

Issues of Inclusion

Judith Plaskow,
'Facing the Ambiguity of God' (1991)

Much feminist work on God-language, including my own, has focused on particular aspects of God to the neglect of others. Feminist characterizations of the sacred have emerged largely out of two central experiences: coming to self-awareness in community with other women; and claiming the healing power of connection to the natural world. These experiences have generated a rich array of images for God focusing on female, natural, and non-hierarchical metaphors. Such images depict God as source, wellspring and fountain, mother and womb of life. God is Shekhina, Goddess, all that seeks life; earth, moon, lover, friend – and so on.

It is entirely legitimate and even essential for a new community finding its voice to speak and write about God by drawing upon its own most fundamental experiences. In a profoundly misogynistic culture that has ruthlessly exploited the natural environment – and that has linked women with the natural world on many levels of practice and discourse – feminist metaphors for God elucidate long-buried dimensions of divinity. These metaphors are not just political correctives to dominant modes of seeing and being; they arise from and refer to real discoveries of the sacred in places we had long stopped looking to find it.

Insofar as feminist metaphors represent a deliberate attempt to capture particular aspects of experience, however, they are also necessarily partial. In a discussion in the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* (Spring 1989), Catherine Madsen and a number of respondents criticized the 'niceness' of God in feminist theology. Madsen argued that once God becomes Goddess or acquires female characteristics, she is connected too exclusively with the so-called female virtues of nurturing, healing, and caretaking, and is cordoned off from the savagery of the world. A 'nice' female God does not take us sufficiently beyond traditional images, Madsen argued – any more than a 'Queen of the Universe' undoes the hierarchical nature of traditional male imagery.

A number of feminist writers and religious thinkers have begun to articulate a fuller and more complex account of the divine than the notion of a 'nice' female God allows for. But I basically agree with Madsen that the ambiguity of God has

J. Plaskow, 'Facing the Ambiguity of God', *Tikkun* 6 (1991)

not received enough attention in feminist discourse. Rereading the story of Nadab and Abihu in this year's annual cycle of Torah readings, I was struck by the extent to which the God who devoured Aaron's sons for offering 'strange fire' (Lev. 10:1) is largely absent from feminist imagery. This God, the same who killed Uzzah for putting out his hand to steady the ark (2 Sam. 6:6-7), and who warned the assembled Israelites not to come too close to the base of Sinai lest they die (Exod. 19:12-13), seems to me to point to a profoundly important dimension of human existence. Unless the God who speaks to the feminist experiences of empowerment and connection can also speak to the frightening, destructive, and divisive aspects of our lives, a whole side of existence will be severed from the feminist account of the sacred.

The question of God's ambiguity is not the same as the classical problem of theodicy. Theodicy is a problem only if one accepts a series of propositions about the nature of God, most of which are irrelevant to my own understanding. Theodicy assumes not only that God is perfectly good and all powerful; it assumes that God's omnipotence is that of a person who acts and interacts as supreme ruler of history. According to this view, if God deliberately chooses not to intervene in a particular evil, then either there must be a higher theological explanation, or God must be blamed.

I do not believe in a God who stands outside of history and manipulates it and who therefore can be charged with our moral failures. The stories of Uzzah and Nadab and Abihu seem to me to present a somewhat different problem. Their deaths are not so much an expression of divine injustice as they are of divine unpredictability. These stories confront us not with a choice between God as good or evil but with the irrationality and ambiguity of the sacred. To use Madsen's term, the God of these stories is not 'nice'. S/he is not neat, sanitized, containable, or controllable. S/he does not easily fit our categories or conform to our expectations. But neither, of course, does the world that God created.

The God of these stories is an ambiguous God – the Goddess as energy of the universe, responsible for life and death and rebirth. S/he is a God who creates forms of startling fragility and beauty and also brings forth monstrosities that frighten and overwhelm us. S/he is the God who makes dry land rise up out of the waters and then washes it away with tidal waves and volcanoes. Creativity by its very nature seems profoundly ambiguous. The power of invention has yielded all the fruits of civilization, but the same power has also brought forth our civilization's horrors.

The ambiguity of life is a truth we all know on the small scale as well as the large. The experience of empowerment so central to feminism may allow women to make considered and important choices, but it does not guarantee that we will always choose rightly. Many movements for liberation generate new forms of tyranny or fighting; many women have been hurt in the name of feminism. In the same way, the Egyptians lost their lives when the Israelites walked safely through the Red Sea; the Palestinians lost their homeland when the Jews found one. On the other hand, it is not just projects begun with good intentions that often go awry. Choices made from selfish motives or dictated by circumstance sometimes lead to unanticipated good or open up new possibilities we could never have imagined. 'Were it not for

the evil impulse', said Rabbi Nahman B. Samuel, 'man would not take a wife, or beget a child, or engage in business.'

These truths do not absolve us from responsibility for the consequences of our choices, but they do point to ambiguity, contradiction, and paradox as fundamental aspects of our experience. One of the things I have always most valued about the Jewish tradition is its refusal to disconnect God from the contradictory whole of reality. 'I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe - I the Lord do all these things', Isaiah announces (Isa. 45:7). This has always seemed to me a far more religiously satisfying perspective than a theology that would close off huge areas of our experience and declare them devoid of sacred power. I do not know how a monotheist can choose to find God in the dry land and *not* in the tidal wave that destroys it - or only in our power to choose life and not also in our power to *choose* (see Deut. 30:15, 19).

