructed to move. You inform that person of what the fireman had told you and continue towards home. However since the person attempting to park in your place had not been told by the fireman himself to move and furthermore could see no evidence of the fire, that person would be doubtful of the authenticity of your warning, perhaps thinking that you wanted the parking place vacant so you could park there. The person is therefore more apt to disregard the warning and leave the car, not realizing that you were being honest in your warning until the person saw the ticket on the car or until the car was towed. In interpretations where Genesis 3 is about sin and punishment, Eve was in a similar situation as the second person trying to park in the parking space. She put faith in the story she heard directly from the serpent (she would not die from eating the fruit but rather would become more knowledgeable) instead of believing the commandment which she heard indirectly through man. She did not realize until after the expulsion from the Garden of Eden that Adam's account was the correct one. Thus, there is no justification for Eve's complete responsibility for the crime of eating the fruit and thus the downfall of humankind. In summary, there was a decreasing immediacy in God's prohibition; man heard of it directly and woman indirectly. In God's "punishment," the immediacy of knowledge of the prohibition was considered. Man was more guilty than woman because he knew of the commandment directly yet still disobeyed it. Man is cursed by God (He is actually indirectly cursed through the earth: "Cursed is the ground because of you"). The serpent is cursed directly ("cursed are you") because although he did not know of the prohibition directly, he was involved in deception. However woman is neither cursed directly or indirectly because she was neither involved in deception nor did she know of the prohibition directly. Thus in the rendition of Genesis 3 as a story punishing Eve for her supposed sin, masculine interpretations have completely overlooked the fact that Eve is the only character who is not cursed. (The basis for this footnote based on H. Nicole Schamban, _The Status of Women in Ancient and Contemporary Judaism_, written for Thomas Longstaff, Colby College [May 19, 1987], p. 12; Christ and Plaskow, p. 80).
In working hard, having many children, acknowledging God's sovereignty, and accepting one's position in life, come rewards of happiness and fulfillment. Thus when read in light of its historical context, Genesis 3 is not a tale of sin and disobedience but one showing life's realities.

In summary, in Genesis 3 woman is not a temptress or untrustworthy or simpleminded. She contemplates the tree before she takes the forbidden fruit. She knows it is good for food; it is a delight to the eyes and it is desired because it makes one wise. "In one brief second, Eve has a vision of the total range of human experience, and by eating from the tree she expresses a lust for life in all its manifestations. The act of violating God's order is not described by the biblical author as the surrender to temptation of a silly, empty-headed person, but as the daring attempt of a curious person with an appetite for life to encompass the whole spectrum of life's possibilities." Woman is fully aware of her action and of the result of her action before she decides to eat the fruit. The initiative and the decision to eat the fruit are her's alone. She acts independently, not seeking her husband's permission or advice. At the same time, she is neither secretive nor deceptive. Nowhere does the story suggest that woman tempted man and its silence on this point does not allow for that inference. By contrast, man is the silent recipient of Eve's gift. His act is one of quiescence, not of initiative.

As was already established in the discussion of the second creation narrative, both woman and man have the same Creator. He explicitly uses the word "good" to introduce the creation of woman. Both man and woman are equal in birth and there is a complete physical, psychological, sociological, and theological rapport between them: They are "bone of bones and flesh of flesh." Thus if there is moral frailty in one as Haag suggests, there must be moral frailty in both of them. Genesis 3 does not legitimize the oppression of women. Rather, it negates such a patriarchal interpretation.

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20For a more detailed analysis of the historical context of Genesis 3 see Meyers, chapter 5.
23Christ and Plaskow, p. 78.
narrative emphasizes the duality of the existence of man and woman: the goodness and frailty of both, their solidarity in daily sufferings, and their shared need of happiness and fulfillment. Next we shall examine several creation myths which emphasize these ideas.

CREATION MYTHS

"The new generation should rejoice, seeing its holy duty as one of creating an element in our shared myth that has been developed in only a fragmentary way."

=Arthur Green=

Just as there are various renditions of the creation of mankind in the Genesis narratives, so are there different myths regarding how the world began. And like the Genesis narratives reflected the historical, cultural, and literary tendencies of ancient Hebraic society, the mystical traditions reflected the realities of the times in which they were written as well. Following are three fragments of mythical tradition and their meanings in light of their contextual situations.

The Lilith Myth:

And wild beasts shall meet with hyenas, the satyr shall cry to his fellow; yea, there shall the night hag [Lilith] alight, and find for herself a resting place.

(Isaiah 34: 14)

This passage in Isaiah is the only reference to Lilith in the Bible. Her story does appear however, in the Alphabet of Ben Sira and is told as follows:

After the Holy One created the first human being, Adam, He said: It is not good for Adam to be alone." He created a woman, also from the earth, and called her Lilith.

1The "night hag" is referring to Lilith. In other translations of the Bible the verse reads, "Yea, Lilith shall repose there..." The name Lilith (לילי in Hebrew) comes from the verbal root לילה meaning "to be dark." This gives us the feminine noun לילה or "night," from which the name Lilith comes.
They quarreled immediately. She said: "I will not lie below you." He said, "I will not lie below you, but above you. For you are fit to be below me and I above you."

She responded: "We are both equal because we both come from the earth."

Neither listened to the other. When Lilith realized what was happening, she pronounced the Ineffable Name of God and flew off into the air.

Adam rose in prayer before the Creator, saying, "The woman you gave me has fled from me." Immediately the Holy One sent three angels after her.

The Holy One said to Adam: "If she wants to return, all the better. If not, she will have to accept that one hundred of her children will die every day."

