

**Aaron Was Silent Upon Hearing of His Sons' Death by Fire  
But Was His Wife Elisheva Also Silent  
About the Death of Her Sons?**

**The Necessity of Writing Contemporary Midrash:**

**Naomi Graetz**

**Monday, April 20<sup>th</sup> 2020 at 9 PM (IDT)**

**Erev Yom Ha-Shoah**

**Zoom Lesson for Women's League Conservative Judaism**



Today, when it is erev yom hashoah, we should reflect and think about how we need to give a name to something inexplicable that we cannot understand. The Hebrew word for the holocaust is Shoah, which in Tzefaniah 1: 15 will “be a day of wrath, trouble and distress, calamity and desolation, [ שׁוֹאָה וּמְשׁוֹאָה ] darkness and deep gloom...” And the other name, which relates to our text today is that of the Holocaust.

*Holocaust* is taken from a Greek word which means “burned whole” or “burn.”

*Holocaust* was originally used in English for a “**burnt offering**,” a “**sacrifice completely consumed by fire**” (Mark 12:33, “more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices” in the **King James Version** of the Bible, was translated by William Tyndale in 1526 as “a greater thing than all holocausts and sacrifices”). John Milton is the first English writer recorded as using it in the wider sense “complete destruction by fire,” in the late 17th century, and succeeding centuries its modern application to “nuclear destruction” and “mass murder” - ... **The specific application to the mass murder of the Jews by the Nazis during World War II** was introduced by historians during the 1950s, probably as an equivalent to Hebrew (words meaning “catastrophe”).... (Encarta ® World English Dictionary © & (P) 1998-2005 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.)

Sometimes our need to understand causes us to explain in unsuitable ways. And we should keep that in mind as we explore the text and the midrashim about The Aaronson Family: Aaron, Elisheva, Nadav and Avihu.

### Leviticus Chapter 10 (from Parshat Shemini)

**Now Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu each took his fire pan, put fire in it, and laid incense on it; and they offered [ ו ] before the LORD alien fire, which He had not enjoined upon them. <sup>2</sup>And fire came forth from (מלפני) the LORD and consumed them; thus they died at the instance of (before) (לפני) the LORD. <sup>3</sup>Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD meant when He said: **Through those near to Me I show Myself holy, [ ב אקדש ] And gain glory before all the people.**" **And Aaron was silent....****

<sup>6</sup>And Moses said to Aaron and to his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, "**Do not bare your heads and do not rend your clothes, lest you die and anger strike the whole community.** But your kinsmen, all the house of Israel, shall bewail the burning that the LORD has wrought. <sup>7</sup>And so do not go outside the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, lest you die, for the LORD's anointing oil is upon you." And they did as Moses had bidden.

<sup>8</sup>And the LORD spoke to Aaron, saying: <sup>9</sup>**Drink no wine or other intoxicant, you or your sons, when you enter the Tent of Meeting, that you may not die. This is a law for all time throughout the ages,**

Too many questions!



Is there a message in this story?

Will we ever understand why this happened to Aaron's sons?

This a sacred text!

So, we can be sure that our sages will find some meaning.

## WHAT DOES THE MIDRASH HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THIS?

### Leviticus Rabbah 20:9

R. Mani of She'ab,<sup>2</sup> R. Joshua of Siknin,<sup>3</sup> and R. Johanan in the name of R. Levi said:  
The sons of Aaron died for four things, in connection with each of which death is mentioned:

- 1. Because they had drunk wine**, and in connection with this death is mentioned, as it says, Drink no wine nor strong drink... that ye die not (Lev. X, 9).
- 2. Because [while officiating] they lacked the prescribed number of garments**, and in connection with this death is mentioned, as it says, And they shall be upon Aaron, and upon his sons... that they bear no iniquity and die (Ex. XXVIII, 43). What did they lack? The robe, in connection with which death is mentioned, as it says, And it shall be upon Aaron to minister... that he die not .
- 3. Because they entered the Sanctuary without washing hands and feet**; for it says, So they shall wash their hands and their feet, that they die not (ib. XXX, 21), and it also says, When they go into the tent of meeting, they shall wash with water, that they die not (ib. 20).
- 4. Because they had no children**, and in connection with this death is mentioned. Thus it is written, And Nadab and Abihu died... and they had no children (Num. III, 4). Abba Hanin says it **was because they had no wives**, for it is written, And [he shall] make atonement for himself, and for his house (Lev. XVI, 6), and 'his house' signifies his wife.

