What is the Point of Prayer?

Some Midrashic Allusions in the Rosh Hashanah Service

Laura Duhan Kaplan

Because our sages speak in the anthropomorphic language they drew from the Hebrew Bible, one might hastily conclude that they hold a rather mechanical theurgic view of prayer: when a person prays, God hears, and adjusts the person's fate. Deeper analysis shows that the sages question this theurgic view. They use it as a gateway into an alternate view of prayer as reflexive: its spiritual efficacy lies in its effect on the person praying. The sages' discussions of prayer, which take place in their biblical commentaries, aphorisms, and parables, express the active nature of their questioning. Character development, intertextual allusion, and fantastical fictions invite readers to inquire along with the sages into the meaning of prayer – and to simultaneously hold different views of prayer. In these discussions, the sages make no formal distinction between fixed liturgical prayer and a heartfelt conversation with God, leaving it to their readers to reflect on the relationship between the two.

Many of the sages' views have found expression, in shorthand form, in the Rosh Hashanah (New Year) prayer service. A few selections from the service guide my choice of midrashim in this paper: the *haftorah* (prophetic reading) of the story of Hannah, the liturgical poem *Unetaneh Tokef* (Let Us Declare the Holiness of this Day), and the point of transition between *Pseukei D'Zimra* (morning psalms) and *Shacharit* (formal morning prayer).

"Mikan amru": Communal Prayer Behavior

One who attends Jewish prayers services only on the High Holydays might wonder about how to participate in so-called "silent prayer." If the newcomer shared the midrashic mindset, some of the newcomer's questions would be answered during the reading of the story of Hannah. The newcomer would hear and read:

> Hannah spoke within her heart. Her lips moved, but she uttered no sound. Eli [the priest] took her for drunk and said to her, "Enough of this drunkenness!" (I Samuel 1:13-15) [1]

And later:

> I prayed, and God has given me what I asked. (I Samuel 1:27)[2]

And, thinking along with our sages, the newcomer could learn how to behave during "silent prayer."

> Rav Hamnuna said: How many important Halachot can be learnt from those verses about Hannah!
>
> *"Now Hannah, she spoke in her heart."* From here, one who prays shall direct his heart.
>
> *"Only her lips moved."* From here, one who prays shall do it clearly, with his lips.
>
> *"But her voice could not be heard."* From here, that it is forbidden to raise one's voice in the Tephilla.
>
> *"And Eli thought she had been drunken."* From here, that one who is drunk is forbidden to say the Tephilla. (b. Berachot 31a)[3]

In order to think along with our sages here, the newcomer would need to know at least three things.

(1) The newcomer would need to be aware of the paradoxical midrashic agenda that preserves the authority of sacred text by reinterpreting it to answer contemporary questions.[4] Background knowledge of Jewish history would help the newcomer recognize the relevance of that principle in Hannah's story. Hannah is the first Biblical character to pray inside a sacrificial shrine. Thus, symbolically, she stands at the intersection of the priestly and rabbinic paradigms of Judaism, where sacrifice and prayer, respectively, are the key technologies for encountering God.[5] Equipped with this knowledge, the newcomer would understand that Hannah's story is an opportunity for our sages to re-read behavior appropriate to the priestly paradigm as model behavior for the rabbinic paradigm.

(2) The newcomer would need to understand the midrashic approach to the language of sacred text. Because sacred text is viewed as the speech of God, every word is significant, and carries layers of meaning that must be carefully revealed. One layer of meaning is found in the integrity of a story taken as a whole, but others are found when words and phrases are considered individually. With this understanding, the newcomer would recognize the legitimacy of an approach that draws inferences about Jewish practice from sentence fragments.

(3) The newcomer would need to be comfortable with *halachic* midrash, the interpretive perspective that dares to deduce an instructional manual from the story of a woman's deep suffering. *Halachah*, "the yoke of the commandments…deals with the letter of the law…[and] with matters that are quantifiable."[6] The newcomer would need

to know that a *halachah*, a guideline for Jewish practice, can be based directly on a biblical verse. Then the newcomer could think along with the sages, who read the story of Hannah and comment, "from here," *(mikan amru)*, we learn about how to conduct ourselves in prayer.[7]

Al Tiqre: Preparing for Inner Prayer

If the newcomer is an astute reader, he or she will notice that Hannah prayed and spoke to God "all this time" yet the Biblical story reports nothing of the contents of her prayer.[8] All we learn about is the vow she took to dedicate the child she hoped for to the service of God. What does she say to God? Perhaps the newcomer's imagination will be shaped by the Hannah's own description of her prayer.

