

Women are From Genesis, Men are from Leviticus: Gender Reads the Bible
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1. The rejection of the idea of “neutral” Torah reading/Torah commentary
2. The importance of a feminist/gendered/queered Torah analysis: as “correction,” as “inclusion” and as “broadening.”

I. Categories of Feminist Analysis (Goldstein)

A. Rejectionist

1) e.g. Naomi Goldenberg: “Although I admire the efforts of the reformers, I see them engaged in a hopeless effort...Many feminists recommend ignoring parts of the Torah, but still claim the book as a whole is God-given. It is hard to deny that an eventual consequence of criticizing the correctness of any sacred text or tradition is to question why that text or tradition should be considered a divine authority at all...In order to develop a theology of women's liberation, feminists have to leave...the Bible behind them.”¹

B. Apologist

1) There may be some instances where women “seem” to be aggrieved or “seem” to be depicted in a negative light, but these few instances can be easily “fixed” by traditional commentators. Apologists usually claim that the problem lies not in the text but in the reader.

C. Revisionist

1) Revision: to alter, to see anew. Uncover, recover, discover; explore, suggest, speculate. Includes the reappropriation of the rabbinic use of parable, story and metaphor, creating explications and interpretations and *midrash*. Like Nellie Morton:

¹ Naomi Goldenberg, Changing of the Gods, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979) 10, 13, 22.

Failing to find women's voices or women's experience, invent them! Like the classical midrashists: wander far from the original to get back to it.

2) Rejection of women's marginality as the central assumption. Attempt to either write women in, reinterpret women in, or critique women's absence. Mary Ann Tolbert: a "conscious effort to retrieve texts overlooked or distorted by patriarchal hermeneutics... (it) focuses its attention on texts involving women characters and explores their functions without the *patriarchal presumption of marginality...*" (emphasis mine)²

II. Feminist Methodologies

A. "Neutral" or traditional analysis: Noticing missing or repeated words, inverted, detailed; wordplays. Echoes of another story, or references to an earlier or later event. Christian connotations, inculcated from the general milieu, into the Jewish Bible. *Rejection of the idea of neutrality because it includes readers own prejudices about the text, childhood memories, and "received wisdom" from a lifetime of sources.*

B. Rachel Adler: "One crucial contribution will be the methodologies feminists have developed for understanding and using narrative... As a method of vision, feminist narratives draw upon fantasies and desires, prophecies and prayers to imagine possible worlds in which both women and men could flourish. As a tool of critique, narrative can expose within abstract theories assumptions about the nature and experience of being human, what people know, how they love, what they want, and what they fear."³

² Mary Ann Tolbert, "Defining the Problem: The Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics" in *Semeia*, Scholars Press, Chico, Ca., Volume 28, 1983, page 122.

³ Rachel Adler, *Engendering Judaism*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1998), 38.

- 1) a critique of the text from within its social context as that context applies to women both in the biblical period and now;
- 2) a critique of the traditional ways of “unpacking” the text that rarely “unpacked” it for women,
- 3) and an analysis of the assumptions we bring to the text, based on a history of our own personal biases we have inherited from a patriarchal Judaism.
- 4) messages of change within a traditional reverence for an unchanging text, i.e. the paradox of being agents of change who still maintain tradition.
- 5) a correction of the so-called “neutral” commentaries which came before. This calls into question the marginality of feminist discussion and offers the opportunity to go back and examine the “neutrality” of what we have learned before.

III. An Example of Feminist Reading

1. The debasement/humiliation of Dina and unpacking of commentary:

וַתֵּצֵא דִינָה בַת־לֵאָה אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה לְיַעֲקֹב לְרְאוּת בְּבָנוֹת הָאָרֶץ וַיֵּרָא אֹתָהּ שָׁכֵם בֶּן־חַמּוֹר הַחִוִּי
 נָשִׂיא הָאָרֶץ וַיִּקַּח אֹתָהּ וַיִּשְׁכַּב אִתָּהּ וַיַּעֲנֶהָ: וַתִּדְבֹק נַפְשׁוֹ בְּדִינָה בַת־יַעֲקֹב וַיֵּאָהֵב אֶת־הַנְּעִר
 וַיְדַבֵּר עַל־לֵב הַנְּעִר: וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁכֵם אֶל־חַמּוֹר אָבִיו לֵאמֹר קַח־לִי אֶת־הַיְלָדָה הַזֹּאת לְאִשָּׁה:

Now Dinah, the daughter whom Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daughters of the land. Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, chief of the country, saw her, and took her and lay with her by force. Being strongly drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and in love with the maiden, he spoke to the maiden tenderly. So Shechem said to his father Hamor, “Get me this girl as a wife.”

Other texts: II Sam 13: Tamar and Amnon

יב וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ אֵל אַחִי אֵל תַּעֲנֵנִי כִּי לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה כֵן בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל אֵל תַּעֲשֶׂה אֶת הַנְּבִלָה הַזֹּאת: יג
 וְאַנִּי אָנֹכִי אוֹלִיךָ אֶת חַרְפְּתִי וְאַתָּה תִּהְיֶה כְּאֶחָד הַנְּבִלִים בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל... יד וְלֹא אָבָה לִשְׁמֹעַ
 בְּקוֹלָהּ...

