BABEL AND BETHEL: LADDERS OF PUNISHMENT AND REWARD

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INTRODUCTION

We have all probably asked ourselves at one time in our lives, "Assuming there is one, how can we make contact with God?" I believe that the great religious traditions are institutionalizations of successful peoples' answers to this question. Like any other institution, each tradition has a "manual", or sacred text, chronicling its birth and movement as well as its morality. It is my intention in this paper to look closely at one of the many "success" stories in Judaism's sacred text, the Torah.

No success story, however, can ever be fully dimensional and meaningful without a failure story to contrast it with. Therefore, I have selected a failure story - the Tower of Babel's ruin in Genesis 11 - in contrast to the success story - Jacob's Dream in Genesis 28 - in order to provide a less lopsided understanding of Jacob's success in making contact with God.

The first section of the paper sets Judaism, and the Torah, into historical context with specific attention to the differences between Judaism and the paganism against which it fought for centuries. Arguments supporting and denying the actual occurrence of these stories are presented and critiqued with respect to archaeological findings and historical documents. This section is intended as an introduction to the culture and religion of the Hebrews who lived and wrote the Torah.

The second section of the paper argues that the two stories are not randomly, whimsically chosen mates for the always questionable purposes of the senior paper, but rather have always been intended for comparison. I reach this conclusion through detailed analysis of the imagery, structure, and meaning of each story, and of the similarities between the two. Other points along the way include analysis of how different people approach analysis of
religious texts, how and why Jacob succeeded, why the Babylonians failed, and what these stories try to teach those of us who ask "How?"

The third section of this paper briefly compares the Torah's answer to "How?" with a hindu religious text's answer. The text taken is the Bhagavad-Gita, in which the hero Arjuna receives revelation from God, just as Jacob receives revelation from YHVH. This section argues that despite many differences between the religions of India and the Middle East, they share certain fundamental convictions about the nature of God and humans, and specifically, that the "way to reach God" is quite similar in both traditions.

At the end of the paper is a short conclusion which sums up the "How?" and goes on to explain what I learned from this paper. I won't ruin the suspense by telling you now what the "How" is; you must find out for yourself!
SECTION I

ANCIENT ISRAEL AND PAGANISM

The land of "milk and honey," known today as Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, and part of Egypt, was in antiquity the land of Canaan, a cultural melting pot for at least 6,000 years. We have evidence that during the Bronze and Late Bronze Ages, Aryans from India (1), Hyksos from the northwest (2), Iranians from the northeast, Hebrews from the east (3), and Egyptians from the south (4) all controlled the people and economy of Canaan at one time or another.

According to the Torah (Pentateuch), the Hebrews' conquest of Canaan did not start until the Early Iron Age (c. 1200-900 B.C.) (5), and lasted relatively uninterruptedly until the exile of Israel from Canaan, around 500 B.C. During that long period of occupation, the Jewish faith underwent some changes; and, most important, its oral traditions were written down. Naturally, these writers could not completely avoid incorporating the idioms of neighboring peoples into their texts, nor could they separate the older from the newer words, images, and stories in the oral traditions they recorded. However, Yehezkiel Kaufmann argues that the Torah we have today is definitely of ancient origins:

Although [The Torah's] compilation and canonization took place later, its sources are demonstrably ancient — not in part, not in their general content, but in their entirety, even to their language and formulation (6).

Inherent in Kaufmann's argument is an even more fundamental idea: that the Hebrews had a unique faith, one which did not evolve from the paganistic cultures around it, but which was spontaneously generated.

Apostolic prophecy, the faith in YHVH, the battle with idolatry, and
the covenant-federation...are inseparable elements in Israel's consciousness [and those which make it unique] (7).

I will address three of the four "characteristics of Israel's consciousness" in order to prepare us for a more specific discussion of two texts from Genesis: the Tower of Babel story, and the Jacob's Ladder Dream sequence. The only characteristic I will not discuss is the "covenant-federation."

Kaufmann clearly denies that peculiarity of the twentieth century scholarly, rational, historical mind which believes everything new must have come from a lower stage of development through time and evolution, and that people in the past were much slower evolvers. For though the Hebrews probably shared in distant times the simple pantheistic beliefs of their fellow-Iranians, the lifetime of Abraham, historically the first monotheist, served to change forever the belief of those nomads we call the Hebrews (8).

What was the pagan heritage, the idolatry, which the Hebrews battled? It came from an agricultural, relatively sophisticated, and politically passive society which had writing, fortified cities, and extensive trading with other nations. It included belief in, and propitiation of, local agricultural and weather gods in order to influence those gods' manipulation of the environment.

This propitiation has three characteristics worth noting.

First, people engaged in what Mircea Eliade calls the "exemplary" or "creative" mythic/magic rituals of the gods (9). They believed that they could become like the gods (as the immortality of the Isis/Osiris myth suggests) or even become gods themselves.

Second, from the Hebrew perspective, the pagans worshipped objects of stone, wood, or metal, often hand-fashioned, which represented the gods, in
order to please the latter. Moses Maimonides said,

"...no human being of the past has ever imagined...that the form he fashions...has created and governs the heavens and the earth. Rather it is worshipped in respect of its being an image of a thing that is an intermediary between ourselves and God (10)."

In other words, pagans attributed YHVH's powers to divine beings/intermediaries other than YHVH.

These "intermediaries" are the third aspect of pagan propitiation I wish to mention. Because there was a pantheon of gods, complete with a hierarchy of relative powers and functions, the only way to please the highest god was to keep the lower ones satisfied; if not, strife would break out in the pantheon and humans would suffer. Thus it might have been necessary to worship or chant to a cow or a rock in the field in order to maintain the good fortune guaranteed by the highest ruling god. I suspect this phenomena of "thing"-propitiation existed because the Canaanites had a simple view of cause-and-effect; good or bad fortune was immediately linked to an external physical source, which was then safeguarded (11). So the pantheon, while constantly hierarchized, was constantly under revision, deposition, and despotism. The Interpreter's Bible addressed the fact that local, incidental worship can often be easily perverted: "The danger of localized religion is that it so emphasizes locality and related ritual that religion drifts back toward the shadowland of magic (12)." It was precisely this magic which the Hebrews felt they were fighting, for such dependence upon human endeavor seemed to them to be a turning-away from God.

Kaufmann argues that the Hebrew religious culture contrasted sharply with that of the Canaanites. The Hebrews did not in the least understand the pagan religion, and this is Kaufmann's proof for arguing that the Hebrew tradition did not emerge slowly from paganism. Nowhere in the Scriptures is there any
evidence that Hebrews criticized the Canaanites' gods, or even realized that those gods were ever considered to be more than concrete and simpleminded representations of YHVH's powers. Rather, "Over and over again the prophet ridicules the belief that inanimate objects are gods... (13)." If we accept Maimonides' version of the human mentality mentioned earlier, we can easily imagine that the Hebrews attributed simpleminded idiocy to the Canaanites. Finally, Kaufmann concludes from this evidence that the Hebrews could not understand that "magico-mythic" structure of Canaanic thought and praxis that there was no syncretism from paganism into the Hebrew conception of God and God's relationship to the world.

This is not to argue, however, that the Hebrews were completely impervious to all the idioms and images of their pagan neighbors. On the contrary - they adopted many festivals, images, stories, etc. and "developed [them into] the idea of the kingship of God in history and the moral order as one of the fundamentals of faith... (14)." To state this another way, the Hebrews had an idea of God and God's interaction in the world and with humanity completely different from that of the Canaanites, but there were some particularly potent images, which Eliade would label "primordial", which were incorporated into the Hebrew framework. They subsequently acquired different connotations in their new posts, and should not be confused with the old meanings.

A simple example of this syncretism comes from the Canaanite creator-god's name, "El". The Hebrews changed this word to mean "holy" or "god-related" but it never meant to designate YHVH's name or essence. From "El" came the Hebrew words "Elohim" and "Bethel" (15).

A more complex example is found in the shared belief that all disasters, personal or natural, were due to sin which needed to be expiated (16).
However, the Canaanites sacrificed or chanted in order to restore harmony in the world. There was no inherent awareness that human decision and emotion directly influenced luck or fortune. The Hebrews sacrificed or prayed in order to accept and, through their own deprivation, somehow equalize with good behavior the bad behavior which caused their problem. This sounds almost like the notion of karma, which we will discuss in the third section of this paper.

Why did the Hebrews fail to understand what Eliade has argued in *Patterns of Comparative Religions* to be a ubiquitous approach to the divine or sacred? There are several reasons.

First, the Hebrews did not believe in any pantheon of gods, nor of any limitation on their one God:

> The mark of monotheism...is the idea of a God who is the source of all being, not subject to a cosmic order, and not emergent from the limitations of magic and mythology (17).

There was no possibility of becoming one with God, nor of limiting or overthrowing God's power. The way to please YHWH was to listen and obey, to use one's given talents and abilities in a "good" way; it was never necessary to "propitiate" gods in the way the Canaanites did.

Second, the Hebrews were a people with a nomadic tradition; their concept of God had to be attached to a People, not a thing or a place; hence the notion of fertility or rain gods was limiting and repugnant to the Hebrews.

Third, as Eliade wrote, "...the Hebrews were the first to discover the meaning of history as the epiphany of God..." (18). Thus God's action was visible in every historical (as well as historic) event; or, to put it another way, everything that happened was part of God's plan. There was none of the chaos and whimsy here that the Canaanite manipulation of their gods seems to imply. One can see that the Hebrews cast the "sacred and the
profane" in a different light and context than the Canaanites did.