> I am a woman in deep distress…I have been pouring out my heart…I have been speaking all this time under the stress of sorrow and vexation. (I Samuel 1:15-16)[9]

If the newcomer is stimulated by Hannah's self description, then he or she will most likely continue to think along with the sages who imagine that Hannah spoke insolently to God.

> R. Eleazar said further: Hannah cast words towards Him on high. For it is said: *"And prayed up ('al) to the Lord."* It teaches that she cast words towards him on high. (b. Berachot 31b)[10]

Here Rabbi Eleazar employs the *al tiqre* method of interpretation.[11] He knows that when the text says she prayed *'al,* its *peshat* (plain meaning) is that she prayed *'al,* <u>to</u> God, or perhaps that she prayed *'al,* <u>about</u> God, i.e., about God's

decision so far to not grant her children. But, given Rabbi Eleazar's background knowledge that Hannah spoke out of vexation, he chooses to read the text as saying that she prayed *'al,* up towards God. He imagines her tossing her words angrily in God's direction. And yet, as the biblical text tells us, her prayer was answered.

If the newcomer thinks along with Rabbi Eleazar, the newcomer will conclude that a bitter heart is not a barrier to prayer. One needn't place God on a pedestal of praise, but can form inner words of anger and frustration. Such prayer will be heard and may even be answered – even if the one who prays, like Hannah, only comes to the sanctuary once a year. If bitterness of heart had previously kept the newcomer away from organized prayer, the newcomer can feel welcomed by Hannah's story.

At this point, however, the newcomer's thoughts might part ways with Rabbi Eleazar's approach. The *al tiqre* hermeneutic opens on to *aggadaic* thinking, which "is the serious effort of the Sages to provide answers to spiritual questions."[12] In the biblical story, Hannah appears to be an ordinary person, who speaks to God occasionally, in official places at officially set festival times. But the sages, and Rabbi Eleazar in particular, seem unable to imagine that an ordinary Jane Doe could get away with speaking insolently to God. Only a person who has an intimate relationship with God could. Thus, Rabbi Eleazar compares Hannah to the prophets Elijah and Moses, who also "cast words" at God and were answered favorably.[13]

Many midrashim imagine the words of Hannah's insolent prayers, and commentators often summarize the midrashim as illustrating Hannah's skill at persuasive argument.[14] It seems to me, however, that the intent of the midrashim is not to illustrate Hannah's rhetorical skill, but to uncover her high spiritual level. I offer three examples:

> *"And she vowed a vow and said, O Lord of Hosts."* R. Eleazar said: Since the day that the Holy One, Blessed be He, created His world, there was no man that called the Holy One, blessed be He, "of Hosts" until Hannah came and called Him "of Hosts." Hannah said before the Holy One, blessed be He: Lord of the Universe, since Thou has created all those hosts of hosts in Thy world, is it difficult for Thee to give me one son? (b. Berachot 31a)[15]

In this midrash, Hannah knows God intimately – so intimately, she has a personal name for God. This name is so apt in its designation that psalmists and prophets adopt it. In fact, the next two biblical speakers who address God directly with this name are King David (II Samuel, 7:27) and the prophet Elijah (I Kings 19:14). A second midrash develops Hannah's intellectual and ethical sensibilities:

> *"Thou wilt indeed look."* R Eleazar said: Hannah said before the Holy One, blessed be He: Lord of the universe, "If Thou wilt look," it is well; and if not, "Thou wilt see"; I shall go and hide from Elkanah, my husband; and since I shall have hidden they will make me drink the water of *Sota;* and Thou dost not make Thy Torah a fraud. For it is said: *"Then she shall be cleared and shall conceive seed."* (b. Berachot 31b)[16]

