

## STUDY GUIDE TO *BIBLE BABES 'A BELTIN'*

### INTRODUCTION

This study guide of women of the Bible is designed as a companion to the "*Bible Babes 'a Beltin'*" album recorded by Rabbi Rayzel Raphael. Its purpose is to provide an in-depth study of the stories of women of the Bible. It is suitable to be used by adults, in Bar/Bat Mitzvah students, and even - at times - for teaching younger children.

This book has been a joy and a struggle. This project was conceived in Jerusalem at the Melton Program for Senior Educators at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, in 1988-89. I have loved learning, researching and teaching the stories. The struggle has actually been finding the time to finish it some nine years later. Rabbinical school, raising a child, and life just got in the way. "By the Shores" or "Miriam Took Her Timbrel Out" , my first song, was written in 1984. The tape itself took a year to make! In other words, there are a lot of years and love that went into this project. Whew! I am proud to finally present this publication complete with CD/musical notation available and questions for discussion. My goal was to bring the stories of our Biblical mothers, daughters, and sisters to life. I wanted to add my voice to the wealth of Jewish women's literature, art and culture that is emerging at the turn of the millennium.

I have numerous thank-yous for this project -- my husband, Simcha, who always believed in me; my parents, Mitchell and Natalie Robinson, for supporting me; and Yigdal, my son, for listening to every song. I also need to thank Debbie Weisman and Noam Zohar, who coached me reading and re-reading the original draft, as well Tikva Freymer Kensky, my teacher at RRC; and my buddies, Rabbi Margot Stein and Juliet Spitzer who devoted hours to helping me birth the tape. In addition my sincere appreciation goes to Cantor Ron Fishman who notated the music, Aviva Bass who checked it, and Batsheva Kotler who made final proofs on everything.

It is my hope that this material will be used in women's groups, in classrooms, informal and formal Jewish education and anywhere that the Women of the Bible share their teaching.

Enjoy, listen, study and learn,

Rabbi Geela Rayzel Raphael

## CONTEXT - THE JEWISH FEMINIST MOVEMENT

The past twenty five years of Jewish feminist activity have spawned a variety of creative expressions. The tension between feminism and Judaism is the catalyst for an artistic outburst of poetry, *Midrash*, crafts, art, ritual, writings and song. Academics are exploring the lives of historical Jewish women. Not only are there women rabbis in the Conservative, Reconstructionist and Reform movements, but even Modern Orthodoxy held a feminism and Judaism conference! Israeli law is being challenged by Women of the Wall seeking to sing and pray at the Kotel. Women are full participants on synagogue boards, creating feminist *seders*, Jewish women's archives, and new life cycle rituals. There are new books enriching our tradition, and courses are being offered at universities on Jewish women. New liturgy is being explored and practiced, and musicians are setting it all to music. The list is endless, and abundant. Jewish women's history is being made.

## JEWISH WOMEN AND MUSIC

There are several ways and reasons Jewish women are composing and shaping song writing for this age of Jewish music. First of all, women are learning traditional liturgy and cantillation modes. Also, as Jews have always absorbed the influences of surrounding cultures and incorporated them into their practice, so too are women integrating contemporary sounds with traditional words. For example, one of the "traditional" tunes to *Adon Olam*, a liturgical piece sung in *Shabbat* services, is a German marching melody. Today our influences are folk, jazz, reggae, rock, rap, etc. These styles combine with the Jewish legacy to create contemporary sounds. Finally, women are creating feminist and egalitarian liturgies for new rituals and women's occasions, such as Rosh Hodesh, the celebration of the new moon.

## KOL ISHAH

Most political struggles have their protest songs; this movement is no exception! *Expression of the spirit is indeed a political statement*, as women have been, up until now, excluded from Jewish religious leadership. The fact that women's voices should not be heard by men, according to some Orthodox interpretations, is one of the motivating factors inspiring Jewish feminists to sing out. Traditionally, according to many, a woman should not be seen

during prayer, nor heard. This concept of *Kol Ishah* , literally “woman's voice”, was created to protect men from sexual arousal during a service. The Talmud says that a woman's voice is sexual enticement, as is her hair and her thigh. This has been interpreted by some to mean a solo female voice, by others more strict, groups of women are also included. In mixed company, in some homes women are allowed to join in, in others they are not. According to some interpretations, women may lead a women's *mezuman*, even if men are present.

Today this term, *Kol Ishah* , has been reinterpreted and reclaimed by Jewish feminists. In *Lilith Magazine*, a Jewish women's journal, there is a section of articles called *Kol Ishah*, "These pages are for news about Jewish women, usually in their own strong voices". The feminist center that existed in Jerusalem in the early eighties was called *Kol Ishah* and a Jewish woman's film company in Montreal also claims the name. This symbol of a woman's voice that has been repressed for generations, has been totally transformed in liberal communities. Women's voices are being heard in board rooms, on committees which decide the policies of Jewish communities, chanting from the *bima* , and also in their own words of song. It has become a political act to sing out.

### *MIDRASH*

*Midrash* is a genre of the vast body of Rabbinic literature that attempts to interpret Biblical verses. The term *Midrash* is from the verb *darash*, meaning to inquire, seek, search, or investigate. *Midrashim* are stories, analogies, parables, or sermons that were written to illuminate a specific Torah passage or to impart the lesson found in the passage.

The two main types of *Midrashim* are *Aggadic* and *Halachic*. The *Aggadic Midrashim* usually deal with the non-legal issues that Jews face, and the *Halachic Midrashim* concern themselves with Jewish law. Meanings and principles of Jewish practice are deduced from *Midrashic* examples. The earliest *Midrashim* were mostly written in *Eretz Yisrael* , dating from around the time of the Second Temple. They usually connect verses of the Torah together as a way of explaining a particular sentence. They compare various verses dealing with the same theme but explaining them each in its own way. *Midrashim* are found in the Talmud as well as in separate collections.

The process of creating *Midrashim* continues. Feminists are looking at the Biblical text and writing stories to fill in difficult passages, bringing new interpretations and giving new life to the Torah. Women are using phrases from the Torah as their inspiration. A hint of a woman's ritual in a traditional text is being examined by feminists as a way of connecting to the text and then embellishing it. Writing songs about women in the Torah is a contemporary way of continuing the *Midrashic* process.

#### BIBLICAL AND APOCRYPHAL WOMEN IN TRADITIONAL SOURCES

At the core of the Jewish feminist explosion is a new look at old texts--Talmud, Midrash, and of course the Biblical text. Studying the texts of women of the Bible provides an easy access for women to find themselves in the stories of our people. Who were the women? What were they saying? These are still relevant questions today.

The stories of Biblical women are sometimes read as Haftorah portions ( i.e. Devorah), but as in the case of Bat Yiftach ( Jephtha's daughter)--she is not only silenced in the text itself, but the rabbis do not include her story as a Haftorah reading. Perhaps it was too troubling.