The angels went after her, finally locating her in the sea, in the powerful waters in which the Egyptians were destined to perish. They told her what God had said, and she did not want to return.²

Continuing the myth, in the struggle for equality which Lilith felt was justly hers, she fled, not standing for subservience. She became evil after she left Adam to avenge God's punishment by the death of one hundred of her children every day. In the legends, she tried to harm the women and children who did not have the protection of a special amulet warding away her evil spirit.

There are several questions concerning the Lilith creation myth essential to the complete understanding of it: (1) Does the Lilith myth have a historical basis? If not, why was she invented? (2) Which is Lilith's true character; a courageous woman struggling for equality and independence or a woman seeking vengeance? (3) Is Lilith a model for Jewish women and can only part of her story serve as a model? Should we reject Lilith because of her alleged crimes and forget her revolt or should we focus only on the significance of it? The rest of this section will be devoted to an attempt to answer these questions.

Most of the legends concerning Lilith developed during the periods of exile (after the Babylonian Exile of 586 B.C.E. and the Roman deportations of 70 C.E.). She appears in the Babylonian Talmud and various medieval mystical works (Zohar and the Alphabet of Ben Sira). All these texts were

either written or compiled in the Diaspora. Lilith's story of exile then, is a reflection on the actual times of exile during which her story was written. The same characteristics which Lilith displays in the myth are those needed for survival during exile. Lilith is the image of strength and decisiveness. She resists Adam's attempts at dominance and is courageous and assertive in doing so. She does not appeal to God to solve her problems with Adam and is willing to accept the consequences of her actions. Lilith is a powerful woman. By acknowledging her revolt and telling of her vengeful activities (whether or not to accept them as significant will be discussed later), myth-makers were also acknowledging her power. Exile was understood and perceived by Jews as a threat to Jewish survival that had to be endured and overcome and the characteristics which Lilith displays would help Jews to survive persecution, humiliation, and the rupture from life in their homeland.

Why, then, is Lilith portrayed in a negative fashion? Janeway writes:

negative roles often appear in times when there is social change and when power is no longer bound by customary limits. New rules are called for but at the same time, people feel nervous because they do not know what the new role player expects of them. They want to separate themselves from the troublemaker and hold him at a distance. The means they find at hand is to call up the negative shadow role.³

What Janeway implies is that every positive role is associated with a negative role. So while the positive characteristics which Lilith displays—strength, decisiveness, courage, assertiveness, and self-responsibility—become representative of those characteristics needed to survive during exile, her negative characteristics, vengefulness for example, become a metaphor for the exile itself. That the account of Lilith's revolt is intrinsically Jewish (no non-Jewish source tells of a similar female struggle for equality) is especially important when one regards the Lilith myth as associated with the unique history of the Jews.

The destructive crimes of Lilith (killing child-bearing women and newborn babies and taking the sperm of men she has excited in their sleep to make demon children to replace her own) symbolize the decimation of the

³ quoted in Heschel, p. 47.
Jews during the exile. Jews are attacked while they are vulnerable and are robbed of their future. The Lilith who robs the Jews of their power and future is a metaphor for the Exile itself. Lilith breaks away from her traditional role. In doing this, Janeway points out, that she should be prepared to find herself "attacked, regarded as unattractive and frightening [and running] into all kinds of hostility."4

We have seen that there are two aspects of Lilith’s character: the justified rebel and the vengeful witch. In deciding on which of these aspects to focus, it is important to bear in mind that mythological characters have never remained immutable; they continuously change in response to human need. Look at the character of Elijah for example. From the fire-eating prophet of First Commonwealth times he became the jolly beggar wandering from shtetl to shtetl. There is nothing to dictate which tradition to accept. Furthermore, the characterizations of role models in Jewish tradition have been very flexible. In Jewish lore King David is loved and respected. However tradition could easily have emphasized his immorality with regard to his political manipulations. He could have become a "negative role-model of an adulterer and a Machiavellian politician."5

The character of Lilith had two sides, but so did the characters of Elijah and David. In choosing on which aspect of Lilith to focus it is necessary to bear in mind the historical context in which the myth was written. Intrinsic to Lilith's character is her struggle for independence, her courage in taking risks, and her commitment to the equality of man and woman. It is these characteristics which are central to the very essence of the

4Images of Lilith are not confined to ancient Judaic texts. There are also modern incarnations of her. For example, S. Y. Agnon's "The Lady and the Peddler" shows Helene, who symbolizes Lilith as a bloodsucking, female vampire. She entices a wanderer into friendship and trust and then tries to suck his blood. On another level, the story is a parable of the precariousness of Jewish life in exile. Joseph, the wanderer, journeys in the midst of hostile strangers. He is the "wandering Jew," the homeless nomad. Helene (her name purposely evokes the Hellenic world and the foreign culture with which Jews were forced to contend during their long history) gives him shelter on a stormy night, tries to attack him, fails, and Joseph, the eternal wanderer continues his journey. The story celebrates the Jews' capacity to survive in the face of hostility. (Discussion of "The Lady and the Peddler" taken from Nehama Aschkenasy, Eve's Journey: Feminine Images in Hebraic Literary Tradition [Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986], p. 58).

5Hechel, p. 49.

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Lilith who is faithful to her own principles. Lilith's post revolt traits are difficult to accept as part of the intrinsic nature of her character for the very important reason that they contradict each other. Lilith is called both seductive and frigid and a mother of demons at the same time as being sterile. Thus we can deal with the negative aspects of Lilith's character in the same way that Jewish tradition deals with the negative aspects of King David: accept the essence and reject the later additions as not central to the intrinsic nature of the character.