**Does Any of this sound familiar to you today?**  
**Blaming the Victim! Politics?**

**Leviticus Rabbah 20: 10 adds to this:**

R. Levi says that **they were arrogant. Many women remained unmarried waiting for them.** What did they say? 'Our father's brother is a king, our mother's brother is a prince, our father is a High Priest, and we are both Deputy High Priests; what woman is worthy of us?'

**BT Sanhedrin 52a**

Moses and Aaron once walked along, with Nadab and Abihu behind them, and all Israel following in the rear. Then Nadab said to Abihu, '**Oh that these old men might die, so that you and I should be the leaders of our generation.**' But the Holy One, blessed be He, said unto them: '**We shall see who will bury whom.**' R. Papa said: Thus men say: Many an old camel is laden with the hides of younger ones.'

**Midrash Rabbah - Leviticus XX:8**

Bar Kappara in the name of R. Jeremiah b. Eleazar said: Aaron's sons died ... **for not having taken counsel from each other. ... as it says, Each of them his censer (Lev. X, 1), implying that they acted each on his own initiative, not taking counsel from one another.** R. Jeremiah b. Eleazar said: The death of Aaron's sons is mentioned in four places, and in every one of them their offence is also mentioned. Why all this? **To inform you that they were guilty of no other iniquity but this one alone.** R. Eleazar of Modin said: Come and observe what concern was felt by the Holy One, blessed be He, at the death of Aaron's sons, or on every occasion when He mentions their death He also mentions their offence! Why all this? To acquaint you with the facts, so that people might have no pretext for saying that they had been acting corruptly in secret....

PERHAPS THERE IS NO SATISFACTORY EXPLANATION TO THIS STORY.

AARON'S "SILENCE" OR "STUPEFICATION" MIGHT BE THE MOST HONEST REACTION.



Chancellor Arnold Eisen, JTSA Commentary on Parshat Shemini April 18, 2009

**“When he heard the lesson drawn by Moses from the event of his sons' deaths, ‘Aaron was silent.’ He got that right, I believe. Theology fails at such points of contact with the ultimate. All sense fails. Words fail. It's far better to fall back on notions such as the ‘**hiding of God's countenance**’ than to construct ‘**Holocaust theologies**’ that purport to explain why God carried out or condoned or allowed or could not stop the horrors.**



## What About Elisheva?

Aaron is famously silent! **But what about their mother?** Aaron's enigmatic silence is to be contrasted with the **total absence of Elisheva's response**. **Was she silent too?** Is it possible that she didn't react to the deaths? **Was she accepting of all this?**

**Did she get a chance to express her emotions? Her anger?**

**The midrash notices that Elisheva isn't mentioned in Leviticus 19 when it says "After the death of the two sons of Aaron"**

**This is how the midrash explains it in Leviticus Rabbah 20:2**

**Elisheva bat Aminadav did not enjoy happiness in the world.** True, she witnessed **five** crowns (attained by her relatives) in one day: her brother-in-law (**Moses**) was a king, her brother (**Nachson**) was a prince, her husband (**Aaron**) was High Priest, her **two sons (Nadav and Avihu)** were both Deputy High Priests, **Phinehas** her grandson was a priest anointed for war. But when her sons entered to offer incense and were burnt, her **joy was changed to mourning**. Thus it is, "after the death of the two sons of Aaron." (Acharei Mot, **כ**)