Within this midrash, Hannah displays her own considerable midrashic skill, as she deliberately and creatively misreads Torah. Torah describes a ritualistic trial that a woman suspected of adultery can undergo in order to appease her jealous husband.[17] The description of the trial of the *Sotah* ends with the statement that the woman "shall be cleared and shall conceive seed." In all likelihood, the Torah does not mean to assert that pregnancy is an automatic result of being cleared. But Hannah, in order to challenge God, reads as if it is. Her allusion to the trial of the *Sotah*, it seems to me, is a metaphorical play on the idea of a "trial." Hannah's allusion shows that she is well aware of the absurd injustices of life. Why is it that some people have to go through difficult trials and others are just handed fulfillment? She sees this as a failure in God's governance of the universe, and challenges God directly. A third midrash teaches about Hannah's spiritual practices.

> *"On the affliction of Thy handmaid…and not forget Thy handmaid, but wilt give unto Thy handmaid."* R. Jose, son of R. Hannina, said: Why those three "handmaids" above? Hannah said before the Holy One, blessed be He: Lord of the Universe, three tests of death didst Thou establish as to a woman (and some say three adherences involving death) and these are they: *niddah, hallah,* and kindling of lights. Have I ever transgressed any of them? (b. Berachot 31b)[18]

In this midrash, Hannah continues to demonstrate her midrashic skill, and also demonstrates that she knows the *halachah* of women's practices. She knows the texts, and she fulfills their teachings. Here she alludes to a mishnaic tradition that a woman's death in childbirth could be caused by her failure to fulfill the three women's mitzvot of

postmenstrual ritual purification *(niddah),* symbolic weekly sacrifice of bread *(hallah),* and lighting Shabbat candles.[19] And she asserts that she practices them faithfully. Thus it makes no sense that she should "die through childbirth," i.e., that through lack of childbirth her genetic line should die out.

As seen through the lens of these *aggadic* midrashim, Hannah's prayer is no simple cry of the uneducated heart. Rather, Hannah's prayer comes out of a long-term awareness of God's presence, a life time of religious practice and study, and a passionate commitment to justice. She knows how to formulate a prayer of the heart, because her heart has been refined and shaped through a life of self-examination, service, and divine guidance. Only a spiritual heart as well-formed as Hannah's could withstand insolent prayer. Imagining an anthropomorphic God, one could say that God tolerates insolence only in the context of a well-established relationship. Alternatively, imagining that prayer changes the one who dares to cry out, one could say that it takes a healthy psyche to process sorrow as deep as Hannah's, even in partnership with God.

A Feminist Question: Suffering Shatters Paradigms

It seems odd that our sages chose the figure of a woman praying for a child as their role model for successful prayer. In the world of the sages, women are not *halachically* required to pray three times a day, as men are – though women are required to pray at least some prayers, at least once a day.[20] The Talmudic world, the obligation to "be fruitful and multiply" was laid upon men only.[21] Why, then, this choice of role model?

Hannah prays out of bitterness of heart. She is suffering over her inability to fulfill the strongest desire of her heart: to become a parent, to know love, to take on one of life's deeply meaningful projects, to gain the wisdom it offers, to feel respected by her peers. This suffering is not gender-specific. Any adult man or woman in Hannah's position would likely experience sadness and vexation. Hannah's troubles are available to all. And the message of her story is available to all: the hope that prayer can alleviate suffering.[22]

The careful reader of *haftorah* will note that Hannah's prayer is not answered immediately. It is answered at *tekufat hayamim,* which could mean "on Rosh Hashanah,"[23] "in the fall,"[24] "when the season [literally or metaphorically] changed" or "according to [her woman's] cycle." Yet the tide of the story turns right after Hannah prays; that is when her face brightens.[25] For Hannah, the very act of pouring out her heart to God is uplifting. Read one way, Hannah's story reinforces a theology in which God, controller of the universe, changes events in response to individual prayer. Read another way, Hannah's story sidesteps that theology, suggesting that prayer heals regardless of whether it affects God's behavior. Hannah's story appeals because its theological ambiguity invites readers to confront their own purpose in praying.