The Sun and Moon Analogy: In certain passages in the Hebrew Bible and in the Babylonian Talmud a different rendering of creation is presented. It is based upon the passage in Genesis 1:16 which reads, "And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night." The Midrash understands the passage in two different ways. The first interpretation is that God punished the moon because it complained about it's equality to the sun. Initially these basic forces in the universe represented the primary feminine and masculine forces; the moon being the feminine principle and the sun being the masculine. However since the feminine principle sought to dominate the masculine principle, God punished the moon, making it smaller and subservient to the sun.

6The two interpretations of the Midrash found in David Sheinkin, M.D., Path of the Kabbalah (New York: Paragon House, 1986), p. 105.
7There seems to be a contradiction in the moon being symbolic of the feminine force because in Hebrew the most common word for "moon" is masculine in gender. Upon closer examination of the Hebrew Bible however, four Hebrew words for "moon" appear, not just one. נַלַג appears most frequently (for example: Isaiah 13:10; 60:19-20, Job 25:5; 31:20, Ezekiel 32:7, Ecclesiastes 12:2) and is masculine in gender. נָלַג occurs much less frequently (for example: Proverbs 7:20) and is presumably masculine although its gender is not clearly exhibited in Hebrew and the origin of the word is dubious (Francis Brown, D.D., D. Litt, S.R. Driver, D.D., D. Litt., Charles A. Briggs, D.D., D. Litt., A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980], p. 490). יִבְשַׁל is used in both masculine and feminine contexts. It is masculine in gender when used in Genesis 7:11 for example. However it is feminine in gender in the Massoretic Text 38:24. It's gender is also feminine when used as a proper noun for the wife of Shaharaim, for the name of the city Carthage, and for the name of a town in Judah. Finally, שִׁבְשַׁל is a poetic form of the word "moon" and is always feminine in gender. It appears in Isaiah 24:23; 30:26 and Song of Songs 6:10. Rabbinic literature also uses נַלַג for "moon." Rabbinic literature was written primarily in the second half of the
The second interpretation of Genesis 1:16 claims that the moon felt that two equal rulers in power could not be effective and asserted that one of the two forces must dominate the other in order for the universe to exist. God agreed with the moon, that the effectiveness of ruling over the universe with two equal powers would be compromised, so he made the moon smaller. This is the interpretation which is corroborated by the Babylonian Talmud. In one passage the text reads, "[When God created the sun and moon, the two great lights], the moon said to the Holy One, 'Sovereign of the Universe! Can two rulers wear one crown?' He answered, 'Go then and make yourself smaller!' . . ." 8

The shrinking of the moon should not be seen as a punishment or representative of the dominance of the sun over the moon and analogously, the dominance of the masculine force in the universe over the feminine. The shrinking of the moon should be seen rather as a honing and refining of its powers. The moon in its present state actually refines the light from the sun, reflecting it to earth.9 It is also possible to regard the story from the following point of view: In order to become closer to God we must humble ourselves. We must take our egos and make them smaller in order to draw closer to the Divine. This shrinking is not necessarily a punishment; it allows for a greater truth. Therefore when God tells the moon to make itself smaller, he asserts its domination over the sun because in the moon's shrinking, it will draw closer to truth. The moon possesses greater wisdom and sensitivity in its shrunken state than the sun does.10

The myth continues, presenting the set of circumstances in which the moon will once again become equal in size and power to the sun. Isaiah 30:26 reads, "Moreover the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the

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Middle Ages. Jewish mystical literature was also written in the latter part of the Middle Ages having its origins in the Apocrypha, the Ma'aseh Merkavah (based upon the first chapter in Ezekiel and known as Merkabah Mysticism), and the Talmud (perhaps the greatest work of rabbinic literature). Therefore since Jewish Mysticism was based in part on the Talmud which is rabbinic literature and which used a feminine form to denote the word "moon," Jewish Mysticism could have adopted the feminine form of the word "moon" or הַמּוֹן and thus "moon" could logically become a feminine force in mystic thought.

8Heschel, p. 261 from the Babylonian Talmud (Hullin 60a).
9Sheinkin, p. 105
10Sheinkin, p. 107.
light of the sun will be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day when the LORD binds up the hurt of his people, and heals the wounds inflicted by his blow." A similar passage from the Babylonian Talmud reads, "Rabbi Akha said to Rabbi Ashi: In the West, they pronounce the following blessing: 'Blessed be the One who renews the moons.' Whereupon he retorted: 'Such a blessing even our women folk pronounce.' [Let there be added] . . . "The moon He ordered that she should renew herself as a crown of beauty for those whom He sustains from the womb, and who will someday, like her, be renewed and magnify their Maker in the name of the glory of His Kingdom." 11

In order to explain the significance of the reparation of the sun and the moon a different but related creation myth needs to be examined, that of the Shekhinah. The Shekhinah, as explained by Susannah Heschel, is a term for the Divine Presence in the world; Jewish mystical literature describes Shekhinah as the feminine principle of God immanent in the world. She is described as a myriad of figures, a few being a daughter, bride, mother, moon, sea, faith, wisdom, and speech and is the chief object of both the divine and human search for wholeness and perfection. 12 By relating Shekhinah to the sun and the moon analogy, the creation myth becomes as follows: In the beginning, the LORD God created the sun and the moon as equals. When the LORD God reduced the brightness of the moon, Shekhinah, the female manifestation of Deity, went into exile. The cause of exile was the alienation of the masculine from the feminine: the alienation of the sun from the moon or the alienation of God from Shekhinah. The equality of the sun and the moon will come again with Messianic redemption when God and Shekhinah reunify. Therefore, by strict analogy, the moon once again will be as bright as the sun when women are restored to their rightful place on earth. Looking back at the passage from the Babylonian Talmud, one can interpret "from the womb" to mean God's children or the people of Israel who continuously disappear almost entirely from history but keep returning. With Messianic redemption will come the redemption of the moon, of Israel, and of the