BABEL, BETHEL, AND MYTH

I have mentioned "the sacred and the profane" in reference to Eliade's definition of these terms; namely, that the sacred place is that in which a hierophany (vision of or contact with God) occurred; the sacred experience is that of a hierophany or of reliving other hierophanies; and a sacred myth or ritual is that which returns "anyone who 'imitates' a mythological model or even ritually assists at the retelling of a myth (taking part in it)...to the Great Time" (19). The profane, in contrast, is time, place, or quality of being which does not have any of these characteristics.

Using Eliade's vision of the function of myth, let us analyze the Tower of Babel story and Jacob's Ladder to see if they are, contrary to what Kaufmann and others argue, myths. Eliade definitely thinks they are part of the mythic tradition based on their imagery: Babel, since "Everything nearer to the sky shares, with varying intensity, in its transcendence (20)"; and Jacob's Dream, since "The stone upon which Jacob slept was not only the 'House of God;' it was also the place where, by means of the angels' ladder, communications took place between heaven and earth. The bethel was, therefore, a centre of the world (21)." Samuel Sandmel, on the other hand, says of Genesis 6, which is the account of divine/human intermingling before the Flood, "This passage is the sole vestige clearly reproduced in Genesis of an elaborate available mythology. Indeed, one can say that what is striking about Genesis is that there is practically no mythology in it" (22). What are we to make of this discrepancy?

We will see that while the Babel story uses mythic imagery, it recounts
the failure of the Babylonians to access the sacred realm or time of God. There was no return to the "Great time." The Jacob story does tell of a hierophany, but the character Jacob was not immortalized or turned into a semi-divine being, and the "Great time" he accessed was the future, not the past. It is granted that while retelling the myth, we participate in that hierophany, but the time we experience is our own! If one wishes to call these two stories 'myths,' one will have to define 'myth' in a way Eliade doesn't. I think it is far more useful to think of these stories the way Kaufmann does - as morals or parables cloaked in the form of myths. It is with this in mind that we will turn to the next section of the paper when we examine what the parables tried to teach. Let us now set these two "parables" into their physical historical contexts.

HISTORICAL BABEL

Most scholars agree that the name "Babel" derives from the Akkadian word "Bab-illus," meaning "gate of god" (23). They deny any linguistic connection with the Hebrew very "Balal," meaning "to confuse," though this is the popular folk etymology given at the end of the Genesis 11 narrative. For the reason that the etymology is irrelevant on other than a punning level, some argue that the Babel story reflects the hands of several writers, and therefore the imposition of historical explanation onto an originally moral story; i.e., the imposition of the reason for many languages onto a story of humans' mistake.

Many critics believe that the narrative not only attempts to teach a moral, but that it did not derive from Babylonian stories (for reasons already mentioned):
It is unlikely however that a myth representing the building of a ziggurat - undoubtedly the original of the tower - as a defiance of God took its rise among the Babylonians themselves. It is much more probable that some ruined or never-finished tower was explained as the result of divine action against human arrogance...(24).

This view errs only in its ignorance of the language borrowed from the Babylonians, as well as many pervasive themes found in all the Mesopotamian countries. While it is plausible that there is no Babylonian story mocking its own religious beliefs, it is ridiculous to claim that because the moral was changed, the story could not have originated with the Babylonians themselves. In fact, Nahum Sarna said in reference to the Babylonian *Enuma Elish*:

> It is not unlikely that the biblical account and that of Berossus both stem from a common tradition. However, there is one significant [factual] difference...Whereas Berossus assumes that Babylon existed before the Flood and was simply restored afterwards, it is implicit in the biblical account that Babylon wasn't founded until after the Flood (25).

I inserted "factual" because we already know that if the Hebrews did borrow from the Babylonians' stories, they changed the moral content and managed to describe an historical event with accuracy as well as to make a judgment against the reasons for its occurrence.

We have assumed Babylon was the site of the tower mentioned as Babel in the Scriptures. Let me provide the commentary of one critic to begin justification of this assumption:

The story, as we have it, has such clear reference to Babylon that the tower which plays a central role in it can hardly be but the great ziggurat or stage tower of the Marduk temple in Babylon...The story in Genesis would seem to have been inspired by the tower at a period when that great monument was in ruins between two rebuildings (26).

Babylon lay in Babylonia, known in the Bible as "Shinar" or "Chaldea" (27). The temple of Marduk, or "Tower of Babel," is known to have existed as
far back as the third millennium B.C. (28). It suffered many invasions, and was destroyed and rebuilt numerous times. Its name was "E-sag-ila," meaning "the house with elevated head." The Biblical narrative's pointed irony comes out in verse 11:4, which describes the tower with "its top in the heavens" (29). This pretty obviously mocked the tower's name as well as its intention, for it lasted neither as a tower nor as a sanctuary, and the purpose for which it was named was foiled by YHVH.

The tower, as was mentioned, was a 'ziggurat', as seven- or eight-story structure with a temple on its top; each story was smaller than the one beneath it, and the whole thing probably looked like a square and approximated pyramid. It was built of burned bricks exactly like those described in Genesis 11 and had at one time a circular staircase leading to the top, a height of 250-300 feet at least (30).

The names of ziggurats often included both heaven and earth in them. Thus, Perrot says,

..the ziggurat appears to me to be a bond of union, whose purpose was to assure communication between earth and heaven. Even when this idea is not actually clearly expressed, it is nevertheless implicitly suggested; for what is the 'mountain' but a giant step-ladder by means of which a man may ascend as near as possible to the sky? Not only in order to touch it, but also, and especially, to approach nearer to the deity whom he seeks, and whose descent towards mankind he wishes at the same time to facilitate (31).

Comparing the ziggurat and its sacred symbology to the later Jerusalem Temple, explicitly described as "a part of the earth which reaches into the heavens - or a part of heaven that touches the earth" and "[having] a series of gates and...a number of steps before...the holy of holies" (32), one sees that the Hebrews could understand the rough significance of the ziggurat's fall, for they understood height as proximity to God, just as Eliade describes.

The Canaanite storm god, Enlil, "was held responsible for the destruction
of [the ziggurat at] Ur by the Elamites, interpreted in terms of a devastating storm..." (33), which suggests again the "casting down" of the Tower of Babel. In Sumerian literature, the idea that humanity in antiquity once had a single common language is also found (34). Further, the Canaanite Creation story, Enumah Elish, is strikingly parallel to the first two chapters of Genesis (35). These three facts suggest to us even more the connection between Babel and Babylon.

For all peoples, "that which is holy must be protected from profanation" (36). We know already that calamities implied sin, and that Babylon was destroyed - a calamity by anyone's standards. By combining these facts with the Hebrew Genesis narrative, we come to conclude that the Babylonians profaned their "temple" (perhaps by devoting it to an "intermediary" - Marduk). The traditional Jewish interpretation is that the people "did stretch forth their hands against God to war against Him..." (37)." This seems silly in light of the current information about Babylon and its religious cults. If this argument were to be presented correctly, one would have to argue the YHWH cast down the Babylonians for worshiping the wrong gods - or worse, no god(s) at all - and this is not the case as presented in Genesis. A better understanding embracing the nomadic character of the Hebrews is this:

..the Babel story pointedly rejects the great old urban traditions of architectural and astronomical wisdom, which appear to the Hebrews as mere ramifications of the self-deifying pride that is more important to man's buildings than brick or mortar (38).

However, even this argument is not clearly true in light of Kaufmann's thesis. It becomes, in true Jewish tradition, the duty of the reader to decide for him/herself what the story really means to say about humans' relationship to God. The next section of this paper will deal with such interpretations.
Before turning to those theories, however, we must set Jacob's dream into its historical context.

THE HISTORICAL BETHEL AND JACOB'S DREAM

The Bethel story has less concrete historical information on it than the Babel story has. We know that the name "Jacob" ("Ya'akov" in Hebrew) comes from "God follows" or "God retards," not from the word for "heel" or "sneak" as popular etymology would have us believe (39). In fact the name "Ya'akov" was not an original creation, but was a common Middle Eastern name. "Abuchednezzar" comes from the same root, as well as other biblical names (40).

Bethel itself is not well described, although many commentators believe Abraham had gone to the same place before Jacob was ever born, naming it Ai, which later became Luz. Most scholars believe it was an ancient Canaanite sacred place, although one commentator says, "The unity of a nomadic tribe often finds expression in a tribal shrine, to which the members of the tribe make pilgrimage for their festivals, and beside which they bury their dead" (41). By this argument, since Jacob was not familiar with the place, and since the Canaanites tended to make their shrines more localized (like the Marduk temple), it seems unlikely that this was an ancient holy place. Other interpreters argue, however, that because the word "place" ("macomb") occurred five times in the dream passage, there is probably some religious significance to the place where Jacob slept; "Jacob came to a Canaanite sanctuary" (42). It is difficult to know whether Jacob really came to a Canaanite sanctuary unknown to him, or whether the repetition of the word "place" was used simply to emphasize the holiness of the hierophany which occurred in the place Jacob
happened to be.

Taking the former interpretation for a moment, we can discuss the symbolism of the stone, which was mentioned several times:

The rocky boulders on the site of Bethel must indeed inevitably have suggested the erection of a sacred pillar...the description of 28:11 suggests the idea that the stone which Jacob took for his "pillow" was a sacred stone, so that 'place' will have the sense of 'sanctuary' (43).