Intertextuality: How Prayer Changes Fate

Following shortly after the Rosh Hashanah *haftorah* reading is the *Musaph* (additional) service, with its poetic centerpiece, *"Unetaneh Tokef." Unetaneh* Tokef also invites participants to reflect on why they pray. Unetaneh *Tokef* declares that today is the Day of Judgment. Today each creature will pass before God in turn. Today God will

decide "who shall live on and who shall die…who dwells in peace and who is uprooted."[26] The poem offers no information about the criteria for God's judgment. But it offers comfort:

> Changed behavior, prayer, and righteous deeds, avert the evil of the decree. [27]

Even a newcomer encountering this prayer in a contemporary Rosh Hashanah service will likely grasp the obvious teaching that prayer is inseparable from personal change. How clearly this reflects the sages' view can be seen when the poet's statement is traced back to its likely midrashic roots. Golinkin suggests that, in crafting this statement, the poet draws on either the Jerusalem *(Yerushalmi)* Talmud or Genesis Rabbah.[28]

If the poet is playing on the words of the *Yerushalmi,* as Golinkin believes, then *Unetaneh Tokef* offers a bold new theological statement. The *Yerushalmi* says:

Three things cancel the difficult decree, and they are: prayer, righteous deeds, and repentance (y. Ta'anit 2).[29]

The poet has made three changes to the *Yerushalmi's* statement. (1) In the *Yerushalmi,* the decree itself is affected. In *Unetaneh Tokef,* only the evil that results from the decree is affected. (2) In the *Yerushalmi,* the decree is completely canceled. In *Unetaneh Tokef,* the evil is averted, or turned aside. (3) In the *Yerushalmi,* prayer is the first effective activity named. In *Unetaneh Tokef,* changed behavior is the first activity named. In Golinkin's view, the *Yerushalmi* offers a "simple yet problematic theology: if you do X, Y, and Z you will annul the severe decree." The poet offers a truer, more sophisticated theology: we can ameliorate the effects of suffering by searching our souls, helping others, and changing our behavior.

If the poet is drawing on Genesis Rabbah, then, it seems to me, the poet's theology is bold, but not radically different from the *midrashic* theology. Genesis Rabbah teaches:

> "He [God] took him [Abram] outside [and said, Look at the sky and count the stars]" (Gen. 15:5). Rabbi Yehoshua of Sichnin said in the name of Rabbi Levi, "He took him outside the world"… The rabbis say [that God said to Abram] "You are a prophet; you are not an astrologer."… R. Yudan said in the name of Rabbi Eleazar, "Three things cancel evil decrees, and they are: prayer, righteous deeds, and changed behavior." … Rav Huna son of Rav Yosef said, "Also change of name [as Torah says] 'Your name will no longer be called Abram.'" … And some say, "Also change of place, as it is said, 'God said to Abram, go…" (Gen. Rabbah 44:12)[30]

This midrash depicts Abram as standing outside of the world and beyond its natural laws. In contrast to an astrologer, who studies the stars to determine human fate, Abram stands above the system of fate. His tools for living beyond the reach of fate are prayer, righteous deeds, and changed behavior. If he can control these aspects of his life, he is, in a very real sense, master of his own fate. As a prophet, in one of its key Biblical meanings, he calls people to religious and political action. To underscore the very concrete nature of Abram's action tools, the midrash reminds us that Abram's life changed radically when he responded to divine inspiration by moving to a new country and taking a new name. If we are students of Abraham, this midrash teaches, then our fate is in our own hands. Prayer changes our inner state; righteous deeds change our

social relationships; new behaviors change our lives. No decree can trap us. If this midrash is the source for *Unetaneh Tokef's* message of comfort, the poet is affirming, rather than revising, a midrashic view of prayer as self-reflexive.