Yet I certainly understand why I and other feminists have not raced to deal with this aspect of God. It is not unique or central to feminist experience; and in addition, it is difficult and painful. More than this, however, the ambiguous God threatens to bring us back to the images of domination we see as so problematic in the tradition. I and many other feminists have pointed to the destructiveness of hierarchical images of God such as Lord and King, images that draw upon and in turn justify oppression in society. But what if God as Lord points not simply to the manipulative ruler of history, the cosmic patriarch who authorizes numerous forms of oppression, but also the non-rational and unpredictable dimension of experience, the forces we cannot control or contain? How do we name the power in the world that makes us know our vulnerability, that terrifies and overwhelms us? Can we name this power without invoking images of Otherness? Can we jettison the Lord of history without also losing the Lord of contradictory life? Can we name the ambiguous God without resorting to the traditional metaphors that have rationalized oppression and denied the humanity of women?

I do not know the answers to these questions, but they bring me to a new place of wrestling my tradition. If I read the traditional liturgy from the perspective of God's ambiguity, then I suddenly see it in a new and ambiguous light. Kaddish, for example, is not simply a hymn to God's sovereignty said precisely at the moment when I most deeply know my lack of power to preserve those I love. It is an acknowledgement of my own impotence exactly when I know myself as impotent. But should I pray to this contradictory God? Or should I pray *against* him or her? If I acknowledged God's ambiguity directly rather than burying it in images of praise would that make the ambiguity any easier to worship? Do I have to change 'who creates weal and woe' to 'who creates all things' in order to be able to say the words? And how do I continue to pray to the God who empowers me when I have confronted the equivocal nature of all power?

Heidi M. Ravven,
'Creating a Jewish Feminist Philosophy' (1986)

Jewish philosophers must address the challenge that has been posed by the feminist critique of Judaism and by the consequent new feminist directions in Jewish belief and practice. I propose the following agenda: (1) a Jewish feminist contribution to social and political theory, including a theology of the Mosaic covenant, a philosophy of Halacha, a theory of the family and its relationship to the Jewish body politic, and a messianic social ideal; (2) a Jewish feminist ethic and meta-ethic; (3) a feminist analysis of the authority of tradition; (4) a feminist contribution to the philosophic clarification of the basic categories of Jewish belief and symbolic praxis: the idea and images of God, divine providence, redemption, creation, revelation, the cleaving of the human being to God, the analysis of Jewish worship and religious language; (5) a conceptual clarification of these relationships and (6) a philosophical model for an ongoing dialogue between the consciousness – attitudes and existential situations – of Jewish women and philosophical models of Judaism.

Recently Daniel Elazar has argued that the Jewish community is most importantly, increasingly, and almost exclusively, a political unity – albeit, a voluntary one. The Mosaic Covenant between God and Israel, established at Sinai, which defines the identity and obligations of Jews, is precisely a political identification, and it has given rise to all Jewish political institutions from biblical times to the present.¹ Thus, the Covenant defines an international polity. The moral/political value of a reciprocal responsibility of all Israel for each other derives from the mutual loyalty of God and Israel established at Sinai. Conventional politics remains dominant in Jewish communal forms that have developed in the Diaspora, especially in the American Jewish Federation system.

Elazar contends that with the decline in religious practice and the decline of the compelling nature of religious symbols and ceremonies as the bases of Jewish life, there is need for a reconstituted, self-conscious Jewish political tradition and community. This includes 'a continuing dialogue regarding proper or acceptable modes of political behaviour, institutional forms, and political cultural norms'.² This covenantal structure constitutes a native Jewish federalism in which separate entities come together to compound a common entity. Their respective integrities are preserved, and no single person or body has the final authority but various bodies share power. Ironically, this structure characterizes the American Jewish community more than the modern Israeli nation-state.

Contemporary Jewish polity needs redefinition and modification in the light of its traditional Jewish sources. Women have traditionally been excluded from Jewish modes of spirituality and religious or halachic authority – e.g., study, synagogue ritual, legal debate and decision-making. The exclusion prevents women from participating in the Jewish public realm and from contributing to its definitions and structures. Jewish women ought not to aspire merely to fit into an already existing polity – as if that were easy! – but instead to help redefine that polity in the light of women's experiences of power, community, family, and models of authority.

Heidi M. Ravven, 'Creating a Jewish Feminist Philosophy', *Anima* 12 (1986)

Jewish women have an opportunity to participate in the reconstituting of Jewish communal life as a self-conscious Judaic political system expressive of profound religious symbols and relationships. Contemporary Jewish political theory – now in its infancy – needs a feminist perspective on the nature of Jewish unity, historic memory, and the shaping of our common destiny. Such contemporary phenomena as *havurot* and women's *minyans* suggest new forms of highly fluid and responsive egalitarian spiritual communities. Philosophic reflection upon and critique of women's leadership styles and structures must begin to have an impact on covenantal theology as well as on local practice, influencing the ideology and praxis of the Jewish people as a self-conscious political entity.

Daniel Elazar suggests that

[e]very political tradition represents shared expectations as to what constitutes justice in public affairs, a common sense of the proper use of power in the pursuit of political goals, a shared understanding of the reciprocal relationship between power and justice in the body politic and a common view of the proper relationship between the governors and the governed. It is built around an enduring consensus . . . on the part of the members of the political community . . . about common questions over generations.³

I suggest some issues that a feminist contribution to Jewish political theory needs to address and some possible approaches. First, women's experiences in the family and in the roles they have traditionally occupied may suggest models for the covenantal relationship different from those offered by men. Elazar speaks of the political expression of the covenant as a 'system of contracts', 'loyalty', 'morally grounded obligation beyond that demanded for mutual advantage', 'a compact' and as that which delineates the 'authority, power, and integrity of the partners'.⁴ Yet, there is an entire realm of a more personal mutuality and cooperation and *caring* – an erotic basis, if you will – disciplined, delineated, and institutionalized by the Covenant Elazar noted but failed to develop adequately. In this regard, women's experiences and their conceptualization of the ethical ties of relationships seem to be called into play.

