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EDITORIAL (DECEMBER 11,1997)

This issue of TR marks a series of new beginnings. We welcome two new general editors to the editorial collective. Charlotte Fonrobert is Assistant Professor of Rabbinic Literature at the University of Judaism, and Nancy Levene is an advanced graduate student in philosophy and religion at Harvard University. Expanding the editorial team accomplishes two very important goals: first, each of us has to do somewhat less of the work that it takes to put out each issue, and second (and more importantly) the range of voices that are heard in making editorial decisions is expanded.

This is the also first issue since the birth of Rachel Josefine Zank whose birth coincided with the Textualities conference.

Finally, this issue marks the first issue during the life of Shachar Ayallah Cohen-Hodos. Her presence made the issues that the articles articles raised ever more vivid and pressing for me.

In this issue we engage two subjects which, though they are arguably at the heart of anything that might be called "textual reasoning," have not as of yet been explored in the journal. The two subjects are Zionism and liturgy, or more specifically, feminist liturgy. The dialogue that is the first article in this issue emerges from an on-line discussion from this past summer. It has been edited for linear coherence, but hopefully not at the expense of the passion of the original (though some of the fire was doused). Elon Sunshine did a wonderful job editing the dialogue—not even being deterred by the birth of his daughter Ariel Yonah.

This is followed by a panel on Marcia Falk's Book of Blessings. Falk's revisioning of liturgy is cause for reflection on another aspect of textual reasoning: reasoning through and around the creation of new texts.

Ben Sommer's engagement with Herb Levine's book on Psalms rounds out the issue with a reflection on the possbilities and pitfalls of new types of interpretations of old texts.

A quick AAR update. Once again we had a very interesting session on Sunday night at the AAR. Pinhas Giller presented his translation of Sifra deTzniuta (TR 6.2) and succeeded in explaining large parts of it. It was also a good opportunity to put faces to some of the names on the e-mail list.

CALL FOR PAPERS
There are two special issues coming up.
1. Gender and Textual Reasoning to be edited by Charlotte Fonrobert, Sarah Horowitz and, Jacob Meskin. Please send proposals to Charlotte (____) or Jacob (___). A more detailed announcement will be forthcoming in TR 7.1.

2. A. J. Heschel and the Poetics of an Engaged Piety to be edited by Aryeh Cohen (aryeh@uj.edu) and Shaul Magid (___). Please send proposals to the editors.

For the editors,
Aryeh Cohen

Zionism/Anti-Zionism/Post-Zionism: a dialogue

[The following dialogue is edited from on an online discussion from this past summer. It was edited only for coherence and retains the flavor and hopefully the passion of the original discussion. My thanks to Elon Sunshine for his editing skills, and to the participants for their permission to reprint their words. All translations that appear in [brackets] are the responsibility of the editor. A.C.]

Introduction: PETER OCHS

The people asked the Prophet Shmuel to find them a king like other nation's kings. Was Shmuel's anguish a token of his disgust with Israel's political CHOICE, or of his despair over Israel's HAVING to have a politics -- having, that is, to embody its nationhood in a government that would initiate actions over-against other governments? ""Set a King over us.' Why do you ask for a king? By your lives, you will in the end perceive what will happen to you in the future because of this king!" (Deut. Rabbah Shoftim).

Since the first volume of Textual Reasoning, we have tragically had reason too often to introduce an edition with some lament about events in Israel today. Nonetheless, we have not yet been prepared to respond to such events, or to the contexts of such events, from out of the unique discourses of "textual reasoning." In March 1996, for example, after the bombings that took the lives of Matthew Eisenfeld z"l and Sarah Duker z"l, we asked, "are the Network's practices of dialogue, commentary, and relational thinking pertinent to the study of Israel's relations to others and to itself?" (Vol 5.1). Until this issue, today, we have not begun to respond. Is our reticence a token of confusion (if not disgust) about the choices available to us? or of despair over our HAVING to make a choice?

Among the various schools of postmodernity, there are forms of "postmodern," critical theory that arm theorists with means of more rapid response: from Foucaultian depth-analyses of the power-relations that inform our conduct to the post-Zionist political programs that begin to appear now, in and out of Israel. Are text-reasoners too utopian to participate in these responses? Or do they fear the tendency of critical theorists to reproduce the very sorts of binary opposition that burden Zionist politics today? Or are there no other options?

On the following pages, the editors of Textual Reasoning have transcribed excerpts of a noteworthy, first response to these questions that appeared

over the TR's chat-line in the Summer of 1997. It is a conversation and debate that situates political Zionism, post-Zionism, and anti-Zionism within the textual and historical framework of rabbinic halachic reasoning and messianic speculation. Call it this journal's initial, dialogic display of political textual reasoning: reasoning about the issues of contemporary political Zionism from out of critical and interpretive readings if the rabbinic sources. Does the conversation reflect Shmuel's disgust or despair or his (eventual) realism? Does it help disclose rabbinic Judaism's political responsibilties today? However you respond to the specific positions taken, we hope you will be stimulated, soon, to apply your capacity to lament, your Torah study, and your practical reasoning, together, to the task -- and obligation? -- to bring this conversation further....

SHAUL MAGID: Why is that I feel Yehuda Halevi didn't have Tel Aviv in mind when he wrote of his longing for, as he puts it, a return to Erez Yisrael (not "The State of Israel"). Even Bialik, at the end of his life, lamented the failure of what he called "the Zionist experiment" in creating a unique "secular Jewish" culture in Palestine. It is obvious to me that those who are said to have longed for *The State of Israel* throughout Jewish history never dreamed of a distinction between such a return and the messianic era. For most of Zionism (save R. Kook's overly optimistic ideology) such a distinction is paramount. Would Yehuda Halevi be a Zionist today? Quoting Shlomo Carlebach, "What do we know - what do we REALLY know?"

Daniel Boyarin: Yehuda Halevi is, after all, the genius who wrote that the only reason that the Jews are "tsnuim" is because they are out of power; were the Jews to be in power they would be as evil as anyone else. Was he dreaming of "The State of Israel"??? Did he think that his words would be appropriated by Naomi Schemer?

Jay Harris: One scarcely needs Yehuda Halevi to teach us this. Anyone with knowledge of ancient Jewish history knows that Jews with power are no different than anyone else with power.

And in truth one does not need ancient Jewish history either. Why is it so difficult for Jews to accept their own humanity with all that that entails? Jews as a collective are as beautiful and as ugly, as virtuous and as vicious as anyone else and always have been. Jewish powerlessness
relative to those who dominated them did not change this. For some Jews always had power over other Jews and overall displayed the full range of goodness to evil in dealing with their poor and disenfranchised. Powerlessness is not evil's antidote. It redirects human evil to be sure, but scarcely more than that. There are evil elements in Zionism; there are evil elements in talmudic Judaism. There is evil in powerlessness, there is evil in power. All the Foucauldian razzle dazzle in the world cannot change that.

The question confronting Jews today is not how to be more moral than anyone else, but to accept the challenge of the Gaon of Vilna and the world he helped create, which is for us, collectively and individually, to be ever vigilant in battling our baser sides, even as we recognize that we must lose sometime.

Boyarin: I am still inclined to think that the Jews were entrusted with a historical mission. Not precisely because we are better than anyone else, but simply to meet a different set of challenges and develop a different set of political and moral practices by being in Diaspora. Rejection of that task constitutes rejection of the very reason for being and remaining Jewish in my theological (Satmarish) opinion. If we are to be as all the goyim, then why bother? The Zionist then has to retreat (as did Herzl) to an argument that the goyim will never let us be like all of them anyway, if we remain on their territory, but only "over there," in Palestine (his term!), will we appear properly as Germans. This may have been true of Germany-Austria a hundred years ago, hardly true of Britain even then, certainly not true of the US or France either today etc. We can assimilate all we want to and quite completely disappear as well there as here (in Palestine), so

why bother, and why get involved in all of the specific and horrific practices that are necessary to sustain the fiction of a Jewish State?

Harris: To be sure, the theme of being like all the goyim is very prominent in Zionist thought, and while I am not as sanguine as you regarding the wisdom of rejecting this vision, I, too, reject it all the same. But this is not the sum total of Zionist thought or program. For Zionists like Ahad Ha'am (whom I note you quote approvingly in Unheroic Conduct, which I have but skimmed and not yet read, so I apologize if I misrepresent it), the need for Zionism rests precisely on the inability to sustain Jewish difference in the Diaspora short of Satmar-like existence. Most Jews cannot embrace the novelty (and it is a novelty) of such existence. And furthermore, the political circumstances in which they lived and still live made the continuity of such difference nearly impossible. I do not mean to suggest that the Zionist project as it has worked itself out has delivered well on this vision, but it has created the only place in the world in which Hebrew texts (and the positive Jewish difference they promote) are accessible beyond the Orthodox community (and I know full well that many "secular" Israelis cannot read many of the tradition's texts, but they remain light years ahead of their American counterparts all the same). Indeed, the only place in which Jewish difference will survive seems to me to be the State of Israel. Perhaps it is not worth the cost, but nothing comes without cost (and I do not intend this as a glib rejection of the real suffering involved). Perhaps you feel that the difference you valorize (regarding moral challenges, etc.) simply cannot be realized in conditions of power, but I would suggest to you that in that case they simply cannot be realized at all, because there will not be a community of learned Jews who can concretize this difference anywhere else, outside of Satmar et al., and let me add that I think you patronizingly romanticize them. Moral paragons they ain't (and I don't say that because I have a problem with their body type).

On the political side, I think your statement above is far too simplistic. It does not recognize the nature of European antisemitism, nor the

concomitant (and partially contradictory) assault on Jewish difference in Britain, France, and yes, the US (in addition to the German *sprachbereich* and the Russian empire). Further, these are all countries that collaborated in different ways in the destruction of European Jewry, and while I am less certain that such things can happen again than some Zionists I know, I am less sanguine than you apparently are that they can't. Beyond the cultural precariousness of Jewish life in the Diaspora, the political dimension of the Jewish question has not disappeared. And when we move from Western countries to the former Soviet Union, it is evident that real Jews remain in real physical danger, and the moral power of Diaspora powerlessness no longer has the opiate effect it once may have had.

Finally, to Daniel specifically: It seems to me that the advantage of powerlessness is not the diminution of evil but the ability to abdicate responsibility too easily. The fact that you are more comfortable, apparently, in "occupied Mexico" than in "occupied Palestine" makes my point. You can, apparently, ignore the horrors that created the comfortable environment in which you live because, after all, it was goyim who did (and do) that. Yet you can, apparently, enjoy the fruits of their crimes without overt qualms. Why? Why do you seem to bear no responsibility to undo the results of the extraordinary brutality and cruelty that created California and the US generally?

Boyarin: Not entirely true. Insofar as these crimes are in the past, I do not abdicate responsibility or accept responsibility for them anywhere. Insofar as they are ongoing, I am engaged in a fight (with greater or lesser passion, intensity, effectiveness, etc.) to redress them in the present, both in California and in the place that my antagonists (not enemies) call the State of Israel. A propos some of the comments, I simply do not see the Palestinians as my or our enemies, and consequently find that construction and its implications one that just doesn't touch me. We are their enemies if we allow ourselves to be. They have no reason to be our enemies if we don't encroach on them and oppress them; there is no

Ewige Antisemit and their resistance is rational and logical. Why should the Palestinians have to pay for the crime of Europeans against Jews?

Harris: The problem here, it seems to me, is that primary displacement of Palestinians took place two generations ago. It may not be as far in the past as what occurred in the US, but it is past. There are today five million Jews in the State of Israel, and whether or not this state should have ever come into being, the fact is, it is here, and cannot go anywhere. This does not mean that the effects of 1967 cannot be reversed, because unlike 1948, a substantial segment of the Jewish community of Israel recognizes that any other course of action is immoral and politically unacceptable as well. But the fundamental reality of a Jewish state is not reversible other than through the force of arms, and I think our moral discourse must adjust accordingly or it becomes irrelevant. As to who is whose enemy, Palestinian resistance to the Jewish state is indeed rational and logical. But that does not mean it can legitimately free itself of all moral constraints. People who blow up babies (and go out of their way to attack at a time that the maximum number of civilians are present) have gone way beyond rational and logical resistance to pathological enmity. If you think that this is the only way to express their rational and logical resistance, I ask to consider what you would say if we reverse the position of Jews and Palestinians. Would you "allow" Jews to engage in this behavior (and I acknowledge that some have), or would you counsel seeking some other form, perhaps less effective politically, of resistance. I have little doubt that the latter is the case. Why then accept real lethal enmity from Palestinians? And why deny that SOME Palestinians have gone from rational resistance to this enmity as you do? Palestinians should not have had to pay for the crime of Europeans, but they have all the same, and this is irreversible. We must live with the results and make them as tolerable as possible for all concerned. This will require enormous moral fortitude on the part of all concerned (even if in some abstract sense the responsibility ought to rest only with Jews), and frankly I see little on either side. Under these, in my view, very real political circumstances, I am not at all sure what is the path out of the current morass.