A stone becomes sacred because it is at least once the scene of a theophany or because a sacrifice or oath consecrates it (44). And in the ancient Near East, people used to sleep in sanctuaries with their heads on sacred stones, hoping to meet the divine:

At Bethel the foundation of the sanctuary was interpreted in relation to an incubational experience there by Jacob...and the disclosure of the divine occupant of the place in a dream-oracle (46).

Therefore the suggestion is that Jacob, knowingly or not, slept in the ritual way on a stone, experienced a hierophany, blessed the stone and the place, and thus partook of an ancient "ritual" the way Eliade defines ritual. While the Genesis narrative in no way implies the pagan belief that Jacob actually thought a 'numen' or holy spirit lived in that stone, it is undeniable that the imagery used here is mythological.

Jacob's vision of the ladder and of God explained Bethel's name ("House of God"). Leaving aside for a moment the obvious connections with the Tower of Babel and ziggurats, I want to point out the ubiquitousness of this ladder theme in diverse religious traditions.

Upon his death, the Egyptian Pharaoh went to heaven by means of a celestial ladder (47). Babylonian texts and Canaanite kingship refer to the connection between heaven and earth, and of the king as channel of revelation, "which he received through dreams after ritual incubation" (48). Shamans in
diverse cultures ascended to heaven in the afterlife on a tree or post, which symbolized a pillar or tree according to Eliade (49). Africans in the Lake Ngami area have an ascension myth similar in many striking ways to that in Jacob's dream (50). Not surprisingly, Christian mysticism has a "ladder of Paradise" (51). Even "Jack and the Beanstalk" has a ladder-symbolic means of climbing to the upper world.

Now the words "gate of heaven" and "head up to heaven" are more than passingly suggestive of Babel's namesake, and we know that staircases (ladders) led up to the temple whose name was "gate of heaven." The ziggurats more than likely had a constant stream of people (messengers) "ascending and descending" just as the dream story describes Jacob's vision. Most commentators argue that the connection between the two does exist - though they fail to argue that it is more than a cultural borrowing. This, however, denies the fact that, borrowed or not, the stories are both found in the Hebrew literature, and that the same images are used deliberately in the two stories, some never to be found again in the Old Testament (52).

One critic, erring in the opposite extreme, completely ignores the historic antecedents for the terms "gate of heaven" etc., and says,

The 'gate of heaven' probably refers to the ladder which led up to heaven and may have been added to avoid the suggestion that God is 'confined' here (53).

The notion of God's confinement or limitation could be applied to the passage which describes the 'messengers of God'. For the Canaanite pantheon's hierarchy of gods meant that every one had his/her "messengers, who were themselves lesser gods (54)." However, Kaufmann rejects this theory, for reasons mentioned in the earlier pages of this paper. He says, "No rejected pantheon ever became transmuted into 'angels' appointed over the major phenomena of nature" (55). In conclusion, then, the 'messengers of God' could
not have been the same things that Canaanic religion implied them to be. In fact, Maimonides gives a very cogent definition of the meaning of "angel", incorporating the designation "messengers of God" which will appear in the next section of this paper.

A SHORT SUMMARY

We have become familiar with the pagan cultures surrounding the Hebrews, and with the reasons Kaufmann gives for believing that the Torah does not provide evidence for any fundamental syncretism with that paganism. We know that there was almost undoubtedly an historical Tower of Babylon, and that the story in Genesis 11 was written rather pointedly to mock, or at the very least comment, upon the pagan purpose of that tower. We have evidence to support the contention that Jacob's Bethel really was a holy site, though the origins of its sacredness are unclear. And we have, though only briefly, glimpsed a startling similarity between the imagery of the Tower and that of Jacob's ladder.

The parallels between the Tower and the dream stories are too pointed to be ignored. Neither can one explain them away as cultural borrowings, for that does not explain their existence in the text, but only their common roots in other cultures. It is my intention to show that these stories are parallel in order to teach us of the right and wrong 'ladder to God.'
SECTION II

GENESIS AND BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP

Genesis ("Bereshit" in Hebrew, meaning "In the Beginning") is the first of the five books of the Pentateuch ("Torah" in Hebrew). It is a synopsis of the creation of the world, of human beings, and of the characteristics or parameters of human nature. It also outlines the events which led to the beginning of the Hebrew faith. Many of these events take the form of myths or sagas, as discussed in the previous section of this paper. These myths were written down and redacted many times between the years 850 and 400 BC by the principal sources J, E, D, and P. Many other minor scribes have made small adjustments to the story since then, of course, but these four sources formed the basic canon of what we have today (1). The date of the myths' origins is uncertain, but scholars agree that they were in existence at the very minimum before the monarchies of Israel, i.e. before 1200 BC (2).

The problem of ascertaining which elements of any given story stemmed from the initial tradition, and which were later additions by rabbis (who were the editors at the time), is nearly insurmountable, and is definitely painstaking and subjective. In the preface to Louis Ginzberg's book there is an outline of his attempts to differentiate between the scribes' contributions, ending with the six general characteristics of the early, oral tradition. They are as follows: 1) stories are small, concise-styled units; 2) they are attached to specific places, often with name-etiology; 3) they are cultic or theophonic, often with reference to "god of the fathers"; 4) the characters are anonymous and general rather than individuals; 5) the stories are often awkward compared with the smoother, more modern prose; and
sagas are original while bracketings of stories (for example, the Joseph saga) are not (3).

The majority of the Tower of Babel and Jacob's Dream texts possess these six characteristics; I shall only make reference to outstanding cases of the division between old and new in each text. It should be borne in mind that these texts were never intended to be simply historical documents, but rather also living traditions, examples, and thought-provokers.

There seem to be three general approaches to interpretation of the texts. The traditional rabbis accepted the texts as inherently perfect despite inconsistencies or contradictions. They developed elaborate and to our eyes often absurd schemas for explaining away inconsistencies. They also approached the texts as authorities in lieu of human teachers, bearing an enigmatic and neverending truth; every verse or story had an ancient and a current moral, could never be passively accepted, and was related circuitously to other texts within the Torah.

The second approach uses the historical, Wellhausian, form-criticism method we often employ today in order to determine the veracity of the given texts. Such an approach implies, it seems to me, a fundamental doubt as to the authenticity and authority of any text traceable to a specific scribe, and also doubt about the divinity of any text that comes to us through human agency. I say "implies" because the doubt is cloaked in scientific and meticulous demands for "evidence" which we take today as the basis of truth. Most often, criticisms using this approach stop short of any moral conclusions since the latter could be (it is claimed) biased and non-universal. It is paradoxical that the more historical evidence found that the patriarchs or Noah existed, for example (thus satisfying the needs of form-criticism methods), the less likely are the scientific-minded to believe in the higher
value or truth of the Bible. This appears to mean that God is so idealized that everything dealing with God should be as perfect and transcendent as God is. Conversely, the more links uncovered between humans and God, the less these people are likely to believe in God. It seems that the scientific-minded have a negative view of human nature and its potential for greatness or approach to divinity.

The third approach, which tends to be the most common modern one, combines more or less successfully form-criticism and Harnackian need for historical truth with the modern opinions one wishes to express. I said "less successfully" because often these commentators, who do not know or bother with Hebrew and its puns, entendres, synonyms, etc., stretch the English (or Greek) translations of the texts to ridiculous literary extremes; or, more commonly, impose modern western mentalities back onto ancient eastern ones rather than letting the converse occur.

I will try to achieve a synthesis of the best in each of the three viewpoints, namely: take each text as a teacher rather than a validifier; attempt to use historical setting as an aid to that endeavor; and take into account as much as I can the Hebrew flavor of words, connotations, and idioms. I will present this effort at the end of the two sections of criticism and interpretations by other scholars. The Babel story criticism will be presented in the following way: First, those opinions that the sin of Babylonians was pride and/or an effort to overthrow YHWH, for which they were punished by God; second, those which view the story as more ambiguous and/or positive with reference to human nature. The Jacob story criticism will be organized in the following way: Specific issues will be brought up with the differing viewpoints presented together. At the end of all criticism, including my own, I will attempt to answer the questions for which this paper
has been written: What is the appropriate balance between freedom from and
dependence on God? And why are the Tower of Babel and Jacob's Ladder stories
parallel in structure?

BABEL

Genesis 11

And it was when they migrated to the east that they found a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. They said, each man to his fellow: Come-now! Let us bake bricks and let us burn them well-burnt! So for them brick-stone was like building-stone, and raw-bitumen was for them like red-mortar. Now they said: Come-now! Let us build ourselves a city and a tower, its top in the heavens, and let us make ourselves a name, lest we be scattered over the face of all the earth! But YHVH came down to look over the city and the tower that the humans were building. YHVH said: Here, (they are) one people with one language for them all, and this is merely the first of their doings -- now there will be no barrier for them in all that they devise to do! Come-now! Let us go down and there let us baffle their language, so that no man will understand the language of his fellow. So YHVH scattered them from there over the face of all the earth, and they had to stop building the city. Therefore its name was called Bavel/Babble, for there YHVH baffled the language of all the earth-folk, and from there, YHVH scattered them over the face of all the earth (4).

THE BABEL STORY CRITICIZED AND COMPARED TO PAGAN TEXTS

Cuthbert Simpson, a form-redaction critic, offers the following summarized view of the text's components: the original oral story was that of
the sons of men, who were not yet Peoples. They built a tower and were scattered by YHWH. Simpson argues that everything else was an addition: J/2 made the people Noah's early descendents; R/p added verse 1 to connect the story with the events of the previous chapter (10) in the written order of Genesis. P wrote verses 10-26 in order to explain that the descendents of those people are our ancestors. The last redactor made up the etymology of Babel/Balal, probably to make this story meet the form of the more ancient texts which often ended with name-etiologies (5).