Carol Gilligan's recent identification of the predominantly female ethic of 'caring' in contrast to the male abstract ethic of 'rights and obligations' could contribute significantly to the discussion. It might also be constructive for women to turn to Martin Buber's 'dialogical' understanding of the biblical Covenant, whose model is precisely the mutuality and intimacy of marriage partners and whose ultimate expression is in the societal life of the Jewish community – in a covenantally based socialism! Turning to Gilligan and Buber would help to expand the discussion beyond the narrow focus set by traditional political theory. The inclusion of Buber is also a good reminder that there is the possibility of a larger perspective that reconciles the partial perspectives of exclusively male or female viewpoints.

The Bible and the tradition portray the Covenant between God and Israel in erotic images as well as in political terms. Since that literature was written exclusively from the male perspective, women ought to recall that spiritual-erotic basis offering new spiritual-erotic imagery that reflects female experiences of love and

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passion. Women can develop new philosophic concepts of Jewish societal life that
reflect female spiritual experience.

There is a need for a philosophic analysis of the family as a subunit of social-
political life. Shall we continue to separate private and public realms? Are there
models of authority and power relations within the family that are applicable to the
larger arena? What form(s) ought the Jewish family to take and what role shall it
play in the larger body politic? Ought we to propose the merger of the family into
the community, as the kibbutz does? These and similar questions can be addressed
with the aid of current feminist analyses of women in the family and in society.

Judith Plaskow has hinted that *Halacha* may not be an appropriate form for
Jewish ethics and social theory once women have begun to contribute to them. She
writes:

[H]alakhah is part of the system that women have not had a hand in
creating, neither in its foundations, nor as it was developed and refined.
Not only is this absence reflected in the content of Halakhah, it may also
be reflected in its very form. How can we presume that if women add their
voices to the tradition, Halakhah will be our medium of expression and
repair? How can we determine in advance the channels through which the
tradition will become wholly Jewish, i.e., a product of the whole Jewish
people . . . ? To settle on Halakhah as the source of justice for women is to
foreclose the question of women's experience when it has scarcely begun
to be raised.⁵

Carol Gilligan's analysis of ethical thinking in *In a Different Voice* bears out
Plaskow's insight that formal legal argument and universalization of ethical princi-
ples is a predominantly male mode of ethical discourse.⁶ Gilligan concludes from her
empirical study of female versus male ethical development that,

just as the conventions that shape women's moral judgement differ from
those that apply to men, so also women's definition of the moral domain
diverges from studies of men. Women's construction of the moral problem
as a problem of care and responsibility rather than as one of rights and
rules ties the development of their moral thinking to changes in the under-
standing of responsibility and relationships, just as the conception of
morality as justice ties development to the logic of equality and reciprocity.
Thus the logic underlying an ethic of care is a psychological logic of rela-
tionships, which contrasts with formal logic of fairness that informs the
justice approach.⁷

Thus the very possibility of a female contribution to Jewish law needs to be
addressed by Jewish philosophers. Is women's lack of contribution to *Halacha* a
necessary consequence of a female nature and style of reasoning or is it merely
an accident of circumstance, the exclusion of women from the Jewish public
realm?⁸

A Feminist Contribution to Jewish Ethics and Ethical Theory

This discussion has raised a number of issues for the feminist Jewish ethicist. Does the logic of *Halacha* conform to the model of American male ethical reasoning that Gilligan identifies? Is Gilligan's ideal model of reconciled male and female ethical perspectives – an inclusive adult ethic of both 'caring' and 'rights' – relevant to Jewish ethical ideals and principles? Would Gilligan's model be of value in the development of new concepts of ethical life within Judaism?

Gilligan's model might also be compared to and augmented by Martin Buber's dialogical model of ethical interaction. According to Buber, all true ethical relations are predicated on the response of the I to the Thou, i.e., the affirmation by the I of the integrity and legitimacy of the otherness of the other and its reconciliation with the equal legitimacy of the I. It must be noted here that Buber's ethical theory precisely precludes *Halacha* as a legitimate ethical expression. Need that be true of all true ethical thinking inclusive of a female perspective?⁹

Buber's ethical theory is linked to and grounded in religious experience in general and the Covenant in particular. The Mosaic Covenant is the paradigm of the I-Thou relation. It thus grounds ethics in religion and mandates that both culminate in the good and true society. If Buber's ethics is expressive and inclusive of women's experience, then his theory also provides women a way to link their experience of ethical thinking and relationships to the divine-human relationship, on the one hand, and to a Jewish social theory, on the other.

A Jewish feminist ethical theory needs to determine whether an ethic of response to the other in relationship is necessarily spontaneous, as Buber claims, and therefore cannot be institutionalized in a halachic law, or whether ethics is reconcilable with a divine law and with universal rights and principles, as Gilligan suggests. Jewish ethical theory must be open also to the newest empirical research on and philosophical analyses of female ethical thinking. Moreover, feminists ought to contribute to the growing literature on specific ethical issues in Judaism, e.g., medical ethics, business ethics, morality of war and the like.