We re-examine ancient texts not only to find ourselves mirrored in them, making them relevant to our lives, but the feminist agenda examines them to heal the stories themselves, adding new endings, interpretations or *Midrashim*. This breathes new life into an old text.

The Biblical text, for the most part, is the story of the development of the Jewish people with an emphasis on the male lineage. The majority of the women mentioned in the text either do not have a name, story, or details about their actions. There are, however, a number of notable exceptions to this pattern, who have served as powerful role models for Jewish women through the ages. They must be examined again with a contemporary feminist perspective, in order to make them relevant to our times, and perhaps that we may discover standards of behavior that will serve our lives today.

Our tradition teaches that some of the women saved the Jewish nation when no man was able to do so, e.g.. Judith and Deborah. Miriam's dancing can be interpreted as a clear expression of women's spirituality. Women sang, wrote songs, prayers and ceremonies, i.e. Hannah and friends of Bat Yiftach. We can still learn from these women.

We read these texts for inspiration, insight and new understanding. They challenge us to use our imagination. The stories unlock our own mythic and psychological consciousness. In short they offer us wisdom.

### *ROSH HODESH*

*Rosh Hodesh* and women's *tefillah* groups are fertile ground for musical inspiration. *Rosh Hodesh* (new moon) groups, inspired by an article by Arlene Agus in Elizabeth Koltun's anthology, *The Jewish Woman* (Schoken, 1976), are flourishing in various cities in North America and Israel. The phenomenon of *Rosh Hodesh* groups is the renewal of a practice which Jewish women have observed throughout the ages. In some of the communities of Eastern Europe, some women took a half day holiday on *Rosh Hodesh* to study Torah. This incarnation of the experience of women meeting for *Rosh Hodesh* reflects the North American Feminist Movement.

Women's *tefillah* (prayer) groups, are the Orthodox feminists solution to the problem that women are not allowed to lead services for men. These groups usually meet once a month with only women, thereby allowing women to assume ritual leadership. Some Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist congregations are beginning to mark Rosh Hodesh with special women's programming or services. Rosh Hodesh is becoming the special, sacred time for women to gather and explore their spirituality.

### MUSIC AS AN EDUCATIONAL TOOL

Throughout the history of the Jewish people, music has been an essential component of our liturgy, celebrations and ritual. Our music has taken many forms from the *klezmer* of the communities of Eastern Europe, to classical Reform *chazzanut*, to Yemenite dance rhythm. Jews have always celebrated and lamented with their music. Learning to chant Torah or *Haftarah*, is frequently one of the *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* initiation requirements of Jewish adulthood. We sing *Z'mirot* on Shabbat to elevate our souls. Music is a central cultural mode of the Jewish people.

Music stimulates the receptive channels in the brain, allowing messages to penetrate. It soothes, causes joy, "opens the heart" relaxes and melts psychic barriers of resistance.

Singing is just plain fun. The use of music will, therefore, make lessons enjoyable.

These songs are meant to be sung with spirit. The stories of the women come alive with this creative approach. They inform and teach about Jewish women while the students are being entertained. The feminist message in this music will reach even those who would not necessarily be interested in it. It is hard to argue ideology when you are having a good time. In this case, this music is being used to raise controversial issues, enliven Torah study and stimulate discussion in an enjoyable manner.

## GOD LANGUAGE

There is a clear need for meaningful prayer in one's own language. Our tradition states that prayers should be translated so that we may know what we are saying. Today, English is being used more and more to express devotion. In addition, new prayers using feminist God language are being written to address the need for more meaningful expression.

The need for feminine God language is another impetus for Jewish women's music. Our female souls are yearning for the channels to express our emotional intensity in our relationship to the Divine and each other. Women are adding the prayer to the morning liturgy, "Thank you G-d for making me a woman" and beginning to honor, in a celebratory way, the spark of the Divine within each woman. This reflects the principle of the feminist movement that urges women to know and love their own bodies. We need our own words *and music* to express these concepts and others to enhance our spiritual experience.

## SHECHINAH

The reclamation of *Shechinah* plays an essential role in the development of the music. This name for God, *Shechinah*, is a traditional Jewish term meaning the "indwelling aspect of the Divine" and was traditionally understood to be feminine in nature. Besides the classical use of the term, *Shechinah* has also come to mean the images and metaphors, sometimes anthropomorphic, that symbolize the manifestation of female divine energy here on earth.

According to Rabbinic thought, the *Shechinah* was eternally present in the human realm to balance the transcendence of the deity. She is present when husbands and wives are in harmony, when people are visiting the sick, when Jews gather to study Torah, and when the

dying cross over to the other world.

With the destruction of the Temple, some *Midrashim* say that *Shechinah* went into exile along with the Jewish people. One of the blessings in the Amidah calls for the *Shechinah's* return to Jerusalem, symbolizing the return of the Jewish people to their homeland and the rebuilding of the Temple. The *Shechinah* will rest over the site of the Temple. Other *Midrashim* say that the *Shechinah* never left the Temple Mount.

The Medieval Kabbalists incorporated the concept of *Shechinah* into a central component of Jewish theology and philosophy. This term has been seized by Jewish feminists because of its interpretation as feminine and also because it is a traditional term. Jewish feminists do not want to abandon Judaism because of its patriarchal bias, but rather explore the female perspectives, images and symbols that were given to women and created by women.

Women are writing liturgical pieces and poetry about *Shechinah* and calling to a gentle, peaceful, yet powerful God. *Shechinah*, God's presence on earth, is seen by women as a symbol of the "mother earth energy" needed to heal our troubled planet. Therefore, *Shechinah* is being appealed to for protection, healing, strength and joy to transform the world.

## SUMMARY

Jewish women are now learning cantorial music and Torah chanting skills that were once forbidden. This new freedom allows women to be contributing partners in Jewish culture and ritual. This opening door has inspired women to use their talents to enrich our Jewish experience. The *Havurah* movement, which has encouraged egalitarian prayer, is a major supporting element in the development of the new music.

*Havurot, Rosh Hodesh and tefillah* groups are crucial to the development of the music. We have a place to sing! During the past three decades it has been a slow process, first to organize the groups, then to create the music, and finally to begin to produce a new and fruitful genre of Jewish feminist music.

We are alive, well and singing in North America and Israel. The spirit of the contemporary Jewish woman resonates from East to West through new music. We are beginning to be heard at conferences, *Rosh Hodesh* (new moon) gatherings and *minyanim* (prayer groups).

This project intends to (partially) fill the void in creative Jewish women's educational materials.

Enjoy!



## BY THE SHORES

By the shores, by the shores,  
Of the Red, Red Sea,  
By the shores of the Red, Red Sea;  
The light of day lit up the night  
The children, they were free.

**CHORUS:** *And Miriam took her timbrel out and all the women danced. (2X)*

***Va- te-kach Miriam ha-nivea et ha tof b'ya-da, va'taytzeh-na col ha-nashim ah-cha-re-ha.***

They danced, they danced  
Oh, how they danced  
They danced the night away  
Clapped their hands and stamped their feet  
With voices loud they praised.