For myself, I do not wish to abdicate responsibility for redressing evil, but feel that we must recognize the limits of the self predatory species we are. If I really wanted to live in a place in which conquest and oppression have not contributed to my comfort, I would have to move to Antarctica, and even there in time I imagine evil will rear its ugly head. This is the world we as Jews/humans live in. We can work to change it but not by imagining that somewhere in this world (California) or somewhere in our past (Lita, say) things were genuinely different, 'cause it just ain't so. Given the world I live in, I can see nothing less moral about living as a member of the majority in Israel than living as a member of the majority in San Francisco. And, frankly, I see something far more Jewishly rewarding.

Boyarin: The issue is not whether conquest has contributed to my comfort (I was, by the way, quite comfortable in Omer as well), but whether the political foundations of the place that I live are defined theoretically and ideologically in terms of an oppressive discourse. The United States, for all of its many faults and evils, greater in the aggregate than the evils of the Jewish State, nevertheless defines its ideals in terms of equality for all. One can fight against injustice in the United States using the discourse of its foundations against its practices. On these grounds, slavery has been abolished, suffrage won by women, etc. There is still an enormous, almost a Sysyphian, task ahead of us, particularly with respect to the African American underclass, but the discursive foundations of the State provide the theoretical justification of the politics. What can be said about Israel? The Jewishness of the Jewish State continues to provide theoretical aid and comfort to racists and racism (which is not to say that this was its original impulse), such as most recently denying the rights of the Negev Bedouin to restore their own mosque in Be'ersheva to its religious status (as opposed to being a museum), because, as the vice mayor of that town said: "We must show them that Be'ersheva is a Jewish city!" This and a constant series of horrors are the direct consequence of the theory of a Jewish State. I am opposed to such a state both in theory and in practice and believe that my notions for what to do about its present existence, which do not, I

hasten to add, consist of having its Jewish population deported, would undermine the theoretical basis of what is called Zionism on all quarters today.

Harris: To me the problem here is yet again working with abstract notions of the political instead of addressing yourself to the very real conditions of the world in which we live. I agree that the US does indeed define its ideals in terms of equality for all; I am very well aware and grateful for that personally as well more broadly. However, I see the US as an extraordinary unfinished experiment in world political history, an (ultimately accidental) attempt to transcend the nation state (and I am aware of a certain anachronism in putting it this way; I beg indulgence to avoid getting sidetracked) and even here there are many who desperately try to turn the US into a nation state. But how ever much academicians regard the nation state as dead and buried, recent history suggests that it remains as strong and virulent as ever. Perhaps an ideal solution for the Jewish question would have been to relocate all Jews to the US (with all the cultural degradation that would have entailed), but that too is irrelevant, since the US would not have accepted them all (since equality for all necessarily applies only to citizens), and in any event that's not the way things turned out. The nation state will no doubt vanish from world history, and with it the Jewish state, but not tomorrow. Why are Jews, alone among people of collective identity to be denied, a priori as opposed to de facto, a place where they can be shielded from the ravages of other, including Arab, nation states (given that the US was/is not a possibility for them)? I think we can recognize the political necessity (historically) for this state without condoning the idiocy of the vice mayor of Be'ersheva. In the end, I guess I cannot share your sense that Jews who would remain in the Land of Israel (since you won't deport them) can live in peace in a democratic state in which equality for all is the stated ideal. Aside from the fact that such a state is foreign to Middle Eastern political culture (and European as well, despite the EU experiment), the Palestinians are seeking their own nation state. They are not prepared to live in a democratic,

egalitarian state, unless of course they constituted the majority (which should tell you something) anymore than Israeli Jews are.

In the end, a moral discourse that seeks real solutions for real problems—that does not waste time on woulda, shoulda, coulda-- is superior to a utopian moral vision that imagines the best possible world, but cannot hope to get there.

Magid: In response to the correlation between Daniel's issues with Zionism and "Satmar ideology" I must intervene. Anyone who has seriously studied the anti-Zionist ideology of R. Yoel Teitelbaum and more importantly his mentor R. Hayyim Elazar Shapira of Munkacz (d. 1936) will be acutely aware that the two are quite different. Daniel's "anti-Zionism" (if one can call it that) is founded on issues of immorality and the abuse of power of the modern State of Israel. He correctly cites Yehuda Halevi as one who was quite aware of such danger. The Satmar Rebbe was an anti-Zionist because he could not accept and found no sources to support a non-messianic State of Israel. I firmly believe that he understood better than most religious Zionists the "heretical" nature of Zionism (albeit a necessary heresy) and the extent to which Zionism would forever alter the correlation of God's Will and Halakhah. I disagree with his conclusions but I accept some of his premises. He loved the Land of Israel no less than R. Kook. In fact, he states many times it is his love for Israel and Torah that forces him to take such a negative position. The Zionist (Hertzlean) position of "normalization" which in many ways has taken place in Israel both culturally and politically, was for R. Yoel the most heretical statement made by a Jew in the modern world.

If I understand Daniel correctly (and Jay for that matter), the problem is not Israel without sh'mirat ha-mitzvot [observance of the commandments] but rather the abuse of power and inability to recognize that, as opposed to what Shamir claimed, the boundaries of the State of Israel are not the barbed wire fences of Auschwitz. We as a people are struggling with the notion of no longer being "the most victimized victims". If Daniel's

position on Zionism is reflected in any of his predecessors it is Rosenzweig and Hermann Cohen and not R. Yoel. It is high time that we as a people and as a scholarly community face the realities of a post-Zionist (not anti-Zionist) Judaism. This is what I meant in my earlier post about deconstructing (not destroying) Zionism. The "necessary heresy" that Zionism gave us brought us many wonderful things. As a Jewish ideology, however, I think it is about ready for retirement. We are witnessing at present the sad consequences of holding onto an ideology which no longer has much moral ground to stand on. The State of Israel is a reality, of that there is little question. We now have to re-access what that means and how we can morally and responsibly live as the Power and not the victims.

It is easy in the academic world to call someone "Satmar" and thus dismiss his case. Few of us are willing to face Rosenzweig and Cohen as anti-Zionists because we take them so seriously as "thinkers". Daniel's position is built as cultural critique rather than philosophical reflection and thus his approach differs in both method and substance from Rosenzweig and Cohen. Yet, compared to R. Yoel, he may be closer to their philosophical position than Satmar's fundamentalist one.

Daniel, I'm sorry if I misrepresented your case. These are just ideas floating around this post-Tish'a B'Av brain of mine.

Boyarin: I do, however, (proudly) identify my theology of the People Israel with that of Satmar.

Harris: Does your theology of the people Israel share the Satmar (and Munkacz) attitude to those Jews who live outside their community? Just asking.

Boyarin: In the sense that they are better left alone and not interfered with like Lubavitchers do, yes indeed.

Falk: Kedey shelo titchashev shtiqah kehoda'ah, et chamat Hashem male'ti, nil'eti hakhil. [So that silence should not be considered as acqiuesence, "I am full of the wrath of God, I am weary of holding it in."]

Without justifying all policies and acts of the present Israeli government, I say every day "nodeh lekha Hashem Elohenu al shehinchalta lavotenu welanu (sic!) erets chemdah tovah". ["we thank you God, our God that you have bequeathed to our ancestors and us (sic!) a good and pleasant land."] Hermann Cohen and Rosenzweig I take as great teachers in many respects, but their attitude to Jewish identity was emancipatorial and therefore dated. I am surprised that after the Shoah, Jewish intellectuals who speak of God, Israel and Torah, can again speak of a Diaspora Judaism in contradistinction to Israel.

This is totally out of line with classical Jewish identity and self-understanding, e.g. of the Gaon of Vilna (who has been mentioned several times) or of any other classic teacher of Torah. For them, there is no "Diaspora" but "Exile", and if somebody thought he could not live in Erets Israel, there was only the reason of Tosafot Ketubbot 110b, s.v. hu.

Satmar ideology is possible for those who reject Enlightenment and historical-sociological criticism; who otherwise relies on it is a "Salonbolschewist" (forgive me for the name-calling, but I need the historical analogy) and cannot be taken seriously.

American Jewry has a long way to go to become as integrated in the culture of the environment as did German Jewry. Now, we understand that this was an illusion. How do you know that present "Diaspora Ideology" is not a similar illusion? Shouldn't "postmoderns" be more self-critical?

As I hinted at the beginning, there is much to be criticized in Israel, and you should definitely play a role in this process. But just because of Israel's need for criticism, criticism cannot be accepted from Bileam but only from

Mosheh Rabbenu (or his like), having demonstrated his love by deeds, having defended Israel even vis-a-vis God and being extremely humble.

Magid: Satmar (or more precisely Munkacz) never spoke of the Diaspora as a permanent situation. It was, for him, a tragedy which was and is the result of our sins. The entire edifice is built on the assumption that the Messiah (and only the Messiah) can institute Jewish statehood. In one sense his critique of R. Kook was that he put the cart before the horse. I suppose the reason I don't fully comprehend your [Boyarin's] identification with Satmar is that I don't know of your attitude and position on messianism. My intuitions tell me that vis-a-vis messianism you are closer to Rosenzweig than R. Yoel but I could be wrong. The issue of messianism is also paramount in understanding some of Jay's remarks, especially those that relate to the GRA. I know that Jay does not accept the position presented by Arie Morgenstern that the GRA was an active messianist.

Jacob Meskin: I think that Daniel Boyarin, in his most recent response to Jay Harris, indicates something that Jay needs in order to support his (Jay's) general position--roughly, the view that something or other about the historical reality of diasporic existence has been a truly important, and not easily minimized element in making Jewish tradition what it is. Just as Daniel is careful to deny that such diasporic existence has somehow made Jews "better" in an ontic or epistemic sense, one must also be careful to avoid any easy choice between onesidedly characterizing Diaspora EITHER as a factor shaping Jewish life, OR as a reality toward which Jewish thought and culture tended to lead independently.

Diaspora--whether cause or effect--has indeed been a feature of great significance in Jewish life, and Daniel must be right in thinking that something valuable is to be retained from it, that indeed either kabbalat ol malkhut shamayim or even just "Jewish identity" must both include it. (An especially poignant version of this--from 1949!--can be found in Haim

Hazaz's famous short story "The Sermon", which is required reading for those who have not yet encountered it.)

But I think Jay also has something that Daniel (and Shaul) need for their own positions--Jay's larger, and more self-critical perspective on the nature, specifically, of political thinking that comes out of the academy. One need not be Kierkegaard to be at least commonsensically skeptical about "systems" of political ideals produced mostly within the relatively safe walls of the academy, and by individuals who, for the most part, neither make nor implement actual government policies. This hardly makes academic reflection on politics "wrong" in some way--but it does open up Jay's basic worry, that of allowing "the best to become the enemy of the good", a vice to which we in the academy may be more prone than others. And one hardly needs Hermann Cohen (or the Gaon, or Levinas) to be able to agree that this sort of skepticism about ourselves--an intellectual form of heshbon nefesh [accounting for our deeds]--would be pretty much at home in Jewish tradition as well. If it is our job as academics to critique others, then why not occasionally make ourselves into "others" and critique ourselves? If we do not do this, aren't we implicitly absolutizing what we happen to be doing at the moment? And isn't specifically political thinking a good place to start, when the stakes are so high?

Seems to me that each position needs a big chunk of the other.

Mirsky: A few brief comments:

1) One variant of anti-Zionism we have not discussed is the Brisker version, espoused by R' Velvel Soloveitchik and his disciples, which has seemed to me to generally be more restrained, less self-dramatizing and confrontational than the Satmar/Munakcz versions. Am I right about that?

2) In discussing Rav Kook, I think that one can take issues with some dimensions of his messianism, as I do, and still find many dimensions of

his experiential relation to modernity not only compelling, but also as offering great possibilities for profoundly moralist discourse within the Jewish people and among disparate cultures.

3) As a working government official (the Human Rights Bureau of the State Dept.), I would underscore the salience of Jacob's comments on academia and the "outside world". It is of course precisely the job of academia to think "outside the box" morally, strategically, historically, etc. Interestingly, in my time in government, I have observed that my colleagues, in the few minutes of the day they have time to think about larger issues beyond the day's meetings, memos and other bureaucratic griefs, tend to derive the most benefit from reading history and occasionally philosophy (with all due apologies to the political scientists among us).

Boyarin: And yet, and yet, I know that this is unfair and would hardly apply it even to Trotsky, how is it that Rav Kook's disciples seem the least moralistic of all?

Mirsky: On Rav Kook's disciples' resort to violence etc., I would say that we should remember that the oldest founders of Gush Emmunim were third if not fourth generation disciples, and are perhaps more accurately thought of as students of R' Zvi Yehudah. Meanwhile, on the other side of the spectrum stands Rav Amital, the foremost Rabbinic figure in the peace camp, who studied Rav Kook even while in the camps and was a student of R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap, whom Rav Kook described as his soulmate, and kept Rav Kook's photo on the wall of his office when he was in the Peres government. None of this is to say that one camp or other has it/him "right" or "wrong" but rather that Rav Kook is a capacious thinker, capable of inspiring rather different groups. Actually, the Trotskyite analogy is on point, insofar as Gush Emmunim (at least in its heyday in the seventies and early eighties) really seemed to resemble Communist cadres, in the messianic fervor, the apocalyptic idealism, the belief that Zionism/the Internationale will save the human race etc.