A Feminist Analysis of the Authority of Tradition

The issue of a feminist contribution to Jewish ethical and political theory suggests a larger contextual problem: defining the authority of Jewish tradition, especially for non-Orthodox Jews. In regard to Jewish feminism this question appears in a particularly pointed way as a conflict between almost universally accepted contemporary ethical insights about women's nature and historic domination, on the one hand, and what appears to be an outmoded and destructive tradition, on the other. The confrontation of a Jewish tradition, which we experience as arcane and even unjust, yet to which we are profoundly loyal, with a modern gentile 'truth' that is our own, too, has occurred in a variety of ways throughout Jewish history. Ahad Ha'am articulated the problem poignantly and believed that he resolved it in his essay 'Imitation and Assimilation.'

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When once [a minority] community is started on this path of Imitation, self-love will make it believe in its own strength, and value the imitative actions peculiar to itself more than those developed by its model . . . The self-consciousness of the imitating community becomes even stronger, and the danger of [complete] Assimilation disappears.¹⁰

Perhaps Ahad Ha'am's admonitions are easier said than done. How do we determine where to set the limits? Are we even deeply enough embedded in the Jewish community and culture to *know* when healthy imitation has given way to the loss of identity and distinctiveness in assimilation? Jewish feminism poses a threat to our Jewish identity as well as an opportunity for its enhancement through careful re-definition. Clearly, Jewish feminists need a philosophic theory of how to incorporate creative change into Judaism without destroying its integrity.

In the Middle Ages the problem of incorporating change within Judaism was conceived of as the philosophic issue of a conflict between Reason and Revelation. Maimonides wrote *The Guide of the Perplexed* to reconcile the intellectual conflict between the competing truths of Greek philosophy and Hebrew scripture. Maimonides perhaps sets the best example of someone who took both sets of convictions with the highest seriousness and set out to bring Judaism into the then modern era with the utmost integrity.¹¹

Yet, there are two major problems with following directly the Maimonidean model today. First, Maimonides adhered to the premodern fiction that normative religious texts had multiple levels of meaning and thus were continually open to deeper and truer analyses – even though these led farther and farther from their literal meaning. With the advent of scientific historical scholarship of texts we can no longer claim this. Today, we cannot integrate new foreign meanings into Judaism through a systematic reinterpretation of traditional texts as Maimonides did. Maimonides' method in the *Guide* was precisely to set down the guidelines for a systematic incorporation of philosophic principles into the interpretation of biblical texts through the wholesale redefinition of religious terminology.

Second, in the Middle Ages Jewish religious and ethical beliefs could be re-defined but *Halacha*, the framework of Jewish law, remained intact. In modernity, secularism has led to a break with Jewish law by much of Jewish society. Whereas Greek philosophy perhaps led to laxity in practice by some Jewish philosophers, Jewish feminism clearly suggests to some that at least the laws of family purity – of *Mikveh* – ought to be *abolished in principle*.

Our modern discomfort with reading new truths back into old texts and our direct and deliberate break with at least portions of Jewish law suggest that a turn to philosophical analysis is now more necessary than ever before. We need to confront the tradition head-on and reconcile new truths to it not by slipping them in the back door but by opening up the front door as much as we shall determine. This calls for not only a philosophic response to the feminist critique but a comprehensive philosophic enterprise. Although Gershom Scholem has argued that every Jewish philosophy picks and chooses what it believes to be reconcilable with dominant non-Jewish trends,¹² I do not see any better way than the philosophical to define clearly the various stands within modern Judaism to tradition. The alternative is to affirm

an eclectic hodge-podge without much attempt at clarity or consistency. This unexamined life leaves us the victims, rather than the framers, of our spiritual and communal future. The philosophic approach recommended below precisely addresses the problem of integrating changes in and varieties of belief and practice into Jewish philosophy in an ongoing manner.

The Basic Categories of Jewish Belief and Praxis; A Unified Theory of Jewish Female Experience; Recommendations for the Proper Philosophic Method

Jewish women ought to contribute to the philosophic definition and analysis of the central beliefs and praxis of Judaism. Women's worship groups have begun to define for themselves which Jewish beliefs and rituals are especially important to them. For example, a number of contemporary feminist theologians have called for the inclusion of Goddess language and *Shechina* worship within Judaism. This directly conflicts with the traditional Jewish philosophical understanding of God which has traditionally stripped him of any trace of anthropomorphism – of any gender, bodily, or even anthropopathic designations. Jewish philosophers, then, need to confront the challenge posed by feminists, and feminists need to address the question of the validity of the classic philosophic concept of God. Must we have the Goddess and/or the King of the Universe to have *Adonai*? Is the philosophic rejection of the Goddess a plot to keep God male?

A second challenge to traditional Jewish philosophy by Jewish feminism arises from the centrality some women's communities have given to the monthly celebration of the New Moon, *Rosh Hodesh*. For some women, *Rosh Hodesh*, because of its mirroring of the female biological cycle, takes on an importance close to that of *Shabbat*.

Judaism needs a mode of philosophic inquiry that is responsive yet not reducible to the real attitudes and experiences of Jewish women. More generally, women's ethical, social, erotic, and spiritual expressions ought to influence the choice of a philosophic approach to integrate them into Jewish philosophy. Such a method would bring to bear both traditional philosophic arguments and emerging attitudes upon the basic issues I have identified. It would reconcile communal and historical self-understandings with ideal philosophic constructions of Judaism.