They danced with joy  
They danced with grace  
They danced on nimble feet  
Kicked up their heels, threw back their heads  
Hypnotic with the beat.

CHORUS

They danced so hard, they danced so fast;  
They danced with movement strong  
Laughed and cried, brought out alive  
They danced until the dawn.

Some carrying child, some baking bread  
Weeping as they prayed  
But when they heard the music start  
They put their pain away.

CHORUS

Enticed to sing, drawn to move  
Mesmerized by such emotion  
The men saw us reach out our hands  
Stretching across the ocean.

As they watched, and they clapped, they began to sway  
Drawn to ride the wave  
and all our brothers began to dance  
They dance with us today!  
They danced, we dance  
*Shechinah* dance  
They danced the night away  
And all the people began to sing  
We're singing 'til this day!!

**FINAL CHORUS:** *And Miriam took her timbrel out and all the people danced. (2X)*

***Va- te-kach Miriam ha-nivea et ha tof b'ya-da, v'a'taytzeh-na col anashim ah-cha-re-ha.***

## BY THE SHORES - DISCUSSION GUIDE

Miriam is one of the leading role models for Jewish women in the Torah. She is primary for the simple reason that a number of different episodes are told about her. Miriam is followed from the

time she is a young girl until her death. She does not "disappear" the way other female figures are inclined to do in the Torah. She is referred to as a prophet and has her own talents and characteristics of leadership. The song, "By the Shores" was written depicting a certain episode in Miriam's life. It can be seen as a contemporary *Midrash*, (usually a story, but in this case a song) revealing a new perspective on a text.

1. What is the setting for this song? (Exodus 15:20)
2. What do you know about Miriam? What are some of the other stories about Miriam? (Her life in Egypt, her well, her leprosy and healing, etc.)
3. Why does the song refer to her as a "*Niveeah*"? (Prophetess)
4. What "children" does the song refer to?
5. What was the "Light of day" that is mentioned in the first verse?
6. What is a timbrel?
7. How/why do you think the women had timbrels in the desert (see *Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer* Ch. 42)?
8. What emotions does this song invoke? Why and how?
9. Close your eyes and imagine this scene. How is your image the same or different from the one portrayed in the song?
10. If you had just witnessed the drowning of the Egyptians in the sea, would your response be the same, i.e. to sing and dance, ? Why or why not? There is a *Midrash* (*Exodus Rabbah* 23:7) that tells that the angels started to sing and G-d silenced them, for He/She didn't want singing when His/Her creatures were drowning.)
11. *Shechinah* is one of the traditional Kabbalistic names of G-d indicating a feminine presence. Why do you think the term "*Shechinah*" is used in this context?
12. What does the line "They're singing 'til this day" mean?
13. Miriam has been used as one of the models for "Jewish women's spiritual expression." What do you think is meant by this, and how do you think this song alludes to that message?

## SHIFRA AND PUAH

It started out in Egypt  
Such a long, long time ago  
When women had the power

{Ex. 1:15ff.}

to tell of Pharaoh "NO!"  
Was the power of the right to birth  
Our heroes had the art  
Of saving the Hebrew children  
Defying Pharaoh's heart.

**CHORUS:**

*Shifra and Puah, sitting stride the birthing stool  
Shifra and Puah, bravely flouting Pharaoh's rule  
Singing and cooing the cause of disobedience  
Guaranteeing civil independence!*

Summoned once before the court  
Before the mighty king  
Pharaoh said "I want them dead,  
"I had a frightening dream.  
Kill all their male babies and  
Bury fast their bones  
For the Hebrews need a leader  
To take them to their home." CHORUS

The midwives returned  
To Pharaoh's court to say  
"Pharaoh, we've tried  
But these women have their ways,  
Of birthing their children  
Fast and in the fields  
For with *Shechinah's* helping hand  
To you they'll never yield." CHORUS

## SHIFRA AND PUAH - DISCUSSION GUIDE

In the first chapter of the Biblical book of Exodus, the scene is set for the story of the flight from Egypt. A Pharaoh begins to rule in Egypt, he does not know the generation of Joseph and he begins to oppress the children of Israel. First he enslaves them, but they continue to multiply. Then Pharaoh calls the Hebrew midwives to appear before him, and demands that they kill the male children of the Israelites. The midwives refuse his request claiming that the Hebrew women are lively and give birth before they even reach them. This is one of the earliest known acts of civil disobedience.

1. What is your image of a birthing stool, and why do you think Shifra and Puah were sitting on it?
2. "*Mashber*" is the Biblical term for birthing stool. In modern Hebrew, it also means "crisis". In what way, if any, do you draw a connection between the two meanings?
3. The names "Shifra" and "Puah" have been roughly translated as "singing and cooing"; (Sota 11b; Rashi on Ex. 1:15)? Why do you think that this is appropriate for their profession?
4. The midwives are often referred to as the first example of civil disobedience, as the last two lines of the chorus implies. Define civil disobedience and give contemporary examples.
5. There is great discussion among the commentators of the Torah as to whether the midwives were Hebrew midwives or Egyptian midwives for the Hebrews. Discuss both perspectives, giving a possible rationale for each view. What would be the significance of either choice?
6. In effect, the midwives told Pharaoh a half truth by saying that the women gave birth before they arrived to help. Do you think that this was the right approach? What other choices did the midwives have? What would you have done?
7. Using your imagination, describe the midwives and invent a dialogue between them when Pharaoh orders them to kill all the male babies.
8. Why is the term "*Shechinah*", divine feminine presence of God, appropriate for this song?
9. When is a good time to sing this song?
10. The story of the midwives ends with a strange sentence. (Exodus 1:20) "G-d was good to the midwives". The people multiplied and grew numerous, because the midwives feared G-d. *He built houses for them.*" Some commentators wonder how G-d built houses. Another commentator thinks that the houses are prisons that Pharaoh built because the midwives disobeyed him. What are your ideas for what happened to the midwives after this incident?

## BATYA

Long ago in Pharaoh's time a princess felt alone  
Longing and praying for a child to call her own  
One day by the riverside - while washing her hair  
Looking down she saw - a basket floating there.

**CHORUS:**

*She drew him from the water, water, water  
She drew him from the Nile  
Today she sits in Paradise underneath God's smile*

Mother and sister watched as the princess held him near  
Breathing sighs of relief, fighting back their tears  
Batya now knew her task, she must stand up to the hate  
Confront her own father, and she must not hesitate.

CHORUS

As the princess looked across the banks at the women standing by  
Knowing of their sacrifice, the child she held might die  
Woman to woman they gazed, eyes locked in embrace  
Not a word was spoken, yet a covenant was made.

The silent bond of sisterhood is stronger than the chains  
For arms linked through the ages, soothe the knots of pain  
To nurse each others children, and listen with a willing ear  
Creates a legacy of love, defiant in the face of fear.<sup>13</sup>

CHORUS

When it came her time to leave the earth  
Batya did not die  
Because of her goodness, she entered Paradise alive  
They say she teaches Torah to the women in the heavenly scene  
And as a stranger is welcomed, she bestows the blessing.

