

Yom Kippur
Tekhine said when fasting

Discussion Question: *What are some of the physical images the poet invokes, and what are the spiritual images?*

On Yom Kippur, take this tekhnine with you and recite it during your day of prayer. Perhaps you might find a connection with women of the past.

May my tears wash away
My worst troubles,
And may my repentance
Strike away Your anger
When you judge me.

And let the sound
Of my weeping
Be the song
That the Levites sang,
At the offering.

Accept my table
As a substitute
For the holy sacrificial altar.

And let the taste of hunger
In my mouth
Be the scent
Of incense.

And let the pot
That I have not placed
On the coal fire
Be the fire
On the sacrificial altar.

And let the weakness
Of my limbs
Be a substitute
For the gasping
Of the sacrifice.

And let the listlessness
Of my blood through fasting,
Be the sacrificial blood
That was dashed on the horns
Of the altar.

And let my broken heart
Tear to shreds
All evil decrees,
And let my bath
That I avoid today
Represent the washing of the priests
In the Temple.

And let my shrinking flesh
Be the fat
That was poured
Onto the altar.

And in my turning to You
May you turn to me,
And to all Israel.
Amen.

Women's Intuition Revisited

In this column, written in the early 1990s when there was only a small number of Conservative women rabbis and cantors, author Francine Klagsbrun asks about the parameters of both domains, and how women can transcend them.

To Walk With Confidence in the Garden

by Francine Klagsbrun (*Moment Magazine*, 1992)

In the religious sphere, feminists have delved into women's feelings and experiences as a way of countering patriarchal dominance. Jewishly that has meant rediscovering the feminine aspects of God, of prayer and of the Torah. And that has been a fine, enriching enterprise.

But what concerns me now is that so much importance has been placed on feminine spirituality that we run the danger of defining women's religiosity only in terms of feelings, mysticism, or intuition. We run the risk of stereotyping women as they were stereotyped for centuries as creatures of emotion and instinct while men continue to own the realms of reason and cognition. No. I want women to be learned in law and text as well as to be rich in spirit. I want them to combine spirituality with intellect, to be Rabbi Akiba and to walk with confidence in the garden, having first mastered the more mundane paths of the Torah.

Discussion Questions:

Do you think that our refocus on spirituality has been regressive or progressive?

Do you think of yourself as guided more by one aspect than the other?

Shema Yisrael
New Interpretations

*What is the opening line of the Shema?
What is its meaning?*

Let's look at two familiar translations:

Hear O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord is one.
(Hertz Humash, Soncino Bible)

Hear O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.
(Etz Hayim, JPS Tanakh)

Discussion Questions:

What idea does the first, older translation of the Shema convey?

What does the newer (JPS) translations suggest to you?

Focus

Mishnah: Berakhot 5:1

None may stand up to say the Tefillah save in a sober mood. The pious men of old used to wait an hour before they said the Tefillah, that they might direct their heart toward God. Even if the king salutes a man he may not return the greeting; and even if a snake was twisted around his heel he may not interrupt his prayer.

Questions:

What is the mood that is required by the Mishnah for the recitation of the Amidah?

What are the implications of disregarding “the snake twisted around the heel” or not returning the greeting of the king?

Discussion Questions:

Do you think that this was intended as a realistic standard?

How should we understand this kind of rabbinic dictum today?

Yehudah Halevi
His Heart Is in the East

My heart is in the East, and I am at the ends of the West;
How can I taste what I eat and how could it be pleasing to me?
How shall I render my vows and my bonds, while yet
Zion lies beneath the fetter of Edom, and I am in the chains of Arabia?
It would be easy for me to leave all the bounty of Spain --
As it is precious for me to behold the dust of the desolate sanctuary.

Question:

Yehudah Halevi expresses himself through imagery of opposites. What are they?

Discussion question:

What other metaphors of physical placement vs. spiritual longing can you suggest?

Hebrew Lesson

Lev veNefesh

Leader: *Hebrew idioms are often constructed of nouns, such as lev or nefesh, with a modifier. The translation can be literal, but often they construct a new idiom.*

Let's first look at idioms constructed from *lev*, which can mean heart, understanding, mind, thought, conscience, will, bosom.