Women can exercise a necessary critique of the predominant reactionary trends in contemporary Jewish philosophy that attempt to construct a static Platonic ideal of an eternal Judaism. Women ought to be in the forefront of a movement away from a philosophic approach that conceives of ideals as static and unresponsive to culture and existential situation. Instead, women should espouse a philosophical method that formulates universals and ideals as they emerge from real, particular living Jewish communities – women's communities, but others as well – responsive to the needs of Jewish women and the Jewish people as a whole to clarify and deepen practice and self-understandings.

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tarian and elitist model that women and minority communities ought to view with great suspicion. Such a philosophic method is not only detrimental to women and to any notion of legitimate diversity within Judaism; it also belies our self-conception as Jews as a community deriving from historic memory and reliving that memory in contemporary forms. It replaces historical self-understanding with timeless truths to which we are expected to have – a static relation. . . .

Judith Plaskow, 'Beyond Egalitarianism' (1990)

An interesting paradox is emerging in non-Orthodox Jewish communities. The very success of egalitarianism – the gains in equal access for women to educational oppor- tunities and fuller participation in Jewish religious life – has generated new ques- tions and uncertainties about whether egalitarianism is enough. Over the last twenty years, barrier after barrier has fallen before women. We have found ourselves being counted in *minyanim*, going up to the Torah, leading services, becoming ordained as rabbis, and studying Talmud alongside boys and men. These new opportunities, however, have brought women up against the *content* of the tradition, and in doing so, have pointed to the need for changes far deeper and more frightening than the process of simply making available to women what all in the community acknow- ledge to be of value.

A rabbinical student finds herself studying a text that renders invisible her exis- tence and experiences as a woman. A woman is called to the Torah and reads that daughters can be sold as slaves (Exod. 21:7–11) or that a woman's vow can be annulled by her father or husband (Num. 30). Women seeking to expand our Jewish lives discover that a tradition that seems to have a blessing for everything offers no Jewish forms for marking menarche or menopause. Ironically, it is only in gaining equal access that women discover we have gained equal access to a male religion. As women read from the Torah, lead services, function as rabbis and cantors, we become full participants in a tradition that women had only a secondary role in shaping and creating. And if we accept egalitarianism as our final stopping place, we leave intact the structures, texts, history, and images that testify against and exclude us.

Many non-Orthodox Jews are now stuck in a position of acknowledging the justice of women's claims to equality, but not knowing how to bring about deeper changes. Or feeling content that in some institutions the goal of equality has been achieved. Or feeling uncomfortable because even where the goal has been achieved, something is not quite working. If none of the steps toward equal access is easy, at least each is definable and measurable; one change opens to the next (e.g., learning opportunities spur the desire to use one's learning), and each is concrete and gener- ally linked to a specific context of struggle (e.g., the Conservative movement, a partic- ular synagogue). Beyond egalitarianism, the way is uncharted. The next step is not nearly so obvious as fighting for *aliyot* or ordination. Beyond egalitarianism, Judaism must be transformed so that it is truly the Judaism of women and men. It must

J. Plaskow, 'Beyond Egalitarianism', *Tikkun* 5 (1990)

become a feminist Judaism focused on women's issues, but a Judaism that all Jews have participated in shaping. But how do we move from here to there? How does egalitarianism become the starting point for a fuller process of transformation?

I would suggest that there are at least five stages that any community has to move through on the path from egalitarianism to feminism or genuine equality. My treatment of these stages will be schematic, both because of limitations of space and because the content of any stage will be determined by the needs and problems of particular communities.

- The first stage is *hearing silence*. Indeed, the impetus to move beyond egalitarianism stems from hearing the silence of the Jewish tradition and of particular Jewish institutions and events concerning the history and experience of women. Silence is difficult to hear. When a silence is sufficiently vast, it fades into the order of things. We take it for granted as the nature of reality. When I went through three years of graduate school without reading a single word written by a woman, it took me a long time to notice. After all, men are theologians; whom else should we study? Women have a long history of reading ourselves into silence. From childhood bedtime stories to the biblical narratives, from male teachers to male books on male Judaism, women learn to people silences with our own shadowy forms.

Rebekah, Bruriah, and other individual women, a class on women in the Bible or a panel at the Y, are not disproofs of women's silence in Judaism. These are names and occasions we need to turn to *after* we have listened to silence, not in order to fill or deny it. Otherwise we miss the jolts against whose background particular women and events emerge: 'you shall not covet your neighbour's wife' (Exod. 20:14) (who is the community being addressed?); the absence of Miriam's prophecy or the record of Huldah's teaching (the hints in normative sources that there is so much more to women's leadership than the sources choose to tell us); a talmudic discussion of whether a girl penetrated before age three should receive her full *ketubah* (Ketubot 11a, b) (would women scholars ever have asked this question?); *a contemporary discussion of this talmudic debate that assumes this is a reasonable question*. Women were agents throughout Jewish history, fashioning and responding to Jewish life and carrying its burdens. But women's perceptions and questions did not give form and content to Scripture, shape the direction of Jewish law, or find expression in liturgy.

- The second stage is *making a space to name silence*. Both hearing and naming silence can refer to the large silences of Jewish history or the smaller silences within any particular movement or community. Hearing silence is often a private experience. Whether a community will move beyond egalitarianism is in part determined by whether or not it creates the space for people to name the silences they hear. Often in particular egalitarian communities women's silence is interpreted either as accidental or as personal choice, or it simply leaves people resentful or befuddled. 'We just don't happen to have many women who feel competent to lead Torah discussions.' 'I don't know why more men than women speak. A woman is leading the discussion; anyone can participate.' The historical and structural impediments to women's speech thus get dismissed or overlooked, and the community is absolved from responsibility.

