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A Weave of Women in the context of contemporary feminism and traditional Judaism

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A Weave of Women in the Context of Contemporary Feminism and Traditional Judaism

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Abstract

In this thesis I discuss E.M. Broner's novel *A Weave of Women* and show how she uses innovative rituals of status elevation and status reversal to focus her reader's attention on the problems associated with the patriarchal structures of traditional Judaism, e.g., racism and religious chauvinism. In Part One I provide a description of contemporary feminist rituals to set Broner's novel into context. Part Two is an exposition of the text of her novel comparing its feminist rites to various Jewish prayer books and descriptions of traditional Jewish rituals.

In my conclusion I offer a critique of the novel. I consider the problems Broner encounters by using traditional ritual forms to develop or celebrate her feminist themes, and I discuss whether or not the rites she creates and performs are best described as Jewish or simply feminist. I also suggest that her concept of "a weave of women" is an expression of the "communal mysticism" which Carol Christ (1980) refers to as a typical element in contemporary feminist literature.

Contents

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Preface

In this thesis I will discuss a contemporary novel by an American feminist Esther M. Broner. I will focus my analysis of *A Weave of Women* on the use and misuse of ritual as a way to develop and explore her various feminist themes. In order to do so I have divided my work into two main parts. The first part provides a context into which I have placed my reading of Broner's text. The importance of storytelling to the liberation process, the function of ritual and various contemporary feminist ritual innovations are presented as context. The second part of this thesis focuses on the text itself. I have done a comparative analysis of Broner's rituals and prayers using traditional Jewish prayer-books and festival accounts in order to determine why and how she uses ritual innovation to deal with the problems associated with sexism in contemporary western cultures.

In the introduction to this novel, Marilyn French has written that

> ...Tradition is a delivery from one generation to another of rites, customs, beliefs, styles, or codes. Age casts venerability upon a practice: it comes to have the force of law. Changes in religious rituals can cause near-rebellions among adherents; even changes in artistic styles can cause riots, as in the reception of the Impressionists, or of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. Thus, a tradition is more than a strand of culture—like a recipe passed down in a family; it is a mold in which people are formed. Changes in traditions therefore threaten the very identity of a society (ix).

My thesis will explore several of the avenues suggested by French as they relate to Broner's ritual innovation and to the problems both men and women face as they try to comes to terms with sexsim today. I will not attempt a literary analysis of Broner's text. My main interest in this thesis is to discover the roots of her ritual content and to see where and how far the various branches she has created in this novel grow into a "feminizing" or "humanizing" vision of contemporary Jewish life and culture.

Part One: A Context for Reading

A Weave of Women

Feminism and Sacred Story

It is my intention in this thesis to explore ritual models and to discuss their visionary style or mood within the women's spirituality movement today, and to concentrate on the fictional treatment of these concerns in E.M. Broner's novel *A Weave of Women*. Before I consider Broner's work I will provide an introduction to these themes by discussing the importance of storytelling to the development of a feminist consciousness, the relationship between storytelling and the emerging feminist spirituality movement and the relationship between storytelling and ritual performance.

Women who have experienced the violence and frustration associated with sexism react in many different ways. Throughout the early years of the women's movement and to the present one strategy that women have found helpful in dealing with the anxiety and stress of sexism has been to meet together with other women to talk about the effects it has had on their lives. The first time that a woman hears another woman speak out about her frustration and rage she is freed from her feelings of isolation and from the silence that has oppressed her. Carol Christ (1985) suggests that when women share these feelings with each other and reflect on their lives in such a setting, they tap into deep regions of unexplored territory from which a new theology, or "thealogy," as she prefers to call it (1979:279), can be conceived. More positive or affirming images of the feminine arise, perhaps embodied as mother or goddess figures. As a result of this exploration the creation of a new mythology based on positive experiences of the feminine has emerged within the women's movement over the past two decades (273-287). Christ refers to a woman's experience of the divine feminine as her awakening to the deepest levels of her creative or transformative self (1980:13). Some refer to this transformation as a conversion experience through which a women is empowered to challenge the powers that she feels dominate her life (Cooey

1985). Others feel the challenge to speak out, to express their deepest feelings of rage or joy which spring from the very heart of feminist consciousness (Kay Turner-1982:226). The attention paid to feelings in the context of feminist ritual is one important mark of Turner's work. She writes that "the flow of feelings, change in feelings, or sharing of feelings with others is a highly desirable goal in performing the ritual"(226). The encouragement to share journeys from oppression to liberation through the telling of stories has been one of the most effective ways that women have created a sense of community or sisterhood today.

Early anthologies of feminist writing such as *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970), edited by the poet Robin Morgan, provided passionate testimony to the power of this storytelling phenomenon. Morgan points out that the writing of this book itself radicalized her. She was overcome by the facts, the statistics, the stories that documented women's oppression and exploitation in contemporary American society.

> Everything, from the verbal assault on the street, to a "well-meant" sexist joke your husband tells, to the lower pay you get at work (for doing the same job a man would be paid more for), to television commercials, to rock song lyrics, to the pink or blue blanket they put on your infant in the hospital nursery, to speeches by male "revolutionaries" that reek of male supremacy- everything seems to barrage your aching brain... You begin to see how pervasive a thing sexism is-the definition of and discrimination against half the human species by the other half (xv, xvi)

Morgan writes with the authority of a woman expressing the depth of her own experience of radicalization. The book, she insists, had to be "told in our own words," free from the distortions of what she refers to disparagingly as the "mass media" (xix). Poets and songwriters are included in the final section entitled "Poetry as Protest." Morgan realizes that the words shared by these artists resonate with the energy and the anger of countless women who have not yet found their voices. Her message that "sisterhood is powerful" has had a major impact on the lives of countless women, who, having read this book, feel relieved of the loneliness and confusion that accompany the struggle to overcome the effects of sexism in their lives.

That women have had a less meaningful part to play in defining or naming their experience of the sacred, or for that matter, naming and defining

themselves, has become one of the most significant areas of feminist concern. Sensing their alienation from a society that does not encourage them in this process of self-definition, women often require courage to speak out about their experience of sexism.

> Women experience emptiness in their own lives—in self-hatred, in self-negation, and in being a victim; in relationships with men; and in the values that have shaped their lives. Experiencing nothingness, women reject conventional solutions and question the meaning of their lives, thus opening themselves to the revelation of deeper sources of power and value (Christ 1980:13)

A burgeoning feminist consciousness seems to have arisen as a result of the widening gap between what a patriarchal society defines as appropriate roles for women and the growing tendency in women to want to define themselves. Smashing the idols of patriarchal images or symbols of God has become a significant part of the process referred to by Mary Daly as "creative rage" (1974:137). Various contemporary women scholars of religion are interested in formulating a theological perspective based on the insights of this feminist iconoclasm. They have identified four basic principles which they feel are necessary to the development of such a feminist hermeneutical approach. They insist that it must include the premise that women are fully human (Farley 1985:44; Ruether 1984:11; 1985:115-116), that women and men are equally human (Farley:45-46; Fiorenza 1985:34; Ruether 1984:21; 1985:113), that mutuality in relationships is essential to well-being (Daly 1974:126, 131; Farley:45-47; Ruether 1984:209), and that to pursue an effective feminist hermeneutic one must assume an attitude of "radical suspicion" when interpretating theological documents or sacred texts (Fiorenza in Sakenfeld 1985:55; Russell 1985:141; Zikmund 1985:27). This radical suspicion of sacred texts is especially important when women consider questions of authority as they define what is good, evil, sacred or profane.

Carol Christ has paid particular attention to the development of women's literature as a alternative source of theological-revelation from a feminist perspective, because she feels that it provides a radical approach to the sacred and "reveal[s] the powers that provide orientation in people's lives" (1980:2). She gratefully acknowledges the influence of "narrative theologians," and

refers specifically to the work of Stephen Crites and Michael Novak in her book *Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest*. "According to Crites," she writes, "every story has a 'sacred dimension,' not so much because gods are commonly celebrated in them, but because [a women's] sense of self and world is created through them.(21)" Michael Novak suggests in *Ascent of the Mountain, Flight of the Dove* (1971) that "not to have any story to live is to experience nothingness: the primal formlessness of human life below the threshold of narrative structuring" (52). Stories provide a sense of self, a form to one's individual life. Thus, Christ writes that

> Without stories a woman is lost when she comes to make the important decisions in her life. She does not learn to value her struggles, to celebrate her strengths, to comprehend her pain. Without stories she cannot understand herself. Without stories she is alienated from those deeper experiences of self and world that has been called spiritual and religious (1980 1).

This emphasis on narrative has challenged theologians such as Christ to investigate the source of women's stories and to question the roles women assume in order to fulfill the requirements the stories suggest.

> As women become more aware of how much of their own experience they must suppress in order to fit themselves into the stories of men, their yearning for a literature of their own, in which women's stories are told from women's perspective, grows. This is why the new literature — written by women who are aware of the gap between women's experience and men's stories is so important (Christ 1980 6).