Harris: [To Meskin] At no time and in no way did I deny the tremendous positive value of the Diaspora. Not all Zionist thought was or is committed to shelilat ha-golah in either a physical or cultural sense. I have devoted most of my energies to Diaspora phenomena, and hope to devote the next years of my life to recovering the great Jewish sub-culture of Lita, which I consider the epitome of Jewish cultural achievement (certainly far greater than anything produced in Israel, in my humble opinion). So no denial here. However, I think we must acknowledge the uglier side of Diaspora existence, political and cultural, and I think Daniel Boyarin glosses over this. Further, I do not share his apparent sense of Jewish political existence in the modern period, before the Shoah. To me modernity has brought a very different but ultimately more effective assault of Jewish identity and culture. Absolutist governments declared war on traditional Jewish existence (not always from antisemitic motives, but from straight political ones that led the Austrians to think they needed to germanize the various populations, the Russians to russify, the French to frenchify(?) (gallicize seems too archaic), etc.) and many declared war on Jewish religious culture, developing schemes to alienate Jews from their texts. I have written about some of this in my How Do We Know This, but a full treatment of anti-talmudic government-inspired actions in the 18th and 19th centuries remains to be written. I believe that the political fortunes of Jews in the Diaspora have energized (note: I did not say created) ugly discourses regarding non-Jews, which under a different set of political conditions might have faded from view. The Diaspora conditions have placed extraordinary limits on Jewish economic experience, a point central to all the haskalot of Europe, which means limits on Jewish enjoyment of the full range of human experiences. One could go on, but enough for now. Shelilat ha-golah is to cut ourselves in half, and I reject any reading of Jewish history that promotes it. But unqualified chiyyuv ha-golah, in my judgment, requires enormous blinders.

Edward Feld : The classical formulation for Jewish politics was that there were three crowns. That is the tradition recognized that there was a

secular realm which was touched by the religious but not ruled by it. Diaspora existence allows the Jew only a sense of religious and secular, kosher and trefe, but not the middle realm which is politics.

The question Israel poses for us is, is there a politics that can be holy? It has been a long time since we have had to face that question. How do we recognize the autonomy of politics, yet make a connection from it to the religious. Not too quickly, I hope, for that has all the danger of religious nationalism and the theocratic state. But not so separate that all possibility of prophetic calling is lost.

It is a wonderfully terrifying old-new enterprise for us.

Boyarin: I find the notion that there was no politics in the Jewish Diaspora counterintuitive in the extreme. This is a thorough identification of politics with the nation-state which hardly characterized Europe before the 18th century. Why are Jewish Germans not a species of Germans who are participating in politics in the broadest, Foucauldian sense at least?

Peter Ochs: Daniel and Jay: earnest hopes that you will continue to press your exchange further. We have not in 7 years on this talk-net been able to open up the heart this way on these central issues of our bodily existence AND to bring to the opening our fundamental hermeneutic and fundamental political claims about Rabbinic Judaism. BUT you can't leave us in the middle this way, whatever the distractions may be; you've taken us too far into the stream to leave us...

So, to continue, tell us more, for example, about what Torah is for you khuts la'arets [outside of the Land]; about kedushat ha'arets [the sanctity of the Land]; about what your relation might have been to Bar Kochba if you were there. Or more, in other words, about your Rabbinic political hermeneutics.

Harris: I was hoping Daniel would respond to this as he is a baqi [expert] and I am not, but here goes.

I think that Rabbinic literature as a whole conveys a clear sense of accommodation to the reality of domination by others. However, unlike what I believe Daniel's position to be, I do not think that most rabbis were ever reconciled to this reality in the sense that they thought it was a positive. this goes beyond their messianic thirst, which after all can be interpreted (and was by Scholem) as an acceptance in the here and now of these political conditions as the preferred state of existence (as the famous text from the end of BT Ketubot can be interpreted). Rather, my sense that they were not reconciled to this reality (in the sense of seeing it as positive) derives from my interpretation of the sometimes extreme rhetorical violence directed against gentiles in general and Romans in particular. The fantasies of revenge in the hereafter, the ease with which rabbis assume gentiles predisposed to bestiality and child rape—with important Halakhic ramifications, thus not the mere stray comment of this rabbi or that--the contempt that is so often (not always) directed against Rome, etc., etc.-- to me this expresses considerable resentment, and a sense that the proper condition of the Jew is certainly not to be dominated by others (or at least not these others).

Aryeh Cohen: Though it is foolish to step between two gedolim, I will take advantage of the fact that Shabbos doesn't arrive in L.A. till much later (if ever) to step into the breach.

I think that this is right overall, though I would nuance the argument in the following manner. Though the Bavli in particular is obviously not reconciled to the domination of this malchut [kingdom], their rhetorical strategy is more interesting. There is, for example, a mapping of Eretz Yisrael onto Bavel (that is, equating Bavel to Eretz Yisrael) in the beginning of Gittin. This is not just a random statement (Rav's "Bavel is like Eretz Yisrael as far as gittin are concerned") but, I would argue the tenor of the first 6-7 daf [folios], and ultimately many more sugyot in the

rest of the tractate. This self reflection on the status of the Rabbinic enterprise then plays itself out in sugyot [Talmudic discussions] in the fourth chapter, e.g. around prusbol [the permission of the court to collect loans in the seventh year] and the status of courts in Bavel (R. Ami and R. Asi) and also in the aggadic sugyot of the churban [destruction of the Temple] in the fifth chapter. While some of the rhetoric is that of subservience to Eretz Yisrael (most explicitly in e.g. Baba Kamma eighth chapter the sugya of "shlihutayhu ka'avdinan" [lit. "we are fulfilling their agency"] on the power to judge of Babylonian courts) there is a counterpractice of claiming greater powers for the batei din [courts] in Bavel -- e.g. halakhically "afka'at kiddushin" [nullification of marriages] and aggadically the sugya in the beginning of Sanhedrin that places the "staff of judgment" in Bavel and not in Eretz Yisrael.

Harris: The land, for all of its kedushah [holiness], is primarily instrumental here. Torah of course is primary such that at least some rabbis imagine it better to live in a maqom torah [a place of Torah study and observance] in chu"l [outside the Land] than in the land but not a maqom torah. Perhaps I'm missing something, but I don't think anyone would suggest that the best thing is anything other than a maqom torah in the land under conditions of political independence, because it is only under these conditions that Torah can fully flourish and Jewish life reach its total fulfillment. The latter requires not just "yeshivot" (excuse the possible anachronism) but a fully Jewish economy, marketplaces that cater to Jewish needs, sartorial standards that allow a Jews to feel at home with traditional "Jewish dress" (whatever that may have been in reality) and much more.

I think there is much to document this, but let me start with one text that points to this. In [Midrash] Eichah Rabbah on the verse (Eichah 1:3), "galtah yehudah" ["Judah was exiled"] the darshan [midrashic exegete] asks the important question, "are not other peoples displaced from their land?" That is, in the ancient world (as alas in the medieval and modern worlds) populations are displaced all the time. There is nothing unique

about the Jewish experience and the darshan knows it. "But", he continues, "even thought they are displaced their displacement is not exile." (I have translated in accord with what I take the sense to be; what I have translated displacement and exile is in fact the same word, galut). Their displacement is not exile because "they can eat the bread and drink the wine...they can walk [comfortably] with their "aspactiot" (whatever they are; probably, based on the contrast, some form of footwear) wherever they go. But the displacement of Israel, IS exile for they cannot eat of the bread and drink of the wine (in the dominant gentile marketplace), and they walk around barefoot (whatever that means), that is with some sort of external marker that prevents them from ever being at home elsewhere, or presumably as a minority in the land.

It is the job of the homiletician to build castles based on a single text, and I am not doing that. There are counter-texts to be sure. But unlike what Daniel has written in Unheroic Conduct, I believe one can talk about the dominant thrust of the textual evidence (which does not act as a survey, as it were, of the many generations of rabbinic teachers). That is, the judgment regarding dominance does not tell us what the majority of rabbis throughout the generations thought about this, but I think it is justifiable to say that the literature we have, as far as I know it, more fully gives voice to the approach I have outlined than to any other reading of rabbinic "attitudes" to their domination by others. Rabbis deeply resented this domination, and felt it alienated them from fully realizing the gift of Torah.

Cohen: There are two aspects to this question: first, whether independent Jewish life in Israel, etc. is something to strive for actively or whether it is the promise for the messianic age alone. Second, what is the best strategy -- accommodation or resistance -- in the present time.

I would argue that there is no dominant thrust of the rabbinical literature on the question of resistance vs. accommodation. I argue in a forthcoming article on martyrdom (that will be in the Journal of Jewish Thought and

Philosophy) that as late as the Bavli there is still no consensus on whether active martyrdom is a desideratum. Further I think that resistance to an active premessianic redemptive strategy is one of the main streams of thought in the first chapter of BT Megillah identified mainly as attributed to Raba (again not one statement here or there but the aggregate of what seems to be a conscious blurring of the boundaries between Mordechai and Haman). About whether independent Jewish life is something to strive for or whether it is messianic, I think that the rhetorical *practice* (both halakhic and aggadic) of the Rabbis argues for the deferral to a messianic age. The situation of displacement is an existential one as well as a geographical one as the Maharal argued.

Harris: Aryeh, I disagree with nothing you have written, nor do I see it as a challenge to anything I said. I believe the dominant thrust of rabbinic literature is towards accommodation, and certainly the claim the Bavel is superior to Eretz Yisrael is based on its superiority (by no means acknowledged by all) in Torah, a classic strategy of accommodation. I believe the dominant thrust of rabbinic political thinking is towards ever increasing reliance on messianic redemption rather than direct political resistance, as you suggest.

The issue I was addressing was a bit different: namely, given the strategies of accommodation, does rabbinic literature reflect a vision that powerlessness is a good thing that provides opportunities, as I believe Daniel to have claimed. To this I suggested that while there are texts, like Pes. 87b that suggest Diaspora is an opportunity for the spread of Torah etc., it seems to me that the dominant thrust (and again I consider it sensible to use such a phrase) is that the political dimension of the Diaspora (= being dominated by others, in the land or without) is a condition that ultimately effects a degree of alienation from God and Torah.

Cohen: Jay, I would make one small change in what you wrote. I would say that this is a condition that *reflects* a degree of alienation from God

and Torah. The major difference is that then this condition of displacement and exile is the ground of the Rabbinic enterprise. The alienation from God (I would rather say the recognition of God's absence as a presence [cf. the first 5 daf of Berachot] but alienation will do) is the distance that allows for both the creativity of Diaspora or at least Bavli Judaism; and at the same time the locus of the nightmares of the Rabbis that the separation from God is actually a divorce. This puts a more positive [though admittedly very fraught] spin on galut.

Harris: Aryeh, without disagreeing with anything you wrote, I would nevertheless reject the suggested change, as it shifts the focus from anthropology to theology, which does not interest me at the moment. That is, galut effects alienation from God, in that God cannot be served properly. This begins, obviously, with the mitzvot ha-teluyot ba-aretz [the commandments whose observance is dependent on the Land], whose non-observance effects a sense of distance form God. It is not surprising therefore, that these mitzvot are, through various hermeneutical moves re-categorized as de-rabbanan [lit. of the Rabbis; meaning a lower level obligation than 'of the Torah'] post-destruction, thereby, I would suggest, mitigating the sense of loss. (Agav [by the way], it is interesting to note that the most important voice of religious hibbat tsiyon [love of Zion] in the 1880s, the neziv [Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin], sought to reconceptualize shemitah [the seventh year in which the Land lies fallow], at least, as mi-deoraita ['of the Torah'] in the face of the first shemitah facing the hibbat tsiyon communities (1888-89). As he prepared for a return from galut [exile], the sense of loss could be redressed hermeneutically as well as "physically." In a different way he makes the same point in an important letter to Pinsker.) For those few dissident--non-dominant-- voices who considered ALL mitzvot as teluyot ba-aretz [dependent on the Land] (in a different sense of that term), obviously being in galut outside the land severely diminished the value of religious life, as it became nothing but a rehearsal for a show they might never get to put on. This reduced religious life is what I mean by alienation from God, or better a sense of alienation from God.

Noam Zohar: Jay - I agree with much of your analysis: indeed the sense of alienation from God was (is?) correlated with the lack of mitzvot ha-teluyot ba-aretz [the commandments whose observance is dependent on the Land]. But at points you seem to imply that the lack of these mitzvot was the source of that sense of alienation; with this I disagree. Surely the theological question was: since, in galut, we are clearly distanced from God, yet also clearly always in contact, we must determine how this duality should be reflected in Halakhah.

The distance from God consisted in the very lack of living in a mostly homogeneous Jewish society (more important than sovereignty itself), and the Mitzvot substraced are those mostly connected with social justice, as we became guests in alien economies (the details could, no doubt, have been worked out differently...)

Falk: The inability of fulfilling the land-bound commandments is a sign of being in disgrace with God. Obviously, you can feel close to God in the Exile, but a greater effort is needed. Erets Israel is not special because of the Jewish society (le`olam yadur adam be'Erets Yisrael afilu be`ir sherubah nokhrim [a person should always prefer to live in the Land of Israel even in a city whose majority is gentile]), but because of some relation between the people and the land and the meaning of the commandments to be fulfilled in the land. Rashi quotes in next Parashah the Sifre on wesamtem (Deut. 11:18), that the commandments in Exile are a preparation for return.