CHORUS

Batya, or Bithia, was the daughter of an Egyptian Pharaoh. Her story appears in Exodus 2:5ff, where she goes to the river to wash. Her father has issued a decree to kill all Hebrew babies, yet her actions contradict his. She is unnamed yet she does such an overwhelming gesture of kindness, i.e. saving the baby, that the rabbis felt compelled to give her a name...Batya- meaning "daughter of God". By this act of kindness she becomes Divine.

1. What kind of risk was in store for Batya in saving the baby?
2. Pharaoh was seen as a god in ancient Egypt, by giving her the name "Batya" daughter of God, what were the rabbis trying to do?
3. What is the general message this song is trying to deliver regarding women and power?
4. Batya is remembered for "welcoming the stranger". Think of instances in your life when you felt welcomed...and as well the times when you did the welcoming.
5. Batya gives the baby first to Miriam and then also to Yocheved to be a wet nurse. The practice of "wet nursing", nursing someone else baby, was a common practice in ancient times. It has mostly died out today in western countries. Imagine the relationship the wet nurse would have with the baby. Imagine the relationship a wet nurse would have with the natural mother. What is different about motherhood today.
6. What is the "covenant" alluded to in this song ( verse 3)?
7. According to a *midrash*, Batya does not die--she enters Paradise alive. (Legends of the Jews, Ginzberg vol 2 p. 271) The only other person to do this in Jewish tradition was Elijah the prophet. Our afterlife tradition teaches that Batya teaches Torah to the women in heaven. What do you think of this vision? What was so righteous about her actions?

{Judges 11:1-40}

In the days of war  
when the judges judged,  
there was no king  
and every man did as he pleased.  
A child was born  
A harlot's son was he  
Driven from his home  
Cast out from his family.  
Yiftach, the Giladi, was a valiant warrior  
Yiftach, the Giladi, was soon to be much sorrier.

**CHORUS:**

*We weep our bitter tears for our sisters who have no names,  
Restore their histories, or our fate will be the same.*

He was begged to lead  
against the Ammonites,  
But instead of peace  
his armies were forced to fight.  
Then he vowed his vow  
to his G-d on high,  
"To sacrifice --  
the first to leave my house will die."  
The daughter of Yiftach, she was a graceful dancer,  
Yiftach the Giladi, will soon be called to answer.

CHORUS

She ran and greeted him  
with the sound of timbrels  
She was the only one  
she hadn't any siblings.  
He tore his clothes and wept  
but blamed the innocent one.  
For the oath he swore  
that couldn't be undone.  
*Bat* Yiftach replied, "Do what you must do!"  
Then Yiftach replied, "If I only knew!"

CHORUS

"Grant me one request,  
let me be free  
for two months to mourn  
my virginity."  
She went away to weep  
with her women friends  
They were her comfort  
until the bitter end.  
The daughter of Yiftach, she never knew a man,  
*Bat* Yiftach was mourned throughout the land.

CHORUS

**cont'd**

No, we'll never know  
if the fires did burn

Or did he lock her up?  
 What lessons did we learn?  
 That the daughters  
 of Israel  
 Leave home every year  
 to mourn lament and wail.  
*Bat Yiftach*, she loved to sing and dance.  
*Bat Yiftach*, she never had a chance!

CHORUS

## BAT YIFTACH - DISCUSSION GUIDE

Judges 11:29-40 is one of the more morally troublesome texts in the *Torah*. It is the story about the nameless daughter of Yiftach, who is offered as a sacrifice to YHVH. Yiftach was born to an unnamed harlot. His half-brothers chased him from his home in order to purify their lineage. Later they invited him back to help conquer the Ammonites. He agreed and when his efforts to make peace failed, he went to war. He vowed to sacrifice whatever came out of his doorway when he returned. He won the battle, and upon returning home, his only daughter greeted him with music and dance. Upon the realization of what her father had done, she asked for some time to lament her virginity with her women friends.

1. This text raises grave questions regarding the practice of human sacrifice. Compare this story with the "Akedah," (binding of Isaac, Genesis 22:9-12) What similarities and differences do you find?
2. This woman, as well as countless others in the Torah, has no name. What message is given by this omission? Why in this case do you think she was not named?
3. *Yiftach's* mother was a harlot and his daughter, a virgin. What significance, if any do you attach to this?
4. The oath that *Yiftach* swore to G-d, he felt, could not be annulled. In what cases do we know of oaths being annulled? (*Heter N'darim* annulment of oaths; *Mishnah Hagigah* Ch 1:8; *Bamidbar Matot*.)
5. There are some commentators who think that Yiftach knew the first thing that would come out of his house could be his daughter or a slave. Why do you think he was motivated to utter this oath?
6. There is another *Midrash* (*Legends of the Jews*, vol 4, p.46) that tells us that *Yiftach* did have a way out. He could have gone to the High Priest at the time, Phinehas, to annul his oath. He refused to go because of his pride and Phinehas refused to go to him. What do you think of their behavior, given that a young woman was sacrificed because of this?
7. *Bat Yiftach* asks for a strange request, to lament her virginity. What do you think this means?
8. The text states that the daughters of Israel go to lament for *Bat Yiftach* every year. Close your eyes and imagine...where do they go? When do they go? What are they doing?
9. There is a disagreement among the commentators as to whether or not *Bat Yiftach* was sacrificed as a burnt offering. Some say she was locked away to do "service to G-d". (Judges 11: *Ralbag* on verse 31, *Metzudat David* on verse 39) What do you think "service to G-d" could mean in this case?
10. There have been other examples of women through the ages, i.e. Judith, Hanna Rachel of Ludomir, whose status as single, divorced, celibate or widowed women, has enabled them to do "service to G-d." In some cases it has seemed that being a powerful woman is in conflict with being married and



having a family. However, for men in the Jewish community, it was expected that they be married. The commandment is on the man to "be fruitful and multiply." Rabbis must be married, as compared with priests who must remain celibate. Do you think the image of Jewish women as celibate has enhanced their spiritual nature? Why or why not? What do you think is the origin of this emphasis?

11. Compare this story with the story of Tamar and Yehuda. (Genesis 38:1-30) What similarities and differences do you find?
12. What are the images of Biblical women gleaned from this text?
13. In what ways do you think we should retell and commemorate this story? Why?

## JUDITH

It happened in the eighteenth year of his reign  
Nebuchadnezzar of Assyrians  
He sent his general, Holofernes  
To bring the Jews down to their knees.  
Charging with their chariots from Nineveh  
Soldiers with their horses on the long way  
They raped, pillaged, destroyed the towns  
Riding to burn Jerusalem down.

### **CHORUS:**

Hey, ho Where you going Judith?  
Hey, ho where you going to?  
You're dressed to kill to meet the enemy  
And he'll be dead if he's messing with you!