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11 Heschel, p. 261 from the Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 42a).
12 Heschel, p. 222.
female half of שֵׁכְהִנָּ֖ה or Shekhinah, who, like the moon and Israel has been diminished or reduced.\textsuperscript{13}

It is not surprising that the moon symbolizes woman. In many religious traditions, the moon cycle and a woman's menstrual cycle are seen as inherently related. With this in mind, the imagery of God as Midwife and Mother who sustains "from the womb" as we saw before in the passage from the Babylonian Talmud, is consistent with the idea of God's concern for those whose womb "moves and changes with the moon."\textsuperscript{14}

There are other examples in Jewish tradition which suggest the outlook associating woman to the moon.\textsuperscript{15} One teaches that God exempted the women of Israel from work on Rosh Hodesh (the renewing of the moon at the beginning of the Jewish lunar month) because of their refusal to contribute to the making of the Golden Calf at Sinai by giving their jewelry. Tradition also teaches that the Jewish Patriarchs, Isaac and Jacob, married into the family of Lavan (the family of Rivkah, Rahel, and Leah) which was a name for the pale-white moon (as in Kiddush levana: the ceremony of hallowing the moon).

In addition, these women were all associated with a well. There is a traditional midrash about Rivkah which tells that when she met Eliezer, Abraham's servant at the well, the water rose to meet her (Midrash Rabbah, Genesis Rabbah LX: 5). When does water rise? When it is pulled by the moon's gravitation. Women are also associated with the moon and wells in the first four chapters of Exodus. It is the women who teach men the process of freedom by teaching them the mysteries of birth as birth is the biological archetype of freedom. Thus Miriam and Pharoah's daughter save Moses who then marries Zipporah. They have a child (which is necessary before Moses can experience the Burning Bush) and Zipporah must complete the birth by teaching Moses to circumcise his son (a necessary condition to reenter Egypt to liberate his people). It is important to note the association of Zipporah, like Rivkah and Rahel, with a well. There is an association between these morally strong women and the moon and water. At a number of important

\textsuperscript{13}Heschel, pp. 261, 262.
\textsuperscript{14}The relationship between a woman's menstrual cycle and the moon based on Heschel, p. 262.
\textsuperscript{15}The following examples from Heschel, pp. 262-264.
moments in the early stages of Judaism (the exemption from work of Jewish women on Rosh Hodesh by God and the saving of Moses for example), the connection between women and the moon or water was noteworthy. Perhaps these fragments of mystical thought quoted above and other pieces of mystical tradition not mentioned hint toward a feminist reading of the Torah, invited by the Torah itself. Let us look now more closely at mystical tradition concerning Shekhinah.

The Shekhinah: Until now we have assumed that Shekhinah is indeed the feminine principle of God immanent in the world. We look now at the basis for this assumption. Shekhinah appears throughout Hebraic literature; there are numerous references to her in both the Talmud and Midrash. Rabbi Yehoshua, a first and second century Palestinian teacher, states the things which Israel enjoyed in the desert: manna, quails, the well, the Tabernacle, the priesthood, the kingship, the Clouds of Glory, and Shekhinah. In addition, Talmudic discussion equates God with Shekhinah: "Rabbi Yose (second century) said: 'Never did the Shekhinah descend to earth, nor Moses and Elijah ascend to heaven... Is it correct that the Shekhinah never descend to earth? Is it not written, 'And Yahweh came down upon Mount Sinai...'?" Shekhinah is also endowed with physical attributes: "All those years that Israel was in the desert, these two caskets, one of a corpse [Joseph] and the other of Shekhinah [containing the two stone tablets of the Law] were carried [by the Israelites] side by side when the passersby would say: 'What is the nature of these two caskets?' They would answer, 'One is the casket of a corpse, and the other of Shekhinah.' 'Is it the custom that a corpse should be carried with the Shekhinah?' They would answer: 'This one [i.e. Joseph] observed what is written in the other one.' Interpreting this passage, the presence of Shekhinah corresponds to the presence of Joseph in the casket. They are both actual, physical presences.

Shekhinah is seen in the Midrash as well. Nadab and Abihv, contemporaries of Moses, feasted their eyes on Shekhinah and Moses

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16 The following references to Shekhinah as well as their analyses are found in Raphael Patai, The Hebrew Goddess (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1967), p. 141-154.

17 B. Sota 13a-b; cf. Mekhila, Beshallah
enjoyed her. Moses was furthermore joined by Shekhinah when the daughters of Pharaoh found the ark where he was placed by his mother. They opened the ark and saw Shekhinah. The examples of Shekhinah are numerous: Rabbi Yehoshua of Sikhnin says in the name of Rabbi Levi, a third and fourth century Palestinian Amora, "A simile: Like unto a cave on the seashore: when the waves rise, it fills with water, yet the sea is in no way diminished. Thus, it was with the Tent of Meeting: it became filled with the glory of Shekhinah but the world was in no way diminished." In addition, the early eleventh century Midrashist of Narbonne in his book entitled Bereshit Rabbati says in the name of Rabbi Akiba, "When the Holy One, blessed be He, considered the deeds of the generation of Enoch and that they were spoiled and evil, He removed Himself and His Shekhinah from their midst and ascended into the heights with blasts of trumpets..."