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Communities need to set aside the time for members to speak the silences they hear. This might happen in an open meeting specifically called for the purpose. Participants might be asked to name the places where they feel silenced or hear women's silence. Discussion must take place initially without judgement and without challenge or cross talk, simply as an opportunity for people to speak their pain and their experience. Sometimes it helps to go around and give each person a chance to say something. Certainly, no one should speak for a second time until everyone who wants to has spoken once. The list of silences would provide a concrete agenda for a community to address.

- The third stage is *creating the structures that allow women to speak*. What these structures are in particular contexts will emerge from the list of silences. In congregations where men dominate the Torah discussions, it might be decided that men and women will call on each other in alternation. In a Talmud class where women feel that the text ignores their questions and experiences, it might be agreed that women will lead the discussions for a certain period, with the understanding that the class is there precisely to hear women's questions of and responses to the text. In any context in which women are apparently free to speak but seldom take the opportunity, a programme on gender differences in socialization, discourse, and learning styles may help both men and women to understand the personal and institutional barriers to women's participation, and to analyse the gender style of their own institution and events.

Crucial to allowing women to speak are women-only spaces – not women-only spaces that are auxiliaries to male ones, but spaces in which women meet to discuss and explore their experiences as women. Men can listen to women, but, by definition, they cannot be the ones to end women's silence, and there are many forces that prevent women from finding their voices in situations in which men are present. Women's discussion groups, Rosh Hodesh groups, retreats, and spirituality collectives are spaces in which, to use Nelle Morton's phrase, women 'hear each other into speech'. These spaces are sources of energy, empowerment, and creativity that potentially enrich the whole Jewish community.

- The fourth phase is *taking the authority to fill in silence*. Once silence is named and space created, there is nothing to do but to take courage to speak. This is what is happening all over the country as women compose new blessings and liturgies, create rituals to celebrate important turning points in our lives, research our history and write new midrashim, reclaim our sexuality and explore our concepts of God. This is the phase where we create the *content* of feminist Judaism, and its timeframe is open-ended, its agenda sufficiently broad to include every facet of Judaism.

Much of this exploration and creativity, however, is taking place outside the boundaries of particular Jewish movements or institutions. Whether feminist innovations will ultimately be integrated into the tradition depends to some extent on the earlier phases I have discussed. It is difficult for women to dare to take the authority to speak. But that authority will be acknowledged and welcomed only when members of the larger community open themselves to hearing silence and thus recognize the need for the inclusion of women's voices. Thus, to take one concrete example, through midrash, story-telling, and historiography, women are creating women's Torah. But women's Torah will be accepted and taught as Torah only as

Jews acknowledge that at least half of Torah is missing. Will Hebrew Union College or the Jewish Theological Seminary confront the contradiction of educating women in institutions in which Torah is still defined entirely on male terms? That depends on whether they hear the silence built into their curricula.

- The last phase is *checking back*. Speaking into silence entails enormous risk. It involves changes that are uncharted and whose direction is finally unpredictable. Not everything spoken into silences will be true or worth saying, and not everything said will finally feel Jewish. Any change that a community takes in the direction of transforming Judaism will necessarily involve feedback and evaluation. Did a particular liturgical or curricular change work? Whom did it empower? Did it create new areas of silence? Did it open new areas of Jewish experience and exploration? Did it feel Jewish? Why or why not? What is our operative understanding of 'Jewish', and does it need to be expanded? Would we want to continue our change or experiment again? Would we want to teach the change to our children?

While such evaluation is crucial, it is equally crucial that it *follow* speaking into silence rather than precede it. Too often, questions concerning the appropriateness and boundaries of change are the first ones raised when feminists begin to alter tradition. Judgement is demanded in advance of any real experimentation. Will it be Jewish? is asked as a way of maintaining silence and continuing the status quo. But once we hear the silence of women, it becomes clear that repairing that silence will take all the creativity Jews can muster. Experiments in form, in content, in new relationships between women and men will all be *necessary to make Judaism whole*. There is time to decide the shape of the Jewish future – but that time is after those who have been silent have spoken.

Abraham Isaac Kook, 'Fragments of Light: A View as to the Reasons for the Commandments' (1910)

... The free movement of the moral impulse to establish justice for animals generally and the claim of their rights from mankind are hidden in a natural psychic sensibility in the deeper layers of the Torah. In the ancient value system of humanity, while the spiritual illumination (which later found its bastion in Israel) was diffused among individuals without involvement in a national framework, before nations were differentiated into distinct speech forms, the moral sense had risen to a point of demanding justice for animals. 'The first man had not been allowed to eat meat' (Sanhed. 59b), as is implied in God's instruction to Adam: 'I have given you every herb yielding seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed – it shall be to you for food' (Gen. 1:29). But when humanity, in the course of its development, suffered a setback and was unable to bear the great light of its illumination, its receptive capacity being impaired, it was withdrawn from the fellowship with other creatures, whom it excelled with firm spiritual superiority. Now it became necessary to confine the concern with justice

A. Kook, *The Lights of Penitence, Lights of Holiness, The Moral Principles, Essays, Letters and Poems*, trans. B. Bokser (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978)

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and equity to mankind, so that the divine fire, burning with a very dim light, might be able to warm the heart of man, which had cooled off as a result of the many pressures of life. The changes in thought and disposition, in the ways of particularized developments, required that moral duty be concentrated on the plane of humanity alone. But the thrust of the ideals in the course of their development will not always remain confined. Just as the democratic aspiration will reach outward through the general intellectual and moral perfection, 'when man shall no longer teach his brother to know the Lord, for they will all know Me, small and great alike' (Jer. 31:34), so will the hidden yearning to act justly toward animals emerge at the proper time. What prepares the ground for this state is the commandments, those intended specifically for this area of concern.

