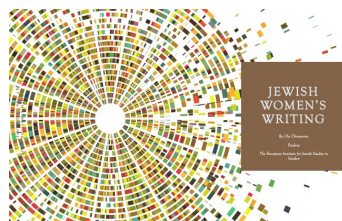


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<https://jewishwomenswriting.weebly.com>

The Presentation:



JEWISH WOMEN'S WRITING COURSE BY ULA CHOWANIEC

I am the essential Rachel whose love lit the road from
 Babyl' Ashlak
 I am the small, shy village girl who grew among tall
 poplar and bushied at the "good morning" of my
 brother's teacher.
 I am the pious girl who paled at her mother's fingers
 trembled over her eyes at the candle blessing.
 I am the obedient bride who humbly brought her head to
 the shears on the eve of her wedding.
 I am the woman of valor who undertook hearing and
 nurturing for a little promised Paradise-light.
 I am the orphaned daughter of a scholar who saved a Jewish
 city with her guarded body and then with her own life got
 herself alive.
 I am the mother who under inconceivable afflictions, to
 the point of consumption, raised sons to good deeds.

IKH BIN FROY / I AM A WOMAN MALKA HEIFETZ TUSSMANN

I am the Jewish daughter who with her father's under
 carried her down head from the people.
 I am the bride-brother who shared "bread and freedom"
 and feed love from under the kike-poles.
 I am the oddball girl who, behind the pious, found joy
 doesn't run great life.
 I am the girl who ordered her white hands to carry bricks
 and stones to the raising of renewed life.
 I am the whose fingers vibrate around the spade, trying in
 vain to the decaying of the destroyer.
 I am the who stubbornly carries around a strange alpha-
 bet and whispers it into the ears of children.
 I am all these and yet many, many not mentioned.
 And always
 I am
 Woman.



PARASHOT AND WOMEN

JEWISH WOMEN'S WRITING COURSE BY ULA CHOWANIEC

- FOR EXAMPLE: Pinchas parasha (Number 25:10-30)
- In our era, we can see this legacy in women such as Judith Eisenstein, who was the first to become a bat mitzvah in 1922, and in the first women ordained as rabbis: Regina Jonas (in 1935), Sally Priesand (Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in 1973), Sandy Sasso (Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in 1974), and Amy Eilberg (Jewish Theological Seminary in 1985). Like Mahlah, Noa, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah, they and the many other courageous women who followed in their footsteps came forth and opened the future for all women seeking to reclaim their Jewish inheritance in new and powerful ways. (from *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, edited by Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss (New York: URJ Press and Women of Reform Judaism, 2008).



The Daughters of Zelophehad (Dalziels' Bible Gallery), 1865-81 Metmuseum.org

JEWISH WOMEN'S HISTORY

Regina Jonas



Sally Priesand



NOT ABOUT REINTERPRETATION OF THE JUDAISM?

Judith Plascow

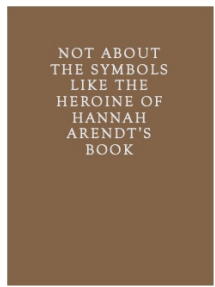
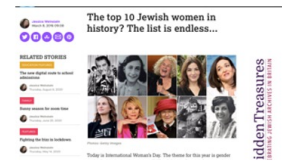
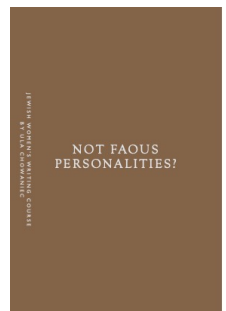


Standing Again at Sinai

Her contributions to Jewish feminist theology in particular have proved to be invaluable. She was the first Jewish feminist to call herself a theologian and Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective (1990) was the first Jewish feminist text dedicated to theology.



THIS COURSE IS NOT ABOUT PHILOSOPHERS?



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dsolmOVS04>

WHAT IS THE JEWISH WOMEN'S WRITING COURSE ABOUT?