### **Analysis of this amazing midrash**

- 1. Who is Elisheva?**
- 2. What is the midrash saying?**
- 3. What is the connection between her happiness and then her great sorrow?**
- 4. Are we again saying she's responsible? Is too much joy and "shvitzing" (bragging about one's family) a form of hubris?**
- 5. Where's the "kneina hora"? Is she bringing the evil eye on her family by being too smug about her yichus?**
- 6. Did she rise too high and have to be brought down?**
- 7. Was Elisheva's family like the Kennedy family:  
(Royalty, presidents, war heroes, senators, politicians and Hollywood connections).**

### David Ben Hassin (1727-1792 Morocco)

Elisheva, Daughter of Aminadav is an honorable woman  
Her husband she saw in the service of the Lord (as a priest)  
Nahshon her brother, was chief of the tribe of Judah  
And the priestly caste came from her loins  
Moshe ruled and her son's son was anointed high priest  
She cried to her close women friends.

#### She could have argued:

"Woe is me O God! how my luck has changed  
All the people are rejoicing and I am alone  
How could you do this to me? Who is this who had done this?"

#### But she as a woman of valor (*eshet hayil*) who speaks with wisdom,

Who is bitter (like Hannah) yet keeps her bitter words to herself,  
And does not complain to the heavens above;

She did not challenge God, but accepted His judgement joyously and recognized that God does what is right (good) in His eyes.

(my free translation)

Ben Hassin was one of the greatest Jewish Moroccan poets and one of the best-known figures of Jewish liturgical poetry, whose piyyutim were spread through the Sephardic world.

**Brad Artson, “*What Can We Learn From A Mother?*”**

While the Torah portion highlights a world of men and public ritual, of fathers and sons and rebellion and punishment, **completely omitted from the account is one key player**: Aaron’s wife and the mother of Nadav and Avihu. ... Where the Torah is silent, the Midrash fills in the gap. ...

Perhaps Elisheva’s response is no different than any other human being, but **I can’t help thinking that her training as a woman helped shape her priorities**: titles, social station, and prestige may be nice, but the only real significance in the world is the love, health, and well-being of those we love. Elisheva knew that the high station of her family meant nothing now that her children were dead. She knew that even this highest honor of the Torah was a shallow ghost, almost a mockery in the face of her grief.

**Perhaps that is why the Torah passes over her in silence, behind a veil. ... Wisely, then, the Torah left her out of a public tale**, and equally wisely, **the rabbinic sages of the Midrash lifted the veil so we could gain insight** from this wise woman, our ancestor Elisheva.

Just as Aaron, her husband, exemplifies the wisdom of accepting what we cannot change, **Elisheva demonstrates the priority of people over position and relationships over status. Her unwillingness to be happy after the death of her sons is an act of emotional loyalty**, and a summons for her descendants’ male and female, to emulate her passionate and stubborn loyalty for each of our children and for the family of humanity.

Here is how a modern woman reacts to the unexplainable, horrific murder of her son.

**Sheri Mandell “Contractions of Death”**

Excerpt from *The Blessing of a Broken Heart* (Toby Press, 2003)

Leviticus 10: 1-3

“Mourning my son has similarities to labor. The contractions of pain rush through my body like a knot that is tied tighter and tighter so that I am unable to breathe, dead along with my son. My womb becomes a grave. I feel the pain of him in my belly, a pressure bearing down on me. It will always be inside of me. And though I hope and pray that one day I will not be as great with pain as I am now, the pain will never leave me.”

Voices on Sh’mini, *The Torah: A Women’s Bible Commentary*, p. 634



## **Who Are You Elisheva? Avital Engelberg**

She doesn't speak. But she is present and her presence is felt – already from the beginning. A sort of figure on the stage,  
Watching what's happening from the sidelines.  
Without a text. She watches.

A viewer who is present.

Her hand is not even extended to Aaron, and his gaze is not directed at her.

But she is present.