Shekhinah is also the love-aspect of God. This representation appears in numerous texts as well. For example, there is a parable which compares the Temple to Solomon's palanquin: just as the palanquin is inlaid with love, Shekhinah filled the Sanctuary. In another text it is stated, "When Shekhinah left the Sanctuary, she returned to caress and kiss its walls and columns, and cried and said: 'Be in peace, O my Sanctuary, be in peace, O my royal palace, be in peace, O my precious house, be in peace from now on, be in peace!'" Thus, as she appears in Hebraic literature, Shekhinah is indeed a presence; she is a substance with physical attributes. Shekhinah is the feminine manifestation of Deity; she is the female divine entity. Her sex is in the forefront of consciousness in every statement made about her even though her femininity is indicated only by the grammatical gender of her name. However, in Hebrew, gender plays a much more important role in grammar than in Indo-European languages. In English for example, it is possible to say "... it became filled with the glory of Shekhinah..." without

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19 B. Sota 12b.
20 Num. Rab. 12:4 (pp. 46d, 47b); Pesiqta diR. Kahana.
21 Bereshit Rabbati. The same midrash is found much earlier in a Hebrew version of The Book of Enoch, where, however, the crucial passage reads, "I removed my Shekhinah from their midst." Cf. Jellinek, Beth Hamidrash II. 114
22 Pesiqta diR. Kahana.
23 Lam. Rab. intro, 25.
knowing the gender of Shekhinah. In Semitic languages however, the verb, the adjective, and the noun have separate masculine and feminine forms so that the reader of "... it became filled with the glory of Shekhinah..." in Hebrew is impressed with her femininity.

Thus we can see how the analogy of the sun and the moon and of God and Shekhinah symbolizes the situation of man and woman in our society. The moon, Shekhinah, and woman are originally the equal counterparts but now the alienated counterparts of a unified presence. For example, originally the sun and the moon equally comprised the two great lights; God and Shekhinah equally comprised Deity; and man and woman equally comprised מָלֵאכָה. As God made the moon smaller, Shekhinah went into exile, and woman became subservient to man. However with Messianic redemption will come the equality of the sun and the moon once again, together with the reunification of God and Shekhinah and the equality of man and woman on earth.

In conclusion we see that not only have the creation narratives been misinterpreted and distorted to support the denigration of women, but the creation myths have been as well. Lilith's post-revolt traits (vengeance in the killing of woman and children and in taking sperm from men to produce demon children) were emphasized and other characteristics intrinsic to her character (her struggle for independence, her commitment to equality, courage, and decisiveness) largely ignored. Instead of looking at Lilith as a metaphor, her post-revolt traits symbolic of the exile and her virtues symbolic of those characteristics needed to endure and to survive exile, her character became one representative of the evil potential in women and the need to control this potential to do evil by controlling women themselves. We now look to the ordination of female rabbis as the culmination of all efforts to break with patriarchal interpretations of biblical texts.
THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY WESTERN SOCIETY: THE ORDINATION OF FEMALE RABBIS

"There are no theological barriers to women rabbis—only political ones."
—Lynn Gottlieb

Woman is immoral and corrupt. She is a temptress. Man has power over woman. Woman is the source of all evil in this world. All these claims for the deprecation of woman have been supported by biblical faith in traditional or masculine interpretations of biblical narratives. Is there any truth in these renderings? The explanation lies in the very evident gender differences between men and women leading to their different roles in life.

In ancient Israel there were essentially two arenas in life: the private or domestic sphere and the public sphere. The private sphere involved the duties concerning the home and family and was linked to women. The public sphere on the other hand included everything outside the home such as legal regulation, prayer, and study and was linked primarily with men. Although these differences appear hierarchical today in contemporary western society (as contemporary values give primacy to the public sphere), they were not hierarchical in ancient society. We should not translate our present day values to a society in which matters of kinship and family were paramount and not distinguishable as less important than economic or political matters.1

Male dominance in the public arena was not equivalent to female passivity.2 Women exerted their wills and affected all members of society. Let us not forget Hannah Rachel, the "Maid of Ludomir," a nineteenth-century Hasidic rebbe or Salome Alexandra or Deborah who rendered

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2 Meyers, p. 30.
judgements. There is nothing in biblical literature to suggest that women felt inferior to men or degraded or oppressed in any manner. In fact, Talmudic tradition says that each person had absolute equality, dignity, and worth. This equality within a sex-differentiated society came with the principle of "separate but equal," a principle depicting the essence of life in ancient Palestine.

The differentiation of roles was not absolute. Women did act as teachers and advisors. However, although this was not rare, it was not commonplace either. In general, women and men acted within their respective spheres of society. However this generality is no longer valid in contemporary western society. Women have integrated into the public sphere. Today it is commonplace to see women who have acquired advanced degrees of study, who are experts in various fields such as business or law, and who are leaders of their communities. Similarly, men have moved into the private sphere. They now share in household tasks and share the duties involved in raising a family, jobs previously attributed exclusively to women. There is however one area which has remained relatively closed to women—that of being a religious leader. In today's society where the distinctions between the roles of men and women are disappearing, not allowing a woman to serve as a rabbi when she is able to function in the same capacity as a man is in other areas, can most definitely be labeled as discrimination based upon gender. Following are some basic arguments supporting such discrimination and the evidence refuting these theories: (1) A woman has duties assigned to her by the Torah such as caring for her family which limit her time and her ability to carry out the functions of a rabbi. (2) A woman is not obligated to perform all the duties which a rabbi performs and thus should not be allowed to perform those duties on the behalf of others. (3) Women are not permitted to study Torah, to teach Torah, or to render decisions based upon the Torah and therefore can not be rabbis as the primary duties of rabbis involve studying and teaching Torah and making judgements based upon it.