There is indeed a hidden reprimand between the lines of the Torah in the sanction to eat meat, for it is only after 'you will say, I will eat meat, because you lust after eating meat - then you may slaughter and eat' (Deut. 12:20, 15). The only way you would be able to overcome your inclination would be through a moral struggle, but the time for this conquest is not yet. It is necessary for you to wage it in areas closer to yourself. The long road of development, after man's fall, also needs physical exertion, which will at times require a meat diet, which is a tax for passage to a more enlightened epoch, from which animals are not exempt. Human beings also acted thus in their most justified wars, which were incumbent on them as a transition to a higher general state.

This is the advantage of the moral sense when it is linked to its divine source. It knows the proper timing for each objective, and it will sometimes suppress its flow in order to gather up its strength for future epochs, something that the impatient kind of morality that is detached from its source would be unable to tolerate. When the animal lust for meat became overpowering, if the flesh of all living beings had been forbidden, then the moral destructiveness, which will always appear at such times, would not have differentiated between man and animal, beast and fowl and every creeping thing on the earth. The knife, the axe, the guillotine, the electric current, would have felled them all alike in order to satisfy the vulgar craving of so-called cultured humanity.

The commandments, therefore, came to regulate the eating of meat, in steps that will take us to the higher purpose. The living beings we are permitted to eat are limited to those that are most suitable to the nature of man. The commandment to cover the blood of an animal or bird captured while hunting focuses on a most apparent and conspicuous inequity. These creatures are not fed by man, they impose no burden on him to raise them and develop them. The verse 'If anyone . . . captures by hunting any beast or bird that may be eaten, he must pour out its blood, covering it with earth' (Lev. 17:13) involves an acknowledgement of a shameful act. This is the beginning of moral therapy, as is suggested in the verse, '... that you may remember and be ashamed . . . when I forgive you' (Ezek. 16:63). It means: Cover the blood! Hide your shame! These efforts will bear fruit, in the course of time people will be educated. The silent protest will in time be transformed into a mighty shout and it will triumph in its objective. The regulations of slaughter, in special prescriptions, to reduce the pain of the animal registers a reminder that we are not dealing with things outside the law, that they are not automatons devoid of life, but with living things. What is inscribed in such letters on rolls of parchment will be

read in the future, when the human heart will be conditioned for it. The feelings of the animal, the sensitivity to its family attachment implied in the rule not to slaughter an ox or a sheep 'with its young on the same day' (Lev. 22:28), and, on the other hand, the caution against callous violation of the moral sense in an act of cruelty shown particularly in the break-up of the family implied in the directive concerning a bird's nest, to let the mother bird go before taking the young (Deut. 22:26-27) – all these join in a mighty demonstration against the general inequity that stirs every heart, and renews vitality even to souls that have strayed, whose hearts have grown dull because of sickness and anger. The divine protest could not extend to man's right over the animal raised by him, until a much later time. Then concern will even be shown for the taste of the food eaten by the tilling animal, expressing a permanent spirit of compassion and an explicit sense of justice. 'Oxen and asses that till the soil will eat their fodder savored with spices, and winnowed with shovel and fan to remove the chaff' (Isa. 30:24).

The prohibition of eating the fat comes to us, on the other hand, in a subdued call. If, by necessity, to strengthen your prowess, you slaughter the animal, which you raised by your exertion, do not indulge in this to satisfy the vulgar craving that lusts for fat, especially in the primitive stages of man. When the savage luxury of eating fat and blood – one can always find room for a delicacy – is forbidden, it takes away the worst element of this cruel gluttony. The impact of this provision will become apparent in the full maturing of culture that is due to come in the future.

The legal inequity in the ownership of property is registered in the prohibition of wearing a mixed garment of wool and linen. We are inhibited from the free mixing of wool, which was taken by robbery from the innocent sheep, with flax, which was acquired by equitable, pleasant and cultured labour. The animal will yet rise in cultural status through the control of a higher moral sense, so that its readiness for idealistic participation with man will not be strange or far away. Therefore we are directed to add to the fringe on a linen garment a woollen thread of blue,¹³ and similarly to mix freely a mixture of wool and linen in the garment of the priests (Exod. 28:5, 8).¹⁴

The mixing of meat and milk is a grave offence, an act that is pervaded altogether with the oppression of life, an oppression of a living being – and of property. Milk, which serves so naturally to feed the tender child, that he might enjoy the mother's breast, was not created so as to stuff with it the stomach, when you are so hard and cruel as to eat meat. The tender child has a prior and more natural right than you.

Just as the rule to cover the blood extends the sway of 'You shall not murder' to the domain of the animal, and the prohibition of mixing meat and milk and the banning of linen and wool in a garment extends the injunctions, 'You shall not rob' and 'You shall not oppress', so does the rule against eating the meat of an animal killed by another animal or one that died by itself extend the duty to offer help and visit the sick to the animal kingdom: be compassionate at least on the unfortunate ones, if your heart is insensitive to the healthy and the strong.