Maybe she's Kimchit. Whose 7 sons died and were high priests.

Maybe she was one of the midwives.

Or maybe she was 'only' Aaron's wife, who brings the priesthood to the monarchy,

Who stands by herself quietly - and Elisheva was silent.

But she is present. To her sons. To her husband.

And only God knew her pain. And her response.

The invisible woman. The inaudible. But present.

Her great pain is told to us,

But what happens next? How is she coping?

She is in the midrash - until the awful moment,

And there - the Midrashim are also silenced.

Where is she? ...



<https://www.kolech.org.il/he/who-are-you-elisheva.html>

## Five Feminist Midrashim on Elisheva

- Ellen Frankel, “Elisheva speaks in her own voice,” in *The Five Books of Miriam* (1996): 159-161.
- Penina Adelman, “Elisheva,” in *Praise Her Works: Conversations with Biblical Women* (2005): 134-139.
- Jill Hammer, “The Tenth Plague,” in *Sisters at Sinai: New Tales of Biblical Women* (2004): 107-113.
- Susan Phillips, “Elisheva Bat Amminadav: The Silent Wife Speaks,” in *All the Women Followed Her* (2001): 119-123.
- Naomi Graetz, “Elisheva: When is it a Time for Me?” in *S/He Created Them: Feminist Retellings of Biblical Stories* (1993, reprinted 2003): 105-110.



# The Five Books of Miriam

*A Woman's Commentary on the Torah*

A stunning combination of scholarship and  
creative imagination. The voice of Jewish  
women, silenced for three thousand years,  
begins to emerge in this book.  
— Rabbi Harold Kushner

Ellen Frankel Ph.D.



**Ellen Frankel, "Elisheva speaks in her own voice," in *The Five Books of Miriam* (1996)**

**Our daughters ask:** Why does the Torah say so little about the dramatic deaths of Nadab and Abihu? All we're told is that the two men are unexpectedly consumed by divine fire; that Moses offers rather insensitive words of consolation to his bereaved brother, as it is written: "This is what YHVH meant when he said: 'through those near to me I show myself holy, and assert my authority before all the people'" (10:3); and that Aaron remains silent. **About their mother Elisheva's response we're told nothing. Why isn't she even mentioned here? Why is she, like Sarah at the Akedah, absent before, during, and after this trial by fire? Does she know what her sons had been planning to do? Is she present when they're struck down? Does Moses address her as well when he speaks to Aaron? Is she silent like her husband, or does she raise her voice in mourning and protest? And even though Aaron and their two surviving sons are forbidden to mourn because they're in a state of special consecration, is she also forbidden to mourn her own children? Does she demonstrate "proper" self-restraint, or does she throw herself upon their graves and keen, as Middle Eastern women have done for centuries?**

## FRANKEL'S ELISHEVA SPEAKS

I heard a piercing cry from inside the Tent of Meeting. I recognized the voices of my two sons, filled with indescribable pain....[Aaron] said nothing.

....I began to wail and beat my breast, until several women held back my hands so that I would not harm myself. Then Moses turned to me and held up his hand to silence me. **But I would not be silenced!** I began to follow after my sons, but Moses ordered the women to hold me back.

[Moses] announced, "**and all the house of Israel shall bewail the burning that YHVH has wrought. But Aaron, together with Eleazar and Itamar, Aaron's two remaining sons—were they not my sons as well, my only two now that Nadab and Abihu were no more-- these three shall not bare their heads nor rend their clothes, lest they die and anger strike the whole community. They shall remain within the Tent of Meeting.**"

....What was I to do now? Was I allowed to mourn? And who would comfort me, with my husband and two sons separated from me in the tabernacle? **But whether God wanted me to or not, I chose to mourn. ...I would not refuse the comfort of my community...** I put on sackcloth and ashes, and sat before them on the barren ground. And [the women] sang a lament to my dead sons, and so I was comforted for my loss.