Mashal: God's Mailbox is Full

The Babylonian *(Bavli)* Talmud offers yet a fourth version of this teaching about ameliorating harsh divine decrees, using its own subtly different set of verbs and nouns. Most interesting is the *Bavli's* juxtaposition of this teaching with a statement about how one can actively bring harsh judgment down on himself or herself! Just before a teaching about the four things that "tear up" the decree of judgment, the text says:

> R. Isaac further said: Three things call a man's iniquities to mind, namely, a shaky wall *(kir natui)*, the scrutinizing of prayer, and calling for [Divine] judgment on one's fellow man.[31] (b. Rosh Hashanah 16b)

Three kinds of arrogance get a person in immediate trouble with God. (1) Believing that you merit being saved from a dangerous situation by a miracle designed just for you. (2) Being so certain that your prayer will be heard that you do not redirect your own heart. (3) Thinking that you yourself can instruct God when and how to bring Divine punishment upon another person. At least, this is the interpretation offered by the canonical commentator Rashi.[32]

The collection of items that get a person in trouble is so odd that it seems to me it must be intended to recall another midrash. In the story of the Oven of Akhnai, Rabbi Eliezer engages in these three behaviors. He calls for a wall to become shaky *(hotlu*

kotlav), expects that his prayers for miracles will be answered immediately, and (according to most interpretations of the story) prays that his rival will be punished.

During a debate in the rabbinic academy, Rabbi Eliezer uses his ability to perform miracles to prove that his minority opinion about ritual purity is correct. His colleagues rebuke him, saying "The Torah is not in heaven!" and then excommunicate him. When Rabban Gamliel, head of the Academy, finds himself threatened by a storm at sea, he stands before God and says, "I did this for your honor!" The storm abates. But Rabbi Eliezer is so devastated by the decision taken in the academy that:

> Ima Shalom was R. Eliezer's wife, and sister to R. Gamaliel. From the time of this incident onwards she did not permit him to fall upon his face [i.e., pray the *Tachanun* prayer in which one pours out one's heart to God]. Now a certain day happened to be New Moon, but she mistook a full month for a defective one [and got confused about which prayers her husband would say that day]. Others say, a poor man came and stood at the door, and she took out some bread to him. [On her return] she found him fallen on his face. 'Arise,' she cried out to him, 'thou hast slain my brother.' In the meanwhile an announcement was made from the house of Rabban Gamaliel that he had died. 'Whence dost thou know it?' he questioned her. 'I have this tradition from my father's house: All gates are locked, excepting the gates of wounded feelings.' (b. Bava Metzia 59b)[33]

In the story, both Rabban Gamliel's prayer and Rabbi Eliezer's prayers are theurgically effective. Gamliel's prayer is morally noncontroversial, as he prays for his own safety. Eliezer's prayer, however, is controversial, as he prays for the downfall of

another person. Yet, in this story, both prayers are answered indiscriminately. A simple theology of prayer -- "pray and God will answer" – is revealed as inadequate.

This *mashal* (rabbinic parable) is told without the usual linguistic signposts, e.g., "it is as if a King of flesh and blood" to signal a teaching about God. Yet the *mashal* shows clearly how odd God's work would be if the simple theology were operative. It is as if *Av Harachamim,* the "Merciful Father" who hears prayer, were like *Ima Shalom,* the "Peaceful Mother." God, who is in intimate relationship with everyone, and committed to answering all prayers, would constantly have to juggle contradictory prayers. The only way to prevent answering disastrous prayers would be to manage world events so that disastrous prayers were always interrupted. Sometimes the management would be nearly impossible, as the liturgical calendar invites people to offer extra prayers on certain fortuitous days. At the same time, God has to be occupied with feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and healing the sick. To make matters even more complicated, the all-knowing God has to bear the burden of knowing the terrible effect that misguided prayer can have on its targets. If the gates of wounded feelings were open all the time, and this meant that God fulfilled the letter of every bitter prayer of the heart, the world would be a terrible place indeed. Only one conclusion is possible: just as the Torah is not in heaven, so prayer is not in heaven. The gates of wounded feelings are gates of the heart: wounded feelings bring us to prayer.

Here I have read the story of Ima Shalom as a *mashal* of "rhetorical narrative," to use Stern's term.[34] This *mashal* holds more than one possible *nimshal* (lesson) that can be drawn. Its apparent conclusion of praise for God's desire to respond to wounded feelings can also be read as an expose of the absurdity of this desire. The *mashal* invites

the reader into active interpretation through its lack of description of the feelings of the main character, Ima Shalom. By imagining how she might feel about managing wounded relationships, the reader can bring the themes out of the specific setting of the story and into general theological discussion. And by engaging in this process, the reader may also learn more about interpretation – which, in Jewish thought, is understood as the act that keeps tradition alive.