Harris [Responding to Zohar]: I did not mean to imply source in the sense of genetic origin, but source in the sense that this lack itself effects a further sense of alienation, in that not only has God in some sense withdrawn, but we are left without all the means needed to restore the relationship. Again, though I wish to stress that my interest here is on what impact galut has on the religoius consciousness of observant Jews as reflected in rabbinic lit. The inability to serve God fully effected (or perhaps I should say

compounded) a sense of alienation from the Torah and God. Further, and more importatn given how this discussion got going, this sense combined with other factors to effect significant ressentiment among rabbis, who reacted with extensive rhetorical violence against those who dominated them.

[With regard to your comments regarding distance from God in galut and in a non-homogeneous society, and regarding mitzvot connected with social justice], agreed, although I would gloss your social justice with "for us." I see less (not no) concern for social justice beyond the jewish community here, a continuation of certain biblical ways of thought, as well, PERHAPS as a further reflection of ressentiment.

Cohen: I still feel a need to say: And yet...

The fact that prosbul, shmittah and yovel [the Jubilee year] – which as Jay mentioned were the locus of Zionist rethinking of Halakhah in the 19th century (and of course to the present time) -- are also exploited in the Bavli to authorize the (exilic) power of bet din "divreihem okrin divrei torah" ["their words uproot the words of Torah"] seems to be a more positive statement about the possibilities of religious existence in chutz la'aretz [outside the Land]. That this sugya follows closely on the self-authorization of "kol dimekadesh ada'atah derabbanan mekadesh" ["all who betroth, betroth with the consent of the Rabbis"] implies a realignment of the religious center toward a more amorphous Rabbinic space, and away from the messianic or utopic geographic space. This is obviously a theological move but with heavy political/anthropological ramifications.

Harris: Even granted all that (and only for the sake of argument), is it not in response to a very real problem? is it not an effort to realign religious values to accommodate a very problematic reality?

[Regarding the theological move toward rabbinic space], I'm not certain of any of this. For one thing compare the yerushalmi's [Talmud of the Land of Israel's] attitude to "bitlo lo mevutal" ["if he annulled it, it is not anulled"] where it takes for granted the rabbinic power "la'aqor davar min hatorah" ["to uproot something from the Torah"] and simply responds to this position with "yaut amar" ["he said appropriately"] (I hope I am remembering this right; if not, I'm sure I'll hear about it). Yet I don't think you would say that this move is designed to move toward a more amorphous ... and away from...(and I confess I don't understand your use of messianic or utopic; it seems ot me your point should be "away from geographic space", period). While the yerushalmi takes for granted what the bavli needs to justify, in the end both talmuds assume rabbinic authority over such matters, and I don't see how this entails a realignment towards a more amorphous rabbinic space. I think you are loading many things on to this text it cannot bear. He/they is/are dealing with a problem, they are asserting authority (mandated after all by R. Gamliel's taqqanah in the first place, which is where the self-authorization finds voice). (Further, if memory serves, the principle kol de-meqadesh etc. originates with R. Ashi, if the attribution is to be accepted, in a sugya in Yeb., in which the authority being grabbed is far more limited than here in Gittin, since it does not involve hafqa'at qiddushin le-mafrea; here in Gittin it is imported from that context and invoked to uphold the justification, "mah koach beit din yafeh" where the "beit din" in question {on which see halivni} is that of Rabban Gamliel Ha-zaqen. To be sure this authority may spill over to them, but my point is that the whole matter here is far more complex that mere self-authorization.) To me what you present here does not follow from this material, even as it would from other rabbinic pronouncements, say, equating (partially) the presence of a beit din to the power of Jerusalem, or tefillah to qorbanot, etc. Not even these moves, because they can never be more than partial, diminish, in my opinion, the very real sense of loss and alienation to which rabbis from both centers and throughout the generations routinely give voice (note that I did not say all rabbis from...).

When the rabbis, not only in the BT, work to diminish the status of the mitzvot ha-teluyot ba-aretz [commandments that are dependent on the land], or to find ways to compensate for the absence of qorbanot [sacrifices] (not an identical problem to be sure), they are, it seems to me, telling us that they have a very serious religious problem with their current halakhic options; they have a diminished religious life, and these strategies are only partly satisfactory in mitigating them. Diaspora or domination by others within the land are largely negative conditions that, to be sure, open up some new possibilities; but, in my reading, these new possibilities never undo the "second-bestness" of the lives they live.

Finally, all this is in some sense an aside from my primary point, which focused more than anything on the way gentiles, and ruling gentiles in particular, figure in talmudic discourse, and the extent to which in my judgment this material makes clear that the diaspora and domination by others in the land, for all its opportunities is not conceived as positive or ultimately acceptable.

Cohen: My point was too heavy handed, it is just that the Land of Israel is never -- even when being displaced -- just a geographic space. I think I might have stepped beyond the boundaries of what can be conveyed in what still appears to be a conversational e-mail, but since I stepped I will flap my arms and try to fly. (The numbering [which follows] is just my most recent attempt to make myself clear, not any conceit of a mathematical certainty...)

1. While Halivni argues for the source in Yevamot, Avraham Weiss argues that it is impossible to decide which is the "original" text. I think that the poetics of the sugya in Gittin render the origin question irrelevant. There is a point begin made here.

Harris: Here I disagree. While it is usually the case that one cannot tell with parallels which if either is "original", in this case it seems clear to me that Yeb. must be the original context of the saying since it fits there, and

is then imported to other places. The reson why this is important is that in the Yeb. sugya, there is no power claimed to annul marriages retroactively, but only on the spot. This raises the possibility that in your sugya in Gittin and the others where it is used apparently to justify retroactive annulment, the saying is actually invoked as an analogy, granting rabbis the same power to set the rules of divorce that have been established concerning marriage, but does not actually signify the power to retroactively annul. This, I think, matters a great deal in terms of what is being claimed here. It is for this reason also that I cited the yerushalmi, which takes for granted that rabbis regulate divorce, without getting into this whole business of retroactive annulment (I'm not trying to harmonize the two talmuds, simply suggesting that here they may not differ as much as appears).

Cohen (continuing): 2. The point starts with the undermining of Rabban Gamilel's takkanah [ordinance] in favor of koach beit din [the power of the court]. A strong reading of koach beit din yafeh [then yields the principle of Rabbinic sway over all marriages: "kol dimekadesh". (Agav, the radical nature of this principle is obvious in the way that the rishonim try to interpret it out of existence.)

Harris: How does koach beit din yafeh undermine the takkanah? It seems to me to do precisely the opposite. Again, I don't think this [principle of Rabbinic sway over all marriages] is being established here; this is taken for granted here. Their control over divorce is what is new here (whatever you think of my reading above).

Cohen (continuing): 3. Read in the local context of the sugya in Gittin 33a this unit effects a move towards redefining marriage as a relationship between a woman and bet din.

Harris: I don't see it.

Cohen (continuing):

4. The sugya of prosbul (3 daf later) also invokes this Rabbinic power: hefker bet din hefker, to assure the efficacy of prosbul derabbanan.

5. The continuation of the sugya of hefker bet din and the continuation of the prosbul sugya are both focussed on the possibilities of Rabbinic power.

The reason I privilege the "power of bet din" discussions (not only the ones in Gittin) over the others is that this is where the ultimate nightmare is: if the galut is actually permanent then the rabbis have no authority for what they are doing. So what they are doing in self-authorization is deferring exile as chaos and living with exile as the nightmare on the margins.

[Regarding your comment about diaspora and domination by others in the land], if by "ultimately" you mean for all time, then we have no disagreement. The difference might be that in my reading of Hazal there is more (as Richard Rorty once said of Derrida) wallowing in the the angst of not knowing -- whether the exile is permanent or not.

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PART TWO:

II. PANEL DISCUSSION OF MARCIA FALK'S BOOK OF BLESSINGS

III. BEN SOMMER:
READING PSALMS, HEARING PSALMS: THOUGHTS ENGENDERED BY HERB LEVINE'S
SING UNTO GOD A NEW SONG

A Reconstructionist Response to The Book of Blessings
by Rebecca Alpert*

Although my role on this panel is to represent a "Reconstructionist" rather than a "feminist" perspective, it is a feminist orientation that compels me to speak rather personally about my religious life. I hope these initial

comments will give you a sense of why I feel like I have been waiting for Marcia Falk's Book of Blessings for most of my adult life.

In my early twenties I became a student at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. Despite my Reform background and my personal predilection for the theology of Martin Buber, Mordecai Kaplan's thought appealed to me enormously. Though I had never articulated for myself my antipathy to anthropomorphism and supernaturalism, upon reading Kaplan's theology I felt he was speaking for me. I was also very taken with the anti-hierarchicalism inherent in Kaplan's repudiation of chosenness and of the distinctions among Cohen, Levi and Israel. Upon reading Kaplan I immediately began to call myself a Reconstructionist and to pray accordingly. I adopted Kaplan's liturgical changes that removed chosenness from the prayer service, believing that he and I were adhering to the principle that he articulated: in prayer as in all things, we must say what we mean and mean what we say. Falk takes this idea to its fullest meaning, and develops a liturgy consonant with a non-supernaturalist, non-anthropomorphic view of divinity.

Falk's work makes clear the ways in which Kaplan's liturgical innovations, bold though they were for his time (and which got him into much trouble in traditionalist circles, including the burning of his prayerbooks and his excommunication) fell far short of the implications of his theological writings. The reaction to Kaplan's small innovations, his desire to influence American Jews to follow his philosophy and his basically traditional bent kept him from going any further. To say that further changes would have been inconceivable at the time is also a fair statement. It is as if Falk picked up where Kaplan left off in 1945 and has created the blueprint for a prayerbook which truly represents Kaplan's philosophy.

Note carefully my reference here to Kaplan's philosophy and not Reconstructionism as a movement. Since the retirement of Ira Eisenstein from the presidency of the congregational and rabbinic arms of the movement in the late 1970s, Kaplan's theology has not been a focus for the

leaders of Reconstructionism. As is the case in all but the most dogmatic religious movements, the ideas of the founder were subjected to revision and reinterpretation. The most controversial elements of Kaplan's theology have either been downplayed or challenged by a more traditional approach. It is not surprising that Falk found in Ira and Judith Eisenstein her greatest supporters. While the new Reconstructionist leaders may recognize that the language of liturgy is not consonant with their theology, they seem completely comfortable with this contradiction.

That is why I, as one who fully appreciates Kaplan's teachings, wholeheartedly welcome Falk's approach to liturgy which adheres to Kaplan's idea that we must mean what we say and say what we mean, even when we are talking about God.

The most compelling adumbration of this idea comes in Falk's reconstruction of the blessing formula. To Kaplan, Jewish life was vested wholly in community. Falk's rendering of blessings in the first person plural, and in the active rather than the passive voice, is a perfect way to explicate Kaplan's theological focus on the Jewish people as the center of Jewish life. Replacing "you are blessed" with "let us bless" captures that magnificently. Others of Kaplan's followers have tried to explain his thinking in terms of grammatical examples (Schulweis' predicate theology; my own prepositional theology, where God works through rather than over or on the world, for example). But Falk's rendition brings together Kaplan's theological orientation and his understanding of the centrality of community.

I differ with Falk when she worries that any of her blessings become formulaic. In this, and in other areas I will look at later, she fails to understand one of the dimensions of the role of prayer in people's lives. While of course words fail to retain their full meaning when used formulaicly, it is not possible to imagine prayer without some fixed points. If "Nevarech et eyn hahayyim" has found resonance, it means people are

prepared to accept this change. This is the only way her liturgical changes will come into usage.

I also admire Falk's refusal of hierarchies, so clearly presented in her havdalah. Again, Kaplan met this challenge in havdalah by removing the phrase "ben yisrael l'amim" from the final bracha. Falk sees more deeply into the basic hierarchical structure of difference and refuses the elevation of the sabbath over the rest of the week, and of light over darkness in terms of its implications for racism. These innovations are crucial to a new understanding of the ways in which we can, as Kaplan suggests, see the Jewish people as distinct, without making odious comparisons, or separating ourselves from the rest of the world. This is a crucial vision and Falk's development of it is a most appropriate way to persuade Jews of the importance of this idea.

Finally, Falk's understanding of liturgy as art and her passionate love of the Hebrew character of prayer are another link to Kaplan. Kaplan's efforts at innovation always focused on retaining the Hebraic character and nuance of the liturgy. Falk succeeds masterfully at this objective as well. For Kaplan a major component of Jewish civilization was art; Falk's ability to render the prayer service as poetry is also in keeping with Kaplan's vision. Beginning in the 1920s Kaplan insisted that women's roles should be enhanced, that women's art should be incorporated in Jewish life. Falk's work clearly achieves this goal as well.

Of course, Falk's goal was not to realize Kaplan's vision, and she certainly differs with him in places, most particularly in his excision of "mehaye ha matim" which she retains. Of course, including the idea of reviving the dead as a form of rebirth which we often experience still conforms to Kaplan's idea that we judge whether to retain an idea based on what it means. Kaplan's whole plan to reconstruct Judaism entailed finding new meanings in old concepts so that they would come alive for each generation. This Kaplanian concept, his most conservative modality, is still central to the Reconstructionist approach today.