When this seed is planted in the thick earth of the field blessed by the Lord, it will bear its fruit. It is necessary for its cultivation to join all these sensibilities into

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a national centre so that the echo released by the moral voice shall not be the voice of weaklings, of ascetics and timid spirits, but the firm and joyous voice of life.

I entered here a limited analysis, but the road is long and wide. We must express not only a submerged feeling. Our concern is not only the need of defending Judaism in the diaspora where it is suffering decline. Ours must be 'the voice of God with might', the voice 'that hews out flames of fire' (Ps. 29:4, 7), the embodiment of the four spiritual dimensions that bring that goal to its fullest expression. 'And the spirit of the Lord will rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord' (Isa. 11:2). To sum it all up, the unification of our thought through joining its various trends and expressions is what effects the unification and integration of the substantive manifestations of life. All that we suffer from defective thinking embodied in life and in literature comes about only from an ideational fragmentation, in which participants of one ideal refuse to countenance the perfection of the other, failing to rise to the level of seeking the amplification of their own view by integration with all views, seemingly different from their own, in an organic unity that bears within itself the light of life and peace.

The area that is more likely to embrace the influence of all the levels of values - the divine, the moral, the religious and the national - in the formative purpose of life, whose effect will soon be recognized in our own time, while its roots go deep and will offer nourishment for future generations - this is the almost neglected domain of the reasons for the commandments. This is due to be an enlightening influence on the scientific study of Judaism, to fructify its dimensions.

It is true that these tendencies have long been immanent in the soul of our people, but the circumstances of exile narrowed them, and the three other levels of value were included in a strategy of transition within the national component alone. But the spirit disturbed our peace. From time to time one or another component emerged in some dramatic way, the yearning for the divine, for instance, through the movements of philosophy and Hasidism; the moral through the various expressions of humanism; the national through the agitation¹⁵ going on in our own time. But these disturbed the religious dimension of Judaism when they emerged from it, adding to its troubles. They diminished its vitality by sucking up its fructifying power. It is for this reason that we note to our astonishment the decline of religious Judaism precisely in a period of the national renaissance. But this is simple: it is its belated crisis, which has sucked up the vitality immanent in it until recent times.

These developments cannot go on in their chaotic form. We must mend with courage and with knowledge past abuses. We must gather up all spiritual trends that have been dispersed to their centre, to ingather the spiritual fugitives of Israel and the dispersed of Judah. Through this spiritual ingathering upon the holy soil, the place suited released the physical potency for the ingathering of the exiles there will be for the realization of all ideals in their different aspects from potentiality to actuality. This will be effected not through individuals or parties, but through the *nation*, through the aggregate of the community of Israel, that will blossom in the beloved land, the fairest heritage of any nation.

Notes to Section 28

- * I conceive of Jewish feminist philosophy as a contribution to the philosophy of Judaism from a particular vantage point rather than as a self-enclosed endeavour separate from a 'male' Jewish philosophy.
- 1 Elazar, Daniel: *Kinship and Consent: The Jewish Political Tradition and its Contemporary Uses*: Center for Jewish Community Studies: University Press of America, Washington, D.C., 1983: p. 9.
 - 2 Ibid. p. 1.
 - 3 Ibid. p. 11.
 - 4 Ibid. p. 5.
 - 5 Plaskow, Judith: 'The Right Question is Theological', in Heschel, Susannah: *On Being a Jewish Feminist*: Schocken, NY, 1983: p. 73.
 - 6 Although there is much to be commended in Carol Gilligan's study of male and female ethical development, her methodology also ought to be subjected to philosophic critique. For example, the collecting of data can perhaps accurately pick out contemporary American male and female ethical reasoning styles. However, one needs a clear philosophical methodology to interpret the data. Gilligan's designation of the former as an ethic of 'rights' and the latter as an ethic of 'caring' is far from adequate. Moreover, an empirical study can hardly provide by itself a way to determine what ethical thinking ought to be normative unless we decide such issues by polls. Even a democracy that includes women's voices as well as men's can hardly serve as a legitimate criterion of the truth of ethical and meta-ethical principles. There is a clear need for philosophers – especially feminist ethicists – to continue where Gilligan has left off. We ought to look to such important philosophies of ethics as those of, e.g., Kierkegaard, Hegel, and the socialists for inspiration and direction. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*: Harvard University Press, 1982.
 - 7 Ibid. p. 73.
 - 8 The large percentage of American women who choose law as a profession would suggest that legal reasoning is hardly a male prerogative.
 - 9 In passing, I would like to raise the possibility that the failure of most philosophical analysts of Buber's ethics to understand his theory may be due to the latter's basis in a more generally 'female' style of ethical reasoning.
 - 10 *Selected Essays by Ahad Ha'am*. Trans. Leon Simon: Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1912: pp. 112–16.
 - 11 This is not in any way to suggest that Maimonides' position on women was enlightened. Maimonides believed that women were biologically inferior – in his Aristotelian terminology they possessed inferior 'matter' – and therefore were both morally and intellectually wanting. See, e.g., *Guide* III, 8.
 - 12 'Reflections on Jewish Theology Today', in *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis*: Schocken, NY, 1975: pp. 264–5.
 - 13 As a reminder of God and of the divine law ordained in Numbers 15:38.
 - 14 The priestly vestments were to be made of 'blue, purple and scarlet' yarn, which is of wool and twined linen.
 - 15 The reference is, no doubt, to the Zionist movement.

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