Paramount among the numerous arguments disputing the right of women to be ordained as rabbis is the assertion that a woman's capacity to

3Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5

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function as a rabbi is limited due to the special duties assigned to her by the Torah. The woman is a wife, a mother, and a keeper of her family. These roles free her from many of the 613 commandments incumbent upon men. For example, a woman is more biologically capable than a man is to care for an infant. Therefore, certain special duties such as nursing are assigned to her by the Torah. Because of these special duties, she may sometimes not be able to fulfill certain religious obligations such as reciting the Shema three times a day, attending the Sabbath service, or any other duties that she might not be able to perform because of time constraints imposed on her by these special obligations. Provisions are made however, for the woman to observe the commandments she might not ordinarily be able to in other ways. For example, in order for a woman to observe the Sabbath properly, the Sabbath ceremony is performed in the home instead of the synagogue.

Just as a woman's duties include caring for her family, a man's duties embrace prayer and study of the Torah. However women are not excluded from prayer and Torah study. There is no place in the law where it is stated that a woman can not study and pray. She may decide to keep each commandment if she wishes, and may study Torah as well, but is under no obligation to do so. Certainly the rabbis were appreciative of women and admired them for their ability and usefulness in religious work. Rabbinic literature praises them:4 "God has endowed woman with a finer appreciation and a better understanding than man." (Nida 45b) "Sarah was superior to Abraham in prophecy." (Tanchuma, Exodus, beginning) "It was due to the pious women of that generation that the Israelites were redeemed from Egypt." (Sota) "The women were the first ones to receive and accept the Torah." (Tanchuma, Buber, Metsora, 18, p. 27a) Rabbis maintained that women were indeed appreciated and the exclusion of them from the rabbinate did not imply their religious inferiority to men but simply affirmed that there were different activities assigned to man and woman by the Torah and woman’s duties did not include those of a religious leader.5

5This is somewhat oversimplified. Women were thought to have a higher propensity to ritual uncleanness which was also seen as a limiting factor, especially with respect to the duties of the priesthood. However this notion was due to masculine interpretations of
Israel Bettan wrote that the exclusion of women from certain religious duties is not a deprecation of women but "a more just appraisal of the value of her time." The concept preached by rabbis was "separate but equal." Harry Kemelman illustrates the concept of "separate but equal" in his book Conversations with Rabbi Small (New York: William and Morrow and Co., Inc., 1981). In public facilities he notes, there are always separate rest rooms for men and for women. They are constructed differently, due to the different biological functions of the two sexes. Though they are different, they are completely equal, both being used to serve the needs of a woman or a man. Similarly, woman and man have different roles in Judaism but they both serve God.

The opposition of rabbinic authorities towards women rabbis stems from the fact that a woman should not be able to represent a congregation in the performance of duties which she herself is not obligated to perform. Precisely, the rabbinic principle states: "One who is not personally obligated to perform a certain duty, can not perform that duty on the behalf of others and certainly can not represent the congregation in the performance of such duties." Rabbis did permit women to be teachers however. For example, women taught other women while Moses and Aaron taught the men. Deborah also taught the law. Women were appreciated, respected, and even admired for their scholarship, just as learned men were respected. But because of a woman's special duties, she was not admitted to the rabbinate. Dr. Lauterbach writes:

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Leviticus 15:1-32 pertaining to bodily discharges. Various bodily emissions produced ritual uncleanness. A woman's menstrual cycle was focused upon making her ritually unclean and thus unfit to perform rabbinical duties. However Leviticus 15:1-32 also states that a man's nocturnal emissions renders him as ritually unclean as does a woman's menstrual cycle. According to Leviticus 13:1-57, even skin diseases and blemishes may render a man or woman ritually unclean. Thus by strict interpretation of the passages in Leviticus referring to ritual cleanliness, men had the potential to be pronounced unclean just as women.

6 Jacob, p. 84.
7"dol she-eino mechuyav badavar eino mots; et harabim yedei chovatan" (R.H. III. 8; Berachot 206)
8 Sifrei Zuta, quoted in Yalkut Shim-oni, Behaalotecha, 741 end.
9 Seder Eliyahu R. IX-X
If there is any calling which requires a whole hearted devotion to the exclusion of all other things and the determination to make it one's world life work, it is the rabbinate. It is not to be considered merely as a profession by which one earns a livelihood. Nor is it to be entered upon as a temporary occupation. One must choose it for his life work and be prepared to give to it all his energies and to devote to it all the years of his life, constantly learning and improving and thus growing in it. It has been rightly said that the woman who enters a profession must make her choice between following her chosen profession or the calling of a mother and home-maker. She cannot do both well at the same time. This certainly would hold true in the case of the rabbinical profession. The woman who naturally and rightfully looks forward to the opportunity of meeting the right kind of man, of marrying him, and of having children and a home of her own, cannot give to the rabbinate that wholehearted devotion which comes from the determination to make it one's life work. For in all likelihood she could not continue it as a married woman.\[10\]

Dr. Lauterbach's stereotype of women may have been understandable at one time but is no longer typical of contemporary women. Past roles may no longer apply in a society in which the roles of women have changed so dramatically. Women tend to have fewer children now and men have come to share in household tasks. Although some women are satisfied with being a devoted mother and wife, the goal of others is to pursue a career wholeheartedly. Still others wish to combine both aspects: having a family and a career. Lauterbach states that devotion to the rabbinate is diminished in all likelihood when one marries. But did Rabbi Akiva or Rabbi Meir devote less of their time and energy to the rabbinate because they were married? And what of an unmarried woman? Does Dr. Lauterbach contend that she should be admitted to the rabbinate because her time would not be occupied with familial obligations? The rabbinate is not right for all women just as being a doctor or a lawyer is not right for all women. In a discussion of an article written by Jacob. Z. Lauterbach entitled "The Ordination of Women," Rabbi Witt posed the question: "What does it require to be a spiritual guide?" The answer: "it requires a great spirit and the quality of leadership. Some women have it and some women have not. Some men have it and some men have not."\[11\]