WRITINGS	BY WOMEN	WHO ARE JEWISH PEOPLE?
<p>Various genres:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poems, Collections of poems Novels Short stories Diaries Notes Mails Posts Essays Articles 	<p>Elain Showalter's</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Invention of the history": election in favour of women Archaeology of women's writing Herstory 	<p>Jewish identity according to Christine Hayes:</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ftGLEQLTFA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Memory/community Covenant Holiness <p>On contemporary Jewish identity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adrienne Rich Irena Klepfisz Zohar Weimar Kelman

Ula (Urszula) Chowaniec Tikkun by Judith, the Wife of R. Hiyya! Or about (un)Desired Motherhood, Freedom(s) and the Right to Individual Choice¹

She changed her clothes to prevent Rabbi Hiyya from recognizing her and came before Rabbi Hiyya to ask him a halakhic question. She said: Is a woman commanded to be fruitful and multiply? He said to her: No.²

Sefaria

Yevamot 65b
The William Davidson Talmud

17 יהודה וחזקיה תאומים היו אחד נגמרה צורתו לסוף תשעה ואחד נגמרה צורתו לתחלת שבעה יהודית דביתהו דר' חייא הוה לה צער לידה שנאי מנא ואתיא לקמיה דר' חייא ואמרה אתמא מפקדא אפריה ורביה אמר לה לא אזלא אשתאי סמא דעקרתא

The Gemara relates that Rabbi Hiyya's sons, Yehuda and Hizkiyya, were twins, but one of them was fully developed after nine months of pregnancy and one was fully developed at the beginning of the seventh month, and they were born two months apart. Yehudit, the wife of Rabbi Hiyya, had acute birthing pain from these unusual deliveries. She changed her clothes to prevent Rabbi Hiyya from recognizing her and came before Rabbi Hiyya to ask him a halakhic question. She said: Is a woman commanded to be fruitful and multiply? He said to her: No. She went and drank an infertility potion.

18 לסוף איגלאי מילתא אמר לה איכו ילדת לי חדא כרסא אחרתא דאמר מר יהודה וחזקיה אחי פוי וטוי

Eventually the matter was revealed, and Rabbi Hiyya found out about what Yehudit had done. He said to her: If only you had given birth to one more belly for me, i.e., another set of twins. As the Master said: Yehuda and Hizkiyya were twin brothers and became prominent Torah scholars, and Pazi and Tavi, Rabbi Hiyya's daughters,

¹ This text was written for Professor Fania Oz-Salzberger in gratitude and compliment for her presence and academic classes offered to the Amos Oz Fellows during the year in Paideia 2019-2020.

² From Yevamot 65b (The William Davidson Talmud), <https://www.sefaria.org/Yevamot.65b.17?lang=bi> (accessed 20.03.2020). I wish to thank my Paideia friend, Lilinaz Evanz, for pointing out this story to me, as to a mother of twins, and altogether three children. Undoubtedly, this essay has been written from the perspective of "personal ethnography" and informed personal experience as a woman and a mother, even though there are centuries and vast cultural and ideological gap between Judith and me, we are connected through a unchangeable (probably) bodily experience, pains and exhaustion, so often connected to motherhood.

Introduction

This short text will combine two tasks and debate two main ideas of (1) freedom and (2) authority as they function from the perspective of the notion of the position of women in the Hebrew Bible and the concept of motherhood. I will also refer to both classical texts on Jewish civilisation (e.g. Kaplan) as well as to voices on contemporary secularism (3), which discuss the concept of obligation in the secular world (here texts by Yizhar, Leah Goldberg and others will be mentioned). This text is just a short sketch, inspired by our online classes led by Prof. Fania Selzberger-Oz, rather than any established argument. Yet, I hope it brings a bit of a light to each of us in these difficult times, since it is about the quest for the importance of woman's self-love and self-esteem as seen in the story of the wife of Rabbi Hiyya.

Talmudic sympathy for suffering

Judith, the wife of Rabbi Hiyya already had two pairs of twins, a pair of sons and a pair of daughters, when she came to her husband in disguise and asked him if a woman is commanded to be fruitful. When the Rabbi said "no," she decided that she was allowed (Talmudic keyword: mutar) to drink an infertility potion. She did this because, as we know, she had "acute birthing pain from these unusual deliveries." This test case, this tiny Talmudic parable, testifies to a huge transgression in Jewish law-making: firstly, it narrates the challenge of the very first mitzva given to people, in the Bible, by God: to multiply themselves (Genesis 1:28 "be fertile and increase", and then repeated in the Parashat Noah, Genesis 9:1) and secondly this mitzva is challenged by a woman. The challenge - following the Talmudic discussion ("Gemara then asks immediately: 'Are women not commanded to be fruitful and multiply'", later Medieval commentators also posed this question) – has been subsequently solved by stating that the imperative of procreation is addressed only to men, based on the reasoning that no pain can be inflicted by mitzva onto another living being. However, this solution does not diminish the transgressive energy of this parable, which I discuss henceforth.