PRAISE  
HER  
WORKS



*Conversations  
with  
Biblical Women*

*Edited by  
Penina Adelman*

**Penina Adelman, "Elisheva," in *Praise Her Works: Conversations with Biblical Women* (2005)**

Adelman bases her Elisheva on the verse in *Eishet Hayil*: "***She is clothed with strength and splendor; she laughs at the final day***" (Prov. 31:25). Her male relatives are her garments. She basks in their glory. Notice how she characterizes Nadav and Avihu and reacts to their death:

- *Nadab and Abihu were my fussiest ones. I couldn't calm them when they were babies; I couldn't placate them as adults. They would always demand to know why this one received more food than that one; why Aaron and I seemed to favor this one over that one; why they had to look after their other brothers at all. They were never content.*
- *Nadab was always scheming against Abihu to show him up, to get there first. **I didn't like the way each of them was turning out.** I told Aaron, "**No good will come from them.**" ...I had my doubts. **I had learned from all those years of midwifery... that a child's destiny is stamped in their eyes with eternal light***
- *When my two oldest sons, Nadab and Abihu, strode up to the altar in what they may have thought was an imitation of their father, the High Priest, what was in their minds: 'How long had they been planning their subterfuge: 'What did they think would happen: ' **Was it their glory, or God's glory, they were honoring?***
- *When I saw them struck down, my spirit briefly left me and went to be with them. My boys had come from my womb and now they were returning to the earth's womb. At that moment, I could not weep and I could not laugh.*

# SISTERS AT SINAI



NEW  
TALES  
OF  
BIBLICAL  
WOMEN

JILL HAMMER

*BT Sotah 11b*

Were the “midwives of the Hebrews” Egyptians or Hebrews?

There are two Talmudic traditions:

“And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives etc.”(Exod 1:15)

Rab and Samuel [differ in their interpretation]; **one said they were mother and daughter, and the other said they were daughter-in-law and mother-in-law.**

**According to him who declared they were mother and daughter, they were Jochebed and Miriam;**

**and according to him who declared they were daughter-in-law and mother-in-law, they were Jochebed and Elisheba.**

“And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that **He made them houses**” (Exod 1:21). Rab and Samuel [differ in their interpretation]; **one said they are the priestly and Levitical houses**, and the other said they are the royal houses. One who says they are the **priestly and Levitical houses: Aaron and Moses...**

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## Notes to The Tenth Plague

**In her notes Hammer writes that she** was working for the **AIDS Risk Reduction Project at the University of Connecticut: The word "plague" was very much on my mind. I wanted to write a midrash that would deal with the shunning of victims of contagious disease. ... The sight of many, many firstborn Egyptians dying must have created panic among the people. I can imagine firstborn children being pushed out of their homes, shunned, even sacrificed. This image brings home to me the arbitrary nature of the plague, its unfairness.**

**I was interested in the character of Elisheva, wife of Aaron the high priest, named in Exodus 6:23. Who was she? Why did Aaron marry her?... "Didn't she have any joys of her own?"**

**The son of Elazar and Putiel's daughter is Pinchas, Elisheva's grandson, who has a special status: He is zealous for God and is given God's covenant of peace (Numbers 25:10-13).**

**The daughter of Putiel is another foundress of a priestly family. But who is she? Who are her sis-ters, Putiel's other daughters? And who is Putiel?**

**In her midrash Putiel is the Egyptian woman who is spared by the Angel of Death. In "The Tenth Plague," Pinchas, the most pure of the priestly line, is descended from an Egyptian convert.**

**Jill Hammer, "The Tenth Plague," in *Sisters at Sinai: New Tales of Biblical Women* (1995, 2004)**

Elisheva the midwife debates whether to leave her house to see a patient during the Tenth Plague:

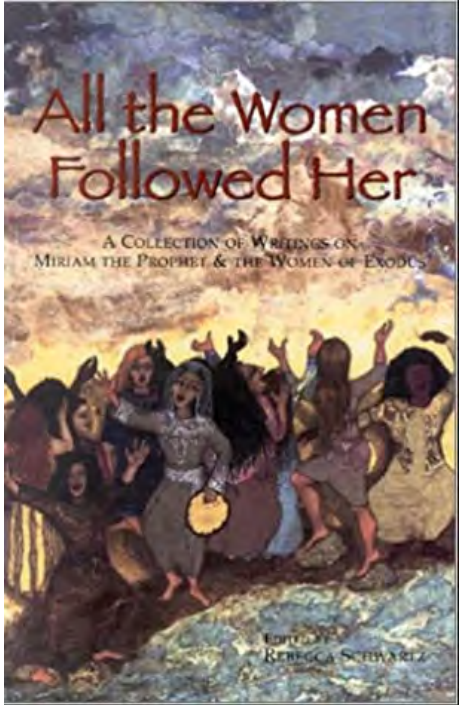
**"My sister is in pain," she said with a clenched face. "She can't even speak. She can barely sit up. She has no strength left. She could die, and you're going to sit here by your warm fire and stir your ashes because she's an Egyptian and because you're scared. What kind of midwife are you? Aren't you supposed to care about all babies?" ...**

She sees the angel of death about to take the baby:

**She breathed a sigh of relief that the plague had not touched her. She began to think of returning home. Home made her think of all that this home was about to lose. Elisheva whipped around and faced the angel, her anger suddenly focused on the unfair decree that took away innocent life.**

....From the shining came a Voice. **"Why are you here, Elisheva?"** it asked. **"Your vigil this night has not been in vain,"** the Voice told her. **"This mother and child will live because of you, and there will be an end to the plague on the firstborn: No one else will die on this night. ... I will give to your hands the power of saving life. I will give to your house the priesthood. ... And because you loved this family as your own, your grandchildren will descend from it. With them I will make My covenant of peace."**





**Susan Phillips, "Elisheva Bat Amminadav: The Silent Wife Speaks,"**  
***All the Women Followed Her (2001)***

Phillips asks how Elisheva dealt with her heartbreak. She starts out by reframing the midrash: *In those early days, when we first left Egypt, I often found myself nearly bursting with joy and pride. What woman, what creature, had ever experienced the happiness I felt!* Phillips adds to the midrash: ***And I was proud to be Miriam's sister-in-law.***

On the one hand she has forebodings about Nadav and Avihu. She hears Nadav saying:

*"Now is when I want to be in charge. I'm ready now." My heart sank. Nadab-wanting everything today, not tomorrow. Wishing perhaps that Aaron were dead and that he could take over as High Priest. I should have stepped in then. ...The two of them were always conspiring. I hoped their brothers and cousins would calm them down.*

When Miriam comes to tell her what happened, this is her reaction:

*I was silent. ... I started to cry, loudly, hoarsely, until I felt weak and sick. .... After that I felt no more joy. ...Instead of the pride I used to feel, I was fearful each time [my husband and two remaining sons] went into the Tent. ... Although I pretended to feel as joyful as I used to be, I felt used up, as if my heart and soul had burned up along with my sons.*

1993

# S/HE CREATED THEM



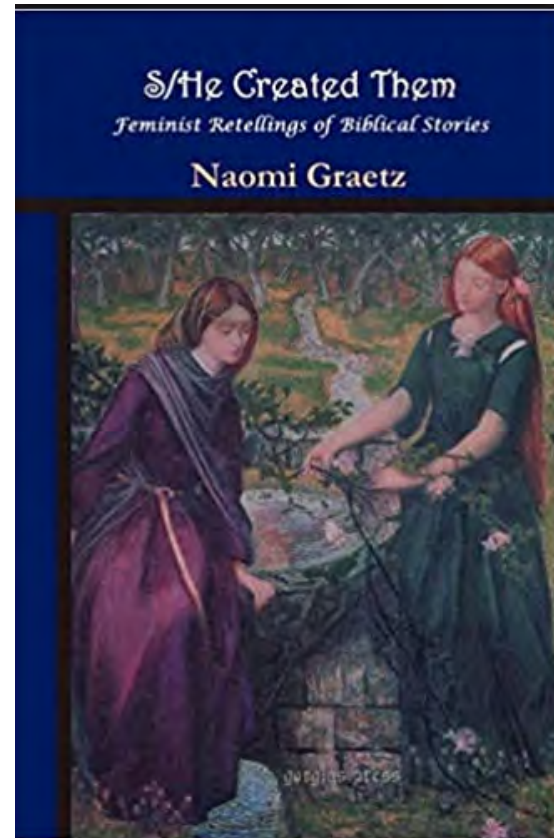
Feminist Retellings of  
Biblical Stories