Telling stories about the sacred or spiritual dimension of their lives forces women to consider the influence of a religion that has denied them the same opportunities and respect that it extends to men. In *Diving Deep and Surfacing* Christ studied the poetry and fiction of Kate Chopin, Margaret Atwood, Doris Lessing, Adrienne Rich and Ntozake Shange. The experience of original "nothingness," the occurrence of mystical awakening in natural surroundings from which the characters derive images and symbols of personal power, and a new naming of the self which incorporates a new-found respect and honour for the female body, are referred to by Christ as common themes in these examples of contemporary women's literature (120). Christ also points out that these "patterns of spiritual quest discovered in women's literature have

also begun to emerge in other art and ritual forms .. [They] are of a new underlying sensibility, a 'sacred story,' which is surfacing in women's culture as a whole" (121). She refers to the songs of Holly Near and her strong emphasis on the building and maintaining of relationships in which a form of "communal mysticism" arises (1980:122), and she comments on the recurrence of circular images, particularly emphasized by ceramic artist Judy Chicago in "The Dinner Party" (123).

Christ writes that the art critic Lucy Lippard found an interesting connection between women's art and ritual. "When women artists like Margaret Hicks, Alice Aycock, Collette, Nil Yalter, and Ree Marton created earthwork sculptures , they, more often than men, created a link to the monumental piece by enacting a ritual around or in it" (123).

The sharing of stories during consciousness-raising meetings is considered by Christ to be a ritual affirmation of sisterhood "where women gather to hear their experiences and visions named" (1980:127). The blurring of boundaries between literature, art, and ritual, suggests to Christ that there is a movement toward integration and wholeness in women's culture that is indicative of women's actual experience of themselves and their world. Such blurring occurs, for instance, during readings by Ntozake Shange, when "poetry-reading spill[s] over into dance and ritual forms (127).

The integration of personal "stories" in the formulation of theological points of view, has been emphasized by women who have chosen to remain within the Christian church. Christian educators associated with the Mud Flower Collective (a group of seminarians and theology students in the United States) feel that the inclusion of their own stories of faith development is integral to the comprehensive treatment of contemporary theological issues. This group has stressed the importance of feminist "imaging" to the process of developing new ways to speak of and to experience, the sacred dimension in their lives:

> "A theological process grounded in imaging invites us to draw from our own lived-experience, to present ourselves, our sense of reality, and to make sense of the stories, words, pictures, or sounds that others share. Imaging makes us aware that we are bringing our own lives and perceptions to theology. Activating our imaginative resources makes clear that the concrete truths

> of our lives, memories, and values are foundational to our conceptual work (161)[1]

Claiming that personal experience is a significant factor in the development of a theological point of view characterizes the feminist spirituality movement today. By sharing stories about their pain and frustration, women reach out to each other for comfort and support. They explore the depths of their own experience of the sacred for answers to the important questions in their lives, and for images and symbols of the divine that speak meaningfully to their experience as women. What has begun to emerge is a women's culture which seeks to express itself in the formulation of women's literature, art and ritual expression. Ritual, particularly, is one way in which women can dramatize their new awareness of themselves in the context of a like-minded community or group. In this way ritual action "animates" (Grimes 1982:58-59) our lives and inspires us to act out some of the transformations or discoveries that we experience in our spiritual journey.

Feminist liturgical communities, or "Women-Church" (Ruether 1985) congregations have been formed to accommodate women's search for a deeper understanding of their spiritual experience through the ritualization of significant moments in their personal and communal life. Ruether writes that women "are starved for the words of life, for symbolic forms that fully and wholeheartedly affirm their personhood and speak truth about the evils of sexism and the possibilities of a future beyond patriarchy" (5). Such groups offer women in this state of flux a supportive place in which to review their lives and experiment with lifestyle innovations.

> We do not form new communities lightly, but only because the crisis has grown so acute and the efforts to effect change so unpromising that we often cannot even continue to communicate within these traditional church institutions unless we have an alternative community of reference that nurtures and supports our being (5).

The inclusion of women's art, poetry and ritual performance into the prevailing patriarchal culture is important to feminism's vision of liberation from sexism, because, as Novak suggests, we acquire our foundational stories, our scripts from the culture into which we are born (1971:49). By providing a variety of positive options for personal development with complimentary

images of the empowered feminine, the feminist vision can have a strong influence on how women come to terms with or challenge sexism in their lives.

This integration of our stories with the emerging feminist point of view motivates some women to act in ways that they hope will encourage sociological and political change. Merely telling stories and not acting out the radical transformation that they imply is like cutting a plant off at its root. Storytelling circles initiate women into the mystery and power of ritual action. Often the unity that is ritually expressed in these meetings inspires women to become more active in in social or political spheres.

Charlene Spretnak's book, *The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power Within the Feminist Movement* (1982), indicates how diverse the paths of contemporary feminists have become. Some feminists describe their process and their developing commitment to feminism through the writing of fiction and the creation and performance of rituals sensitive and responsive to the experience of contemporary women. The importance of ritual to women who look forward to the transformation of culture, as well as to a transformation of the self, has been suggested by Kay Turner's essay, "Contemporary Feminist Rituals," which is published in Spretnak's book.

> That women in the United States and elsewhere have begun to claim sacred space for themselves, to create rituals which emphasize their loyalty to each other and finally name the powers which men have found "anomalous" (i.e., nameless) is indeed an ultimate radical (proceeding from the root) affirmation of the revolutionary potential of the feminist movement... Feminist ritual practice is currently the most important model for symbolic and, therefore, psychic and spiritual change in women (1982:222).

In his article, "The Symbolism of Liminality", Juha Pentikainen (1979) writes that the performance of various rituals is one way in which a culture transmits religious or other messages to members of that culture when they become aware of their symbolic meanings (158). He refers to Firth's (1973:77) suggestion that symbols can be understood as a culture's "storage units." These emerging feminist ritual groups are reflecting as well as inspiring the creation of more positive symbols of the feminine. Clifford Geertz

suggests that the exchange of these symbolic meanings between individuals is the process by which they become "human". This suggests the importance of feminist ritualization for women dealing with the pain of sexism in their lives today. Powerful or empowering images and symbols of the feminine encourage women as they explore what it means to become "human" today.

> ...Culture provides the link between what men [sic] are intrinsically capable of becoming and what they actually, one by one, in fact become. Becoming human is becoming individual and we become individual under the guidence of cultural patterns, historically created systems of meaning in terms of which we give form, order, point, and direction to our lives. And the cultural patterns involved are not general but specific: not just "marriage" but a particular set of notions about what men and women are like, how spouses should treat one another, or who should properly marry whom. Man is to be defined neither by his innate capacities alone, nor by his actual behavior alone...but rather by the link between them, by the way in which the first is transformed into the second, his generic potentialities focuses into his specific performances (1973:52).

It is important to note with Pentikainen that behind every ritual performance, or the transference of meaningful symbols, is an over-riding worldview which distinguishes one cultural or historical period from another. Northrop Frye reminds us that "culture interposes, between the ordinary and the religious life, a vision of possibilities, and insists on its totality -for whatever is excluded from culture by religion or state will get its revenge somehow" (1957:127). According to many feminists this revenge has taken the form of a revolution in women's consciousness, which has expressed itself in an outpouring of positive feminine images and language.

One of the significant developments related to the rise of feminism, therefore, has been an increased interest in women's experience and expression of the sacred. Just as women have challenged the political, legal and medical institutions of patriarchal culture, they have challenged religious institutions as well by seeking ordination and other positions of authority within their traditions. Aviva Cantor, Judith Plaskow and Rosemary Ruether address this question by encouraging liturgical reform from within the Jewish and Christian traditions. Some women have turned their backs on patriarchally oriented traditions altogether. Women who feel that their experiences have

been devalued or ignored within them have been seeking ways to express their spirituality through, for example, alternative ritual forms. They feel that the Jewish and Christian traditions are hopelessly archaic and irrelevant to women's spiritual quests today. The rituals referred to by Carol Christ, Starhawk and Hallie Inglehart Mountainwing exemplify this path. Whichever path is taken both groups seek to affirm positive images of the feminine. They seek to challenge the inferior position and negative attitudes toward women that typify patriarchal societies and religions.

Ritual and Religious Tradition

Definitions of ritual vary from writer to writer, and some definitions are more helpful than others in facilitating fruitful study of feminist rites. The definition formulated by Jonathan Z. Smith is helpful for understanding feminist ritual, because it considers the performance of ritual as an attempt to rationalize the imperfections of the human condition and to project an idealized world toward which the performers can strive. Smith characterizes ritual in this way:

> I would suggest that, among other things, ritual represents the creation of a controlled environment where the variables, (i.e., the accidents) of ordinary life have been displaced precisely because they are felt to be so overwhelmingly present and powerful. Ritual is a means of performing the way things ought to be in such a way that this ritualized perfection is recollected in the ordinary, uncontrolled, course of things. . . . It provides an occasion for reflection and rationalization on the fact that what ought to have been done was not done (Smith 1982:124-125).