Of course, Rabbi Hiyya, was not happy about the event and his dishonest wife, Judith, is not portrayed in a good way, she is mentioned elsewhere as being contemptuous, and also her act, the pure act of self-defence from pains, is condemned – in the text - by (1) revealing the sorrow of Rabbi Hiyya, who wished she could have given him "one more belly" (another pair of twins) and (2) by stating that Judith most likely deprived humanity of another wonderful pair of saintly scholars. This is made clear by the fact that the previous pairs of twins are

deliberately mentioned: firstly, the sons Yehuda and Hizkiyya as forthcoming great Talmudic scholars; and subsequently, the daughters (the matriarchs: Pazi and Tavi) as the imminent great mothers of several great Talmudic scholars.

A contemporary reader finds it difficult to understand the Talmudic scornful attitude towards the wife of Rabbi Hiyya and her trickery, when she was simply a woman in pain. Yet, there are three aspects of this Talmudic test case, the story of Judith, which are particularly empowering for female herstories:

(1) deception as woman's agency can be seen here as a method of self-defence and of creating her own rules, she is a Talmudic trickster, having her own chutzpah. It can also be argued that this is the first transgendered manifestation in Jewish texts,³ since it is quite evident that Judith was disguised as a man;

(2) it is important to notice the Sages' awareness and sympathy towards birthing pains and understanding the enormous bodily efforts invested in the child-delivery experience. The fact that women's needs, fears and objections were addressed should be unquestionably seen as a signature of the strong position of women in the private sphere of Jewish life; and

(3) thirdly, the test case gives the actual Talmudic standpoint towards woman's procreation as non-obligatory, and this stands completely against commonly-held opinions; however, as Kaplan explains the authority works twofold: "A living civilisation must include a general will, which makes itself felt in the consciousness of the individual, either as a form of authority, capable of physical coercion, or as that more subtle form of authority which reveals itself in what may be called as social expectation" (Kaplan 2005). And this is clear: the social pressure for women, both Jewish and non-Jewish, religious and non-religious is put – to diverse degrees and intensities – on her fertility and her ability to secure continuity (not the textual one, as discussed by Oz-Salzberger 2012, but the physical one - the bloodline continuity). The authority of social expectation in our everyday experiences overshadows completely the lesson from the Talmudic parable. Yet, whatever the social practice and authority of communal pressure has been over the past thousands of years, the Talmud, the Jewish law in its verse was exempting women from the most difficult bodily experience, which is delivering a child.

³ This notion is further developed by Raveh 2014.

To highlight the importance of this parable and the importance of the action of the Talmudic trickster-woman, Judith, we need to observe how it offers an extraordinary, multifaceted perspective on women's agency:

(1) on one hand – it gives a woman freedom to choose, at least from the perspective of official law;

2) on the other hand, it is a perspective of mindfulness and compassion for women's physical pain and suffering, since - as we know – delivering a child has always been the most mythicized and romanticized experience ever; with very few literary accounts of the actual pain and fear women experience throughout it.

Judith's chutzpah, secular intuition or the performing of tikkun!

If we see the act of Judith, the wife of Rabbi Hiyya, as a chutzpah that can be traced back to Sara's chutzpah, laughing at God's messengers; to Esther's chutzpah, saving the Jewish people; or to Hannah's chutzpa – which seems to be concerned with quite the opposite issue – yet, at the same time is still the same chutzpah of getting a woman what she really wants. Then, perhaps, we can see all these women as feminist Biblical and Talmudic heroines, who worked hard to reclaim their voices (and becoming - as the authors of *Jews and Words* call them - "vocal women"!).

Furthermore, if we follow the argument of David Biale that the Sages' gesture against Eliezer and God's support for Eliezer can be seen as a prototype of the secular act of reclaiming human agency, then – perhaps – the wife of Rabbi Hiyya, this contemptuous woman, unhappy in her position (and probably completely overburdened, as a mother of twins - times two!) can also be seen as a prototype of a woman's secular rebellion against God's commandment to "be fertile and increase".

And Judith is not just a conformist rebel, she – like every serious secular thinker – makes sure she both considers and engages with the law. Through, or with help of a disguise, she gets involved in the rabbinic dispute. She is overburdened with the mundane (motherly and bodily pains), nonetheless she chose to engage with the law. She has *a courage for the mundane*, as the poet Leah Goldberg would call it two thousand years later. This concept is explained by Anat Weisman: "with the concept of 'courage for the mundane,' Goldberg scrutinizes the relationship between the constant work of taking apart and examining incomplete, daily, and ordinary existence, on the one hand, and the yearning for perfection and the sublime, on the other. Only in this way, she believes, does the 'great human synthesis' come about. On the one

hand, the mundane must not be betrayed on account of the desire for the great whole, the perfect; on the other hand, if we do not want to betray the values of art, then 'small reality' cannot be all what we have. (Weisman 2013, 225).