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\[10\] Jacob Z. Lauterbach, "Ordination of Women" (1922) found in Jacob, p. 30.

\[11\] Jacob, p. 32.
In addition to the fear that a woman caring for her family does not have enough time to devote to the rabbinate, another concern about the admission of women to the rabbinate is that it is only a goal of liberalism—an attempt at professional equality and not a reflection of the true desires of women toward ritualistic behavior.12 Reform Judaism has allowed Jews to assimilate into a modern way of life. Since equality of the sexes is a part of contemporary western society, Reform Judaism, in order to establish its goal of assimilation, should conform to these ideals. The Bat Mitzvah is just such an attempt at equality. Women being included in the minyan, being seated together with men in synagogue, and being called to read from the Torah are examples of how Reform Jews are assimilating into a world based on equality. The issue of women in the rabbinate should be considered in the context of the needs and aspirations in today's society and not only according to ancient religious codes according to Reform Judaism. Today where political, social, and intellectual issues apply to both women and men, it would not be correct in continuing with a state of affairs which arose from entirely historical and social conditions. The attitude of Reform Judaism is that the Torah must have a built in ability to change in order to have the capacity to be subjected to the different interpretations of different times. It can not be rigid or it would become irrelevant in a changing society.13 However Rabbi Laura Geller reminds us of the goal of liberation in Reform Judaism. "There is a danger in thinking that the ordination of women is all we need to ensure equality of the sexes in Jewish life. So what if a movement ordains women then sits back and proudly applauds itself for being so liberal."14 What Geller is suggesting is that the ordination of women should not be a political question but a theological one.

Fortunately, the rabbinate is not a goal of professional equality but of real religious commitment for most women. Debra Hachen, a rabbinical student says, "I'm not going into the rabbinate to serve women Jews only.

12 Jacob, p. 29.
14 "Growing Number of Women Seek Rabbinical Careers: Are We Ready for Them?" Reform Judaism (November 1976).
I'm going in to serve Jews."15 Michal Bowzne, another rabbinical student at the Hebrew Union college in New York City says in regard to Saturday services she began at Sloan-Kettering Institute and the High Holy Day Services conducted at a nursing home in Mamaroneck, "it's a giving thing for me. It's so obviously important. . ."16 The book Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions,17 points out that since women can be as theologically committed to God as men can, they should be able to show these feelings in the same ways that men can, by becoming rabbis. A rabbi is first and foremost a teacher and a religious decision-maker. The rabbi's importance to the community comes because he or she is well versed in the law and is able to teach it and to base decisions upon it. Henry Cohen writes, "whatever may have been the specific legal status of the Jewish woman regarding certain religious function, her general position in Jewish religious life has ever been an exalted one. She has been the priestess in the home, and our sages have always recognized her as the preserver of Israel. In view of these Jewish teachings and in keeping with the spirit of our age . . . we declare that women cannot justly be denied the privilege of ordination."18

As Laura Geller suggested, religion should not be simply a reflection of society, conforming to its cultural values. The ordination of women rabbis should not be thought of as a reflection of professional equality but should depict genuine religious feelings. The idea of having women rabbis should transform society, providing a vision of society as it should be. Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso defines the way in which women rabbis will change Jewish life in the future:

Does being a women make essentially any difference in the kind of rabbi I am and can be? I think that it does . . . Women come to the rabbinate with a different set of experiences . . . Women's center of focus is on people rather than principles . . . Women's vision of reality is not a

18Jacob, p. 25.
hierarchical model where one's goal is to move up, to be alone at the top, but rather a network model where the goal is to connect with others, to be together at the center. . . . Women's voices speak less of dichotomies of good and evil, dominance, and subservience and more of a complementary process of interconnections. In this model what is most important is not account-ability, who can be blamed, but response-ability, who can be helped.19

It seems that the real obstacle to female ordination is not a question of theology. It lies instead in men's attitudes toward women. The discomfort that tradition-minded men feel because of female rabbis is conveyed in the 1979 minority opinion report of the commission appointed to study the issue of women in the conservative rabbinate: "We recommend to the leaders of the Conservative Movement that appropriate roles be created for Jewish women short of ordination, so that their commitment and talents may be a source of blessing and not of unnecessary controversies."20 However Judith Hauptman, the first woman Ph.D. in Talmud believes that modern women having positions as religious authorities is essential. Decisions about religious issues are based upon Halachah but they also involve personal bias. It is therefore important for women to be involved in such decision-making as scholars and rabbis.21

Until women are accepted as independent authorities, men can lend authority to support decisions made by women. For example Saul Berman, an Orthodox rabbi respected in halachically observant communities and noted for his progressive attitudes on women's issues under Jewish law, believes that women will be able to influence the Halachah and will become active participants in the halachic process in the near future by writing scholarly articles to be used in discussions by other scholars. According to Berman, since p'sak Halachah (Halachic decision-making) is mostly a matter of clarification, any man or woman with specialized knowledge should be able to serve as a posek (legal decision-maker) in that area.