"High fiber, fat-free...at an unbelievable price!"

NAOMI GRAETZ

2003



## Naomi Graetz, Introduction to S/He Created Them

- In my introduction to the book I explain **Why I Write Midrash**. I write that I seek to reveal new meaning in the biblical text that can be applied to contemporary issues by retelling the biblical tale in contemporary language, adding dialogue and/or description to the original story, or by recovering or inventing other stories. I contribute new insights and perspectives to the original version.
- The midrashim I write are eisegetical, they reflect **personal concerns which are read back into the biblical text**. I wrote about Elisheva after I had developed a strong sense of my need to find in the Bible role models with whom my daughter could readily identify.
- I depict the **loneliness and ambiguities of women's leadership** in a patriarchal society. I am **consciously feminist** when I attempt to imaginatively **rediscover a past** in which biblical women were active participants. In the case of Elisheva I suggest that given the opportunity to be leaders, **women's form of leadership might lead to a better world**.
- Although Elisheva is only a name in the Torah, I have **fleshed out the gaps in the text**, by inventing a daughter, a lover and an independent role for her. I have suggested that **her feminist vision no doubt amplified the male-bound Torah**.

**Naomi Graetz, "Elisheva: When is it a Time for Me?"**  
***In S/He Created Them: Feminist Retellings of Biblical Stories (1988, 1993, reprinted 2003)***

The midrash begins with a conversation that Elisheva has with her daughter Batya:

"Sometimes it bothers me that I am known solely as sister-in law to Moses, wife to Aaron, daughter of Amminadab, sister to Nahshon, mother of the deputy High Priests, grandmother of Phinehas."

**Elisheba pointed to the three men gathered around and continued talking:**

"All these scribes hang on to my every word. They interview me, ask me intimate questions, write my words down as if they are historical facts. Yet to them my significance rests in my family connections--as if I am not important."

"But you don't feel that way about yourself, do you?" her daughter asked. Elisheba answered her daughter. "I haven't felt that way for a long time. **I'm beginning to have more of a sense of who I am; who I am is not only in relation to others. I think I changed after the death of the two sons of Aaron**".

"How can you say that? Nadab and Avihu were your sons as well!"

"It's true I bore them, but were they my sons as you are my daughter?"

Her negative view of her sons is seen in these acrimonious exchange of words she had with Aaron on the day of the boys' funeral.

"Why aren't you crying?" he had asked her through his own tears.

**"I shed enough when they were growing up. You spoiled them. They could do no wrong. But I knew they were capable of great evil. Your sons wanted instant power and would have done anything for it. God took them from us before they could harm others.** You--and the other priests--gave them everything, from the choice sacrificial leftovers to the scraps of costly priestly materials. They were delighted to lord it over everyone. It was natural for them to assume they could get away with taking the foreign fire to the altar. Only the Almighty could stop them, and God did."