According to Gunther Plaut, the story "stands between the universal tableau of humanity and that specific list of families from which Terah, Abraham, and their live will spring (6). In other words, it is the transition story between the universal and the specific, and part of its purpose is to explain why the universal could not suffice to explain the history of us all. Gerhard Von Rad tries to say the same thing in religious vocabulary: "We stand here, therefore, at the point where primeval history and sacred history dovetail..." (7). However, he implies that the sacred history must be specific (in contrast to what Eliade would say about heroes and primordial images, etc.) and thus the primeval in chapters 1-10 is not sacred. I find this idea often in Christian literature. This does not surprise me, for the Christian faith must base its creed on a specific person rather than an anonymous archetype. It is not, however, an appropriate imposition onto the Hebrew faith, which does in fact consider the creation of humanity and the evolution of that humanity sacred history.

Nahum Sarna sets this text in historical context with the following idea about the introduction of paganism into the world:

A careful scrutiny of Scripture shows...not a trace of paganism is to be found in the world until the rise of ethnic divisions among
the children of men. That is to say, a universal monotheistic era in human history is thought of as coming to an end with the generation of the dispersal of mankind (8).

The justification for this assumption about "primeval monotheism" comes from comparison of the Hebrew version of a temple's construction with the typical and original versions of Mesopotamian religious building practice and belief:

According to Mesopotamian religious psychology the gods were intimately associated with all phases of temple construction. Through their revelation the project was usually initiated, the priests would consult the omens to determine the gods' will at every stage of the operations...The biblical stress on the strictly human nature of the enterprise breathes a different spirit, one of opposition and protest against this polytheistic concept (9).

And finally, he discusses the reasons why this story should not be considered an item borrowed from Babylonian literature, as readers of Enuma Elish would like to argue. His reasons are, briefly stated: 1) no native of Babylon would think his building was displeasing to the deity; 2) the surprise expressed at use of brick and bitumen labels the author as a foreigner; and 3) there is satirical hostility towards pagan nations (10). Umberto Cassuto polishes off this "anti-pagan" theory by nipping in the bud the argument that "Come-now, let us..." implies a pantheon of gods in Israel's past (11). He states, "Wherever we find customary and stereotyped phrases in the literary tradition we need not concern ourselves too much with their literal meaning" (12). In other words, there is no real information to suggest that this story was copied from, implied common origins with, or taught the same message as, Mesopotamian flood stories, despite the existence of some shared images or words. I believe this is a fair statement. Practically none of the sources I consulted tried to argue the converse in all its implications, and most agreed that there was in the text a lot of biting sarcasm at the paganistic notions of the Babylonians.
I found three fundamental approaches to the Babel story. There are those critics who focus on verses 6 and 7 and use them in conjunction with assumed motives of the people to say that the Babylonians sinned against God and were punished for it. Less conservative critics focus on the story's historical context, and search for the explanations of fundamental human condition and characteristics, such as many nations, or many tongues. Finally, "liberals" believe that the story teaches a morality, a lesson about both the correct and incorrect usage of human talents, and a lesson about God's purpose and methods of achieving that purpose.

Von Rad believes that the history of humanity since its creation is "characterized on the human side by an increase in sin to avalanche proportions (13)". This sin is typically described as "overweening pride." It is likened to the ending of the garden of Eden story, which is generally accepted as a description of the "fall" from perfection to sin, rather than as the necessary growth away from nonindividuality and innocent non-choice.

What exactly was the sin? Some, like Von Rad, believe that it was rebellion against God (14). However, that rebellion lay not in what the text explicitly states was fear of being scattered (which God had demanded after the flood when God said in 9:7, spread out and multiply over the earth), for "how could such a possibility have been avoided by building a tower (15)?" Rather, it lay in "mutilat[ing] the shoots of faith (16)", i.e. in breaking God's trust in human beings by attacking God, and thus 'mutilating' the original, lofty purity of a completely honest relationship. To quote Pearl, who was referring here to the words "children of men:"
The phrase is deliberately explicit to show that just as Adam ignored the good and sinned and blamed his sin on Eve, so too his descendants rebelled against their Benefactor, who saved them from the Deluge (17).

Ramban argues that those who understand the mystical meaning of "name" will understand the whole subject, namely, that theirs was an evil thought, and the punishment that came over them...was meted out measure for measure...Thus their sin was [that they] sought to undermine the principle of the Unity (18).

Though I am not familiar with Kabbala, I suspect that Ramban is here drawing on the complicated Hebrew notion that God is nameless in order to preserve God's all-encompassing qualities in our minds, and to avoid the possession that occurs when one names another. If people were to try to "make a name" for themselves, they could be assumed to possess or control themselves and their destinies, i.e. rebel against the nature of our relationship with God. However, I am not sure what Ramban really meant, and he nowhere explained himself clearly.

Kaufmann believes that the sin was one of presumption, that "man" wished to storm heaven, to be "like God," to rule the world. For this he was doubly punished; his language was confused, and nations with their wars and rivalries sprang up. But God also hid himself from man and abandoned him to his defiance and soaring ambitions (19).

In other words, the sin of pride was the intention to replace, be like, or to have no necessity for, God. This quotation points out an important subtlety of the narrative: the people were "punished" in two ways: first, by being scattered against their wills; second, by being separated from God (Whom they could not see).

The Babylonians' sin was disobedience, according to the Wycliffe Biblical Commentary. Rather than rebelling against the specific desires of God, the Babylonians were guilty of "wanting to make themselves renowned" and of
"self-sufficiency (20)." It is unclear to me why either of these are considered sins, and the argument that they are not will be presented in the second half of this discussion.

Ginzberg summed up these three types of rebellion against God as war-mongering, idolatry, and heaven-storming (21). These assume an inherent intention amongst the peoples, rather than either a propensity toward misdeeds in their natures or an intention which they thought was good but became in hindsight evil. I cannot condone a view of human nature which believes we are all inherently evil; and I believe that if God thought the human race was hopelessly evil, God would have annihilated it and started over again. In fact, the biblical account of the Flood bears out this belief; God did exterminate all which was inherently or hopelessly evil.

However, Maimonides made a statement which tends to refute my last point. We have rejected the implication that Babylonians built the Tower with foresight and intention, as a tool with which to rebel against God. This quotation from Maimonides supports that implication: "In the case of everyone who makes any instrument, it is clear that unless he had a conception of the work to be done with that instrument, he would be unable to make it (22)."

Thus, the Babylonians built the Tower with knowledge of its intended use. However, we still do not know the sophistication of thought of the average Babylonian; if the evidence from the first section of this paper is accepted, it was not very high. So my argument that the Babylonians were not evil cannot be refuted, though neither can it be supported.

Taking the third approach mentioned in the beginning of this paper section, The Interpreter's Bible unpacked the Babel story in the following way:
But back of the ancient story there is a profound insight. Differences of language are a source of trouble, the symbol and accentuation of division, strangeness, suspicions, and hostility. And by profound insight, again, this fact was linked with the overweening spirit by which men are always trying to make themselves bigger than they are. In other words, one of the primary roots of trouble in human history is human pride (23).

I think this is the most convincing argument that the sin of the Babylonians was pride, though it comes from a definition of human nature which was not explicitly set forth yet in the story and it is questionable whether the interpretation is valid. On the other hand, it is just as questionable whether the oral tradition of the Babel story implied that it had to fit into a specific chronology-frame; it could very easily be argued that Genesis 11 was the ancient version of a fairy-tale, without any original, intended place in a larger text.

Compared with the idea that God does not want humans to be thoughtless creatures dependent upon God (a Buberian perspective) but rather capable of choosing good and evil, the problem of pride is delicately balanced with that of independence; the two seem to alternate throughout the Scriptures.

Von Rad, with whose commentary we began this section, finished his argument with the observation that "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more (Rom. 5:20). None of [this], of course, is theologically formulated in so many words..." (24). It seems ridiculous that he could argue on the one hand that God punished the people, and then to claim that such punishment was imbued with "grace" and forgiveness, a concept that was not developed until at least 1200 years later, not to mention its irrelevance to the story at hand.

It is time to turn from these interpretations of the Tower as an expression of human hostility toward, disregard for, or disrespect of the deity to the more positive commentaries.
Sarna finds it strange that people consider the Tower of Babel story to reflect inherent evil in humankind. He gives three reasons for this opinion: The Tower is never again mentioned, as Sodom and Gomorrah (the original seats of all human evils concentrated) are, in the Torah; Babylon is considered the center of pagan arrogance, but the Tower isn't; and the narrative itself never says that the sin of the people was pride (25).

Von Rad, surprisingly, gave a cogent argument for the position Sarna took, namely,

..one will observe a subtlety of the narrative in the fact that it does not give anything unprecedented as the motive for this building, but rather something that lies within the realm of human possibility, namely, a combination of their energies on the one hand, and on the other the winning of fame, i.e. a naive desire to be great. Jacob points to the underlying motive of anxiety. These are therefore the basic forces of what we call culture (26).

He adds that the peoples' "joy in their inventiveness" is shown by the puns in the Hebrew (27): assonances and alliterations such as "levna/lavan" and "chemar/chmar", particularly during the brick discussion (28). While Von Rad attributed this to "joy in discovery", and thus ultimately to his point that the people were prideful, others see it as jeering at the idiocy of people who thought their structure would last forever and be great.