21Schneider, p. 45.
Although women never had the label of "rabbi" in ancient times, they still performed rabbinical duties. Deborah, Rashi's oldest daughter, and the wife of Eliezer Rodeach among many others, all taught Torah. The wife of the first Belzer rebbe made decisions based upon the halachah. These two duties, to teach and to render decisions concerning the law, are the two main obligations of a rabbi. A woman is not restricted and has never been restricted from study or from prayer, and nor should she be restricted from admission to the rabbinate. The principal argument against the ordination of female rabbis is that it is not correct to have women in positions where they can not function as complete Jews. This refers to the commandments which women are not required to obey under Jewish law. The crucial weakness of this argument is that while all of the 613 commandments are not mandatory for women, they can be accepted voluntarily. The fact that a woman may voluntarily choose to fulfil obligations that she is not required to fulfil marks a special kind of dedication and devotion, fundamental characteristics of those wanting to serve in the rabbinate.
CONCLUSION

In writing this paper I have hoped to not only investigate some of the problems with traditional interpretations and to raise questions pertaining to the impact of the Hebrew Bible on ancient Israelite culture, but also to study the significance of biblical texts on contemporary society.

I have argued that the biblical texts themselves are not sexist. Rather it is the masculine interpretations of the texts stemming from a male-dominated society which are where sexist views originated. Although the conditions of ancient Israelite culture during the time when biblical texts were written may seem sexist according to contemporary attitudes, they were not sexist in ancient society. Women were not oppressed. The conclusions in this paper point toward the equality of man and woman as being the original intent of biblical texts. Although there was role differentiation based on gender, the duties and obligations of the woman were just as important as those of the man.

In trying to grasp the original meanings of biblical texts, an understanding of the context in which they were written as well as the effects of historical and societal circumstances on them is important. The ancient Israelites were originally a nomadic people who were organized in familial groups or clans. Polygamy and polytheism were the norm. However as the monarchy was established and Israel moved towards more righteous behavior in the eyes of the LORD, both polygamy and polytheism were eradicated. Societal organization changed from clans to a theocracy. The public sphere of life gained importance as economic issues, governance structures, and prayer were focused upon. Since men were linked to this public sphere, their importance to society increased as well. Although a woman's role did not diminish in importance, it was no longer accorded the attention that it had in the past. Biblical interpretations conformed to these changes. As male importance in society became greater, biblical passages referring to men were emphasized or even slanted to stress their importance.
Today, society is moving away from a patriarchal construction. Women are beginning to occupy the same roles as men. Similarly, men are slowly starting to share in the duties traditionally performed by women. Almost all careers open to men are also open to women. Women are now executives, political leaders, scholars, and laborers. Just as biblical interpretations reflected the biases of a male dominated society, now interpretations are beginning to reflect the ideals of contemporary society. Sexist biases of masculine interpretations are being discarded and the narratives are being read in their proper historical and literary contexts.

One career which, until very recently, has been beyond the reach of women, the rabbinate, is a result of biased interpretations of biblical texts. Women were thought of as unclean when in fact men had the same potential towards uncleanliness as women. Furthermore, women were scorned as religious leaders because interpretations showed they could not teach or render decisions when in fact the existing evidence shows that there were indeed women teachers and judges. Today, women are permitted to attend rabbinical seminary and are permitted to become rabbis in Reform Judaism but there is still concern over the hiring of a woman as a religious leader. This is due to the biases which still exist in the minds of many. What new interpretations are attempting to do is to eliminate these concerns by removing the masculine biases of traditional interpretation.

I have argued that religion does to an extent conform to society. Biblical interpretations have traditionally been fluid. For example, in a male-dominated society, biblical narratives were seen to reflect the superiority of man. However today, in a society which is moving towards the complete equality of men and women not just with respect to the importance of their roles but also with respect to the equality of the roles themselves, biblical narratives are being interpreted to reflect that equality. In fact, one of the primary goals of Reform Judaism is an attempt to modernize an ancient religion to allow Jews to assimilate into a new, more modern way of life. Reform Judaism reflects the ideals of today’s society which include the equality of men and women in all capacities. Thus, there should be no obstacles to women performing the same duties that a man performs as a rabbi. However, just as society is slow in accepting the absolute equality of men and women, Judaism too is struggling to achieve equal representation in
the rabbinate. There are still obstacles which exist which are not as much theological as psychological; people find it hard to break with over three thousand years of tradition and accept a woman serving in the capacity of a rabbi.

But to what degree should religion conform to society? Should not religion be a vehicle by which society is transformed? It is true that in order to continue to exist in a changing world, a religion must also change to reflect changing circumstances. More important however, is that religion provide a vision of society as it should be, not a reflection of what it is. In looking at Judaism in this light, the acceptance of women to the rabbinate by existing rabbis, institutions, and the community in general would be a lesson that within Reform Judaism is absolute equality of men and women and that with this equality does not come tension but harmony. The harmony existing in Judaism would be the example that would eventually be followed by society in general. No longer would there be employers acting in the interests of a particular person because of gender or unneeded competition between men and women in the workplace. Intellect and achievement would be the influential factors in assessing skill and not gender.

In order for Judaism to transform society, the traditional views of biblical literature must be transformed as well. Depatriarchalization is an attempt to do just that, to rethink the slanted interpretations of biblical literature stemming from a male-dominated society by accenting biblical evidence largely ignored which refutes such patriarchal analyses. Masculine interpretations of biblical literature are contrary to the very essence of Reform Judaism. In giving credence to interpretations which do not take into consideration the historical and literary context in which biblical narratives were written or interpretations which ignore crucial passages, we are allowing patriarchy to hide behind biblical faith. The challenge to Judaism is to undo the biases of these patriarchal interpretations. Today, when women are becoming more and more involved in the public arena, the attitudes from a time when society was viewed as primarily hierarchical should be changed. Women should be allowed to act in the capacities in which they are capable, including those traditionally dominated by men. Judaism should remember the principle of "separate but equal" in an attempt to unlock the doors protecting traditional male roles.
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