It is my opinion that feminist ritual in particular exemplifies this process of reflection and the acting out of an idealized reality because it focuses its attention on the conflicts women experience in an increasingly antiritual and sexist society. Kay Turner suggests that engaging in ritual performance facilitates a woman's ability to break through her present reality and to invent alternatives that reflect her new mood and growing commitment to developing a better life for herself.

> Ritual is a potent source of invention because the participants feel the extreme intensity, sometimes ecstasy, of openness to possibility and revelation (1982:227).

Feminist ritualists suggest that such a transformation depends on the mutual empowerment of individual women. Paula Cooey writes that this empowerment of women is often felt as a transforming religious experience and

that religious language is used to interpret or describe it. She says the changes associated with embracing feminism constitute a conversion experience (1985:24-32). She writes that this kind of conversion is a turning toward "full related self-hood" and that this experience "is the first genuine taste of what it means to be a person equal to other persons, a full participant in a wider community of being" (30). This mutual empowerment of women is often the explicit goal of women's spirituality groups. Explorations into the sources of ritual action seem to facilitate this process. Kay Turner in her essay, "Contemporary Feminist Rituals," describes the empowering function as the "continual exchange of gifts which heightens the affirmative identity of all who participate.... At the the very least, it has been a useful mode for envisioning what a different world for women might *feel* like" (1982:226). This stress on the idealized nature of the world created by feminist ritual seems to echo the thought of Jonathan Z. Smith cited above. Both writers suggest that ritual provides an imaginative or projected vision of how things could be if we all lived in a perfect world. Kay Turner and other feminists such as E.M. Broner go so far as to assert that their vision provides a template of how things could be and indeed *should* be in a world beyond sexism. The power of feminist rituals rests in their ability to charge the women who participate in them with a creative spark. Empowered by this spark women can invent and embody new ways of being in the world. Kay Turner explains:

> The use of ritual is significant as a source for the renewal of commitment to evolving and transforming society as a whole. In authentic ritual experience something, an ability to break through the present, is available which can lead to discovery and creativity. Ritual is a potent source of invention because the participants feel the extreme intensity, sometimes the ecstacy, of openness to possibility and revelation (1982:227).

Kay Turner's views concerning this creative aspect of ritual seem to suggest that rituals in and of themselves provide an opportunity as well as a challenge to individuals and cultures to reflect on their ability to express these deep feelings. When ineffectual traditional rituals lose their meaning alternative ones are created to provide more appropriate settings for "divine" revelation to occur. Feminist scholars such as Christ believe that women's experience provides sources of sacred knowledge for them and that rituals should reflect this experience by using language or images better suited to them.

The human life cycle has been described by various theorists as the passage through physical as well as social changes of status and self-awareness within the context of a particular culture. Typically, these rites are intricately connected to the religious beliefs and practices of that culture.[3] Although they are not recognized universally, most cultures facilitate passage through these stages by recognizing them and providing rites which not only mark the transition from one stage to another but also pass on specialized knowledge to aid individuals to live productively in, and identify more closely with, new stations or status in that social structure (Van Gennep:13; V. Turner:95).

Ritual can be understood as a conserving or preserving agent which maintains and strengthens the cultural identity of individuals and perpetuates the culture itself. What is passed on *is* the culture—the traditions, symbols and the language used. Both my own daughter and a Ndembu girl must pass from girlhood into adulthood sometime in their lives. How they do so-what they leave behind and what they can look forward to—are some of the factors that make them different from each other.[4] Each represents her own unique culture and heritage, her family life and social expectations.

Howeyer, there is another level of human experience that affects the ritual expressions of a particular culture: *Cultures themselves change*. What was once appropriate in the context of one historical or cultural setting may no longer be so in the context of another. The position and status of children, for instance, has varied widely from the days when eight-year olds worked long shifts in the mills and factories of our own nineteenth century urban areas to the computer age in which "vidkids" match their wits with *Donkey Kong*. A child in each of these settings must learn what is socially acceptable behavior, and each must acquire the skills necessary to survive within it.

In a similar way a woman's passage through the life cycle differs from the passages made by her foremothers. A woman of my grandmother's generation passed into womanhood with the expectation of marriage and child-rearing. The skills she learned encouraged the development of her ability to keep and maintain a household, which probably included several children (Luxton 1980). Today a woman of my generation does not necessarily approach adulthood with the same expectations of marriage and family. These

are only two of the possible courses a woman can take. The impact of feminism on women's ability to seek alternatives has changed the way in which women approach maturity in this and other modern cultures. It appears that many women's gender role expectations are changing much more rapidly than their culture's ability to assimilate these changes through appropriate rituals. Religions, for instance, founded on patriarchal assumptions are being challenged by contemporary women to at least note, if not liturgically reflect, these social changes.

Victor Turner (1969) suggests that ritual itself is a process by which a culture deals with and discharges the anxiety produced by disruption and change. Ritual provides opportunities and settings where possible changes in "direction and self-definition" can take place (Doty 1988:102). In *The Ritual Process* Turner stresses what he perceives to be an alternating movement or flow between social structure and what he refers to as "communitas" or " anti-structure." Communitas is characterized by its ability to transcend the conventional ordering of society into a hierarchy in which one class or group dominates another (1969:158). In this state of flux, which he refers to as "liminoid" (after Van Gennep's (1960) use of the term "liminal"), ritual is experienced as a dynamic process through which individuals or cultures create new structures. Feminism can be viewed as a social movement whose primary aim is to restructure society in ways that provide men and women with equal opportunities for personal and social development. Feminist ritualists focus on the fact that women are systematically denied status within the context of patriarchal structures. They note that women are assigned specific roles which deny them opportunities to reach their fullest potential, and that it is from this experience of marginalization that women's desire for meaningful change has come. Victor Turner has suggested that it is precisely at the point where convention and social expectation clash that change is likely to take place.

> Liminality, marginality, and structural inferiority are conditions in which are frequently generated myths, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems, and works of art. These cultural forms provide men [and women] with a set of templates or models which are, at one level, periodical reclassifications of reality and [wo]man's relationship to society, nature, and culture. But they

> are more than classifications, since they incite men [and women] to action as well as to thought (1969:128-129).

Women who feel alienated from their culture because of its sexist limitations must also deal with feelings of guilt when their strategies to overcome this alienation threaten or challenge religious principles and institutions that they have identified with since childhood. Perhaps they have participated with their families in traditional religious practices which have provided a ritual or liturgical structure to their lives. The celebration or marking of life-cycle transitions is usually associated with a particular religious system or worldview. Participants in ritual quite often petition for and expect divine guidance as they pass through one stage of life to the next. If not a deity, a host of ghostly ancestors is called upon to aid them in their passage. Divine approval reinforces a culture's power to maintain the position of its dominant group, especially by outlining social norms that it then "legitimizes" (Berger 1969:38,39).

Simone de Beauvoir, in her study of what she referred to as the "second sex," i.e., women, makes a similar connection between social structure and divine sanction in this way:

> Man enjoys the great advantage of having a god endorse the code he writes, and since man exercises a sovereign authority over women it is especially fortunate that this authority has been vested in him by the Supreme Being For the Jew, Mohammedans and Christians, among others, man is master by divine right; the fear of God will therefore repress any impulse to revolt in the downtrodden (1952:585).

The significant thing about the feminist revolution regarding religious domination is that despite the incredible ability of a sovereign, repressive structure to manipulate individuals through this fear, some women have risen up and challenged that power by questioning male dominance as it expresses itself through patriarchal assumptions about man's preeminance in assuming religious authority. Kay Turner has suggested that feminists are creating and performing rituals that "promote and sanction this turning away from the old to the new" and which provide "emotional, descriptive, intensified and sanctifying version[s] of emerging ideological systems" (1982:220). The ordination of women in patriarchal religions such as Christianity and Judaism

typifies a point at which these two conflicting ideologies meet and clash. For example, Reverend Carter Heywood and Rabbi Sally Preisand felt compelled to express a more meaningful commitment to their respective faiths by challenging the notion that women were unsuitable as candidates for ordination. They were among the first women in their communities to do so.

In order to suggest the significance of their actions in light of the traditional biases against women I will briefly discuss the impact of their challenge to the authority of their male superiors.

Heyward was ordained a priest with ten other female deacons in Philadelphia in 1974. Many people opposed the ordination, and it was declared to be invalid by the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church in America. Heyward says in her book of essays and sermons, *Our Passion for Justice: Images of Power, Sexuality and Liberation* (1984),

> The time has gone when we could make a gracious and responsible attempt to discuss the pros and cons of women's ordination with those who oppose it, including the Presiding Bishop:... There is and will be no turning back. Women are priests. We are a fact. We are an irreversible reality. And we are, in the words of a sister priest, a gift to the church (1984:3-5) Indeed, the issue in the Philadelphian ordination was that of a disruption of sexist order: women saying NO to the divine authority that has been assumed by men as their own; women daring to claim the right and the power to stand in defiance of this authority, which had become, historically, a strong, tenacious given (14).