In fact, this irony is further exemplified by the following criticism on the verse in which God "comes down": "The verse ironically implies that the tower supposed to reach the heavens is still far from there (29)."

As regards the desire to "make a name," Sarna says that "...a closer look reveals that the sentence is parenthetical. The desire for fame is perfectly human and not in itself reprehensible. Indeed, the granting thereof is part
of the divine promise to Abraham... (30)." To this irony Cassuto adds the fact that the Babylonians certainly succeeded - they wound up with one of the most asinine name-legacies in the bible (31)!

YHVH "came down" not because God didn't know the events of humans, but because "Scripture intends to teach the judges that they should not proclaim a defendant guilty before they have seen the case and thoroughly understand the matter in question (32)."

And this is because God sets a high value on peace and harmony. In fact, some argue that the punishment was so lenient because the people of the Tower at least worked together and loved each other, even if they had a warped understanding of, or relationship with, God (33). In fact, God decided, according to Von Rad, that "A humanity that can think only of its own confederation is at liberty for anything, i.e. for every extravagance. Therefore, God resolves upon a punitive, but at the same time preventive, act, so that he will not have to punish man more severely [later]... (34)."

Liebowitz argues that it was only in abuse of human skill, power, and wisdom that they erred. And Abravanel added that "Their sin was not in trying to achieve a [political society] but in regarding it as an end in itself rather than as a means to a still greater end - spiritual wellbeing (35)."

Others, however, do not view what God did as a punishment at all, probably because they did not see the behavior of the Babel-builders as deliberate or malignant. Says one critic, "Their dispersion is not a punishment destroying the original unity of mankind. The scattering of one nation is dispersal among others and means loss of its homeland (36)."

Skinner sees this "distribution of mankind into nations and the diversity of language " as part of God's divine plan for human progress, devoid of any element of punishment whatsoever (37). This is too deterministic for my taste
but deserves to be mentioned as a part of the Calvanist heritage.

A quotation from Sarna sums up this section very nicely: "Not the monumental achievements of human ingenuity, but only the human heart can forge a link with God (38)." Let us now see how Jacob's heart managed to form the link with God.

JACOB'S LADDER

Genesis 28:10-22

Yaakov went out from Be'er-Sheva and went toward Harran, and encountered a certain place. He had to spend the night there, for the sun had set. Now he took one of the stones of the place and set it at his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamt:
Here, a ladder was set up on the earth, its top reaching the heavens, and here: messengers of God were going up and down on it. And here: YHVH was standing over against him. He said: I am YHVH, the God of Avraham your father and the God of Yitzhak. The land on which you lie I give to you and to your seed. Your seed will be like the dust of the earth; you will burst forth, westward, eastward, northward, southward. All the clans of the soil will find blessing through you and through your seed!
Here, I am with you, I will watch over you wherever you go and will bring you back to this soil; indeed, I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you. Yaakov awoke from his sleep and said: Why, YHVH is in this place, and I, I did not know it! How awesome is this place!
This is none other than a house of God, and that is the gate of heaven!
Yaakov (arose) early in the morning, he took the stone that he had set at his head and set it up as a standing-pillar and poured oil on top of it. And he called the name of the place: Bet-El/ House of God --
however, Luz was the name of the city in former times.
And Yaakov vowed a vow, saying:
If God will be with me and will watch over me on this way that I go and will give me food to eat and a garment to wear, and if I come back in peace to my father's house -- YHVH shall be God to me, and this stone that I have set up as a standing-pillar shall become a house of God, and everything that you give me I shall tithe, tithe it to you. (39)

JACOB'S DREAM CRITICIZED, COMPARED WITH PAGAN TRADITIONS

The episode of Jacob's life quoted above is that in which he first makes personal contact with God. Previously in the cycle, we see Jacob in his family life, cheating his fraternal twin out of birthright and blessing, and fooling his father at the urging of his mother. Later, we see Jacob prospering in his endeavors, reconciling his misdeeds "with God and with man" (Gen. 32:29), and becoming "Israel" (God-wrestler). The Dream-sequence is the turning-point, the seminal experience which allows Jacob the opportunity to become a patriarch. As such, it is not the end of the story, but rather the beginning of Israel's history.

Before we enter into a discussion about the meaning of the Dream, however, let us examine the story in its historical context.

Sarna carefully separates the pagan-sounding "top reached the sky" from pagan ideas about the nature of that heavenly connection:
The note...is reminiscent of the stereotyped phraseology used in
connection with the Babylonian temple-towers. but it differs from pagan mythology in that the stairway of Jacob’s dream is not a channel of communication between man and God. The deity does not descend by it from the divine sphere (40).

It must be borne in mind that the ladder was a vision of the angels doing divine errands, not of God doing anything in the human realm. God was not limited in any way to the ladder.

In general, it is agreed that Jacob’s journey “takes him not only to a foreign land, but to the portals of adulthood. It begins fittingly with a dream vision, so that we will know from the start that God is with him. In fact Yaakov always encounters God at crucial life junctures... (41).” Let’s take a closer look at that encounter which first took place in the dream.

When he awoke from the dream, Jacob said, “How awful is this place!” Skinner believes that Jacob was frightened of God’s potential wrath at his ignorance of the place where he slept (42). However, The Interpreter’s Bible says,

> Who can contemplate the distance between himself and God, even when the angels of God’s forgiveness throw a bridge across it, and not bow down in agonized unworthiness? So it was with Jacob. The consciousness of guilt in him made him shrink from the revelation of God even when he craved it (43).

This interpretation does not seem borne out by the scripture itself; Jacob is not "agonized" nor does he seem to "shrink from the revelation." In fact he goes on to make an oath to God.

Jacob’s oath was ostensibly added by E to effect a transition to the next story and "the bargaining tone of the vow may be a subtle indication of what E thought of Jacob’s character as it had hitherto developed (44)." However, Ramban does not accept that the vow had a bargaining tone to it, nor that E’s authorship made any difference to the importance of the story as a whole. Drawing upon the Hebrew "ve’im," which usually means "and if," he says it
means in this case "when," i.e., "if there will come a time when the condition is satisfied, then the deed will be fulfilled (45)." To restate this, Jacob did not offer God a bargain. He merely promised his services if he remained alive. B. Jacob takes this to "imply the confession that the fulfillment depends upon God alone (46)." So we come up with a pious, rather than a pompous, Jacob.

There were actually two dreams in Jacob's Dream: that of the ladder and God's manifestation. Dealing with the former, we find that the word used for "ladder" (sullam) comes from the verb "salal" meaning "to heap up" (47). Maimonides takes the word in a concrete but allegorical sense, and comes up with this interpretation of the ladder's role in Jacob's 'prophetic' dream:

For after the ascent and the attaining of certain rungs of the ladder that may be known comes the descent with whatever decree the prophet has been informed of - with a view to governing and teaching the people of the earth...for the "angels" seen by Jacob are none other than the prophets (48).

Maimonides also discusses in great detail the significance of the terms "ascent" and "descent":

And as He, many He be exalted, wished -as He did- to let some of us have knowledge deriving from Him and an overflow of prophetic inspiration, the alighting of the prophetic inspiration upon the prophet or the coming-down of the Indwelling (angels) to a certain place was termed "descent;" whereas the removal of this prophetic state from a particular individual was termed "ascent" (49).

In other words, the ladder was the symbol of the (spiritual) indwelling rather than of (physical) connection with God or the heavens. And the reason the angels "descended" first, "ascended" second rather than moving in the more familiar order, was that God (or God's angels) came down to invite Jacob up, and left at the end of the dream when Jacob came down.

There are two other interpretations of the angels' order of movement, however. One is that "some were exalting him and others degrading him,
dancing, leaping, and maligning him (50)." This probably comes close to the intended meaning of the Scriptures, for Jacob had just done a terrible thing, and feared for his life. It is not unlikely that in such a situation one would take serious stock of oneself, even in a dream.

The other interpretation is rather literal: "The angels who accompanied him in the Holy Land did not go outside the land and ascended to Heaven. Angels who were to accompany him outside the Holy Land then came down (51)." Implied here is the notion that angels are place-specific, which is very similar to the notion that "YHVH could be worshiped only in Canaan...because ancient Israel never considered the gods of the other nations only as "nothings", but attributed to them too a relative sphere of power and cult (52)." However, with the definition of "angel" which follows in a moment, we can come to accept B. Jacob's interpretation that the "angels change at the border as every land due to its different conditions of life and dangers need other angels (53)."

What then are angels? Maimonides spent several chapters defining them. I give here several excerpts from his analysis:

Now you already know that the meaning of angel is messenger. Accordingly everyone who carries out an order is an angel; so that the movements of animals, even when these beings are not rational, are stated in the text of The Scripture to have been accomplished through an angel...(54).

..the sages have made it clear that the angels are not endowed with matter and that outside the mind they have no fixed corporeal shape, but that all such shapes are only to be perceived in the vision of prophecy...(55).

..how could the Creator seek help from that which He has created? Rather do all these texts state plainly that all this...has been brought about through the intermediation of angels. For all forces are angels (56).

Interestingly enough, Satan (whose name derives from "satah", "to turn away") is an angel too by this definition, for Satan is also a force in the world
If the angels are forces, then we begin to get a picture of what Jacob saw in his dream, and why some say he saw "the course of the world's history (58)." The forces of the world, or of God, or of himself (or perhaps all three, and more), were shown to him in the form of "angels."