The Jews, they prayed and fasted through the night  
with ashes on their heads  
and the enemy in sight  
Surrounded by army, the water jugs were dry  
Crying to their God, "We're not prepared to die!"

CHORUS

Now a woman arose with a plan to save the day  
Beseeching her people, "Join me now and pray!"  
"For tomorrow I go to turn the evil tide  
We can not lose with our God on our side!"  
So she dressed with jewels and a turban on her hair  
Perfumed, anointed, she took her food for fare.  
The gates were opened, she marched to set them free  
This woman changed the course of our Jewish destiny.

CHORUS

She knelt before him, charmed him with her smile  
Saying, "Listen to me, General, I'll make it worth your while.  
I'll tell you when they're helpless, the Jews, your enemy."  
He fell for her beauty and her subtle trickery.  
Three days she prayed to the One up above,  
Crying, "Heaven, help me! Guard me with your love."  
When he tried to seduce her  
She cut off his head  
A triumph for Israel, Holofernes was dead.

CHORUS

## JUDITH- DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Book of Judith is found in the Apocryphal literature of the Jews. It was written around the

year 100 B.C.E. The story of Judith is of a heroine. This lone woman takes it upon her shoulders to save the Jewish people. She is a model of piety, praying before every action. Her prayer is one of only a few examples of Biblical women composing songs to glorify God. (Others include Deborah, Hannah, and Miriam.) As a remembrance of Judith's action, one of the *Minhagim* for *Hanukah* is that women do not work while the *Hanukah* lights are lit. Read the Book of Judith, or a summary of the book, for background, in order to answer the following questions.

1. In the apocryphal Book of Judith, Nebuchadnezzar is cast as the king of Assyrians. Historically, he was the King of Babylon, and Nineveh was not his capital city. Why do you think the author took this liberty?
2. In the beginning of the Book of Judith, Nebuchadnezzar of the Assyrians and his territory are besieged by Arphaxad of Medes. Nebuchadnezzar sends messages to all the inhabitants of Persia, Egypt, Lebanon, and all the way to Ethiopia, including Jerusalem, to help him. They ignore his appeals, and he swears his revenge on them. After he slays Arphaxad, he turns his attention to conquering the "whole world" which had disregarded his pleas. He sends Holofernes, his general, with orders to conquer all that resisted Nebuchadnezzar's rule, and to subdue the inhabitants. Holofernes demolishes the local shrines, cuts down the sacred trees, and forces the people to worship Nebuchadnezzar as a god. What do you think his response would be to the Jews he finds?
3. What did Jerusalem symbolize to the Jews during this period? (They had only returned from captivity a short time before this.)
4. Why did the Jews put ashes on their heads? (4:11)
5. In what other place or places is fasting mentioned in our tradition?
6. In the story of Judith, the Assyrians laid siege to the Jewish town and cut off their water supply as a tactic to force the Jews to surrender. Name other incidents where denying water was used as a method for conquest. What do you think about it?
7. The Book of Judith goes to great length to describe the clothes Judith wore and her beauty. What other Jewish women are referred to as beauties? In what ways was/is this an asset or a liability?
8. The book also takes care to describe Judith as a very pious widow. What subtle messages about the sexuality of women are imparted here?
9. Why did she take her own "food for fare"?
10. Why would Judith kneel before an enemy?
11. Imagine yourself as Judith. Would you have the courage for this strategy? What other scenarios would you have planned?
12. Have you ever been in a situation that has required great faith? Describe how you felt.

## DEVORAH

Dwelling underneath the palm  
Devorah sat so wise and calm  
Judging the children of Israel;

{Judges 4:4ff.}

They came from far and wide  
To sit by her side  
On the road from Ramah to Bethel.

**CHORUS:**

*Where she said,  
"I am the mother of Israel  
Hear Ye Children of Israel  
Awake! Awake! Awake!"*

Ruled by *Yavin*  
A mighty and sinister king  
For the Jews did evil in the land;  
They bowed to *Baalim*  
When it should have been *Elohim*  
Until Devorah issued her command.

CHORUS

Sisera, captain of the guard  
Oppressed the Jews so hard  
They cried out for their salvation;  
Devorah called Barak  
Said, "We must attack  
See, I've had a revelation!"  
"For today I prophesy  
Sisera must die  
By the hands of the woman, Yael;  
She'll feed him milk to drink  
He'll fall into a sleep  
His plans for domination will fail." CHORUS

So today we praise  
The glory of G-d be raised  
We dance and sing to the One  
Who guides us with Her might  
Who brings us to the light  
Strong and bright like the sun. CHORUS

## DEVORAH - DISCUSSION GUIDE

The period of the Judges in Israelite history occurred after the death of Joshua. It was an unstable time, as the children of Israel were constantly repenting and sinning against YHVH. They followed other gods, i.e. idol worship, and the judges came to represent the moral conscience of the nation. The Book of Judges includes the stories of a number of heroes that arose to turn the

Israelites back to their God. Deborah, a woman is one of the first judges mentioned and she stands out throughout all Jewish history as one of the true great women leaders of Israel. Read Judges Chapter 4 and 5 as background to this song.

1. Deborah sat "underneath the palm," where Israelites would come to have their disputes settled. Why do you think she sat there? Use your imagination and describe the setting.
2. What was so terrible about the Israelites worshipping the local gods?
3. Deborah is unusual in her attributes. First of all, she is called a prophetess; then, she leads the troops to battle, and then, she sings an epic tribute to G-d. Give other examples in our history of women who have shown some of these characteristics.
4. Why do you think Deborah was called a prophetess?
5. Another woman, Yael, is also mentioned in this story. ( Judges 5:24) She gives Sisera, the general of Yavin's army, milk to eat and he falls into a sleep. Some sources say she even seduces him. She then drives a tent peg through his head. What are the lessons that this story teaches us?
6. At the end of Deborah's heroic battle, she sings a song, as Miriam did after the crossing of the Red Sea. According to some Halakhic opinions the voice of a woman (*Kol Ishah*) is not to be heard by men. It is comparable to revealing her nakedness and causes sexual arousal. How do you explain that both Deborah and Miriam sang to the mixed community? It seems that some Biblical women's behavior was not according to these halachic guidelines. How do you explain the disparity?
7. Why do think that this particular Biblical song was preserved?
8. Deborah's actions contradict the traditional image of women as homemakers and mothers in the Jewish family. How do you explain this contradiction?
9. How do you feel about the violence found in these stories?
10. Deborah claims to be the "Mother of Israel". What do you think she means by this statement?
11. Close your eyes and imagine that you are one of the judges of Israel. What are some of the issues that are brought before you? How would you respond if you were called to battle? What characteristics of leadership do you think were necessary in order to be a judge?

## WHO WERE THE WOMEN?

Who were the women  
and where were their voices?  
What were they doing  
and what were their choices?  
Who were the women  
and what were they saying?  
When were they singing  
and why are we praying?