Sally Preisand was the first woman to be ordained rabbi by any theological seminary. The ceremony took place on June 3, 1972, at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, Ohio. The significance of this event is best described by Preisand herself:

> As I sat in the historic Plum Street Temple waiting to accept the ancient rite of *s'micha* (ordination), I couldn't help but reflect on the implications of what was about to happen. For thousands of years women in Judaism had been second-class citizens. They were not permitted to own property. They could not serve as witnesses. They did not have the right to initiate divorce proceedings. They were not counted in the *minyan*. Even in Reform Judaism, they were not permitted to participate fully in the life of the synagogue. With my ordination all that was going to change; one more barrier was about to be broken (1975:xiii).

Even though Reform Judaism had declared "official" equality between men and women, it is still expected by some that women would stay within the traditional confines of the home. Although Preisand credits some of her professors and the president of the seminary, Dr. Nelson Glueck, with encouraging her to further her study and to seek ordination, she met with resistance at the seminary, and met it again when the time came to find a position. Many congregations refused to interview her. Eventually, Preisand was offered a position at the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue in New York City as assistant rabbi. She writes that "The only area in which people have shown any real hesitancy has been that of my officiating at funerals" (xv).

> The last of the life-cycle events is death. Both men and women are expected to observe traditional mourning customs. Only men, however, are obligated to recite *Kaddish*. This mourner's prayer, which does not mention death but praises the God of life, is to be said by the closest male relative if no sons, brothers, or father survive. In cases where there is no male relative, it is customary to hire someone to recite *Kaddish* (60-61)

Preisand found that it was at this point in the life of the Jewish community that tradition and convention were expected and appreciated. However, she refers to a letter written in 1916 that eloquently speaks to the issue of women's role in the ritual life of Judaism. In it Henrietta Szold writes to a male friend who has offered to recite the *Kaddish* for her at her mother's funeral.

> ...Jewish custom is very dear and sacred to me. And yet I cannot ask you to say *Kaddish* after my mother. The *Kaddish* means to me that the survivor publicly and markedly manifests his [sic] wish and intention to assume the relation to the Jewish community which his parents had, and that so the chain of tradition remains unbroken from generation to generation, each adding its own link. You can do that for the generations of your family, I must do that for the generations of my family.... My mother had eight daughters and no son; and yet never did I hear a word of regret pass the lips of either my mother or my father that one of us was not a son. When my father died, my mother would not permit others to take her daughter's place in saying the *Kaddish*, and so I am sure I am acting in her spirit when I am moved to decline your offer (61-62).

Preisand does not feel that she has stood alone in her struggle to pursue ordination against the traditional tide of Jewish custom. She feels that she

stands in a long line of Jewish women who have carried out their duties and have gone far beyond what their religion expected of them. Women are not obliged to carry out the prescribed rites and ceremonies that men are. However, she argues, this tradition should not prohibit them from participating in them if they wish to. Although Preisand is considered the first woman to be ordained as a rabbi, she herself insists that a woman succeeded in fulfilling the requirements for ordination in the 1930's. Regina Jonas completed her studies at the Berlin Academy for the Science of Judaism, focusing her dissertation on the question of whether or not women can become rabbis. Of course she set out to prove that they could. Although she fulfilled all the requirements, and defended her thesis with success, she was denied ordination by the licensing authority, because her professor of *Talmud* refused to officiate (67). Preisand recognizes Jonas out of respect for her courage and determination to succeed against the overwhelming opposition and misogyny of her time.

Many other women have felt called to challenge the patriarchal conventions of their faiths. Heyward and Preisand are but two who have gained recognition in our time. Neither would want to suggest that they accomplished this Promethean task alone. Carter Heyward gratefully acknowledges those who helped or inspired her as she struggled toward a more meaningful ministry to the church she loved. She believed that by challenging the church in this way she was dutifully embodying God's will. "We must make no peace with any oppression—our own or that of others. We must speak out. We must risk offending, not for the sake of offense, but for the sake of God" (5).

The lives of these women seriously challenge the stereotypes and prescribed limitations associated with patriarchal religions. Their determination to overcome the prejudices that surrounded them has become an inspiration for other women who have decided to follow this path and to make the passage from laity to ordained clergy their own.

Rosemary Radford Ruether proposes that "religious traditions fall into crisis when the received interpretations of the redemptive paradigms contradict experience in significant ways" (1983:16) and that "a still more radical

crisis of tradition occurs when the total religious heritage appears to be corrupt"(17). Ruether qualifies this statement by insisting that "whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of woman is, therefore appraised as not redemptive"(18,19). The crisis addressed by this feminist challenge can be described as a shift in some women's willingness to accept a patriarchal culture's religious paradigm. Jewish or Christian feminists carry out their reforming work with the hope that such an inclusion of their interests will inspire change in the theological considerations and ritual forms of their traditions. Women who have chosen to explore Goddess-centred worship reflect an even more pronounced departure from this patriarchal paradigm.

Rituals can be seen as vital arteries through which the lifeblood of a culture passes into and through the community of individuals who make up that culture. Blockages caused by out-dated rites and ceremonies can be relieved by pressure exerted on them by anyone committed to meaningful change. Either this pressure ruptures the artery by its very urgency for change and spells death for that particular ritual tradition,[4] or it can reduce the blockage by exerting a gentler pressure, slowly working on the problems and dissolving the encrustations within the context of the already established tradition.[5] In either case the culture itself will be profoundly changed, as will be the individuals who have contributed to its transformation.

When seen in this light, Smith's definition of ritual makes a great deal of sense. The major function of ritual, he suggests, is dealing with "matters of incongruity" between the way things are done and they way they ought to be done if we could control our reality in any ultimate sense (1982:57-58). Rituals can provide a setting and a time to reflect on one's individual and collective experience. Occasionally, they free the imagination to create alternative ways of living and being in the world. Ritual allows the participant imaginative or performative control of an event that is being reflected on, and to experience the power and/or status that is denied within the context of his or her ordinary reality. Smith refers to the performance of a ritual which precedes a bear hunt (1982:64), in which the participants recognize that they cannot control the bear. What the associated ritual does do is give them an

opportunity to reflect on their relationship to the bear and time to prepare mentally and physically for the arduous task of actually tracking down and killing it. Similarly, feminist rituals allow women to reflect on their experience of sexism in safe and supportive "founded places" (Grimes: 1982:67) where like-minded individuals can help them work through the arduous task of re-creating themselves. Such rituals can inspire a change in the way a woman actually perceives her world. They often help her differentiate between the things she cannot control or change and the things that she is able to change if only she has the will and courage to try. Feminists refer to this aspect of ritual as its "empowering" function, its ability to facilitate a woman's transformation by revealing more of her individual and collective power to change the circumstances of her life.

Feminist Rituals

What are some of the options open to women who are looking for alternatives to what they perceive as hostile or meaningless ritual traditions? How does a woman come to terms with her feelings of confusion, loneliness, fear or guilt when she realizes that the religious tradition she has been born into is only adding to her anxiety or alienation? How do women cope with the incongruities inherent in a patriarchal religious system that seems to deny them the same rights and privileges it extends to men? What does a woman do when she feels the pressure to conform to the rites and ceremonies of a particular faith which denies her an authentic sense of self or a meaningful voice in how she chooses to live her life? These are some of the questions that will be discussed in this chapter and which have engaged the minds and hearts of feminists interested in the spiritual development of women over the past two decades.

There are many routes that a woman experiencing these kinds of problems might take. Psychotherapeutic counselling,[7] pastoral counselling (which might encourage confession, penance and absolution), converting to another religious tradition,[8] or expressing one's deepest feelings through the mediums of art or literature are all paths that have been travelled with varying degrees of success by contemporary Western, middle class women.

The recent development of alternative rites and ceremonies inspired by contemporary feminist theology has offered women another path. Ruether emphasizes the importance of "intentional communities of faith and worship" in this period of sociological, cultural and theological crisis (1985:3):

> One needs communities of nurture to guide one through death to the old order of patriarchy to the rebirth into a new community of being and living. One also needs deep symbol and symbolic actions to guide and interpret the actual experience of the journey from sexism to liberated humanity

> (3). . . Women in contemporary churches are suffering from linguistic deprivation and eucharistic famine. They can no longer nurture their souls in alienating words that ignore or systematically deny their existence. They are starved for the words of life, for symbolic forms that fully and wholeheartedly affirm their personhood and speak truth about the evils of sexism and the possibilities of a future beyond patriarchy (4).

Ruether suggests that women who gather in such intentional communities embrace a "liminal religiosity" that draws from biblical as well as pre-biblical traditions (4), and which in its earliest stages is characterized by its separation from male-dominated groups. Such communities provide a haven for women in need of healing and support. Women drawn to them "assume that existing institutional churches do not have a monopoly on the word of truth or the power of salvation." Ruether insists that "their power is so negative that attendance at their fonts poisons our souls" (5).