It should be obvious then that I believe Marcia Falk's Book of Blessings to be a major contribution to Reconstructionism; one that should compel this movement in Judaism to rethink its connection to its original teachings. My only concern is that Falk's work may not succeed any better than Kaplan's in furthering acceptance and appreciation of the theology it espouses, because American Jews seem to have little interest in intellectual honesty in prayer. In a study of Reconstructionism in the 1970s, Orthodox sociologist Charles Liebman concluded that although most Jews agreed with Kaplan's theology, they saw no need to have their religious lives accurately reflect their beliefs. For most Jews today, prayer is an experience of the heart, not of the heart and mind. Those who pray seem to prefer not to be troubled that they don't believe what they are saying, that the images in the prayerbook don't reflect their concept of God, that their opposition to hierarchy is not represented or that their need to find new ways to explore women's contributions goes unheeded. In a religiously conservative age, it is not surprising that nostalgia and conformity are the values that dictate our religious lives.

While Falk wants to reach out to those who are alienated from Jewish life, I don't think they will find The Book of Blessings to be their entree. What is compelling about this work is its sophistication; its nuanced and passionate use of the Hebrew language; its close renderings of the traditional passages and images changed only to conform to Falk's theology and ethics. Its power is not in its accessibility, the lack of which is underscored by both its price and its size.

These cautions notwithstanding, Falk's first volume is a revolutionary act that will raise questions about Jewish theology, ethics and prayer for generations to come. I applaud this work, and look forward eagerly to subsequent volumes. And, yes, I will surely pray with it.

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Response To Marcia Falk's Book of Blessings
by Rachel Adler*

Tractate Berakhot, the tractate that deals with blessings, stands at the very beginning of the Talmud. It heads the first order of the Talmud's six orders, an order called Zeraim, seeds. For the rabbis, blessings are the seeds of individual devotional expression, of the communal liturgical voice, and of the institutions of synagogue and studyhouse where rabbinic Judaism is generated and propagated. Seeds contain both the past and the future. As legacies, from the dead they reproduce the world. As pledges to the future, they change it. No seed exactly replicates its bearer. Every seed points toward some future seed which will both incorporate it and differ from it.

In The Book of Blessings, Marcia Falk harvests a new crops of seeds from the foundational genre of rabbinic prayer: the seeds of feminist liturgy.

The Book of Blessings, then, is more than a feminist liturgy. It is a genotype whose character will mark its pure-bred progeny as well as a profusion of hybrid liturgies. Some of this mutational process has already begun, as both Jewish Renewal communities and the institutional liturgies of non-Orthodox Judaisms import and canonize language and images Marcia sought to keep contingent and variable. Thus, the exhortative nevarekh "let us bless" and the alternative divine nameeyn ha-hayyim, "Source of Life" have begun to serve, in some quarters, as standardized gender inclusive berakha formulae. However, to reduce the impact of The Book

of Blessings to these fetishized pieces would be to ignore some of its far-reaching implications for Jewish liturgy and Jewish thought. I would like to discuss a few of these.

First of all, The Book of Blessings represents the most serious and learned feminist conversation with Jewish liturgical tradition to date. Previous feminist services either emend masculine language in traditional texts phrase by phrase or ignore the traditional liturgical structure altogether. Marcia knows the elements that compose the formal structure and the themes they intend to set forth. But instead of replicating them, she echoes them, reacts to them, quarrels with them, improvises from them like a jazz musician playing riffs on a traditional motif. Moreover, this conversation with tradition is not merely to be inferred by the more knowledgable reader.

Marcia's massive commentary serves as a kind of Gemara reconnecting her work to previous tradition, debating the reasoning for liturgical decisions, justifying linguistic choices and making explicit the underlying theological disputes. No previous work of feminist liturgy has had or could have needed such an apparatus. Because of Marcia's section introductions and commentary, The Book of Blessings is a text for study as well as a text for prayer. For the reader to whom Jewish liturgy is unfamiliar, the commentary complexifies what looks simple and exposes strata of tradition beneath what looks new.

For those well-versed in Jewish liturgy and scholarship, Marcia's prayers and their commentary challenge the assumptions and definitions that inform traditional prayer and offer a searching theological critique.

A second significant feature, unprecedented in feminist liturgy, is Marcia's liturgical language. Previously the bulk of feminist liturgical innovation has been in English. Although for most serious and thoughtful Jews, Hebrew is preeminent among the languages of Jewish prayer, the ability

to compose Hebrew prayer is confined to a small elite whose ranks include few women.

The paucity or absence of Hebrew stigmatized feminist liturgy as worship by the ignorant and for the ignorant, much as in previous generations Yiddish prayer was relegated to "women and men who are like women." Hebrew is not the only language for Jewish prayer inThe Book of Blessings - - English prayers and English and Yiddish poetry are prominently featured - - but the backbone of The Book of Blessings is Marcia's radiantly beautiful Hebrew, echoing and ringing changes upon the language of Tanakh and Siddur.

A third noteworthy feature is a systematic theological perspective informing every prayer and poem. This theology deemphasizes the historical or quasi-historical stories that comprise Jewish memory in favor of the embodied human self and its sensuous experience of the natural world. It rejects hierarchies and dualisms, softening or blurring the traditional boundaries between holy and secular, Jew and non-Jew, Israel and diaspora. For the traditional divisions between God and world and God and self, it substitutes a unitive spirituality that collapses God into nature and humanity. The object of revence in this spirituality is the life force itself together with the beauty and diversity of the world it creates and sustains. In this theology, life and death, joy and pain, are represented as complementary elements in an ultimately beautiful and harmonious cosmic order. In other words, Marcia has merged feminism and classical Reconstructionist thought into a single theology, and tranfused that theology into a liturgy that is an aesthetic tour de force. I honor the daring, learning, and skill that went into this notable achievement.

At the same time, I have fundamental and irreconcilable theological differences from Marcia, and I want to lay those on the table. I am not a Reconstructionist. I believe in a God who is an Other with whom we have flexible but distinct boundaries. For me, interdependence with a God who is Other is the fountainhead of all possibility for relatedness and exchange,

conflict and communion. Hence some language and imagery which Marcia, echoing Susanne Langer's terminology, calls "dead metaphors" are very much alive for me.

But I do not understand how some of Marcia's traditional terms are other than dead metaphors for her. I find it difficult to comprehend terms like worship, bless, kavanah, (orientation/ intention), without an Other toward whom they are directed. What does it mean to have a covenant without an Other? If God is not distinct from self and community, why use the theological language of partnership at all? Now I am perfectly aware that classical Reconstructionist thought has answers to these questions, all heavily influenced by Durkheim's conception of prayer as the community's apostrophe to its projected and idealized "conscience collective." "Worship" is the rehearsal of cultural categories and foundational myths. "Blessing,' while not an expression of gratitude articulates satisfaction and pleasure with the world and its resources. Classical Reconstructionism addresses prayer directly to this fictive Other. Marcia, more honestly, removes the fictive referent completely or praises it in terms that make clear its impersonality.

In such theologies the only alternative to prayer as an exercise in socially useful solipsism is unitative mysticism, a fusion experience which dissolves boundaries between self and cosmos. This experience can also be recognized in William James' "cosmic consciousness" or the "oceanic feeling" which Romain Rolland described to Freud. But it is a mystery to me why, after feminists have worked so long to establish that difference is to be celebrated rather than transcended, have fought so hard for integrity of selfhood, have resisted so bitterly being subsumed or swallowed up, we should embrace the deadly experience of fusion in our spirituality. Of course, either of these worship experiences is an improvement over what Drorah Setel has called the language of vulgar monotheism, a system of totalized imagery that validates and enforces male dominance. But, as the old aspirin commercial asks, why exchange a

headache for an upset stomach? There are resources within Jewish tradition for a diversely imaged and gender-flexible theology of relation.

My other ongoing dispute with Marcia has to do with our different approaches to theodicy and anthropodicy. From my perspective, Marcia's liturgy does not adequately reflect the existence of disorder, injustice, pain and violence in the world. While I find the serenity of The Book of Blessings moving, I miss the outcries of indignation, anguish, terror, rage, and penitence that percolate through the psalms and prayers of classical weekday service. We had some of this discussion over Marcia's beautiful blessing before going to sleep which concludes "mal'ah nafshi hodayah al mat'not ha-yom. mal'ah nafshi hodayah al mat'nat ha-yom." Marcia translates: "I call to mind the gifts of the day -- the gift of this day-- and give thanks." Marcia suggested that the blessing could be "a stimulus to awareness, a way to help oneself recognize the unseen gifts one had received" even in the course of a terrible day. This interpretation reminded me of the classical tziduk ha-din, the blessing justifying God's judgment said at a catastrophe. And certainly my own teachers taught me to refer to suffering as "bitter" rather than "evil." I would like to practice saying Marcia's bedtime prayer because I would like to become the kind of person who could be receptive even to bitter gifts.

Perhaps what disturbs me inThe Book of Blessings is the lack of liturgical language for exactly how bitter it can be. In the classical prayerbook, I can go to the Tahanun service and say, "I am worn out with my groaning; every night I flood my bed with tears."(Ps. 6). "we are worn out and no rest is granted us." I can accuse with the psalmist, "How long will you (judges) judge unjustly and favor the wicked?" (Ps.82) or "They conspire against the life of the righteous and condemn innocent blood." But here, I find no outlet for noisy complaint.

Marcia's prayers emphasize the need for justice and compassion. I would not for a moment suggest that she condones social injustice or glosses over personal suffering. But there are no vivid depictions either of human evil

or of human pain. Perhaps, it is because there is no Other to whom to complain, no divine mirror for grief or outrage, that disharmony is so disturbing in Reconstructionist theologies. The tendency is to move immediately past it to reconciliation and acceptance. A Reconstructionist Book of Job would cut directly to the speeches in the whirlwind. The ultimate wholeness, as Marcia says in her commentary on the blessing for someone who is gravely ill, "comes from a deep acceptance of one's place in the greater whole of being." (483).

It is certainly true that we ought to regard both suffering and death as part of the human condition rather than as terrible surprises that befall those who are especially unlucky. And yet there are crucial differences between, for example, the "good death" of a Bernardin, lucid and fortified by faith and friendship, and the death of a Medicaid patient, alone, inadequately medicated, and tied to a hospital bed, or the death of an abandoned Hutu child from dysentery beside the road as desperate multitudes stream toward Rwanda? Are there situtations that ought not to be accepted as part of some greater pattern but must remain outrages and reproaches to any larger harmony that purports to soothe them?

The world is very beautiful as Marcia's lovely psalms of creation attest and she is right to make her Sabbath services reflect only joy and wonder. But the world is also very terrible and this terribleness has no voice in The Book of Blessings. Without a God to fight with or plead with, it must be a lonely place indeed. As I have said, this is a very different theological perspective from Marcia's own. At this point in our ongoing debate Marcia usually tells me, "That's your book; this is my book." We know neither of us is going to convince the other; this is more like a formal protest from her Majesty's loyal opposition. Throughout its process, I have been both challenged and enriched byThe Book of Blessings., and I am grateful for the wonderful conversations with Marcia as both of us were writing. Surely, the next best thing to fighting with God is fighting about God. I am lucky to have as wise and creative a dialogue partner as Marcia to fight with.

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THE BOOK OF BLESSINGS: A RESPONSE
by Judith Plaskow

I am delighted to be here this morning to celebrate the publication of a long-awaited and extraordinary volume, a Jewish feminist prayerbook of genuine religious depth and poetic power. It has always concerned me that a great deal of Jewish feminist liturgy represents an intellectual response to perceived inadequacies in the traditional prayerbook. As such, it may perform a valuable consciousness-raising function. Yet, since there is no necessary correlation between an ability to analyze the problems with traditional images and the capacity to create new ones, much feminist liturgy is not particularly religiously satisfying or moving. The Book of Blessings, however, emerges out of a genuine religious sensibility and vision, a love of Hebrew, and, indeed, a love of language generally, and an ability to draw on traditional vocabulary and evoke traditional resonances even where the substance of the prayers is very new. What I would like to do this morning is to talk about The Book of Blessings as a feminist prayerbook and then raise some of the questions and problems a feminist prayerbook presents.

It is worthwhile reflecting on The Book of Blessings as a feminist prayerbook because it does not fit into that rubric in the most obvious way. Most Jewish feminist liturgy uses female God-language--either evoking the Shekhinah, creating new female names for divinity, or rewriting the traditional blessings in feminine grammatical language. For at least some feminist Jews, feminist liturgy is defined by the use of such language. But Marcia uses no female images and little feminine grammar. Evoking the sacred as totally immanent in creation, her blessings offer an alternative

to the whole notion of God as male or female person, and thus do not proclaim themselves as feminist in immediately recognizable terms. Yet I would argue that The Book of Blessings is deeply feminist in its thorough incorporation of the three moments or phases that have marked feminist scholarship in virtually every area: a critical response to and analysis of tradition, the creation of a new history that places women at the center, and the transformation of received tradition in the direction of the dismantling of hierarchies and greater inclusion.