Dina! Dina! Dina went out to the land, to the land, {Gen. 34:1}  
Dina! Dina! She went out to meet the women  
of the land, of the land.  
She was raped by the hand of Shechem, Shechem  
She was never heard from again, again;  
She was never heard from again.

Hulda! Hulda! A prophetess of Josiah, {2 Kings 22:14}  
Hulda! Hulda! Proclaimed the law for Judah.  
To her we owe Deuteronomy;  
The story of our people, our history  
She was never heard from again, again  
Not a word from her again.

Rahav! Rahav! A harlot of old Jericho, {Joshua 2:3}  
Rahav! Rahav! Hid Joshua's spies so the king wouldn't know.  
She gave them room and she gave them board,  
Binding the sign of a scarlet cord  
She was never heard from again, again  
Not a word from her again.

Daughters! Daughters! Daughters of Tzelophehad, {Numbers 36:6}  
Daughters! Daughters! Wanted the land for their own blood;  
Married among the tribal brothers  
Women of inheritance unlike the others  
They were never heard from again, again  
Not a word from them again.

Yael! Yael! Put her hand to the tent spike, {Judges 5:24}  
Yael! Yael! Struck Sisera with all her might.  
She saved the Jews with bravery  
Sporting the head of the enemy.  
She was never heard from again, again,  
Not a word from her again.

Women! Women! We've got the voices let's join hands  
Sisters! Sisters! We know our choices lets take a stand.  
Our Biblical mothers were strong and bold  
Let's learn their stories they must be told  
They want to be heard from again, again.  
They will be heard from again!

## WHO WERE THE WOMEN? - DISCUSSION GUIDE

There are a number of Biblical women who are only mentioned once in the Torah, perhaps for a line or two, and then at no other time. Sometimes they have performed a heroic deed, at other times, they are the mothers of a king or someone else who becomes famous. There is usually a significance in the naming of characters found in the Torah. (There are a number of unnamed characters found throughout the *Tanach*.) The following song contains five different verses of women who are mentioned in the *Tanach* only once or are only referred to in a couple of sentences. This songs attempt to illuminate their stories more fully.

1. In what ways does the first verse of the song serve as an introduction?

2. Dina is the first character mentioned in this song. Her story can be found in Genesis 34:1-31. She is the only daughter of Jacob that is mentioned in the text. Read her story as preparation for the following questions:
  - a) Why do you think Dina went to see the women of the land?
  - b) After Shechem rapes her, he asks for his father to arrange for her hand in marriage. Dina is silent throughout this exchange. What do you think she is thinking?
  - c) After Shechem and his townspeople circumcise themselves in order to meet the standards to intermarry with the Hebrews, Dina's brothers kill them anyway. What is your reaction to this piece of the story?
  - d) From this point on, Dina is only mentioned in the Torah one more time to define her lineage. Why do you think she is never mentioned again?
  - e) How are women treated in this story and what image(s) does it leave you with?
  
3. Hulda is mentioned in 2 Kings 22:14. We know that she was one of the seven prophetesses of Israel. (The others are: Sarah, Miriam, Avigael, Esther, Devorah, and Noadia.) The "Book of the Law" is found in the Temple by one of the priests and read before King Josiah. He tears his garments and sends the priests to read the book before Hulda. Read her few lines of story in order to answer the following questions.
  - a) When prophets wanted to spread their message so that a large number of people would hear them, they usually stood outside the gates of the city to reach those coming in and out. Two of the gates of the Temple Mount are named the "Hulda Gates". Why do you think they might have been named so?
  - b) Given such prominence in the court of King Josiah, why do you think she was given so few lines of a story?
  - c) In what way do her words convey the fact that she was a prophetess?
  
4. Rahav's story is found in Joshua 2:3. Rahav was a harlot, yet she saved the spies of Israel.
  - a) What does this say about Rahav's character?
  - b) What do you think Rahav's motives were for hiding the spies?
  - c) What risk did she run by hiding the spies?
  - d) Give other examples from our history where Jews had to be hidden.
  - e) In what cases, if you were asked to hide someone, would you?
  
5. The story of the Daughters of Tzelophehad is found in Numbers 36:1-12. This is the first case in our history of women being able to inherit land, a right that is upheld unto this day.
  - a) Do you think that this is such an important issue. Why or why not? Why was it so important in the Bible?
  - b) Imagine yourself as one of these women about to lose your inheritance. What would you do?
  - c) In many places in the Torah, the women's names aren't mentioned. Why do you think the names of the Daughters (Mahlah, Tirzah, Holgah, Milcah, Noah) are given?
  
6. Yael's story is in Judges 4:17. She kills Sisera, the commander of Yavin's mighty army, that seeks to

conquer the Jews.

- a) Do you think that this is a heroic deed? Why or why not?
  - b) Why do you think she is only allotted six sentences in the Tanach and never referred to again in the text?
  - c) What other examples of a woman's heroism are found in our Jewish history?
  - d) The way in which Yael kills Sisera is extremely violent. She puts a spike through his head while he is sleeping. In your opinion, is a violent means ever necessary to justify an end? If so, when is this justified in your opinion?
7. In what ways do we "have our voices" and are we "out in the land" today?
8. Consider the following additional questions:
- a) Why do you think the author uses the words "voices" and "heard" repeatedly?
  - b) What is the message and how does it relate to our Jewish tradition?
  - c) In what way is "using our voices" an important concept?
9. In your words, what is the message of the final verse of the song?

## RIVKA

Rivka- bride to be of Yitzchak

Watered a thousand camels at the well

When asked to leave she said, "I'm going"

Rivka, you leave us the mystery of the veil.

### **CHORUS:**

*And Rivka said three times;*

*"Listen to my voice, **Sh'ma b'Koli***

*Listen, listen, listen*

*Listen to my voice, **Sh'ma b'Koli**"*

Rivka- sought an oracle for bearing children

G-d answered with a sign of twins inside her well.

Rivka- mastermind of subversion

Dressed the youngest as the oldest so Yitzchak couldn't tell.

CHORUS



Rivka- knew the legacy of her bloodline  
She claimed her rights as a mother in Israel  
Rivka- seized the power of the moment  
All she touches falls under her spell.

CHORUS

## RIVKA - DISCUSSION GUIDE

Rivka, Rebecca, one of the four matriarchs - wife of Isaac, mother to Jacob and Esau. Her story appears in Genesis 24:1 and 27:9. Her life was full of adventure. She leaves her family, restores the light in Sara's tent, is passed off as sister/bride to Avimelech, and she finesses the youngest son to receive the birthright blessing. Rebecca is a powerful character, using her commanding voice.