From this perspective, this overburdened mother of four children, can be seen as the one who possessed this essential ability of not-fearing, perhaps even the secular courage of combining the everydayness with her engagement with Talmudic law: creating within this law a space for herself! Judith acts alone, she will be condemned by majority, but she acts. As S. Yizhar writes in his 1982 formative essay: "To be secular means to claim sovereignty over one's own life, without *a priori* commitments to precepts or obligations that do not derive from one's own autonomous decisions—accepting responsibility for any mistakes, as well as the consequences they may bring. The secular chooses to live in a state of perpetual revolution."

There is no doubt that Judith, the wife of Rabbi Hiyya, had to pay for her "revolution:" her children would have to recompense for their mother's sin and they all would become Talmudic scholars (or the mothers of such scholars), hence her children would become an even stronger mirror of Judith's crime. Judith, the wife of Rabbi Hiyya would be noticed only as a contemptuous, trickster woman, the prototype of the sort of folk beliefs that one can never believe about a woman, the sort of commonplaces expressed in the Nietzschean quote: "you go to women? Do not forget the whip!"

Yet, the shaming and silencing of Judith - as with many other Biblical and Talmudic women - did not stop her from becoming part of our Jewish "vocal women" heritage, because - as Adrienne Rich, one of the most wonderful Jewish women poets - says:

*Silence can be a plan
Rigorously executed*

The blueprint to life

*It is a presence
It has a history, a form*

*Do not confuse it
With any kind of absence.*

Silence can be broken. This is why Judith, the wife of R. Hiyya, so cunningly sneaked into my essay. This is a story of Judith, as the etymology has it, the one that will be praised! This is a story of Judith, a story - to conclude with a quote of one of her interpreter's - "of a woman who performs an act of *tikkun* (repair) for herself and resumes her independent, individual identity, not completely conditioned by the social norms that defines her, simply - Judith" (Raven 20014, 81).

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Adrienne Rich on Jewish Identity:

Split at the Root: An Essay on Jewish Identity

Adrienne Rich

Adrienne Rich is one of America's leading poets, an essayist, and a committed feminist. Her poetry has won numerous awards, including the National Book Award in 1974 for *Diving into the Wreck*. In the following selection, from *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-85*, Rich performs a kind of self-analysis by looking at the sources of her own divided identities in her experiences growing up and seeing the world from "too many disconnected angles: white, Jewish, anti-Semite, racist, anti-racist, once-married, lesbian, middle-class, exmatriate southerner, split at the root."

◆ Suggestion for Reading

As you read, notice how Adrienne Rich analyzes her identity as "split at the root," composed of multiple and sometimes conflicting selves. Annotate those passages where Rich identifies these various selves and their relations to each other.



For about fifteen minutes I have been sitting chin in hand in front of the typewriter, staring out at the snow. Trying to be honest with myself, trying to figure out why writing this seems to be so dangerous an act, filled with fear and shame, and why it seems so necessary. It comes to me that in order to write this I have to be willing to do two things: I have to claim my father, for I have my Jewishness from him and not from my gentile mother; and I have to break his silence, his taboos; in order to claim him I have in a sense to expose him.

And there is, of course, the third thing: I have to face the sources and the flickering presence of my own ambivalence as a Jew; the daily, mundane anti-Semitism of my entire life.

These are stories I have never tried to tell before. Why now? Why, I asked myself sometime last year, does this question of Jewish identity float so implacably, so ungraspably around me, a cloud I can't quite see the outlines of, which feels to me to be without definition? And yet I've been on the track of this longer than I think.



In a long poem written in 1960, when I was thirty-one years old, I described myself as "split at the root, neither gentile nor Jew, / frailer nor black."¹ I was tall, trying to hide it both ways: to be neither, trying to live (with my Jewish husband and three children) more Jewish in ancestry than I. In the predominantly gentile Yankee academic world of Cambridge, Massachusetts.

But this begins, for me, in Baltimore, where I was born in my father's workplace, a hospital in the black ghetto, whose lobby contained an immense white marble statue of Christ.