That The Book of Blessings stands in a critical relationship to tradition is evident at many points. First of all, Marcia's transformative agenda is rooted in two staples of feminist criticism of traditional male God-language: its idolatry and its hierarchical character. Rejecting "strictly formulaic language for the divine" and the identification of divinity with a single image," Marcia points out that many Jews are guilty of verbal idolatry in that they identify particular images with the reality of God. The images that are sanctified, moreover, tend to be hierarchical in character—Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe--providing the theological justification and underpinnings of the hierarchical dualisms that pervade Western culture.

The questions Marcia raises about Torah constitute another area of criticism of tradition, and one where her contribution is both important and original. For the last twenty years, Jewish feminists have been analyzing the androcentrism of Torah and, in a variety of theoretical and also separatist liturgical forums, seeking to invoke women's words as Torah. Feminist analysis and experimentation have had virtually no impact, however, on the synagogue ritual surrounding the Torah reading as the center of the Sabbath service. To my mind, Marcia's introduction to the Torah reading is one of the real gifts of The Book of Blessings in that it provides a way to address the meaning and limits of Torah in a liturgical context. By raising a series of thoughtful, meditative, and beautifully-worded questions that are both respectful and critical of Torah, she

challenges congregations to reflect on and expand the notion of sacred teaching at the point that the Torah is read.

Marcia's commitment to an expanded notion of Torah is then evident in a constructive way in what I take to be the second significant feminist element in her work, the creation of a women's history and lineage. As she points out, the anger and divisiveness that, in many congregations, have surrounded discussions of the simple inclusion of the matriarchs in the *amidah* indicate the extent to which women's invisibility is still accepted as normal and normative by large portions of the Jewish community. If that community is to become truly inclusive, and the liturgy is to reflect and foster inclusiveness, then women's presence will need to be not simply tagged onto an already- established liturgy but brought "fully into the foreground of awareness." Marcia's Kabbalat Shabbat (Welcoming the Sabbath) and Sabbath morning amidah contribute to this "foregrounding" by introducing into the liturgy poems by Jewish women. These poems both represent the voices of the "women psalmists" who have been excluded by the canon and compensate "for some of the imbalance of Jewish liturgy by making women's names and stories visible." It is, finally, the third, or transformative, phase of feminist discourse that The Book of Blessings is most fully about, and, in this context, I would like to name four of its contributions to feminist theological conversation. One of the most salient characteristics of feminist reflection on God over the past twenty years has been an emphasis on immanence as opposed to transcendence. The God known in and through the world, a God who is empowerer rather than power over, has been invoked again and again in feminist writing. And yet, to the extent that Jewish feminist liturgy has simply inserted female names and pronouns into standard readings, it has offered up a slightly softened version of the traditional God rather than realizing a new understanding of the sacred. The Book of Blessings, however, actually embodies feminist discussion and principles liturgically by summoning the divine as "the dynamic, alive, and unifying wholeness within creation," This transformation is closely related to another theme in feminist theology and discourse: the centrality of "our bodies/our

selves" and the appreciation of embodiment. In seeking the divine both "nowhere in particular" and yet everywhere, in every moment and ordinary detail of experience, Marcia refuses the hierarchy of body and spirit that leads to the association of men with soul and women with the domain of the body. In her discussion of the Sabbath, in which she points out that it is possible to consecrate time only in space; in her many poems evoking the shapes and colors of creation; and in the numerous blessings that lift up the holiness of everyday embodied life, her insistence on immanence fuses with an embrace of sensuality that reminds us we can find divinity "wherever our hearts and minds, our blood and souls are stirred."

These pairings, "hearts and minds," "blood and souls," are significant, for they point us to another of Marcia's constructive contributions: her insistence that the dismantling of hierarchical dualisms is not to be confused with the abolition of distinction. "The recognition of differences is part of our very appreciation of life," as she puts it. Her final havdalah blessing--"let us distinguish parts within the whole and bless their differences"—can be taken as a paradigmatic feminist statement about difference, and one which is embodied more subtly in her Torah service, which values Torah as the core of Jewish difference without affirming it in contrast to the religious teachings of others.

This contribution is in turn related to the last I will mention: Marcia's reformulation of monotheism as "the embracing unity of a plurality of images" rather than the elevation of a single image as the image of God. This conception is expressed most fully in her extraordinary rewriting of the Sh'ma, a prayer that succeeds in bringing together all the themes I have named: the divine as immanent, the value of embodiment and of diversity, and the intuition of unity within the diversity of creation. The Book of Blessings, then, is a powerful and important feminist prayerbook. Yet precisely because it is, it raises difficult questions about what it means to have feminist prayerbook, and how it should be viewed and used. Marcia herself is very insistent that she does not intend to offer new formulas that

can serve as substitute images for the divine to be inserted into any prayer context, but that her blessings are part of an ongoing process of naming that reaches toward a more inclusive monotheism. I would heartily concur with this perspective since, in my experience, the process of form-breaking and a sense of open-endedness are every bit as central in defining feminist liturgy as the actual content of the prayers. Yet a book necessarily freezes the process of image-making at a particular moment. How, then, can it be made to encourage continued naming rather than cut off that process?

This question becomes all the more urgent when we acknowledge that The Book of Blessings embodies the theology of one woman who has long been engaged with Jewish feminism. This is in no way a criticism. It is the fact that The Book of Blessings comes from the hand of a poet of extraordinary religious sensibility that gives it its depth. Yet feminism is a political, social, and religious movement for change, drawing together women with many different experiences, sensibilities, and visions. What does it mean to have and use a feminist prayerbook that represents one lens on the sacred?

As someone who has used Marcia's Shabbat home blessings for many years--and who must dredge up the traditional blessings from my memory when I'm called on to say them--I was very struck at how uncomfortable I felt when confronted with her whole Sabbath morning service. I want to filch large portions of it, but, at the same time, I am not willing to surrender the anthropomorphic deity of the traditional liturgy. If I can find God in the wind and the apple and the stone, why not in attributes of personhood? While Marcia suggests bringing "human relations directly into [the] liturgy" by making explicit commitments to certain interpersonal values, I find the moments where she does this the most abstract and least satisfying in the book. I feel, in the second part of the Sh'ma, for example, as if I'm reciting a list I know I won't be able to live up to, rather than creating deep motivations and resonances through praying to a God who embodies the characteristics I value. Moreover, anthropomorphic imagery captures the ambiguities of existence for me in

a way that the language of immanence does not. While Marcia affirms that an inclusive monotheism incorporates the domain of the "bad," and she rewrites the blessing of creation to include harmony and chaos, the overall effect of the blessing--as of her liturgy more generally—is to catch up the bad within a larger unity. But I don't always experience the world--or God--in that way. Sometimes I feel overwhelmed by the fragility and vulnerability of human existence, by the evil in the world, and by the ambiguity at the heart of human creativity. Anthropomorphic language allows me to capture and grapple with those experiences in prayer. It also allows me the luxury of protest against God-- a theme in Jewish theology I deeply value, but which seems to have no place in a theology of total immanence.

I am not arguing here that Marcia should be me or have my theology. I love her blessings as crucial elements in an inclusive monotheism. But I would like to think together about what it means to have a feminist prayerbook that each of us will find partial in different ways. How do we try it on, use it, appreciate it without criticizing Marcia for not doing everything--and, at the same time, without letting the existence of a very solid book between two covers block our own visions and our own continuing process of naming?

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Response to the Book of Blessings
Aryeh Cohen

It seems to me that the most striking characteristic of the Book of Blessings, though one which is subsumed in its overall heft, is its severe minimalism. For example the Nishmat prayer (p. 161) which runs on for some two pages of dense text in the traditional version-in a way enacting its own

awe of over-abundant blessings for which to give thanks-is rendered in the Book of Blessings in six couplets-in a way enacting the paucity of praise. This severe minimalism is an important aesthetic and religious choice.

The roots of the discussion of whether and how one can pray go back as far as prayer itself. While the liturgical traditions have usually gone by the rule that there can never be enough, the halakhic discussions have taken the other tack.

Tosefta Berachot 1:5-9, a third century compilation of Rabbinic law, lays out in significant detail stylistic rules concerning blessings. Those which are long cannot be shortened, those which are short cannot be lengthened, those which open and close with a blessing cannot be recited otherwise. Neither the Tosefta nor the Mishnah, the first compilation of Rabbinic law, offer much hint as to the reason behind the rules. One sign of the seriousness of the rules, though, is the following statement in the Tosefta:

"By his blessings, it is known whether a person is ignorant (lit. empty) or a student of the Sages."

The understanding of the somewhat intricate rules of when to say what, is a sign of one's belonging to the class of "Students of the Sages," that is the Rabbinic elite.

The Palestinian Talmud, a fifth century compilation styled as a commentary to Mishnah, (p Ber. 1:8) attributes to ⌈Hizkiah the knowledge of an addendum<1> to the previous statement:

"One who lengthens [blessings] is condemned, on who shortens is praised."

If this statement is actually modifying the previous one, then the student of the sage is the one who knows how to say less, the one who fights the urge towards excessive, possibly ecstatic, praise.

One reason for this notion is found in a story that is recounted in both the later Babylonian Talmud, a sixth century compilation, (Ber. 33b) and the Palestinian Talmud (Ber. 9:1). In the Palestinian version, R. Yo|hanan and R. Yonatan are on some sort of mission to the cities of the south of Israel. They happen upon one congregation wherein the |*Hazzan* or service leader, chants the first blessing of the *Amidah*-the core of the three daily prayer services-with many more epithets than in the "official version," and they silence him. They then admonish him, saying:

"You have no permission to add to the form set by the Sages for blessings."

This ruling is followed by several midrashic explanations. The final one is a midrash on Psalms 106:2 attributed to R. Abun. The verse "Who can utter the mighy doings of God, or show forth all His praise?" Is read through the intertext supplied by Yacov of the village of Niburrayah: (Psalms 65:2) *lechah dumiyah tehillah*. The rare *dumiyah* could be read so that the phrase would mean:
1. to you *is fitting* to praise. (LXX)
2. Praise *is due* to you. (RSV) or
3. To you *silence* is praise. Yacov reads the verse in the third way. This turns the verse in Psalm 106 into a question whose obvious answer is "nobody." This is reinforced in the Palestinian Talmud by a folk saying: "The greatest drug of all is silence. It is compared to an invaluable jewel. Any praise just lessens it."

The rationale for the prohibition of adding on to the blessing form that the Sages created is that, in fact, silence is the proper praise. This leaves in place the question: why say anything? It is a given, however, that something needs to be said. That something though, needs to be as little as mandated.

The corresponding story in the Babylonian Talmud (attributed to R. |Hanina) gives as its rationale that one could never relate all the attributes of God. If this is true, then any attempt to make a complete list, which goes beyond the mandated praises, is actually taking away from God's attributes-it is degrading God.

The echoes of a popular prayer which did not confine itself to the minimalist parameters outlined by the Sages grow stronger as we have evidence of both the sanction and the "sin." In the earliest Halakhic or Jewish legal work of the Gaonic period there is an explicit prohibition against saying of *Kerovot*-liturgical poems-in the first three blessings of the Amidah.<2> The collections of *Kerovot* also survived, demonstrating that the power of the Gaonim was not as great as they wished it to be.

This situation continued through the centuries, with the most articulate attack on the expansionist trend in blessing being made by Maimonides, the great Jewish philosopher and Halakhist of the medieval period, in his _Guide to the Perplexed_. Quoting the version of the story from Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Berakhot, Maimonides then comments:

"According to the spirit, this dictum makes it clear that, as it happened, two necessary obligations deremined our naming these attributes in our prayers: one of them is that they occur in the *Torah*, and the other is that the prophets in question use them in the prayer they composed."

Thus we say anything about God in our prayers only by necessity, and through the precedent of Biblical usage.

Maimonides then turns his attention to the composers of liturgical poetry.

"Thus what we do is not like what is done by the truly ignorant who spoke at great length and spent great efforts on prayers that they composed and on sermons that they compiled and through which they, in their opinion,

came nearer to God. Sthey predicated attributes of Him and addressed Him in all the terms that they thought permitted and expatiated at such length in this way that in their thoughts they made Him move on account of an affection.S This kind of license is frequently taken by poets and preachers or such as think that what they speak is poetry, so that the utterances of some of them constitute an absolute denial of faith, while other utterances contain such rubbish and such perverse imaginings as to make men laugh when they hear them, on account of the nature of these utterances, and to make them weep when they consider that these utterances are applied to GodS" (_Guide to the Perplexed_, I:59; p.141)

The poets are the greatest of the defamers and blasphemers according to Maimonides. They misuse language either maliciously or through ignorance of its power. Ultimately the result is one-those who think they glorify God by adorning the prayers, are in fact guilty of the worst sin: imagining that God has a form. This is verbal idolatry, which is Maimonides' unique contribution to the religious consciousness.

At the very same time that Maimonides was railing against the excessive description of God, the liturgical poets who Maimonides excoriated continued their work, and the central text of Jewish mysticism, the Zohar-whose forte was describing the inner workings of the Godhead-was being written.

These two approaches to the ineffable nature of God-on the one hand the Maimonidean approach of silence, codified also in his Halakhic work; on the other hand the poetic/mystic approach of the multiplication of images of God-continued to define at least one set of parameters of the thinking about prayer.