In this story, anthropomorphic language about God invites us to place ourselves imaginatively in the role of God. The imaginative exercise produces results so ridiculous that we must inquire into the nature of anthropomorphic language. If we cannot take it literally, how can we take it seriously? We can take it seriously by recognizing it as an invitation to look more deeply. As the *Zohar* teaches, articulating principles key to the midrashic mindset described earlier:

> Rabbi Simeon said: If a man looks upon the Torah as merely a book presenting narratives, alas for him! A more excellent book, we too could compile. But the Torah holds supernal truths and sublime secrets. People without understanding see only the narrations. But the truly wise pierce all the way through to the true Torah. (*Zohar* III.152)[35]

Hachi ka'amar: God Is and Is Not Like a Soul

To enter imaginatively into anthropomorphic language, one must simultaneously hold two different theological perspectives: God is like a human being, and God is not like a human being. The assumption of likeness makes it possible to enter the *mashal.* The discovery of difference makes it possible to interpret the *mashal's* teaching about

human life.[36] A similar duality of perspective makes prayer possible, according to the sages. Prayer is speech directed at an Other who will witness the prayer. Prayer is also speech directed at sorting out the inner life of the one praying. The *midrashic* mindset recognizes a conversation between the two views:

> He said to him: What is the meaning of the verse, *"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name?"* (Psalms 103:1) He [R. Joshua b. Levi] said to him: Come and see that the competence of the Holy One, blessed be He, is unlike the competence of flesh and blood. Flesh and blood draws a figure on the wall, but cannot put to it spirit and soul, bowels and intestines….He [R. Judah b. Menasya] said to him: What I meant to tell you *(ana hachei ka ameina lach)* is this: Concerning whom did David say these five *"Bless the Lord, O my soul"?* (Psalms 103:1, 103:2, 103:22, 104:1, 104:35). He said them only concerning the Holy One, blessed be He, and concerning the soul. As the Holy One, blessed be He, fills the whole world, so also does the soul fill the body. As the Holy One, blessed be He, sees and is not seen, so also the soul sees and is not seen. As the Holy One, blessed be He, sustains the whole world, so also does the soul sustain the whole body. As the Holy One, blessed be He, is pure, so also is the soul pure. As the Holy One, blessed be He, dwells in the innermost chambers, so also does the soul dwell in the innermost chambers. Let him who has these five things come and praise Him who has these five things. (b. Berachot 10a)[37]

Rabbi Joshua asserts that the great divide between human and Divine nature calls people to prayer. Humans are awed by the Creator's power, and so address petitions to the One for whom anything is possible. But Rabbi Judah says, "*hachei ka amina* – here is a different interpretation of the same passage that will help us better understand the topic under discussion."[38] People find God, he says, within their very own souls and this finding is what calls them to prayer. Human consciousness is expansive, itself filled with possibilities. One who prays speaks to her or his very own soul, and listens for the guidance offered in that conversation.

Psalm 103:1 works as a call to prayer whether one follows Rabbi Joshua or Rabbi Judah. The verse invites its listener to enter prayer and allow different experiences to flow. In the Rosh Hashanah service, the verse is strategically placed at the end of the reading of morning Psalms. Immediately following the verse comes the formal, anthropomorphic announcement that prayers for the Day of Judgment are beginning: "The King is seated on a lofty and exalted throne."[39] The newcomer to services will recognize that this is ancient poetic language, and will likely respond as he or she usually does to the authority of Jewish tradition – with awe or rebellion. The experienced student of *midrash,* however, may have a different experience. Upon hearing the key *mashal* word "King," he or she may enter the expansive space of interpretive consciousness and begin a day of inquiry into self and God.