## Depiction of Pinchas, a dangerous role model

Since, in addition to being a feminist, I am a **politically moderate Israeli, active in the Masorti movement**, I am very concerned about the influence of the extreme Right. In the midrash about Elisheva, Pinchas typifies the **religious right-wing zealot who sticks to the letter of the religious law often in violation of the moral law**. He is depicted as a dangerous model for us to emulate, in contrast to some macho mainstream midrashim which praise him for his act. This is how Elisheva views Pinchas:

"Phinehas is a perfect example of what I mean. Ever since God rewarded him with the priesthood because of his zealotry in slaying Zimri and Cosbi he has been saying that Moses is an ineffectual leader who should now be removed. He is suffering from vainglorious pride. The rest of us are nothing to him. Yet to me **Phinehas is no more than a murderer** who, instead of being rewarded for his bloody deed, should be made to atone by bringing a sin offering. Moreover, he is an ungrateful grandson who doesn't show proper respect to his elders, yet speaks of stoning others."

## **Elisheva's relationship with Moses:**

I hope she [her daughter] wasn't too shocked about Moses and me. Did I say anything compromising? Moses and I can't afford to have rumors starting about us, even if we're both past our prime. I remember the time when he came to my tent. Did Aaron ever guess why I chose the name Batya? I doubt it. Yet **he dedicated the central chapter of his book to the subject of adultery and incest--and showed it to me.** [see Leviticus 18: 6-30]

Enough of that. My heart's been divided long enough. If I want to make an impact it will have to be through Aaron, not Moses.

Clearly Moses and Elisheva are on the same wave length and managed to convince Aaron to include some moral laws in his boring book about priestly laws.

Elisheva is against sacrifice and says:

"I don't know. I will never agree with those who say that God's spirit rests in the sanctuary, yet I fear we are heading for a period of intolerance and ritualistic behaviorism because of our ignorance and lack of faith."



*I would like to end on two personal notes. This evening is full circle for me. In the eighties, Dr. Lynn Heller, then editor of WL's OUTLOOK, commissioned me to write this midrash. Although she loved it, it was rejected by the board, because it was considered to be too critical of the tradition. Perhaps they were shocked by the fact that Elisheva had an affair with Moses and was so outspoken about "formal" religion.*

The late scholar-feminist, Hannah Safrai heard about the midrash and sent it off to a Dutch journal which published it.

Dutch translation

“Wanneer Komt Mijn Tijd? Een  
joods-feministische midrasj,”

*Werkschrift*

93 jaargang, no. 6 (maart, 1989): 15-18.



**And the second personal note is**

**A COMMERCIAL BREAK FROM A PROUD MOTHER!!!!**

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... an online book club featuring contemporary Israeli literature that provides insight into and understanding of the lives and concerns of our Israeli counterparts.

Our first selection, 'A Rabbi's Daughter,' a novel by Avigail Graetz, is a semi-autobiographical story of three generations of strong women. Drawing inspiration from the author's life experience growing up in the south of Israel, in the home of a Masorti rabbi serving a Masorti kehilla, this book is the first Israeli novel set against the background of Masorti Judaism.

Buy the book on Amazon: <https://tinyurl.com/WRabbiDaughter>



**Webinar: A Conversation with Avigail Graetz**  
Learn about the background of the book, before you read it!

**Wednesday, April 22 | 1:00 p.m. EDT**  
**Register at**  
<https://tinyurl.com/MERCAZReadsIsrael042220>

A second webinar will be scheduled in late May/early June for participants to discuss the book, after they have read it, with the author!

MERCAZ READS ISRAEL is a partnership between

**THE Israel forever FOUNDATION**

The Zionist Organization of the Conservative Movement

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## Mercaz Reads Israel: A Webinar with Author Avigail Graetz

Public · Hosted by Mercaz USA מרכז

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This new, exciting initiative is a partnership between Mercaz USA and the [Israel Forever Foundation](#).

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On **Wednesday, April 22, 2020 at 1:00 p.m. EDT**, we will have the opportunity to engage in conversation with the author, Avigail Graetz, via a Zoom conference.

Join us to learn about the background of the book, before you read it!

A **second webinar** will be scheduled in late May/early June for participants to discuss the book, after they have read it, with the author!