In *The Ritual Process* Victor Turner writes that movements that stress an identification with liminality often occur during periods of rapid social change (1969:189). Expressions of communitas, which I feel Ruether is describing when she refers to intentional faith communities or Women Church congregations are, according to Turner, conceived in the turmoil of what he describes as cultural "disaster area|s|" (1969:154). According to feminist theologians such as Mary Daly (1984) the very structure of Judaism, Christianity or any other patriarchically structured religion implies the sexual marginalization and psychological, if not physical, abuse of women. Women and children suffer horribly in what might be described as outright war on their happiness and well-being. Men suffer abuses within the context of a sexist social structure as well, but women seem to be the primary targets in this patriarchal offensive.

Turner refers to danger itself as "one of the chief ingredients in the production of existential communitas" (1969:153). From the point of view of those women who have chosen to leave traditional religions such as Judaism and Christianity it is easy to appreciate their participation in rites and celebrations associated with the more affirming images and language of Goddess worship (Christ 1979:274-287). These women are attempting to re-define their religious experience free from the domination of men and sexist stereotypes.

For those women who continue to identify themselves as Christians, Ruether has situated their mandate for liberation within what she refers to as the "prophetic principle" of the Hebrew Bible. Ruether and Fiorenza (1985) insist that the New Testament and the Hebrew Bible provide internal critiques of patriarchy and the religious legitimation of it (Reuther 1983:22). Women who are inspired by this tradition can look to the prophetic tradition against oppression, references to a liberating sovereign, a strong proscription of idolatry and the presence of both male and female images of the divine (61-66). Women who have been inspired by this liberation tradition can choose to separate from the institutional church and to gather together into alternative liturgical communities. Very often they feel that they are operating under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit when they do so (Ruether 1983:34; Turner 1969:131-165). Typically, these groups feel that they are returning to the roots of their tradition and to the basic teachings of their founder. Both Ruether and Fiorenza exemplify this trend in that they emphasize the ministry of Jesus to the poor, the outcast, the oppressed (Ruether 1983, 1985; Fiorenza 1985).

The ritual process understood in Victor Turner's terms, "typically functions as a mode of redressive action in the process of accelerated social transition" (Grimes 1982:147).

> In Turner's writings, liminality designates the generative quality which lends motions to a society, forcing it out of a rigid system and into flowing process. Among the liminoid phenomena considered by Turner are rituals, myths, pilgrimages, millenarian movements, revolutions, fiestas, and public celebrations (149).

The feminist rituals that I will now consider are fundamentally redressive. Whether they are rituals developed in the context of Christian or Jewish feminist reform traditions or are the women-honouring rituals associated with Goddess worship, they seek to right the wrongs and address the grievances being expressed by women suffering the pains and frustrations that seem unavoidable within the context of a sexist society.

Bringing a Daughter into the Covenant

In her essay, "Bringing a Daughter into the Covenant," Judith Plaskow introduces her reader to a rite she created to celebrate the birth and dedi-

cation of a daughter into the Jewish community with as much "pomp and ceremony" as has been traditional for the welcoming of a son. She writes,

> In the past few years, many Jewish parents, myself included have tried to rectify this inequality in life cycle rituals by creating distinctive ceremonies for the birth of a daughter paralleling the *brit milah* [the covenant of circumcision for boys] (1979:179).

Plaskow was unable to think of a comparable rite to circumcision, and so decided to centre her celebration around important aspects of women's experience within Jewish history that were important to her.

> In insisting that girl children are also the heirs and guarantors of tradition, it reminds us that-just as they are excluded from *brit-milah*-they have in fact been excluded from much of Jewish religious life (180).

This rite is deliberately compensatory as Plaskow's use of female God-language implies. The song of Hannah is recited by the mother of the girl; a *Midrash* on the giving of the *Torah* is read by the father, with an affirmation that daughters as well as sons are "good guarantors" that its teachings be guarded and preserved and taught from generation to generation. Plaskow then acknowledges the contributions of Jewish women—Sarah, Miriam, Huldah and "the unnamed thousands of women" who have taken part in the history of her people (183). A portion of the *brit milah* ceremony is recited by the parents using female God-language, which names the infant girl as a new daughter of Israel. The rite ends with a blessing:

> May She who blessed our mothers Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, Miriam the prophetess, Hannah the barren one, Deborah the Judge, bless also this little child. May she be with you and be gracious to you. May she show kindness to you and give you peace (183-184).

Within the context of the traditional Jewish ritual two significant redressive changes have been made. God is referred to as *She*, since as Plaskow writes "full participation in the Jewish community is indissolubly connected with our willingness to speak of God as male and female..." (180). The second is that women, traditionally marginalized or tokenized in the history of the Jewish people, are invoked and asked to be witnesses to the welcoming of an infant girl as she is blessed and named within the Jewish family.

A Menopause Ritual

Contemporary feminist rituals bring into sharper focus those rites of passage that might be ignored or trivialized by a patriarchal culture. Rosemary Radford Ruether has included a menopause rite in her book *Women-Church: Theology and Practice* (1985:204-206). In this rite women are gathered into a circle and given candles. Pre-menopausal women are given purple ones, and women who have already stopped bleeding are given yellow ones. In the meditation that follows, the creative energy of women is evoked and honoured by the gathered women:

> It is the power of the ovaries to create eggs and wombs to nurture the seeded egg into another human being. It is the creative energy to bring forth poetry, song, image. It is the creative energy to reflect on all reality, to mirror the world in the mind and bring forth rational discourse, and to teach others of the secrets of the workings of the world around us . . . All of these are our many creative mother-energies. We rejoice as she enters into her full powers in the many other birthing energies which are hers (205).

In this rite of transition, the loss of one birthing energy is mourned while the other creative energies of women are affirmed. The woman making the transition blows out her purple candle and is given a yellow one which is then lit from the candle of another menopausal woman. She is welcomed by the menopausal women present with the words, "Welcome to the community of women who no longer ovulate and bleed and who create now with their minds and their spirits" (205). A cup of herbal tea is blessed and shared around the circle. The brew is a traditional healing witchhazel tea which is used by women to calm and soothe the "distresses of the monthly cycle of egg and blood" (206). One of the women then continues:

> This healing tea links all women—those who do not yet bleed, those who bleed, and those who no longer bleed—in one community of creators and caretakers of life in its many forms (206)

This ritual is also redressive in character, since it seeks to mark a transition in women's lives that has been neglected, and because it seeks to honour the female body in all its stages through the life cycle. It affirms a woman's experience of her body as good, when in the wider culture she might feel useless and unwomanly. This rite lovingly reinforces a connectedness with

the community of all women, whatever stage they are at in the life cycle, so that womanhood is redefined in all of its aspects whether or not the ability to bear children is a part of that state.

Seasonal or calendrical rites have also been created by women. I have selected two; one which is celebrated in the spring, and one which is celebrated in the fall.

A Jewish Woman's *Haggadah*

Aviva Cantor created the *Jewish Woman's Haggadah* in order to remember and re-enact the participation of women in the history and development of the Jewish people. It is a reworking of a rite that she collaborated on with two men, Itshak Epstein and Yaakov Kirshen (Cantor:185). Her desire to produce a feminist *Seder* grew out of her association with a Jewish women's consciousness-raising group.

> We felt that we were a family and that we could use this most Jewish of ceremonies to bring us and other Jewish women closer to each other and to our history and values (186). The *Haggadah's* aim was to provide connecting links between Jewish women of the past and us here in the present (187).

This example illustrates very well how fluid and yielding a ritual must be, especially if it is to remain meaningful to the individuals who are participating in it. Cantor admits that the *Seder* is incomplete. She challenges others to address the problems she found inherent in a *Seder* specifically tailored for use by women:

> On one hand, the Seder is a Jewish celebration. It marks a *specific*-national-liberation from a *specific*-national-oppression. The Jewish woman however, cannot celebrate this liberation with a whole heart because she knows that her oppression continues. This might lead us to want to incorporate into the *Haggadah* a whole lot of material on the oppression of women in Jewish life, and indeed my first draft did just that. But that would bring us into conflict with the essential nature of the *Seder*, which is joyous and emphasizes those things that unite Jews rather than divide them...(187).

To overcome some of the problems that might detract from the very nature of the *Seder* celebration, Cantor studied the history of her people more closely and decided to use examples of participation by women in the struggle for national freedom and self-determination. The traditional *Seder* does not

typically address the problem of the oppression of women within the Jewish community. Cantor's version did not totally address this problem either. It also did not lend itself to the traditional *Seder* atmosphere which incorporates the participation of young and old, men and women who joyously meet to celebrate their liberation together. In spite of these problems Cantor believes that this revised *Seder* gives Jewish women an opportunity to celebrate liberation from their own oppression, especially when it is celebrated by a group of women who have met to scrutinize and lovingly investigate their spiritual heritage together (186).