My father was then a young teacher and researcher in the department of pathology at the Johns Hopkins Medical School, one of the very few Jews to attend or teach at that institution. He was from Birmingham, Alabama; his father, Samuel, was Ashkenazic, an immigrant from Austria-Hungary, and his mother, Hattie Rice, a Sephardic Jew from Vicksburg, Mississippi. My grandfather had had a shoe store in Birmingham, which did well enough to allow him to retire comfortably and to leave my grandmother income on his death. The only souvenirs of my grandfather, Samuel Rich, were his ivory cane, which lay on our living-room mantel, and his hat, which I did not see until his good poems were published in the *New Yorker* and his head was in the hospital in which I did not see my father's books in the course of reading my way through his library. In this private book there was a newspaper clipping about my grandparents' wedding, which took place in a synagogue.

My father, Arnold, was sent in adolescence to a military school in the North Carolina mountains, a place for training white southern Christian gentlemen. I suspect that there were few, if any, other Jewish boys at Colonel Bingham's, or at "McJetta's" university in Charlottesville, where he studied as an undergraduate. With whatever conscious forethought, Samuel and Hattie sent their son into the dominant southern white culture to be educated. My father, Arnold, did not see his father's headstone until after his own death. He, too, did not speak of having suffered—from loneliness, cultural alienation, or outcasthood. Never did I hear him use the word anti-Semitism.



It was only in college, when I read a poem by Karl Shapiro beginning "To hate the Negro and avoid the Jew / is the curriculum," that it flashed on me that there was an untold side to my father's story of his student years. He looked recognizably Jewish, was short and slender in build with dark wavy hair and deep-set eyes, light freckles and curved nose.

¹Adrienne Rich, "Readings of History," in *Signatures of a Daylight-So-Low* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987), pp. 34-46.

My mother is a gentile. In Jewish law I cannot count myself a Jew. If it is true that "we think back through our mothers if we are women" (Virginia Woolf)—and I must have affirmed this—then even according to Jewish theory, I cannot (or need not) count myself a Jew.

The white southern Protestant woman, the gentile, has always been there for me to pool back my own Jewishness. My mother was also frustrated artist and intellectual; a lost writer and a lost composer in her eighties. But there was also the obsession with ancestry, with "background," the southern talk of family, not as people you must necessarily know and depend on, but as heritage the guarantee of "good breeding." There was the inveterate romantic heterosexual fantasy, the mother telling the daughter how to attract men (my mother often used the word "fascinate") the assumption that relations between the sexes could only be romantic, the urge to cultivate an identity, correct her social feelings. Sexual love was a kind of bond. I think I know her. Her role in the southern racist scenario. Heterosexuality as protection, but also drawing white women deeper into collusion with white men.

It would be easy to push away and deny the gentile in me—that white southern woman, that social Christian. At different times in my life I have wanted to push away one or the other burden of inheritance, to say merely *I am a woman; I am a lesbian*. If I call myself a Jewish lesbian, do I thereby try to shed some of my southern gentile white woman's culpability? If I call myself only, through my mother, is it because I pass more easily into the white world than I do? According to Karl Jaspers, my two Jewish grandparents would have made me a *Mischling, first-degree*—nonesuch from the Final Solution.



The social world in which I grew up was Christian virtually without needing to say so—(and I am not a Jew). I was a gentile, white, middle-class world in which "common" was a term of deep opprobrium. "Common" white people might speak of "niggers"; we were taught never to use that word—we said "Negroes" (even as we accepted segregation, the eating taboo, the assumption that Black people were simply of a separate species). Our language was more polite, distinguishing us from the "rednecks" or the Lynch-mob mentality. But so charged with negative meaning was even the word "Negro" that as children we were taught never to use it in front of Black people. We were taught that any mention of skin color in the presence of colored people was theatrical, without good will. In a private way, the word "Jew" was also used to offend people, to offend people in the presence of their fathers. The word "Jew" was to be allude to "the Hebrew people" or "people of the Jewish faith." The world of acceptable folk was white, gentile (Christian, really), and had "ideals" and "manners" included not hurting someone's feelings by calling her or him a Negro or a Jew—earning the hated identity. This is the mental framework of the 1930s and 1940s in which I was raised.

(Writing this, I feel dumbly like the beverage of my father, who did not speak the words of my mother, who must have trained me in the messages of my case and class of my mother.)

Two memories: I am in a play reading at school of *The Merchant of Venice*. Whatever Jewish law says I am quite sure I was seen as Jewish (with a reassuringly gentile mother) in that double vision that bigotry allows. I am the only Jewish girl in the class, and I am play-