In that expansive space of consciousness, one who prays may find new interpretations of her or his experiences. The new interpretation may be intellectual, and appear as a theological insight, as in the case of Abram. It may be emotional and appear as relief from the grip of painful feeling, as in the case of Hannah. It may be practical,

and appear as a solution to a problem, as it does Nakdimon ben Gurion who is simultaneously negotiating for water and praying for rain.[40] To open to this expansive consciousness, our sages recommend several spiritual paths. We can work to develop an intimate relationship with God through study, emotional refinement, and the pursuit of justice, as Hannah did. We can take control of our lives through prayer, righteous deeds, and changed behavior, as Abraham did. And we can recognize that God is not only in heaven, but dwells inside our very thoughts and feelings, as King David did.

Notes

[1] Translations from Rabbi Jules Harlow, ed., *Mahzor for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur* (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 1972), 183.

[2] Translation mine.

[3] Rabbi Dr. A. Zvi Ehrman, ed., *The Talmud: With English Translation and Commentary: Berakoth,* vol 3 (Jerusalem: El-'Am-Hoza'a Leor Israel, 1982), 640-641.

[4] Michael Fishbane, *The Garments of Torah* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 36-41.

[5] Rachel Adler, *Engendering Judaism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 64-65.

[6] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Heavenly Torah As Refracted Through the Generations,* trans. Gordon Tucker (New York: Continuum, 2007), 2.

[7] Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, *The Talmud: The Steinsaltz Edition: A Reference Guide* (New York: Random House, 1989), 131.

[8] Tikvah Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 304-305.

[9] Harlow translation.

[10] Ehrman translation.

[11] Fishbane, 19-32.

[12] Heschel, 7.

[13] B. Berachot, 31b – 32a.

[14] Frymer-Kensky, 305.

[15] Ehrman translation.

[16] Ehrman translation.

[17] Numbers 5:11-31.

[18] Ehrman translation.

[19] Mishna Shabbat 2, 6.

[20] Rabbi Eliezer Melamed, "A Woman's Obligation to Pray," http://yeshiva.org.il/midrash/shiur.asp?id=3758. See also Rachel Biale, *Women and Jewish Law* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 17-20.

[21] Judith R. Baskin, *Midrashic Women: Formations of the Feminine in Rabbinic Literature* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2002), 119-126.

[22] Baskin, 119-140.

[23] As interpreted in b. Berachot 29a.

[24] As suggested by Exodus 34:22.

[25] I Samuel 1:18.

[26] Translation from *Kol Haneshamah: Prayerbook for the Days of Awe* (Elkins Park, PA: The Reconstructionist Press, 1999), 349.

[27] Ibid., 351. Translation mine.

[28] David Golinkin, "Do Repentance, Prayer and Tzedakah Avert the Severe Decree?" *Insight Israel,* 6:1 (September 2005). http://www.schechter.edu/pubs/insight48.htm

[29] Translation mine.

[30] Abraham Tzvi Steinberger, ed., *Midrash Rabbah Hamivu'ar, Sefer Bereisheet,* vol.2. (Jerusalem:Hal-Or, 1986), 292-296. Translation mine.

[31] Soncino translation, *Soncino Judaic Classics Collection (CD).*

[32] "Rashi on the Talmud," *Soncino Judaic Classics Collection.* My interpretive translation.

[33] Soncino translation.

[34] David Stern, "The Rabbinic Parable and the Narrative of Interpretation" in *The Midrashic Imagination: Jewish Exegesis, Thought, and History*, ed. Michael Fishbane (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 78-96

[35] Quoted in Fishbane, *Garments,* 34-35. I have taken an excerpt from the longer quote, but eliminated the editorially appropriate ellipses to make the excerpt readable.

[36] The view that metaphor and analogy require terms that are both alike and different is a standard philosophical view. See for example Max Black, *Models and Metaphors* (Ithaca. Cornell University Press, 1962); Andrew Ortony, ed., *Metaphor and Thought* (New York: Canbridge University Press, 1979).

[37] See Judith Z. Abrams, *The Talmud for Beginners, Volume I: Prayer* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1994). Abrams quotes this midrash to make the point, "God's nature is so lofty, and so different from ours, that we might feel discouraged trying to communicate with God. Therefore [the sages] demonstrate that there is something in is, the soul, that is like God and can relate to God."

[38] Steinsaltz, 113.

[39] Translation mine.

[40] As in b. Taanit 20a, where a solution to the problem of drought comes through prayers for rain.