In the opening message of the *Seder* the celebrant points out the growing sense of family experienced by women through affirmations of sisterhood (189). In traditional Judaism the basic structure of the traditional Passover *Seder* consists of the following:

1) Preparatory steps: lighting the candles, making the separation and hallowing of wine *kiddish* for blessings, washing the hands, eating bitter greens dipped in salt water and breaking of one unleavened *matzah*.

2) Telling the story through a series of questions and partial answers between the youngest of the group and an elder. The heart of the telling is from Deuteronomy 26: 5-8 which tells of the Israelites' entrance into and exodus from Egypt, and the discussion of *midrashic* commentaries. Included are tales about the ten plagues sent by God.

3) The singing of *Hallel* psalms thanking God for present and future redemptions.

4) The eating of ritual foods which consists of *matzah*, *maror* (bitter herbs), and *charoset* (a paste of chopped nuts, apples or raisins and wine).

5) The post meal grace and the singing of more psalms (Waskow 148-151).

Cantor relates the courageous story of Jewish midwives who refused to kill Jewish male infants as was commanded by the Pharaoh. The first cup of wine is blessed in memory of these women. The second cup of wine is dedicated to the memory of Jewish fighters and prisoners who died in Nazi camps and ambushes during the Second World War. Cantor especially remembers several women such as Hannah Senesh and Haviva Reik, who were

active in the Resistance movement (190). Women who participated in the Zionist movement are remembered after the eating of *matzah* and the bitter herbs/greens. The third cup of wine is dedicated to the modern women who laboured in the new nation of Israel-the *halutzot* or women pioneers, and those who died in the defense of Israel while serving in the Underground or army during the War of Independence (191). Those who founded the first Working Women's Movement of of 1911 are also remembered. The fourth cup is blessed and dedicated to those women who are "struggling to find new and beautiful ways to say "I am a Jew" (192). The *Seder* is concluded by a communal meal and the words,

> May we carry out our self-liberation soon, joyously returning to our heritage and our homeland and our people-to be redeemed and to participate in the redemption of the Jewish people. Next year in Jerusalem! (192).

The *Seder* has also been adapted by others to incorporate the theme of reconciliation into the theme of remembrance. Ruether draws our attention to the *Pesach* or *Seder* celebrations that have been shared to express reconciliation between Palestinians and Jews in "a seder for the children of Abraham" (1985:259). She also notes that Christian and Jewish women have shared "A Seder for the Sisters of Sarah" (260) based on their shared vision of feminism.

Hallowmas Celebration

The second seasonal rite that I would like to summarize is the "Hallowmas Remembrance of the Holocaust of Women" (Ruether 1985: 223-228). This celebration marks the end of the growing season, the harvest, and the death and decay of the summer's growth. In the Christian calender Hallowmas follows All Saint's Day which is celebrated on October 31. Hallowmas is set aside to remember the dead, who like the dying vegetation, have returned to the earth and "rest in the bosom of God/ess" (222). Parts of this rite were written by Chris Carol and taken from an unpublished manuscript prepared in 1984. Some other contributors were Robin Morgan, Starhawk, and Michelle Maxwell (294).

The history of women is full of the memories of women who, have experienced in a real way the horror of sexism. This ritual evening of remembrance

is dedicated to the lives of women "who have been killed, beaten, raped, deprived of an education and opportunities for development, in order to be made servants to the male gender" (223). This rite centres around a altar table holding a small brazier, corn, apples and flowering branches. It begins with the lighting of the brazier and the singing of a song by Holly Near, "Sister-Woman-Sister, Can You Still Feel Any Pain?." This is followed by a chorus of women lamenting the burning of their history when so many of their "mothers" were burned to death as witches(224). During the "Litany of Remembrance" grains of incense are thrown into the brazier while the names of women burned, tortured, boiled in oil or drowned during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries are chanted (225-226). The litany is followed by a "Keening Chorus":

> Weep, O my sisters
> Weep for the blood of women shed for you,
> the blood of the matriarch, the blood
> of the prophet, the priestess and the witch;
> Weep for the women slaughtered
> Weep for the lovers raped
> Weep for the daughters stolen, the mothers
> humbled and enslaved
> Weep, O my sisters
> Weep for purification on this most hallowed eve
> Weep until we rise in blood and flame to
> redress and rebirth (226).

A "Litany of the Oppressed" is recited antiphonally in which the sins of the oppressors are remembered as well as the collaboration of women in their oppression due to their learned passivity and self-hate. The women pray for inspiration to help them speak out and to resist such self-immolation. The flowering branches are passed around and held in the hands while the participants remember women killed or victimized in wars, the nurses who tended the wounded who were themselves casualties, the women raped by soldiers of both sides and then rejected by them, the women crippled and killed by bombs in civilian raids that destroyed their homes. In a procession the women carry the corn and apples to the table, and the flowers are placed as an offering to the mother earth and blessed. The women then turn and

bless each other, and holding hands, sing "Hey Sister, Come Live at the Edge of the World," by Carole Etzler. The celebration ends with the sharing and eating of the apples that have been blessed at the altar (227-228).

Both of the above rites, the *Jewish Woman's Haggadah* and the marking of Hallowmas, are similar in that they both are ceremonies of remembrance and are dedicated to the elevation of the status of women. Both seek to bring to mind named and unnamed women from the past in order to challenge and inspire women in the present and of the future. Both seek to extend the spirit of communitas through time, which restores a sense of community and relationship with foremothers, and helps to remind women today of their responsibilities to their daughters and sons.

Both of these rituals attempt to criticize the ritual traditions from which they are derived by being inclusive in ways that challenge the traditions themselves. The oppression of women is never adequately addressed within the wider context of Jewish oppression that is remembered and re-enacted in the traditional *Haggadah*. Is it appropriate to utilize a ritual form when the content includes fundamental differences in perspective of philosophical points of view? For instance, the Christian rites of All Saint's Day are revised to commemorate women who would not have been considered part of the "sainthood of all believers." Witches were burned precisely because they did not conform to the conventions and beliefs associated with the Christian church. By including them in a memorial service, not only are they being reclaimed as honoured forebears by contemporary women, they are also being used to criticize the tradition itself.

Some women have tried to come to terms with the limitations inherent in rites derived from traditional patriarchal religions by creating their own. These women have left behind the patriarchal traditions of their male predecessors and have explored avenues of religious and ritual expression that are derived from pre-biblical sources or from deep within the recesses of their own imagination and dreams. These women reject the biblical traditions and seek to ground their theology in the experience of women's lives. This is why Carol Christ, for instance, has paid such close attention to the work of contemporary women writers. She believes that clues to the understanding of an intrinsically feminine experience of the sacred is revealed in them

(1979:193; 1980). An interest is also being expressed by feminists in the area of transpersonal psychology. Naomi Goldenberg (1979) has explored the content of women's dreams, and Sylvia Perera (1981) the Inanna myth and associated rites, from a Jungian perspective in order to develop a specifically feminist approach to the psychological aspects of women's spirituality.

From this emerging tradition, which typically emphasizes Goddess language and imagery, I have chosen to discuss two rites which exemplify status reversal. What women seek in feminism is a sense of belonging, of connectedness. During periods of intimacy with other women, individuals can "assure each other that they really are not crazy, that they really have been defined and confined by systematic marginalization" (Ruether 1985:59). It is necessary for women to separate themselves from "male-dominated spaces" so that they can define themselves based on their own experience of life (59). This state of separation then becomes shared and defined by like-minded "sisters" and is preferable to the frustration and pain experienced in the vain struggle to conform to patriarchy's definition of what is holy, good, and normative for them. Turner writes that communitas ideally involves the total knowing of another person (1969: 188). Perhaps such knowing is only possible within the context of rituals which permit an unusual degree of intimacy. When women expect to be known "totally" as human and not as mere appendages to men, or as patriarchically defined "fembots" (Daly 1984:83), they challenge the structure of a society and/or religion from which they have been excluded as equal partners.

In order to accentuate the radical departure these women have taken from any form of ecclesiastical authority, order or hierarchy, I will discuss a self-blessing ritual used by Zsuzsanna E. Budapest (1979:269-272) and a summer solstice celebration described, with a commentary by Barbry MyOwn (in Kent Rush 1976: 375-388).

A Self-Blessing Ritual

Budapest suggests that by exploring the ritual potential of their own experience, women can reverse the power of the "patriachal policeman" within (271-272). In this ritual each woman becomes her own theological authority. As priestess she embodies the divine energy, the Goddess herself. Men are

usually excluded from these rites. Women's experience becomes the norm in formulating ideology and ritual expression. The self-blessing ritual "is a woman's own blessing on herself; her own divinity is honoured in a ritual with [the Goddess]. It is a self-affirmation, a very private, and a very powerful ritual" (269).