12 But she said to him, “Don’t, brother. Don’t humiliate (?) me. Such things are not done in Israel! Don’t do such a vile thing! 13 Where will I carry my shame? And you, you will be like any of the scoundrels in Israel!...” 14 But he would not listen to her...

Gen 16:6, Sarah and Hagar:

וַתַּעֲנֶה שָׂרַי וַתְּבָרַח מִפָּנֶיהָ: And Sarai despised her and she (Hagar) ran away from her.

Deut 26:6: what the Egyptians did to us:

וַיִּרְעוּ אֶתְנוּ הַמִּצְרַיִם וַיַּעֲגֹנוּ וַיִּתְּנוּ עָלֵינוּ עֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה:

The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; they imposed heavy labor upon us.

Deut 22:23 laws of rape:

...את הנענך על דבר אשר לא צעקה בעיר ואת האיש על דבר אשר ענה את אשת רעהו...
...[T]he woman because she was in the city and no one heard her cry out in protest, and the man on account of the fact that he humiliated (?) the wife of his neighbor...

RASHI: בת לאה ולא בת יעקב? אלא על שם יציאתה נקראת בת לאה, שאף היא יצאנית
היתה (בראשית רבה), שנאמר ותצא לאה לקראתו ועליה משלו המשל כאמה כבתה
Scripture calls her why not the daughter of Jacob? Because she “went out” she is called Leah’s daughter, since she, too, was fond “of going out” (Genesis Rabbah 80:1), as it is said (30:16) “and Leah went out to meet him”. With an allusion to her they formulated the proverb: “Like mother, like daughter”.

וישכב אתה כדרךך: ויענה שלא כדרךך

He was with her. In the usual manner. And mistreated her. In an unusual manner.

על לב הנערה דברים המתישבים על הלב; ראי, אביך בחלקת שדה קטנה כמה ממון בזבז,
אני אשיאך ותקנה העיר וכל שדותיה

[AND SPAKE] LOVINGLY TO THE DAMSEL (literally, he spoke to the heart of the maiden) words that would appeal to her heart: See how much money your father has lavished for a small plot of field. I will marry you and you will then possess the city and all its fields (Genesis Rabbah 80:7).

RABBEYNU BAHYA:

ובמדרש לראות, יצאה לראות ונראית

A Midrashic approach: the word לראות, “to see,” means “to see and to be seen.”

MALBIM:

ותצא דינה. מודיע כי דינה לא אשמה בזה, שלא תאמר שפרצה גדר הצניעות, כי היתה בת לאה, שהיתה צנועה באהלה, ואשר ילדה ליעקב, שלידתה היה מתיחס אל יעקב שהיתה צנועה וכשרה, כי לא היתה היציאה ללכת אחרי הבחורים רק לראות בבנות הארץ ובתהלכותיהן

Dr. Shawna Dolansky, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada (“Rejecting Patriarchy: On Clarifying the Objectives of Feminist Biblical Scholarship” at the SBL 2014 Annual Meeting in Biblical Hermeneutics & Women in the Biblical World):

“So what does ‘innah mean and what exactly happened to Dinah, as far as the narrator is concerned? Deuteronomy 22 and Genesis 16 suggest that ‘innah denotes a downward movement in a social sense. It means to “debase” or “humiliate,” or to lower a person’s status. This debasement is unrelated to the woman’s consent, and, therefore, not equivalent to our concept of rape.

To be fair, although the text never says that Dinah was forced into having sex, it never says that she engaged in it willingly either. Rather, the narrator is unconcerned with the question of Dinah’s consent; Dinah herself does not speak a single word in the story. Why Dinah’s mindset was not of interest to the author is the question that a feminist social scientist and historian ought to begin investigating about the society of the Bible, rather than read into it what she might project from her own.”

Jewish Women’s Archive:

“The story invites two opposing interpretations. The traditional understanding is that Dinah has been raped by Shechem. Her brothers Simeon and Levi retaliate by violently slaying and plundering Shechem, Hamor, and the Shechemite community. But the retaliation puts Jacob’s group in jeopardy by making subsequent social intercourse and peaceful coexistence impossible. Jacob thus reprimands his sons for their behavior. But concerning the question of whether Dinah has been raped, the final clue comes in the last sentence of the story. Simeon and Levi say, “Should our sister be treated like a whore?” (34:31). Prostitutes engage in sexual intercourse for financial gain, and their sexual actions involve mutual consent. Rape therefore does not characterize either prostitution or what has happened to Dinah. Furthermore, one of the purposes of sexual intercourse in the ancient world was to create permanent bonding and obligation; but in prostitution, there is no bonding or obligation. By saying that Dinah has become like a prostitute, Simeon and Levi might be suggesting that, from their perspective, Dinah and Shechem’s intercourse could never lead to bonding and obligation...”