1. We first meet Rivka when Eleazar asks her for a drink of water. She offers to water his camels. (Gen 24:13-20) A *Midrash* states that she watered 1000 of his camels! What kind of picture does that *Midrash* paint of Rivka?
2. When Eleazar negotiates with Rivka's family for her as a bride for Isaac, they delay her departure. (Gen. 24:59) However, they turn to ask her opinion and she says, "I will go." What does this say about her character?
3. When Rivka sees Isaac (24:65) for the first time she takes her veil and covers herself. From this we learn about the Jewish *bedeken* ritual of veiling a bride. Why do you think she does this?
4. In Genesis 25:23, Rivka goes to inquire of G-d about the turmoil she feels happening in her womb. She seeks an oracle for the future. G-d speaks directly with her. It was unusual for God to speak directly to a woman. How do you think she asked the question? Where does she ask it? Why did G-d answer? How did G-d answer?
5. Rivka is the mastermind behind the plan to disguise Yaakov when he inherits the blessing from Isaac. (Gen 27:90) What do you make of her actions? Was she right to be deceitful?
6. Rivka says 3 times "listen to my voice" (Gen 27:8, 27:13, 27:43). Why did she have to say this?
7. In Chapter 26, Rivka, like Sarah, is passed off as a sister to Avimelech, king of the Philistines. She doesn't complain or comment at all. What do you think she is feeling?
8. Rivka doesn't say another word after Jacob leaves her for Haran. We lose her story. How does her life end? How does she deal with the fact that her favorite son leaves and she is left with Esau?
9. The song alludes to "falling under her spell". What spell did she use? Who did she influence?

When we were young, we were often told  
Having children was the goal.  
"Find yourself a man and  
A family will be planned"  
Fantasies that won't release their hold;  
Be we married or divorced  
Single, widowed, gay, of course--  
Internal longings to fill an empty hole.

**CHORUS:***Oh, Holy One Above!*  
*Fill my womb with your love*  
*Complete my dreams of laughing children,*  
**Tift'chi Rachmi!**  
**Moshivi Akeret, Habayit, Em Habanim S'maycha, Halleluya!**

Sarah waited for her children ninety years {Gen.17:18}  
Stoically choking back the tears.  
Or did she choose to lead?  
Hoping every month to bleed  
The light within her tent glowing strong;  
Each cycle that we wait  
We wrestle with our fate  
Wondering if something's going wrong.

CHORUS

Mother Rachel cried her painful words {Gen. 30:1}  
Yaakov's heart, was disturbed.  
"Oh, give me a child  
Or I will surely die,  
I need to see my flesh and bones!"  
"Am I in G-d's place?  
It's your anger you must face!"  
Trust your destiny and you'll not be alone.

CHORUS

Hannah, the wife of Elkanah {I Sam. 1}  
Was taunted by her rival, P'nina.  
Yet with prayer she was soothed  
Silently she moved  
To fill a void so deep and wide;  
For our own tribulation  
May yet be jubulation  
Finding courage, hope and faith way down inside.

CHORUS

We ask these questions of ourselves  
Seeking answers that may help.  
For we don't always understand  
Why things don't work as planned  
Like others, we must search for other roles;  
More than mother, more than wife  
Putting richness in our life  
Laughing, loving, helping others be our goals.

CHORUS

## TIFT'CHI RACHMI - DISCUSSION GUIDE

Several Biblical characters were plagued by infertility. It is a recurring theme affecting several of

the Matriarchs - Sarah, Rivka, Rachel- as well as Hannah. This song weaves a contemporary perspective with the ancient stories.

1. What is your general reaction to this song and what other issues does it raise for you?
2. What does the phrase "fantasies that won't release their hold" mean to you?
3. Do you know any women who are trying to conceive a child? Are you relating to them differently? If so how?
4. The line, "*Moshivi Akeret, Habayit.....*" is from the *Hallel* prayers. It is translated "He transforms the barren wife into a glad mother of children." Given the incidence of infertility today, how can we sing this line with clear consciences?
5. Which image of Sarah do you think is accurate: a woman who stoically choked back her tears for ninety years, or a woman who chose her fate knowing she must have her time free for leadership?(See Savina Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess*) Why?
6. There is a medieval commentary about Yaakov's angry response to Rachel when she says she will die if he doesn't give her a child. The commentator states that Yaakov got so angry because he knew that Rachel had other talents in life besides bearing children. He wanted to remind her of them. What image of women does this portray?
7. Another *Midrash* (*Genesis Rabbah* 72:6) states that Leah knew that she was going to give birth to another boy. She had a prophetic revelation as to how many boys would be born to Jacob. Then she prayed for the child in her womb to turn from a boy to a girl in order for Rachel to have the merit of birthing another boy. What is your experience of other women's prayers on another's behalf? With today's technology it is possible to know the sex of the child in advance. How do you feel about this?
8. Hannah was taunted by P'nina for being barren. Do you think women without children are "taunted" today? Why or why not, and in what way?
9. In your experience, in what way does prayer soothe?
10. What is this song trying to say about fate and destiny?

## RITZPAH

Ritzpah was the concubine of old King Saul {2 Sam. 3:7}  
The legend of her beauty, she stunned one and all;

They say that she was the power behind the throne  
Yet many words are missing, her deeds won't be known.

**CHORUS:**

*She was on the ground,  
But she was not down  
Her sons were bound  
But she was not down  
Such pain profound  
But she was not down  
Ritzpah! Eyes burning hot like coals.*

After King Saul died, his son desired her  
Yet she turned for comfort to General Abner;  
Yes, many men they wanted to possess her soul  
But Ritzpah was fiery, dangerous to hold.

CHORUS

Then came a famine in the reign of David {2 Sam. 21:1}  
So he went before the Lord to inquire and to plead;  
T'was the sins of Saul on the Gibeonites  
So the sons of Ritzpah--doomed to death on that night.

They were hung on the hill, before the harvest began  
Left to rot and dangle in the wind;  
Ritzpah spread her sackcloth upon the rock  
Guarding those bodies, till the water dropped.

{2 Sam. 21:8}

CHORUS

She shielded them from the buzzards that flew by day  
Awake through the night to scare wild beasts away;  
David heard of her kindness and gathered the bones  
Claiming Ritzpah for concubine, her final home.

CHORUS

## RITZPAH - DISCUSSION GUIDE

Ritzpah is mentioned in two places in the Second Book of Samuel. She is said to be daughter of Aiah, a concubine of King Saul and King David. She is also noted for the deed of protecting the bodies of her sons from the wild beasts; and from her we learn how to honor the dead.

1. *Ritzpah* in modern Hebrew means "floor". It is also used in Biblical Hebrew to mean "burning coal". Given what you know about this woman, which interpretation is more appropriate?
2. What deeds of kindness do you think we learn from this woman?
3. Ritzpah was the concubine of King David and King Saul. What do you know about the status of concubines? What rights or power, if any, did they have? Could Ritzpah really have been the power behind the throne?
4. David went to inquire before the Lord as to why there was a famine in the land. The answer he received was that the sins of Saul towards the Gibeonites caused the famine. So David goes to the Gibeonites to ask what price he should pay in order that they bless his kingdom. They demand that the descendants of Saul should die. David agrees and surrenders all of Saul's male descendants, except the son of Jonathan. It was very convenient for King David to agree that the descendants of Saul would be slain. This would insure that there would be no more challenge to his kingdom. Do you think King David's motives were also political? Why did he agree to spare Jonathan's son?
5. How did she feel after David claimed her for concubine, given that he had had her sons killed? (Yerushalmi Kiddushin 4, 65C; Ber. Rabbah 8:4)
6. What are the traditional images of Eshet Chayil/Woman of Valor? Do you think that they applied to Ritzpah? Why or why not?
7. Ritzpah did the "ultimate mitzvah" of burying the dead. Why do you think that this is seen as the most important mitzvah?