Many people claim that it is unfair for God to have shown Himself to Jacob, the misely cheat and coward. But God is not unfair - things that happen are punishments and rewards set up by God but brought about by ourselves (59). And though Jacob's recent actions would seem to have merited punishment, he did something else which elicited the reward of a vision. That can only have been a turning of his heart, the opposite of "satah," i.e. a turning-toward God. For "According to [the Bereshit Rabbah] Midrash, the Almighty only reveals Himself after man has approached him first...(60).

At the very least,

[Jacob] became aware that there actually is communication between heaven and earth. He recognized in that place that God was by his side, promising guidance through life, and future greatness...(61).

But he must also have learned some truth about the forces of good and evil (as discussed in the, Babel section) which enabled him to turn in his ways and prosper, as well as accept the defeats he had coming him.
THE TWO STORIES JUXTAPOSED

BABEL

Now all the earth was of one language and one set-of-words. And it was when they migrated to the east that they found a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. They said, each man to his fellow: Come-now! Let us bake bricks and let us burn them well-burnt! So for them brick-stone was like building-stone, and raw-bitumen was for them like red-mortar. Now they said: Come-now! Let us build ourselves a city and a tower, its top in the heavens, and let us make ourselves a name, lest we be scattered over the face of all the earth! But YHVH came down to look over the city and the tower that the humans were building. YHVH said: Here, (they are) one people with one language for them all, and this is merely the first of their doings—now there will be no barrier for them in all that they devise to do! Come-now! Let us go down and there let us baffle their language, so that no man will understand the language of his fellow. So YHVH scattered them from there over the face of all the earth.

Yakov went out from Beer-Sheva and went toward Harran, and encountered a certain place. Now he took one of the stones of the place and set it at his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamt: Here, a ladder was set up on the earth, its top reaching the heavens, And here: messengers of God were going up and down on it. And here: YHVH was standing over against him. He Said: I am YHVH, the God of Avraham your father and the God of Yitzhak. The land on which you lie I give to you and to your seed. Your seed will be like the dust of the earth; you will burst forth, seaward, eastward, northward, southward. All the clans of the soil will find blessing through you and through your seed! Here, I am with you,
I will watch over you wherever you go
and will bring you back to this soil;
indeed, I will not leave you
until I have done what I have spoken to you.

Yaakov awoke from his sleep and said:

Why, YHVH is in this place,
And I, I did not know it!
How awesome is this place!
This is none other than a house of God,
and that is the gate of heaven!

Yaakov arose early in the morning,
he took the stone that he had set at his head
and set it up as a standing-pillar
and poured oil on top of it.

And he called the name of the place:
Bet-El/House of God--
however, Luz was the name of the city in former times.
And Yaakov vowed a vow, saying:
If God will be with me
and will watch over me on this way that I go
and will give me food to eat and a garment to wear,
and if I come back in peace to my father's house--
YHVH shall be God to me,
and this stone that I have set up as a standing-pillar shall become a house of God,
and everything that you give me I shall tithe, tithe it to you.
I have presented the two texts in parallel form in order to facilitate comparisons of the texts with respect to shared themes.

We notice right away the shared structure of the stories. Both contain a migration or movement from one place to another; for the Babylonians it was migration, and for Jacob flight. Both give an account of some interaction with the earth; the Babylonians molded it with purpose in mind, and Jacob slept upon it. Further, both specifically mention stones. Both record the vision of a connection between heaven and earth, with the pagan-reminiscent imagery of "head in the heavens;" The Babylonains received their vision in an unspecified manner, and Jacob through a dream. Both record the relationship of YHVH to these visions; for the Babylonians, God was invisible as God walked among them, while for Jacob God was in the here-and-now, in all space and time around him. Both contain a statement of part of God's identifying characteristics; in the Babel narrative, YHVH appears as a taskmaster, while in the Dream sequence, God is simply YHVH, the God Who connects Jacob with his ancestors. Both stories contain YHVH's reaction to the current behavior of the stories' main characters; God scatters the Babylonians over the face of the earth, but rather blesses Jacob in a personal address. Both stories contain the aftermath of God's action; Babel had to be abandoned, while Jacob metaphorically "builds" the stone into a pillar which symbolized the connection he dreamed. The stories both contain name-etioligies to encapsulate the main idea of the story. Then they end in a brilliant counter-harmony: Jacob makes a promise to God, starting impersonally and ending up in a direct address, while the Babylonians are left scattered, unable to communicate with each other, let alone with the God they were never able to see; the text lets this silence sink in, a brilliant meshing of means and ends.

Why are these parallels so pointed? I believe we are meant to compare the
two texts at each point of similarity, to understand why Jacob succeeded in a situation similar to that in which the Babylonians failed. And it seems clear from the stories that what Jacob succeeded in doing was making contact with God, while the Babylonians succeeded in alienating God and each other. Using as a base what the text says, let us draw some conclusions of our own, since I truly believe that the text's very lack of explicitness or moralizing intentionally draws us into active involvement with, and interpretation of, the stories.

The first stage in making contact where it hasn't existed before (this is true of other biblical narratives, as for example Exodus) involves (obviously) change away from the status quo. Since most of us cannot change spontaneously, without some change in our environments, the change involves movement from the familiar "home" to a new place. However, simply moving is not enough. As the narratives show by example, we have to become involved in the new place. The Babylonians were involved with the land and the attempt to secure themselves on it by building bricks; Jacob by sleeping on the ground rather than in a tent or on a bedroll, with a rock for his pillow. Though his involvement was not active, it was nevertheless important enough to be mentioned in an otherwise very terse story.

The second stage or aspect involves the perception of alternative. The Babylonians "said" they should make a tower and a name in order to avoid what they probably feared was otherwise inevitable. Jacob "dreamed" of the ladder and its messengers. The crucial difference between these two perceptions can be taken from the verbs of perception: the Babylonians "said" while Jacob "dreamed." The Babylonians sought (built and planned) the alternative, while Jacob passively allowed it to come to him. The Babylonians attached a cause and a purpose to their alternative, as well as concretizing it into a physical structure, thus leaving behind its original meaning. Jacob, on the other hand, did not try to
build a ladder to God, nor attach any personal purpose to his vision. This is perhaps the reason why great revelations are often depicted as taking place in a dream-state, an uncritical state of acceptance without the boundaries, egotism, or editing of the usual waking mind.

The third aspect of connection with God is related to the second: the ability or openness to see the presence of God in a perception of an alternative. Again, this seems contingent upon a mind free of preoccupation or self-serving interests, a mind with the leisure to consider the full ramifications of a vision. The Babylonians were so busy working on their tower that they could not see God walking among them. Jacob, on the other hand, went from the ladder vision to direct, real communication with God with no mention of any action on his part.

The fourth part of connection with God is realizing that it entails a mutual bonding, what Kaufmann referred to as the idea of "Covenant." For if one does not use the voice one has to talk to the holy or divine, one will not be able to talk to anyone, nor to be understood. The Covenant is more than being able to talk, however. It involves love, respect, mutual sacrifice, and trust. Jacob vowed a vow, offering his love and sacrifice based on the trust that YHWH would give the same to him. The Babylonians could only be silent, for they lost the privilege of communication with, and from, God.

There must be a certain balance of forces within any person, let us say between the creative and passive, in order to approach God. These forces, or "angels" as revealed to Jacob, must be neither too strongly couched in the creative and independent (the Babylonians) nor in the passive and dependent (Jacob, the mama's boy, before he fled). It is with this thesis in mind that we approach the next section of the paper, in which we compare the Jewish/Christian notion of balance with that of the Hindu religious tradition.
SECTION III

In this section of the paper I shall compare the relationship of Jacob and the Babylonians to YHVH in Genesis with that of Arjuna to Krishna in the Bhagavad-Gita. Specifically, I shall point out strong assonances in the two traditions with respect to the nature of God, the "righteous" or "blessed" man, and of the relationship between the two. I believe this comparison is feasible, despite many obvious differences between Judaism and Hinduism, because I subscribe to Eliade's conviction that religions all describe, in varied but limited types of imagery, the same human experience of, and in, the divine. I also believe that the Gita, with its lengthy exegeses on the three ways to reach God, lends itself handily to this comparison. Let us now identify the Gita as a religious text before proceeding to a comparison.

THE GITA: AN INTRODUCTION

"Gita" means "the song" and "Bhagavad" means "of the Blessed" or "of the Lord," hence, the Bhagavad-Gita is "The Song of the Lord (1)." This 18-chapter poetic text is found in the center of a much longer work, an epic entitled the Mahabharata which chronicles a great battle between the Pandvas and Mauravas. The "Lord" of the Mahabharata appears incarnated in the Gita as Krishna, who speaks to and helps the warrior Arjuna. Arjuna is torn between his caste duty as warrior (prescribed by the laws of dharma) to kill relatives if necessary, and the desire for a higher order of morality or action which would release him from the cyclicality of endless rebirths (karma) influenced by his action. This liberation or salvation is called moksha.

Interestingly, Arjuna's micro-conflict describes quite well Hinduism's macro-conflict during the Gita's composition, around 200-300 A.D. For during
this period, caste validity began to be challenged, and the abstract conception of God characteristic of the Upanishads gradually evolved into a more personal single deity (2). As R.C. Zaehner put it,

It was the Bhagavad-Gita that set in motion the transformation of Hinduism from a mystical technique based on the ascetic virtues of renunciation and self-forgetfulness into the impassioned religion of self-abandonment to God...(3).