> Begin after sundown. Prepare your altar with two white candles anointed with van van oil or blessing ritual oil. The altar is dressed in white, the chalice is filled with half wine and half water. Sprinkle salt on the floor and stand barefoot on it. Light your candle saying: Blessed by thou, creature of fire. Light meditation incense or peace incense. Dip your forefingers into the chalice, touching your forehead, say "Bless me, Mother, for I am thy child." Dip your fingers again and touch your eyes... your nose... your mouth... your breasts. .touch genitals .... Finally dip and touch feet. Take a little time before extinguishing the candles. You shall experience a surge of energy and lightness of heart. Blessed be. (This condensed version is from Kent Rush 1976:365)

Budapest writes that the responsibility women accept by ritualizing the self in this way, is that they acknowledge themselves as priestess Goddess, that they have the power to resist another's will over them. "Speaking out" in this way evokes the Goddess of freedom. Budapest writes that "religion controls inner space; inner space controls outer space. If a woman internalizes her oppression and thinks she is inferior, she internalizes a policeman..." (271).

> Self-blessing rituals are a way of exorcising the patriarchal policeman, cleansing the deep mind, and filling it with positive images of the strength and beauty of women. This is what the Goddess symbolizes—the divine within women and all that is female in the universe (272)

A Summer Solstice Celebration

A similar feeling of female power and life-generating energy can be experienced in large groups as well. The summer solstice celebration created by Ursa Maior, a seven member circle of women who explore women's spirituality together, is a good example. This particular rite was performed by 150 women in Oregon at a "womanspirit" festival (MyOwn 1976:375). It is a body-centred ritual whose aim is to affirm self-love, to heal, strengthen and positively reinforce female sexuality (376).

> We began the ritual with a birth rite. Marge and Deborah made an archway with their arms, and each woman walked through and joined the line to create half of a new arch, until a long tunnel was formed. At every pair in the tunnel, each woman was embraced, kissed and told, "Through women you were born into this circle" (376).

After the birth ritual a circle was formed and an altar was prepared in the centre. The women placed their hands on the bellies of the women beside them and began to chant together to raise power from this powerful centre. The chant was based on a poem written by MyOwn (in Kent Rush:378). The circle danced into the centre, out of it, to the left and to the right nine times while women made all kinds of noises (379). Part of a poem by Carol Erdman was read which tells about the power of the blood of women, while two women painted each woman's face with a daub of menstrual blood. As each woman was painted, she was told, "This is the blood that promises life" (381). After the painting the women sang a song written by MyOwn, called "Song for Our Bodies" (382-383). Then the women evoked the Goddess by naming their own names (in Kent Rush:384). MyOwn describes it in this way,

> The materialization of the Lady is the clearest vision I have seen of Her. 150 women, painted with blood, holding each other, full moon in the valley. The three of us take turns in the circle, gazing into each woman's eyes, being compelled to touch a part of her body, saying "Here are the breasts of the Goddess." ... For the first time I *feel* what it means to be part of an organism ... (in Kent Rush:385).

Hallie Inglehart Mountainwing wove through the circle with a ball of red yarn, uniting them all, as they asked the Goddess to be with them throughout their daily round of work, and to protect them from violence (in Kent Rush:386). To open the circle the yarn was snipped and each woman was kissed and blessed (387). Hallie wrote after the rite,

> I feel very quietly, very surely that we were touching souls with our foremothers in other times and other lands, women who knew the value of our moonblood. They knew as we were remembering, how our monthly blood shows us the secrets of the rhythms of healing, of growing, of living (388).

Although these rituals were created and performed by different women from various regions in the United States, they all have one thing in common. Each rite has been created by women, for women, in order that some

aspect of their experience of womanhood be affirmed. It has been suggested that the *Seder* and the Hallowmas are variations of traditional ritual forms that have been adapted to address the needs and concerns of contemporary women. These rituals differ substantially from the spirit or intent of the original liturgical forms because they insist on incorporating a feminist perspective and include women in ways that would not be acceptable to the ritual authorities who initially created or performed them. The *Seder*, for instance, does not typically speak to the oppression of women, unless of course, it is understood within the wider context of the oppression experienced by the Hebrew people as a whole. It will be the purpose of the second part of this paper to consider whether rituals so closely associated with patriarchal traditions can be utilized by feminists to reflect their own principles and agendas for social change. In order to accomplish this goal I will discuss the use of ritual in a contemporary novel by E.M. Broner. In light of the current development of rituals within the women's movement inspired by feminism, it would be safe to say with Carol Christ that the writing of contemporary feminist fiction influences as well as announces its emergence as a powerful image source that reflects as well as inspires women's expression of the sacred in their lives. Contemporary feminist rituals function as the carriers of this new and more positive expression of the feminine.

Part Two:
The Text of *A Weave of Women* and its Traditional Background

In my discussion of Broner's use of ritual in her novel *A Weave of Women*, I will consider the development of her main themes, compare her ritual innovations with traditional rites and ceremonies performed within the Jewish community and suggest ways in which the ritual action in this book adds to or detracts from the appreciation of her feminist themes. Broner has been active within the women's spirituality movement creating and performing innovative rituals which she feels challenge the cultural authority of traditional patriarchal rituals, particularly those rites associated with the Jewish faith (1982:234-235). She claims that women's ritual heritage has been neglected within this tradition and that many of the rituals associated with a pre-biblical Goddess-worshipping society have been usurped by it and transformed into patriarchal manifestations that either minimize or exclude the participation of women. Broner harkens back to a time when women were ritual architects and participants in these Goddess-centred rites." She says,

> Preserved on tablet and stone are historical ceremonies. Women greeted the new moon, presided at births, held forth at funerals. We selected our mates and passed property on to our daughters. Ancient female gods were honored by their daughter priests in psalms. But after the gender of God changed, all else changed. Women became the ruled.... Gradually rites excluded her. [Now the] new moon ceremony is danced...by male Chasidic Jews. The birthing ceremony...welcomes only the boy child.... The puberty ceremony welcomes only the maturation of the boy child...[and then] women priests were named temple prostitutes (234-235).

Broner's interest in the ritual practices of women is centred in her first hand experience of innovative Jewish rites. In her essay, "Honor and Ceremony in Women's Rituals" (1982:234-244), she refers to her participation in the creation of two feminist calendrical rites based loosely on the traditional holidays of *Pesach* and *Rosh Hashanah*. The Women's *Seder*, which is celebrated during Pesach, is unique in that it stresses the importance of naming women within the Jewish community. Broner feels that Judaism pays more attention to the exploits and achievements of men than it does to those of women. She discusses her choice of Miriam as the historic symbol of women's under-rated contribution to the development of the Jewish people by writing that "we followed her in the *Torah*, in commentaries and legends...we dug up Miriam's bones in the desert...and we asked questions" (238).

In this innovative *Seder* the women in Broner's group reworked the traditional question and answer portion of the meal as a dialogue between mothers and daughters (238-239). These women also made the telling of plague stories an occasion to meditate on feelings of shame, alienation and what Broner refers to as the worst plague of all—the "darkness" associated with women's ignorance of their own tradition (239-240). This *Seder* gives women the opportunity "to leave the men in [their] families, to seclude and exclude [themselves] with women in introspection, thoughtfulness, and women's prayer" (241).

Rosh Hashanah, or the Jewish New Year, is traditionally marked by the consideration of one's conduct throughout the preceding year. It is followed by *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement when one's name is either written into or erased from God's Book of Life. "Thus the rabbis wrote, 'One is judged on Rosh Hashanah and one's doom is sealed on Yom Kippur. Four things cross out the doom of a person: righteousness expressed through gifts of charity, prayerful supplication, change of name, and change of conduct' " (Waskow 3-4). Broner and her group have interpreted this heightened consciousness of sin as an opportunity for women "to remove the excess lint from our soul, the dust that made us less ourselves and removed us from our essence" (1982:234). The turning out of one's pockets into the sea is one way in which Jews symbolize their turning away from the sins of the past (Micah 7:19, Waskow 19). Broner suggests that any act or attitude which does not affirm the self, or contribute to a woman's self-esteem, should be considered as sinful and in need of change.[10]

Broner understands ritual as a way to "mark time" within the context of a community's life together. She suggests that it is characterized by its repetitiveness and orderly progression through time and space. Her main concern in the development of feminist ritual seems to centre on how well it functions "to remind ourselves and one another that we are not alone" (235). She suggests that ideally women develop meaningful relationships with each other in the here and now, as well as with mothers and sisters from the past, whether they have been named or not. Ritual action links performers in such rites to forebears by engaging their bodies as well as their minds in

meaningful ways. Kay Turner agrees that the principal function of ritual is to help individuals make connections with a group (1982:226).[11]

Themes, Setting, and Characters

In *A Weave of Women*, E.M. Broner introduces the reader to a community of women who tell each other their stories and explore ritual action together. Two main themes weave their way through the lives of these characters. They function as connective threads drawing the action and the scope of the novel into a startling and often horrific tapestry of lives lived within the context of a sexist society. The first theme that I will consider is the inclusion of women into the ritual life of contemporary Judaism.