The Book of Blessings is sitting at an oblique angle to this dialectic. On the one hand, there is a very Maimonidean sensibility. Falk speaks of idolatry as one of the dangers of "strictly formulaic language for the divine and immutable liturgical forms." (418) The minimalism throughout the Book

of Blessings resounds with the sensibility of "Sto you *silence *is praise." There is a palpable fear that the traditional prayers are forcing us to lie. (421)

At the same time, one of the driving forces behind the writing of the _Book of Blessings_ was to create new, unprecedented forms of blessing. Forms that speak to important questions of hierarchy and theological truth-telling. Forms that evoke a sense of belonging to the whole of being. (7)

The _Book of Blessings_ is ultimately ultra-Maimonidean and ultra-poetic at the same time. Any address of the Divine is shied away from. ("Where is the divine in all of these? Nowhere in particular-yet potentially everywhereS) At the same time, the commentary forces the sparse blessings to carry great allusive weight. It is, though only through the commentary that the blessings are tied back to Biblical sources.

Paradoxically, the Maimonidean fear of speaking, and fear of verbal idolatry, leads Falk to a very literalist reading of the traditional blessing formulations. Falk claims that the formulation "Blessed are You" is a "passive construction" which "is ultimately disempowering in that it masks the presence of the speaking self (whether personal or communal) that is performing the act of blessing. "(419)

"Passive constructions" such as "blessed are You" have been read as active since the earliest times of the Rabbinic period. In a relatively early midrashic compilation, the *Pesikta deRab Kahana*, Moses' plea to God (Numbers 14:17): "And now, I pray thee, let the power of the Lord be great as thou hast promisedS" is understood as Moses giving power to God. It is read as: "And now the power of the Lord *will *be great," thus providing Biblical basis for the religious understanding that the deeds done by the righteous *give* strength *to* God.

This is spelled out explicitly in various places in the Rabbinic and mystical tradition in regards to the specific formulation "Blessed are You." I will

cite one short example from Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev, a mid-nineteenth century Hassidic master. The first part of the formula in Hebrew is four words:

Baruch [Blessed-are] *ata* [you] yhwh [GOD] *eloheinu* [our-God]

The three last words of this formula all refer to God. Rabbi Levi Yitzhak understands this as a movement from You to our-God. That is a relational movement. The pray-er who recites the blessing starts the flow of Divine effluence with the first word: *baruch*. The next two words are two different names of God, representing first the aspect of harsh judgement (*ata*) and grace or mercy (*yhwh*). The pray-er then, in the technical language of Hassidut, "sweetens (*mamtik*) the judgements" by combining these two aspects (as the third sphere of the Kabbalistic spheres, *Tiferet*, does), resulting in *eloheinu*, our-God, an intimate connection to/with the Divine. This is all actively accomplished by the person saying the blessing. The formulation is a performative utterance, far from passive in its effects.<3>

NOTES <1> Louis Finkelstein in his commentary on p Berachot claims this is an addendum. _A Commentary on the Palestinian Talmud_, 177. <2> Ginzburg, _Ginze Schechter_ vol. 2, p. 508 and following. <3> One might characterize this manner of dealing with the risk of verbal idolatry as Levinasian: one rereads to keep a text, any text from becoming static. Cf. Levinas' essay "Contempt for the Torah as Idolatry," in his collection _In the Time of the Nations_, especially pp 59-60.

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The Rains

The rains have washed the ice away
and all over the woods, the birches

have dropped their scrolls
whose secret maps lead inside

to the tweet, tick, scritch, and gulp,
to the rumble of distant sky

and the muffled roar of sea,
sounds washed in rain like music

you have heard before,
you have not heard before,

the raw material of your life
abounding.

-Psalm for Tuesday, from The Book of Blessings (p. 36)

This is a very full moment for me. I'm honored to be the recipient of this panel's thoughtful responses to my work, and I thank all the panel members for their participation, with special thanks to Judith for proposing and organizing the session. A great many ideas have been put forth this morning, and a number of important questions have been raised; obviously I cannot address them all. Although the responses have been diverse, I have noticed common threads running through them, and I'd like to focus my remarks this morning on one of these strands. In doing so, I hope not only to highlight points of agreement and of difference among us, but also to connect today's conversation to a larger context: the history of discourse on prayer within Judaism.

The rabbis of the Talmud framed many of their discussions of prayer with a dialectic between what they called kéva, "fixed form," and kavanah, "spontaneous intentionality." While most rabbis insisted on the need for regularity in prayer-by which they usually meant specific words recited at set times of the day-there were those like Rabbi Eliezer who emphasized

the importance of spontaneity, freshness, and authenticity. Since talmudic times, the categories of kéva and kavanah have continued to inform Jewish thinking about liturgy, with each generation reshaping the contours of the dialectic to address its particular concerns. Today, too, at this panel, we have seen versions of this dialectic emerge.

Kéva and kavanah, however, may themselves be viewed as a variation on, or perhaps an aspect of, a broader dialectical framework within Judaism-that of halakhah, "law," and aggadah, "lore." When viewed with the appropriate amount of poetic license, these thematic poles can provide a context for an even more encompassing dialogue, in which we might tease out some of the less obvious connections among the issues raised by today's panel.

In a now-classic essay entitled "Halakhah and Aggadah," the modern Hebrew poet Hayim Nahman Bialik analyzed this complementarity, which underpins much of Jewish literature and thought. Halakhah and aggadah are, for Bialik, "twin forms of literature and of life." Bialik is careful to note that although these terms come from the Talmud, where their meanings are quite specific, he is extending their use to cover a "range of related phenomena"; in other words, he is using the traditional pairing of these concepts as a metaphorical jumping-off point. In Bialik's essay, halakhah refers not just to a prescribed body of Jewish law but to strictures in general, to discipline-what he calls "the iron yoke"-and to "action" as opposed to "speech"; just as aggadah represents not only traditional teachings in the narrative mode but "singing," "creativity," "love." "To each age its own aggadah," writes Bialik, "to each aggadah its own halakhah." In his view, literature and life need both halakhah and aggadah in order to thrive.

It seems to me that today's papers grapple in interestingly different ways with the tension between halakhic and aggadic realms. Judith Plaskow, for example, speaks about image-making and form-breaking, product and process, prayer book and evolving prayer. The finished, final, printed

prayer book is, for Judith, a kind of halakhah: finite, determined, determinate, and-ultimately-limited. In contrast, the community of prayers and their needs are diverse and constantly changing-an aggadic tale that is ever-unwinding. Any prayer book-even a feminist prayer book-represents, for Judith, "one lens [and only one!] on the sacred." But true community-inclusive community-necessarily comprises many lenses, many visions. I certainly agree with her about this, and I would say, indeed, that no single prayer book-like no single image of the divine-can ever express the totality of the whole, nor should we expect it to. Rather, authentic prayer should stimulate and invite us to create more, much as literature inspires more literature and art moves us to make more art.

Janet Walton focuses on this point; she, too, asks us to consider the tension between process and product, between our experience and liturgical form. Addressing my resistance to formula, she comments that "her [my] work urges our own." Janet engages personally and intensely with The Book of Blessings; her reading of it seeks to mirror the creative process itself-or at least so it seemed to me, as I read her. In using this book (or, presumably, any liturgy), she demands of herself and of her liturgical community no less integrity and intensity than she demands of the author. In some ways, I think that Janet asks more of herself, the reader, than she does of me, the author-or, in any event, more than I do of myself-because for her it is a sacrifice to give up familiar God-language, a sacrifice requiring "discipline" or, as she puts it even more poignantly, "a kind of fasting." I confess that this metaphor does not obtain for me: giving up the G-word was nothing but an enormous relief to me. Thus Janet adds to the dialectic between liturgical fixed form and prayer experience another version and another layer of halakhah and aggadah: she calls upon poetry and the other arts to liberate us by helping us let go of old liturgical habits, even as she speaks of the letting-go itself as a willed act of renunciation (a submission, perhaps, to Bialik's "iron yoke").

The tension between formula and spontaneity is also addressed by Rebecca Alpert, who, however, leans in a different direction. While Judith

concurs with my position of resistance to creating formulas for prayer, and Janet goes further, questioning my use of "the same words for divine presence over and over," Rebecca critiques my critique of formulas, asserting that "it is not possible to imagine prayer without some fixed points." For Janet, The Book of Blessings may contain too much repetition; for Rebecca, perhaps not enough.

Rebecca also points out another tension that might be looked at through the double lens of halakhah and aggadah. In her analysis of Reconstructionist community, she calls attention to a dissonance between theological belief and liturgical practice: while Reconstructionism is based on the writings of Mordecai Kaplan, who denied the existence of a supernatural deity, most Reconstructionists are not Kaplanian in their approach to prayer; in their liturgy, they pray to a personal God. In Rebecca's view, this is not terribly surprising, since, as she puts it, "American Jews seem to have little interest in intellectual honesty in prayer." But if this observation is indeed true of the Reconstructionist community then it would seem that Reconstructionism as a movement has not resolved an important internal contradiction. It has not integrated its halakhah-its rationalist, Kaplanian foundation-with its aggadah-its emotional yearning for what is comforting because familiar and because it is seen as connecting us to our past (a past that is often more imagined than real but that is nonetheless presumed to be "our heritage"). For intellectual stimulation, the Reconstructionist may turn to Kaplan; but the intellect is, presumably, abandoned where "spiritual" experience begins. As Rebecca puts it, "For most Jews today, prayer is an experience of the heart, not of the heart and mind."

Rebecca is right to note that the premise of The Book of Blessings conforms to "Kaplan's idea that we must mean what we say and say what we mean, even when we are talking about God." In fact, I think she is on target in many ways when she calls my work "Kaplanian." But she's also correct in her assumption that I did not set out, with this project, to fulfill Kaplan's vision, and I might add that it was not until I was well engaged in the

work that I became familiar with the Reconstructionist movement and immersed in Reconstructionist ideas. Once I began to study Kaplan, however, I had hopes that my liturgy might find a home in the Reconstructionist world. For it seemed to me that not only was my theology consistent with Kaplan's but my liturgy was connected at every point-at virtually every word and phrase-to Hebrew liturgical tradition; like Kaplan, I believe passionately in the importance of Hebrew to the preservation and growth of Jewish civilization. Moreover, in writing The Book of Blessings, I had hoped not only to preserve Hebrew as a living medium for liturgical expression but to fuse creativity and continuity without loss of intellectual integrity-goals I think Kaplan would have approved of. But if Rebecca is right about the Reconstructionist movement's unresolved contradictions-its unmediated, polarized oppositions between belief and practice, mind and heart, halakhah and aggadah-then The Book of Blessings, which seeks to create a ground on which these opposites might reconcile, may not find immediate welcome there.

Finally, Rebecca points out that Kaplan was a self-proclaimed rationalist who believed in the supreme importance of art to Judaism. Art, of course, is based at least in part in realms of the nonrational, the unconscious, the emotive. So we might say that Kaplan's work itself is a call for the revival of the creative interplay between thought and feeling, between halakhah and aggadah.

Larry Hoffman highlights the tension between the need for creativity and the desire for continuity with the past. In reviewing the community's receptivity to new liturgy, he points out a perceived conflict between liturgical innovation and the ambiguous entity we call "tradition." In raising this issue, though, he turns it on its head by asking the historian's hardheaded questions: Whose tradition? Continuity with what? And then he asks, specifically: Is "tradition" to be equated with halakhic standards imposed after the fact of the original liturgical creation? Or should we, in seeking to preserve "tradition," recall its earliest creative roots along with

some of its later branches, which yielded fecund aggadic blossoming? In exposing what he calls "the limits game," Larry reminds us that the past is rarely how we imagine it was-and the future can be more than we sometimes dare to imagine it to be.

Aryeh Cohen, in his reading of The Book of Blessings, points to yet another dialectic: between "heft" (as he calls it) and "minimalism," between "more" and (if you will) "less is more." He points out that tradition is divided between two aesthetic camps: "while liturgical traditions have usually gone by the rule that there can never be enough, the halakhic discussions have taken the other tack." As Aryeh outlines them in his thesis, these positions, too, fall into aggadic and halakhic categories: he notes, on the one hand, "the poetic/mystic approach of the multiplication of images of God"; on the other hand, he points to "the Maimonidean approach of silence," a strict and demanding position of truth. He then locates The Book of Blessings "at an oblique angle to this dialectic": the urge to create new images represents the aggadic call for "more," while the brevity of the book's lyric forms (the amount of white space on the page) resounds with the halakhic Maimonidean demand for silence in the face of the ineffable. I agree with Aryeh, in the sense that I say yes to both-sometimes more is less and sometimes more is more-although in my own case I am not sure that the impulse toward silence necessarily springs from the source he attributes it to. I have found silence itself to be a well from which inner voices spring. But I thank Aryeh for offering me a fascinating talmudic model with which to reflect further upon the creative process and the created product.