## TAMAR

She was the wife of Judah's first born  
 The second one as well--  
     She was promised the third  
     But she never heard a word  
 That's why Tamar rebelled, Yeah!  
 That's why Tamar rebelled.

**CHORUS:**

*Tamar connived, Tamar survived, Tamar she did defy!  
She took aim, felt no shame, of having Judah's child.*

She stood by the road as Judah went by  
Widow's clothes no more  
Covered by a veil  
So he couldn't tell

Judah thought she was a whore, yeah!  
Judah thought she was a whore! CHORUS

But she was a smart lass and she covered her (ass)  
Takin' him to pledge  
Then she disappeared  
and she had no fear  
This woman had the edge, yeah!  
This woman had the edge.

Then, she had a baby kickin' inside her belly  
A baby kickin' inside  
She was almost burned  
She almost died  
They thought Tamar had lied, yeah!  
They thought Tamar had lied! CHORUS

Then they dragged her out to stand for trial  
Accused of harlotry  
But she had the last laugh  
For his ring and staff  
Were there for all to see, yeah!  
Were there for all to see! CHORUS

## TAMAR - DISCUSSION GUIDE

Tamar's story appears in Genesis 38. Tamar is betrothed and married to Judah's eldest son, Onan. When he dies it becomes the responsibility of his younger brother to marry her according to Israelite law. However, upon his death, Judah is reluctant to marry off his third son and sends Tamar back to her family's house. Tamar takes matters into her own hands, seducing her father-in-law and securing an heir for the family.

1. The practice of Levirate marriage consists of a man being required to marry the widows of their dead brothers. (For a more detailed description see the book of Ruth.) This practice has been discontinued.

Whom did it benefit? What was its purpose? What were the pros and cons of such a situation?

2. Tamar went to extremes according to our modern perspective. To claim her right to birth children, she seduces her father-in-law. What other options may have been open to her? In your opinion did she do the right thing?
3. What was the significance of Judah's ring and staff?
4. When Judah finds out that Tamar was pregnant, he calls out, "Bring her out and burn her!" (G.38:24) How do you react to this decree? Did the punishment fit the crime?
5. When Judah finds out that the child was his, he exclaims, "She is more righteous than I am!" Can you explain his reaction? Was she more righteous? In what way?
6. Compare this story to the story of the Daughter of Yiftach (Judges 11), in which the text alludes that she is actually offered as sacrifice. What do these stories demonstrate as to the status of women in Biblical times?
7. Tamar is called both a "zonah" (common whore) and a "kedesha" (cultic prostitute) in the text. What do you think are the differences? Similarities?
8. Can you think of an incident in your life where you had to be devious to achieve your goals?
9. Do you think Judah was really fooled by Tamar's disguise?
10. Tamar gives birth to twins, Peretz and Zerach (38:39-30). A red thread is tied around Peretz to determine that he is the oldest. He is supposed to be the ancestor of King David, the greatest Israelite king from whose line the Messiah will come. How do you feel about the fact that from an act of seduction, the Messiah will come?
11. The red thread is also, according to *midrash*, the same red thread that Rahav the harlot of Jericho uses to let Joshua know that her house is hers and he should not attack. Given these two examples of righteous prostitution should we reexamine our prejudices toward harlotry?
12. Prostitutes dwell on the margins of society, yet prostitution has been a stable profession since biblical times. Why would a woman choose this as her profession?

## TZLOPHANIT AND THE ANGEL

### **CHORUS:**

*I said, "The wife of Manoah heard an angel!"*

*I said, "Tzlophanit harkened to the call."*

She was walking in the field, minding her own business  
When an angel did appear, calling her to witness  
Saying to her very clear, "A son will be born this year."

CHORUS

She ran into the house, looking for Manoah;  
He said, "What's this all about?" she said, "I've got something to show ya."



He said, "I don't believe what I hear, there are no angels, dear."  
"Yes, oh, yes, there are, for this is what he told me,  
'Don't drink any wine, or eat foods unclean,  
Don't put a razor to his head, it'll bring about his death.'" CHORUS

They ran back to the field, Manoah oh, so shocked  
For sitting there quite calmly, an angel on a rock  
Manoah said, "My, oh, my, I think we're gonna die." Chorus

They asked the angel's name, with an offering to eat  
But he rose into the flames, ascending through the heat;  
Manoah was quite alarmed, Tzlophanit knew he wouldn't harm.  
She was strong and brave, not at all afraid,  
She knew that they'd been blessed, by the heavenly guest,  
While Manoah was a little dense, Tzlophanit had common sense. CHORUS

## TZLOPHANIT- DISCUSSION GUIDE

The story of Tzlophanit is found in Judges 13. An angel visits an unnamed woman, the wife of Manoah. The angel tells her that she will bear a son, and that she must be very careful regarding what he must eat and drink, and that he should not cut his hair. His hair will be his source of strength. This son grows up to be the famous Samson, who is betrayed by his beloved, Delilah, a Philistine. Tzlophanit is not mentioned in the text, yet the rabbis give her the name Tzlophanit, a derivative of “*tzei*” which means shadow.

1. Why do you think she was given the name Tzlophanit, derived from “shadow”?
2. An angel visits earth and makes a birth announcement. Where else do angels make birth

announcements in Torah? (i.e., Isaac) What other angels do you know about from Torah? (Jacob's wrestle, to guard the garden of Eden, in S'dom and G'morrah, Balaam's' donkey, Gideon, etc.)

3. What are your beliefs about angels?
4. When the angel describes what her son can and can not do, he is describing the behavior of a *Nazir*. A *Nazir* was a holy man in ancient Israel, who couldn't cut his hair, had to eat and drink strictly. This practice died out, however what reminds you of a *Nazir* today?
5. How do you explain the different reactions of Manoah and Tzlophanit to the angel ?

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<p>Additional Sources:</p>
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<p>Torah: Exodus: 2:1-10; 15: 20-21; Numbers 12:1-16</p>
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<p>L. Ginzberg, <u>Legends of the Jews</u>. Vol. II , pp. 36, 50-54, 258-262; 307-309,</p>
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Pharoah had a frightening dream (Source?)

#### Sources for Bat Yiftach

<p>Additional Sources:</p>
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<p>For further discussion of this text see: Phyllis Trible, <u>Texts of Terror, Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives</u>, Fortress Press, 1984.</p>
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