Given that the Gita reflects a religion in limbo (between brahmanism and bhakti cults), it is not surprising that it does not wholeheartedly espouse any one of the three paths to moksha, but rather suggests a blend of the three. They are: the way of knowledge (jnana), the way of non-involved action (karma-yoga), and the way of loving-devotion to God (bhakti). Again, Zaehner sheds light on the significance of these different paths: "The Bhagavad-Gita had taught that the love of God is open to all, irrespective of caste and sex, but it had also taught that each man should perform the duties dictated to him by his station in life (4)." We see here a tension between action for self versus society (i.e., between salvation through dharma or through bhakti), a dilemma similar to that expressed in the Genesis narratives.

THE PERFECT MAN

The Gita deals mainly with two of the three ways to achieve salvation: karma-yoga and bhakti. And it explains them in the form of alternatives offered Arjuna by Krishna. Since they are equal but different paths, we should examine them separately. This analysis will facilitate a discussion of their similarities to the Genesis narratives.

We saw earlier that the Babylonians were too preoccupied with their own
actions (good though their intentions may have been) to notice God, and I
concluded that they were blinded as well as muted because they could not face
God with open hearts and uncluttered minds. Krishna gives Arjuna many
lectures in the Gita which echo this same notion:

Abstaining from attachment to the work, Abstaining from rewardment
in the work, While yet one doeth it full faithfully, / ...who doeth
duties so, Unvexed if his work fail, if it succeed Unflattered, in
his own heart justified, Quit of debates and doubts, his is [the]
'true' act... Whoso, for lack of knowledge, seeth himself as the
sole actor, knoweth nought at all/ And seeth nought (5).

To put this in the words of Edgerton's translation of the Gita, "On action
alone let thy interest be fixed, never on its fruits. Let not thy motive be
the fruits of action; but cleave not to inaction (6)."

Both traditions require of human beings action in the world; but both
put strictures on the type of action. The Babel story teaches that there
should not be action without reaction, or rather, that action must be based
upon the right motive. The Gita teaches that there shall not be action for
reward's (or one's own) sake, for as such it distracts from the path to
salvation, which is a turning-to (love of) God; rather, action should be
performed out of duty only. I think these two texts are teaching the same
message; their different emphases stem from the fact that the Babel story
focuses on the rotten fruits of good intentions without emotions, while the
Gita warns against emotional, self-serving actions devoid of right intentions.

The Gita gives a very explicit although markedly Brahmanic passage on how
thoughts and actions lead away from moksha:

If one Ponders on objects of the sense, there springs Attraction;
from attraction grows desire, Desire flames to fierce passion,
passion breeds Recklessness; then the memory - all betrayed - / Lets
noble purpose go, and saps the mind, 'Till purpose, mind, and man
are all undone (7).

The noble or perfect man in Hindu terms would, therefore, be one who acts free
from bondage to the sensory world, one who does not allow the urgings of his senses to govern his decisions and actions. The Babylonians, by this line of reasoning, were not perfect men, for they indeed did allow their senses to be "attracted" and for attraction to grow to "desire" and "recklessness," until they forgot the God of their ancestor Noah and could not see that their tower was not the way to God. Jacob, on the other hand, did not even notice the discomfort of sleeping on the ground, alone, at night in the wilderness, with a hard stone for a pillow, let alone "dream up" some alternative. Hence, he saw God, and was (in Brahmanic terms) a "perfect man" in that narrative. It is unclear in the Gita whether Arjuna is this type of man or not, but his reluctance to enter into the excitement and glory of battle would suggest that he embodied at least part of this dispassionate, uninvolved, brahmanic ideal.

However, there is another type of "perfect man" characterized by what would seem to be the opposite of the brahmanic ideal: strong attachment to God (bhakti). Zaehner describes it well:

The word bhakti means a variety of things, but in the Gita it means devotion and loyalty to Krishna, the personal God, trust in Him and love of Him. It also means God's love for man (411) and the original meaning of the word which is 'participation' is never wholly lost (8).

This "participation" is a notion very central to Judaism as well as bhakti cults, and we will see in a moment what it implies about God's nature. For the moment, we will limit ourselves to what it implies about the people who experience it. Both Arjuna and, I would argue, Jacob, felt devotion and loyalty to the God they made contact with. This argument is partially justified by the striking similarity between their behavior and oaths after seeing the "divine." Since we already know of Jacob's oath, let us read here Arjuna's:
Bub, some amazed, Thrilled, o'erfille,d dazzled, and dazed, Arjuna
knelt, and bowed his head, And clasped his palms, and cried, and
said:Yeal! I have seen! I see! Lord! all is wrapped in Thee!

and

Worthily, Lord of Might! / The whole world hath delight / In thy
surpassing power, obeying Thee... (9)

Both Arjuna and Jacob were spoken to first by God, though they had the right
"attitude" before God initiated any contact. Still, they could have sat
around with the "right attitude" forever and never known that God was there,
so close, if God had not acted. Therefore, I argue that their relationships
with God are indeed based on bhakti and that Jacob's God was just as
participatory as Arjuna's.

This understanding of bhakti and the potential for it which is what
prompts God to speak and reveal helps us to solve the unanswered question from
Section II as to why God blessed Jacob, who was at most evil, and at least a
passive follower of his mother's suggestions, with no critical faculty of his
own. For as Zaehner put it,

To be sure we are told that 'if even a very wicked man worships Me
with single devotion, he is to be regarded as righteous after all,
for he has the right resolution'. . . [this suggests] a sort of magic
absolution from sin by devotion to God, or to knowledge, as the case
may be (10).

This also explains why Arjuna receives the revelation from Krishna when it is
his older brother, Yudhishthira, who craves the contact and the knowledge.
For Yudhishthira does not have the "right resolution;" or, to put it in
Zaehner's words, his "karma has not yet worked itself out: he must wait for
it to 'ripen' and only then will he attain to moksha. To tell him the great
secret prematurely would be to violate dharma itself... (11)." So in
comparison with the Genesis moral, in which the Babylonians could not see God
because they were not looking with the right intention, we have here the Hindu
counterpart, of someone looking with what seems like the right intention, but
is in fact premature or forced. In fact, the right intention would never
imply a search, for with the right intention God comes to YOU, as God came to
Jacob and Arjuna, unhidden and in the here-and-now.

GOD IN THE GITA AND YHVH

"[Krishna] has all the attributes of a full-fledged monotheistic deity,
and at the same time...the attributes of the Upanishadic Absolute (12)." So
wrote Edgerton about the nature of the Gita's God, who is a synthesis of
Vedic/Upanishadic impersonal Being, and the personal "God" familiar to
westerners. It is the personal aspect of God, Krishna, that we see in
explicit connection with Arjuna, but we must never be tempted to think that
the Hindu religious faith limits God any more than Christianity does with the
figure of Jesus. For, as Edgerton writes,

God is pictured as the First Principle of the universe, the Soul of
all; the highest or best part of all; the noblest aspect of all;
immanent in all...He transcends the universe...God takes on
individual incarnations to save the world of men; such an
incarnation is Krsna. His supreme form is revealed only as a rare
act of grace to His elect; such an act of grace is granted to
Arjuna, who beheld God's very Self in a mystic vision (13).

So we see here a transcendent God, but one who also makes contact with humans.
This leads to a point I hinted at earlier, which is that as Zaehner stated
(see footnote 8), bhakti involves God's love of us as we love God. This is
similar to the Jewish notion of a loving and personal God, designated by YHVH.
I will argue later that the two are in fact one God experienced differently by
different peoples.

It is not relevant to God what duration of time was spent in evil or good
actions if one did not have the right heart; and if one does turn suddenly,
as we have seen in the Jacob story, it is irrelevant what went before. What is important is the change. Krishna says this to Arjuna:

I am alike for all! I know not hate, I know not favor! What is made is Mine! But them that worship Me with love, I love; They are in Me, and I in them! (14).

This implies that God is capable of love for all, and gives all a free chance to "be in God." In other words, Krishna, like YHVH, gives humans free will, as for example offering Arjuna the choice of moksha, rather than forcing it upon him. But YHVH and Krishna will never take the first step; note that Arjuna says, "But them that worship Me," implying that with free will comes the responsibility to turn to God first. Both faiths, it should be noted, imply optimism, for there is none of the predestination of the Protestants following Calvin, nor control of gods, and eventually of life itself, through ritual or propitiation common to paganism. There is in both Judaism and Hinduism a common blend of God as unbiased, omnipresent, loving, and at the same time untyrannical, patient, and ever ready to forgive.

GOD AND HUMAN

We have already seen in the context of the discussions about human and God many aspects of the relationship between the two. Coming full circle back to the point about the Babylonians with which we started this paper, let us review on a deeper level the similarities between Krishna and YHVH, and the Vedic monks and Babylonians. Edgerton has translated Krishna's words on the subject of idolatry (though it was not thus labeled in those times): "Those who are deprived of knowledge by this or that desire (for some fruit of religious actions) resort to other deities; they take up various religious systems, being constrained by their own natures (15)." In an Upanishad of the
same time period, the author wrote, "the virtues of loveless men are sinful (16)." And finally, Krishna said,

There be those, too, whose knowledge, turned aside/...gives them to serve/Some lower gods, with various rites.../Worship what shrine they will, what shapes, in faith ~/Tis I who give them faith! I am content! (17)

Combining these three quotes we come up with the following idea: If one loves God, has faith, and has trust, then one's actions, whatever they be in an effort to love God, are good. If one does not love God, or have faith, then one's actions are not of worth in any context other than the mundane. And it is clear from this that the Babylonians did not love God or have trust in Him; hence, though they thought they were building a tower connected with God, they in fact were doing a virtueless action. Jacob did love and trust God, and so was blessed in his actions though they were not inherently valuable.