Some idioms constructed with the word *lev* include:

Hebrew	Literal meaning	idiom	
<i>lev even</i>	a heart of stone	cruelty	<i>even</i> =stone
<i>lev ehad</i>	of one mind	unanimous	<i>ehad</i> =one
<i>lev basar</i>	a heart of flesh	compassion	<i>basar</i> =flesh
<i>lev zahav</i>	a heart of gold	kind-heartedness	<i>zahav</i> =gold
<i>lev tahor</i>	purity of heart	sincerity, honesty	<i>tahor</i> =pure
<i>be-lev va-lev</i>	half-heartedly	insincerely	
<i>'ometz lev</i>	courage		<i>'ometz</i> =bravery, courage
<i>haser-lev</i>	without understanding	foolish, stupid	<i>haser</i> =deficient
<i>shinui levavot</i>	change of heart		<i>shinui</i> =change
<i>nedivot lev</i>	donations of the heart	generosity, philanthropy	<i>nedivot</i> =donations

Leader: *Now let's look at idioms constructed from nefesh, which can mean soul, life, spirit, breath, creature, self, human being*

Following the same formula, idioms are often constructed of a noun, such as nefesh, with a modifier. The translation is not rendered literally, but together they construct a new idiom.

Hebrew	Literal meaning	idiom	
<i>lenafsho</i>		alone	
<i>ba'al nefesh</i>	a man of feeling	soulful	
<i>dinei nefashot</i>		capital offenses	<i>dinei</i> = laws of
<i>heshbon hanefesh</i>		self-criticism, scrutiny	<i>heshbon</i> =reckoning
<i>yedid nefesh</i>		bosom, close, sincere friend	<i>yedid</i> =beloved
<i>mapah nefesh</i>		disappointment, despair	<i>mapah</i> =despair
<i>mar nefesh</i>		angry, frustrated, embittered	<i>mar</i> =bitter
<i>pikuah nefesh</i>		matter of life and death	<i>pikuah</i> =inspection, control

A Meal of Jewish Proverbs

Leader: *What do the following proverbs have in common?* [This could take three hours!]

- *A heavy heart talks a lot.*
- *After a good cry, your heart is lighter.*
- *Not every heart that laughs is really cheerful.*
- *The heart and the eye are the two agents of sin. (Hebrew)*
- *When the heart is bitter, sugar won't help.*
- *When the heart is full, the eyes overflow.*
- *What soap is to the body, tears are to the soul.*

**Resilience:
Soul in the Service of Heart**

From *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*

From Leah to Her Sister

by Sherry Blumberg

My eyes are weak
But my body is strong
I'm not afraid to work
I have worked and will work
And someday we bear children

My eyes are weak
but my resolve is strong
I shall have my due
First to be married
First to bear children
Yet I'll not be as loved as you

My eyes are weak
But my love is strong
For I have loved you
You shall become a legend
I will always be second
Even in memory and prayer

Questions:

In this competition between sisters, we see competition between the physical and the emotional. What must Leah overcome?

What does Leah describe as "weak"?

What is strong?

Discussion Question: *Is Leah's model realistic? Is it useful?*

Mishnah Berakhot 9:2
**Does prayer come from the heart, or is it a
response to the world around us?**

One who sees shooting stars, **earthquakes, lightening, thunder or storm-winds** says, “Blessed is the One whose might fills the world.” One who sees mountains, hills, seas, rivers or deserts says, “Blessed is the One Who creates material existence.” Rabbi Judah says, “One who sees the great sea (i.e. the ocean) says, ‘Blessed is the One Who creates the great sea.’ This is when he has not seen it for some time.” Regarding rainfall and good tidings one says “Blessed is the One Who is good and does good.” Regarding bad tidings one says, “Blessed is the true judge.”

Discussion Question: *While we can see the benefit to blessing God for majesty, why should we bless something that is terrifying?*

The Golem Demands Her Soul

From “The Jew Who Wasn’t There: Halachah and the Jewish Woman”
by Rachel Adler
in *Response: The Jewish Woman: An Anthology*, Summer 1973

The halachic scholars must examine our problem anew, right now, with open minds and empathy. They must make it possible for women to claim their share in the Torah and begin to do the things a Jew was created to do. If necessary we must agitate until the scholars are willing to see us as Jewish souls in distress rather than as tools with which men do mitzvot. If they continue to turn a deaf ear to us, the most learned and halachically committed among us must make halachic decisions for the rest. ...But to paraphrase Hillel, in a place where there are no menschen, we may have to generate our own menschlichkeit. There is no time to waste. For too many centuries, the Jewish woman has been a golem, created by Jewish society. She cooked and bore and did her master’s will, and when her tasks were done, the Divine Name was removed from her mouth. It is time for the golem to demand a soul.

Discussing Questions:

When Adler was writing in the early 1970s, she characterized the Jewish woman as a golem. Why does she use this term?

What might Adler say today about Jewish women?