I intend also to think further about the ideas put forth by Rachel Adler, who, over the course of our longstanding friendship, has shared many insights into talmudic thought with me. Despite mutual receptivity to-indeed, engagement with-each other's work, I must say that at times I think Rachel and I are as far apart in our religious sensibilities as two committed Jewish feminists can be. One of the lessons I have learned slowly over my lifetime-a lesson reinforced consistently in my dialogues

with Rachel-is that the dialectical mode of argument extends only so far. Rachel and I will never persuade one another to adopt the other's truths-and I, at least, do not intend to try. (While I accept that Rachel's personal theology works for her, it does not work for me, and I confess that I'm puzzled as to why she wants to convert me to it.) I saw only a partial draft of her paper before I began writing this response; she had FAXed me the pages that included her remarks up to the following sentence: "It is a mystery to me why, after feminists have worked so long to establish that difference is to be celebrated rather than transcended, have fought so hard for integrity of selfhood, have resisted so bitterly being subsumed or swallowed up, we should embrace the deadly experience of fusion in our spirituality." The best I can do to answer this outcry is to say that apparently one person's mystery is another's revelation; one person's deadly experience is another's life-affirming sustenance. The experience of deep connectedness-of union with the greater whole of being-is, for me, a rare and precious gift, unpredictable and unwillable in its coming, ultimate in its power, indisputable in its truth and-dare I say it?-in its salvation. It is also, for me, the ultimate ineffable; beyond that, I can add only silence.

Later, however, when I was finalizing my remarks for this panel, I received the remainder of Rachel's comments, which address the problem of evil-an issue Judith Plaskow also raises. This time Rachel's passion stirred a more heated response in me. Yes, I believe there is evil in the world, and I believe it to be a specifically human phenomenon. The death of the Hutu child by disease and human abandonment does not have to be; and yes, certainly, we must express our outrage at this. But what purpose is there in directing this outrage to "God," or in asking some "Other" to fix the situation? The help-insofar as there is help for suffering-must come from us. The Book of Blessings does not avoid or ignore the inevitable facts of our pain, our sorrow, our illness, our death, our grief. Nor does it call for our acceptance of evil. Rather, it urges acceptance of what can never be overcome: the changes that life itself inexorably undergoes with and through the passage of time. But of human crulety

and injustice there can be no tolerance. On the contrary, I believe, with Abraham Joshua Heschel, that authentic prayer is subversive, implicitly protesting against evil and exhorting us-or to use Janet Walton's word, expecting us-to act rightly and with compassion. It is true, as both Rachel and Judith point out, that there is not much ranting in the liturgy of The Book of Blessings; protests and arguments are saved for the Commentary at the back of the book and the introductions to its three liturgical parts. But I hope that the book as a whole conveys the message that life's misery must be acknowledged and dealt with, and that evil must be fought against. Ultimately, of course, words cannot do it all; our prayer-our spirituality-cannot be viewed separately from the social actions it inspires or condemns. Perhaps the proper question to ask about the relationship of prayer (any prayer) to evil is not what expression that prayer gives to life's "terribleness" but what actions that expression leads to.

It is interesting to me, in this context, that the very parts of my Sh'ma that Judith objects to are examples of commitments to bring about change in the social order, to overcome evil in the world. Both Judith and Rachel seem more comfortable addressing the problem of evil by protesting to a personal God-Thou. But I have no choice in this matter: I cannot speak to a personal God; for me, this would simply be bad faith. As a poet, I cannot help but feel that the metaphor of God as person is crucially unlike the other images Judith mentions-wind, apple, stone-because of the dominant place it has occupied in the tradition. But, in any event, I don't speak to the wind or stone either; I-Thou conversation with the divine-with the whole of which I am a part-neither makes sense nor feels right to me.

And finally- No, Rachel, the world is not a lonely place for me because I do not have a personal God to fight or plead with. The world is, at times, a lonely place-but the fiction of a personal God would not change that for me.

As must be obvious, I am gripped by the various questions that these papers have raised, both explicitly and implicitly, and, while I have

personal answers to some of them, there are many I am still grappling with. I'm not sure where I'll end up (if there is any "ending up") on some of the issues, such as how much repeated form we need in prayer, or how many words we need, or how much silence. But this much, anyway, I know: As someone who learns through both argument and intuition, who is nourished by both poetry and prose, who craves philosophy as well as art and especially craves the dialogue between them, who is engaged at times by silence and at other moments by the world's lively noise-I cannot choose between halakhah and aggadah. And lest I am being unclear, let me say outright that I do not equate the poetic process with aggadah, the scholar's task with halakhah. Rather, I see both poetry and scholarship as emerging from the creative tension between the two. To the poet, the poem is at once a spontaneous gift and a painstakingly shaped and crafted form; to the scholar, insight comes, whether gradually or suddenly, as a merging of accrued knowledge and reasoned thinking with inner understanding, acceptance, and belief. And "spirituality" (that awful, limited, disembodied word we use to embrace the wholeness of our most whole experiences) is, I believe, analogous to (at times even identical with) the creative experience-an experience that takes myriad forms (poetic, scholarly, scientific, and more). If The Book of Blessings succeeds in fulfilling my intentions, it will stir in you both the music "you have heard before"-the inner halakhah-and the "music" you have not heard before"-the inner aggadah.

Reading Psalms, Hearing Psalms: Thoughts Engendered by Herb Levine's Sing Unto God a New Song

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What does it mean to interpret a psalm? And what does it mean to write a book that interprets psalms? Both of these questions are suggested, in different ways, in Herbert Levine's rich book, Sing unto God a New Song: A Contemporary Reading of the Psalms (Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). Levine goes beyond standard approaches to the Book of Psalms, not simply in the sense that he employs a literary or integrative method where others had confined themselves to philology or comparative ancient Near Eastern studies, nor in the sense that he revels in post-modern readings over New Critical or historicist interpretations. Rather, he dismisses the narrow classification of psalms as literary texts, reminding us that these poems were composed to be uttered, to be heard, and to effect change in the lives of individuals, communities, and God. Thus Levine finds older approaches to be useful but insufficient. In order to understand psalms as psalms (rather than as poems or as exercises in Northwest Semitic linguistics) he embraces perspectives from anthropology and ritual studies, from history and phenomenology of religion, from speech-act theory and from the work of philosophers and literary critics. Moreover, he remembers that psalms continued and continue throughout Jewish history to function - i.e., they were, and are, recited and listened to; worshipers employed and employ them in order to alter the world; they served and serve as the springboard for new dialogues with the divine. Especially in the last chapter ("Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death and Beyond: Psalms and Jewish National Catastrophe"), he investigates not only the use to which psalms are put in contemporary Judaism but responses to catastrophe in modern Jewish philosophy and poetry which in some ways recall the reactions to misfortune found in the Book of Psalms.

Other reviewers have summarized Levine's work and have described the successes his approach achieves. In this venue, therefore, I will prefer to focus on a few problems suggested by this book, problems that challenge contemporary scholars to ask themselves how they should integrate

disparate perspectives, how they relate to older scholarship, and more generally, what it means to write a book about the Bible.

The strongest and most exciting aspect of Sing unto God a New Song strikes me as comprising its greatest weakness as well. Levine utilizes many different approaches, but the focus on these approaches themselves often drowns out the ostensible topic of the book. Most chapters begin with lengthy summaries of secondary literature (e.g., scholarship on the nature of the Israelite sacrificial cult; surveys of the work of Bakhtin and Buber or Austin and Searle), so that the Book of Psalms is altogether eclipsed in large parts of the book (and nearly forgotten in much of the last chapter). More importantly, even when a text from the Book of Psalms is being discussed, the author frequently inserts a quotation from some theorist. The relevance of these interpolations is clear: this idea of Bakhtin or that notion from Eliade applies quite well to the psalm at issue; this sentence in Buber or that paragraph from a speech-act theorist provokes the interpreter to see something he might otherwise have missed. The question I wish to pose is whether it makes sense to put all of this down on the page. Reading whatever theoretical rumination generates each of Levine's thoughts was, to me at least, somewhat like having the computer code underlying my word-processing program suddenly irrupt in the midst of my document. (I use Nota Bene, and this has actually happened to me. You shouldn't know from it.) Yes, I'm glad that a strong conceptual foundation underlies what I'm reading, but uncovering the foundation as we move along interrupts me more than it enriches my understanding of the psalm. Isn't this what footnotes and brief introductions describing one's methods are for? (Alternatively, I can imagine a book in which the interpretations are at the center of the page and various quotes from theorists surround it; such a model would be perfectly fitting in a book about Jewish reading practices, and the trace of Glas would not be inappropriate, either.) At times, the topic of a given chapter of Levine's book becomes unclear; I wonder as I read, what is it that I am supposed to be learning about: the Book of Psalms? Bakhtin? Levine's genuinely impressive erudition?

In another respect one gets the sense that the lenses have become the main concern of the book more than the psalms that are on the slide: many psalms are discussed several times throughout the book, once, say, from the perspective of speech-act theory, later as an example of Bakhtinian or Buberian dialogue, and again in light of Eliade's ideas of the sacred center. On the one hand, by examining a single text in different chapters Levine highlights the contribution of each approach. But this practice also yields a sense that integration is lacking. If the book is more than an exercise or primer, I would hope that we could see several methods working together; better yet, that we would read an interpretation of a psalm in which various methods have already been synthesized so that a complex but whole understanding of the psalm emerges. Some of Levine's truly beautiful ideas are obscured, I think, by the book's methodological heaviness, by Levine's insistence on showing us all his cards throughout.

Two other problems left me somewhat uncomfortable as I read this book. The Book of Psalms is textually and linguistically full of difficulties, and almost any attempt at close reading (or here, better, close listening) of a psalm needs either to confront these difficulties or to adopt someone else's solutions. Levine chooses the latter path, in general simply quoting the NJPS translation without attending to alternative readings (whether at text-critical or translational levels). This policy can lead to some oddities (on page 140 Levine quotes the Masoretic Text together with the NJPS version of Psalm 93:4, apparently not realizing that the latter does not translate the former; NJPS assumes a Hebrew text reading 'addir mimmishberei yam, not 'addirim mishberei yam). More importantly, Levine's decision to eschew textual nitty-gritty deprives him on occasion of grist for his interpretive mill. I shall cite but one example. On pages 191-192 and elsewhere Levine addresses the tension among various psalms regarding the timing of God's justice: until when will God permit evil to flourish? Levine notes that Psalm 92 "takes the long view" regarding the divine time frame, which differs from a limited, human time frame. Psalm 81, on the other hand, is said to anticipate Israel's redemption in "the

present moment" if they obey the covenant, since NJPS renders Psalm 81:14-15, "If Israel would follow My paths, then I would subdue their enemies at once." A closer look suggests that Psalm 81:15 by itself reflects the tension Levine finds in his comparison of Psalm 81 and Psalm 92. The word rendered in NJPS as "at once" (kim`at) can also mean "easily" or "as a little thing;" thus Buber translates the line, "Wie leicht zwnge ihre Feinde ich nieder." (Cf. the Septuagint's ambiguous - indeed bizarre - rendering [en to: me:deni]; significantly, the Septuagint does not translate kim`at here with a phrase meaning "quickly" as it does for this word in Psalm 2:12 [en tachei], nor does it render the word clearly as "like a trifle," which we find in Psalm 73:2 [para mikron].) Psalm 81 at first seems to make the manifestly unrealistic claim that God's justice is swift, and thus many a reader may regard the psalm as naive. But it may be the readers, not the psalm, who are naive; the Hebrew allows another translation that is perhaps less satisfying to the sufferer but is ultimately more in tune with the tempo of the Eternal One (and more honest to what we see around us in the world). This sort of productive ambiguity within a text is often lost through Levine's tendency to rely on a single translation. Philology may seem deadly boring, and in the hands of a philologist it often is; but in the hands of a sensitive reader like Levine, it can be quite powerful, and its absence in this book is thus unfortunate.

In the first chapter of the book Levine surveys the history of interpretation, and I must confess some discomfort at the degree of anti-Christian animosity this survey displays. Each discussion of a Christian exegete, from antiquity to modernity, contains some reference either to the exegete's anti-Semitism or to some interpretive sin he commits. As this survey presents it, Christians either ignore the simple meaning (peshat) or "concede" it while emphasizing their Christological eisegesis. They continued to do so even after they "gained access" to peshat, which Levine seems to regard as a Jewish invention. (In fact, as Eliezer Touitou and Sarah Kamin have shown, the flowering of peshat-oriented exegesis among the rabbis in twelfth and thirteenth century France was largely the result of hermeneutic practices and terms which the rabbis borrowed from

slightly earlier Christian exegetes in the Abbey of St. Victor.) Levine does not deny that Jews also practiced eisegesis, but his references to Jewish interpreters lack the snide language he employs when discussing the Christians. Similarly, from reading this survey one would not know that some modern Christian scholars of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament produce work quite untainted by anti-Semitism. Nor would one realize that even the work of scholars who did allow disdain for Judaism to influence them can nonetheless contain very enriching material. One senses considerable surprise and anger on Levine's part in this chapter. While justified, these emotions seem to have blinded him to contributions made by Christian scholars and to problematic aspects of Jewish scholarship as well.

All these criticisms, I hasten to stress, should not be read as a condemnation of the book, which is bold in its use of perspectives that are at once fresh and fitting for the study of psalms, and which contains throughout interpretive gems. My goal in this essay is not simply to review the book (for that, see the standard journals) but to provoke some thoughts about how we should go about investigating very old material in new and compelling ways. What do we gain as we focus our readers' attention so heavily on our methods, and are those gains worthwhile? Must innovative methods entail passing over timeworn ones? Much of Levine's book is indeed new and compelling; as other scholars attempt to follow his lead (whether in the study of psalms or in other areas), can we avoid some pitfalls along the way?