This all comes back to the notion of intention versus action. And at this point the Gita has a very interesting observation to make: "Who sees inaction in action/And action in inaction,/He is enlightened among men; He does all actions, disciplined (18)." In other words, one can generally say that external, physical action is inversely proportional to internal or spiritual action. This makes comprehensible why Jacob's non-action, which was puzzlingly silent and unexciting, brought such great rewards from God.

In conclusion, then, one can say that the way to God, taught in both the Gita and the Torah, is through right intention. But "intention" should not be translated as "motive" or "impulse," for these imply some process of manipulation and rationalization. Rather, "intention" could be translated "orientation," a state of being rather than a state of becoming. This implies a certain quietude of the soul and the mind, and a trust in the God who is there whenever, wherever one looks about oneself, in all things and part of
all people. In order to experience this trust, the Gita offers karma-yoga or meditation on the truth as an exercise to teach trust. The Torah does not offer any explicit ways to reach God, for these would become idols or motives in themselves, but I believe (borrowing a bit from Martin Buber) that it teaches us the following: if one loves other human beings, and takes the moments to reflect on one's insignificance without them, one will have a chance. Just as Maimonides treated the angels as powers (of good and evil, or passive-aggressive, or any pair of opposites one wants to assume), and said that they had to be in balance in any person's life, so the Gita says that action and non-action, or involvement (with God) and non-involvement (in the world) must be balanced in a seemingly paradoxical way. For, as Krishna admonished Arjuna, "'all those...whose actions are good are released from the delusion of the opposites and participate in me, firm in their resolve (19)."

Buber expands upon this in Good and Evil:

But that [evil] is called the evil urge derives from man's having made it so...It becomes so, and continually becomes so, because man separates it from its companion and in this condition of independence makes an idol of precisely that which was intended to serve him. Man's task, therefore, is not to extirpate the evil urge, but to reunite it with the good (20).

Let us hope our world, which has been compared to Babel, can do the same.
CONCLUSION

Jacob and Arjuna are our two "success" stories, and I have argued that they were successful for the same reason: they both existed in a state of what I will label "non-grasping" for want of a better term. The Babylonians, by contrast, were dismal failures: they grasped at several things, and lost more than they sought to gain. The difference, as the Gita points out repeatedly, is not what is done or not done, but rather the way in which it is done. The person who grasps at nothing, paradoxically, gives and receives more than s/he could ever imagine, while those who grasp at anything usually lose more than they bargain for.

Why is this so? What do these traditions want to teach us about God's desires for us in the world?

I believe these texts teach that we are all creative. But we also have the propensity to let that creativity exist in the vacuum of its own existence, detached from the people and world around us, alienated from the deepest reality within us. God does not want us to squelch our creativity; such would be a waste of the uniqueness within every person! But neither does God wish us to create for the sake of creation itself; action should be purposeful. However, we are often unable to determine the overall use of an action by ourselves, and any attempt to do so usually results in an unuseful action. This is where both YHVH and Krishna, in different ways, tell us to trust that such a determination will be "made for us by God." This is a simplistic explanation of a very complicated idea, and one which cannot be rationalized, for it is the rationalization process which God's help allows us to avoid! I will try to explain it, with Buber's ending quote from page 48 to help me, as well as I understand it.
The world is made up of infinite possibility and as such cannot rightly be categorized into pairs of opposites. We categorize in order to learn, and this exercise is very useful up to a point. But when we start to let the categories determine what we perceive (which happens in adulthood), we limit our growth and often engage in useless activity. It is at this point that we must accept the paradoxicality of all things we imagined defined, and this is not easy. Jacob saw the angels, or powers, moving and changing position constantly, shifting and playing into one another on the ladder to God. Krishna said to Arjuna that those people who are released from the "delusion of the opposites" can come to Him. Both experiences were frightening enough to create awe and humility in the two men. This process of accepting "illogicities" is one in which another seeming illogicity should not be disturbing: by "being close to God" with utter devotion and by giving up all "grasping," one is able to see more clearly the ramifications of actions and to choose wisely by oneself. I repeat: it is not what is done, but how it is done, that determines the "perfect" person, or the one who is close to God.

I hinted earlier that YHVH and Krishna are different peoples' names for the same ubiquitous deity. I cannot prove this, of course - to attempt to do so would be foolish and a process opposed to that which I believe the texts we studied condoned. Instead, I suggest that any God who cannot be named, who is ubiquitous, who is loving and loved, who does not interfere in human affairs until they reach massive proportions, who patiently waits for humans to approach Him/Her, who asks for and rewards what seems impossible and yet wonderful, who is omniscient and omnipotent, and who is transcendent yet involved in the world, is unlikely to have been created by more than one culture by accident. Instead, I think cultural differences in the images of
God we see result from the approximate nature of words and images those who "succeed" can use to explain the impossible and illogical to the rest of the world. Each success story has a specific history, and often imposes its original approach to the world into the context of "contact with God." If we just keep in mind that each of us has a unique context, a potential meeting which can never be reached through our conscious, rational minds, we can accept that these stories are describing the same, unnameable, supreme God.

THOUGHTS AND REACTIONS

This paper taught me that one does not have to approach a research paper knowing exactly what one wants to say or prove. In fact, it can be valuable to research with an "open mind," for in such a state one is more likely to search out, see, and understand everything rather than edit ideas which don't conform to the thesis. I did not know what I wanted to write until I sat down with my note cards and sifted through the opinions.

On the other hand, I learned that one can never have all the information one thinks necessary to make the most fair decision - at some point, the deciding criteria must come from personal experience or opinion. When one realizes that all the information came from people who did the same thing in the past, the decision is pushed from the realm of academia and scholarship, history and research, into the quiet depths of one's own, individual, here-and-now life. In fact, I think that just such moments are those in which one has the potential to meet God. That I did not during the writing of this paper does not depress me; I know that when ends and means meet again, I will have another opportunity.

The last sentence on page 48 was meant as an allusion to the many "evils"
of our current world, the most significant of which is nuclear weapons. Until we cease to separate our ability to make weapons from our ability to sing or love, we will not escape that which, paradoxically, our efforts now attempt to "extirpate." We put relative value even here at Swarthmore upon different majors; most people find engineering far more impressive than religion, economics better than music or philosophy, and chemistry or physics better than English.

It is incumbent upon those of us who stop to think about it to spread what little alternative to our Babylonian world we can. We should not "grasp" at a solution to nuclear weapons or crime in the streets, for grasping begets grasping. Instead, we should educate ourselves and our children, our friends and our neighbors, inform people that there is hope and an alternative. For it is the spreaders who keep the messiah from appearing at the call of complete corruption.
PART I


FOOTNOTES

44. Eliade, Cosmos, p. 36.
46. Ibid., p. 174.
50. Eliade, Myths, p. 68.
51. Black & Rowley, Peake's, p. 197.

PART II

8. Nahum M. Sarna, Understanding Genesis (New York: Schocken Books,
9. Sarna, Understanding, p. 76.
10. Ibid., p. 64.
27. Ibid., p. 144.
30. Sarna, Understanding, pp. 73-74.

32. Rosenbaum & Silbermann, Pentateuch, p. 45.


34. Von Rad, Genesis, p. 145.


36. Jacob, The First, p. 79.


38. Sarna, Understanding, p. 77.

39. Fox, In the Beginning, pp. 112-114.


41. Fox, In the Beginning, p. 113.


43. Buttrick, The Interpreter's, p. 621.

44. Ibid., p. 694.

45. Ramban, Commentary, p. 358.

46. Jacob, The First, p. 191.

47. Von Rad, Genesis, pp. 278-279.


49. Ibid., p. 36.


51. Pearl, Rashi, p. 59.

52. Von Rad, Genesis, p. 280.

53. Jacob, The First, p. 190.


56. Ibid., v. II, p. 263.
57. Ibid., v. II, p. 489.
60. Liebowitz, Studies, pp. 307-308.

PART III

3. Ibid., p. 134.
4. Ibid., p. 125.
13. Ibid., pp. 190-191.


19. Ibid., p. 96.


1. Can a people have a "unique faith" when speaking the language and sharing the social and economic customs of those surrounding them? To put it differently, does one assume or prove that culture does not mediate a monotheistic faith?

2. If the Hebrews were monotheistic from the time of Abraham, why does the commandment not say, "thou shalt have no other gods" rather than "thou shalt have no other gods before me."

3. Doesn't Judaism as well as Christianity require the rejection of an "anonymous archetype" as the basis of faith (p. 21)?

Anne Hamel

1. Take one of Najarguna's dialectical approaches and assess its philosophical validity?

2. Is the study of comparative religions useful primarily because it lends to the understanding of a religion through contrast/ or because there is a phenomenon called religion which underlies all religion?

3. How can a religion that denies empirical and ontological reality be considered pragmatic and positivistic? (p. 10)

Hillary Kunins

1. What is "community" for feminists? Does it originate and function in the an analogous function to the Jewish community?

2. Is there any way a radical feminist can remain committed to the Torah and halachic dispute without betraying feminism?

3. Is the feminist language/world view of Wittig an attempt to create a new religion?