In her book *The Jewish Woman* (1976) Elizabeth Koltun writes:

> Jews have always expressed their relationship to God, and their membership in the community of Israel through ritual—concrete, formalized acts, symbols and words. Women, however, have traditionally been barred from leadership of public ritual, relegated to observer status in the synagogue, and assigned but a few private rituals which, moreover, were formulated by men. In the last few years, Jewish women and men have begun to explore and create new Jewish rituals— to include women equally in public worship and to celebrate female experience and spirituality (19).

This inclusion implies the elevation of the status of women within the tradition by broadening the definition of womanhood to include those avenues of self-development and self-determination that are not included or affirmed for women in traditional Judaism.

The second theme involves the broader picture of life in a modern city such as Jerusalem. Broner attempts to come to terms with the excessive violence and hatred that exists between the Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities that live in the city of Jerusalem today. If we refer to the inclusion of women as the weft of Broner's tapestry, it is the violence of the racism and religious chauvinism of this city that makes up the warp. It is onto this seemingly indestructible background of blood red threads that Broner has chosen to weave her narrative and to project her feminist vision for the future.

The weaving metaphor which is used in this novel by Broner has been developed by other feminists to suggest a network or community of like-minded

women. Kay Turner pays special attention to this weaving or networking motif in her study of contemporary feminist rituals.

> Networking refers to the power (covert, unnamed, and diffuse as it may be) that women have in facilitating relationship by means of their mediations. Networking refers to a horizontal, earth-bound spreading-out and-crossing of boundaries that insures the life-flow of relationships between structurally opposed social domains (in Doty:103).

Web-making has been described by Donna Henes as the "most basic female instinct" (in K. Turner:222-223). Hallie Inglehart Mountainwing's summer solstice celebration concluded with the weaving of red yarn through the gathering of women and the tying of the snipped pieces around each women's wrist. Similarly, Mary Daly plays on the "webster" or weaver theme in her discussion of "be-friending" in *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy*(1984).

> Be-Friending involves weaving a context in which women can Realize our Self-Transforming, metapatterning participation in Be-ing. Therefore it implies the creation of an atmosphere in which women are enabled to be friends. Every woman who contributes to the creation of this atmosphere functions as a catalyst for the creation of the evolution of other women . . .any women who makes leaps of metapatterning, whether these be in personal relationships, in political activity, in a work of theory or of art, in spiritual understanding. . .is a weaver of the network of Be-Friending (354-375).

The women of Broner's novel have created a context in which to make these "leaps of metapatterning." Their cohesiveness as a group depends largely on their ability to be honest, to listen to each other and to share their feelings with each other in confidence.[12] The fabric of their communal experience is severely threatened when Gloria becomes intimately involved with some of the men who have abused or humiliated women in the group. Gloria commits a serious offense–she becomes the traitor, she betrays her friends. The group deals with this breach of trust by ritually excluding her from further fellowship. In my discussions of the various rites and ceremonies which follow, I will pose three questions: How does Broner use ritual to deal with or develop these two themes? Why does she use ritual? and is she successful?

In order for readers fully to appreciate Esther Broner's novel it is necessary that they understand the context into which she has placed her characters. The setting of the novel is contemporary Jerusalem. A group of women

gather from time to time to participate in ritual events that are usually created or instigated by the central figure of the novel, Simha. Her house is the centre of the novel, although some of the characters are drawn to the Western Wall area of the Old City, where they engage in traditional and non-traditional ritual practices. Posner, Kaploun, and Cohen (1975), refer to this plaza as "Jewry's best-known prayer location" (34). This division of ritual space into clearly defined areas, i.e., the home and public places of prayer, is typical within traditional Jewish practice. Women usually concentrate their attention on rituals within the home, while men have various obligations to engage in public prayer. Some of the tension that is created in this novel centres around Simha's insistence that she has a right to pray and sing in this public place and not to be separated from the *Torah* by the traditional *mehitzah* or partition.

Simha's house seems to take the place of the traditional *shul* or synagogue. The women gather here to pray, sing, eat, and perform their rites and ceremonies. The first part of my discussion of the use of ritual in this novel will focus on rituals associated with life-cycle events, many of which take place within the "walls" of Simha's house.

The group of women that make up the community at Simha's house come from various backgrounds. Most are Jewish, although some are Christian. Broner has introduced her characters at the beginning of the novel as if they were performers in a play and has provided a brief description of where they originated and who they are relative to the story she is about to introduce. They are:

The Israelis

Terry, Director, Home For Wayward Jewish Girls
Simha, mystic
Hepzibah, religious from Haifa
Dahlia, singer from Beer Sheva
Mickey(Mihal), divorcing woman from Haifa
Vered, social worker from Tel Aviv
Rina and Shula, wayward girls

The British

Antoinette, Shakespearean [actress] from London
Joan, journalist and playwright from Manchester
The German
Gerda, the scientist
The Americans
Gloria, the convert from California
Tova, the curly-haired actress
Deedee, the Irish-American tourist, [a Christian]
Robin, a wayward girl
The Children
Hava, daughter of Simha
Rahel, daughter of Hepzibah

Appended to this list of women is the note, "and the men they encounter" (Broner 1985).

Ritual and Life-Cycle Events

According to Jewish tradition God is the recognized giver and guardian of the life-cycle events (Marty and Vaux:193). Within Judaism's ritual framework there are seven basic ceremonies to mark transitions in the the life-cycle. Some of these rites are exclusively designed for boys and men. They include the initiation into the covenant of Abraham, which involves the circumcision of eight day old boys; the *Pidyon ha-Ben* or the redemption of the first born; and the *Bar Mitzvah*. Marriage rites, birth rites and rites dealing with death and mourning follow. I would like briefly to describe the important aspects of these traditional Jewish rites in order to compare them with the innovations that Broner introduces in her novel.

The *Pidyon ha-Ben* follows the circumcision rite if the child is the first-born son of his mother. This "redemption of the first-born" is required in order that the commandment to sanctify "whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast" (Exodus 13:2) can be met. Only if the father of the child is a *Cohen*,[13] or *Levite*,[14] or the mother is the daughter of a *Cohen* or *Levite*, are they exempt (*Daily Prayer Book* 1948,1975:1035). In this rite the father of the first born son presents the

infant after his thirtieth day of life to the priest. The priest asks if the father would like to redeem the boy by paying a certain amount of money. If the father wants to redeem the son the priest declares three times "Your son is redeemed" (Posner, et al:232). The *Daily Prayer Book* says of this rite,

> It was the usage in ancient Israel that the first born son in each household was devoted to the service of God. Rabbinic tradition teaches that, till the completion of the Sanctuary, the duties of priesthood were confined to them.... In order both morally and legally to set each first-born male child free from his service, it was to be redeemed.. (1035).

Birth: Prayers of Thanksgiving and the Hymenotomy

In her article, "Honor and Ceremony Among Women" (1982), Broner says that in Judaism the arrival of baby boys is celebrated with more embellishment than is the arrival of baby girls. *A Weave of Women* opens with the birth of Simha's daughter and her ritual welcome into the relationships that have been woven togther by the group that meets at Simha's house. Broner suggests that as women "reclaim" their bodies through the influence of feminism, they will "reclaim" a ritual tradition that has been lost or neglected, or that they will learn to be ceremonious with themselves and with others by inventing an entirely new one (1982:241).[15]

Just as Judith Plaskow has dealt with the lack of ceremony associated with the welcoming of girl children "into the covenant", Broner's novel suggests two inclusive rites that are specifically designed to deal with this problem. The first is a simple blessing and honouring of Simha and her baby Hava by the group.

In this ceremony Simha is tended to by the women that are present at the baby's birth. They brush her hair and weave a garland of flowers to crown her with. Each of the women participates in some way. Some sing, some pray, some recite poetry (4-5). They stroke and massage the baby. Simha is helped into a sitting position as the women gather around and chant their welcome to the new baby and to the new mother. The father of the baby presents a basket of gifts from his kibbutz. Simha begins to pray:

> I come into your house, O Mother God. You inclined your ear toward me, and I will whisper into it all the days of my life. The cords of life and death encompassed me. From the hollow of the grave, from the cave of the mouth

> of birth I called. I knew my happiness and anguish. You delivered my soul from death into birth, my eyes from tears, my feet from falling. I shall walk before You in the land of the living (8)

This prayer is similar to the prayer of thanksgiving after childbirth that is included in the *Daily Prayer Book* (1039). The most significant difference is that Simha directs her prayer to "Mother God," instead of to "the Lord." During the traditional ceremony the child is presented to the congregation and the priestly blessing or benediction is pronounced over it (*Daily Prayer Book*(1041). In Broner's novel prayers for comfort and peace are offered for both the mother and the child. The baby's father prays "May she serve however she wishes, in the chicken house, the barn, the rose garden, the cotton field, the kitchen, the guesthouse. May she be a member of the community of people" (8). The father is a member of a kibbutz some distance from the city. These are the things that he understands and wishes for his daughter. The women of the house receive the child into their company. They are the ones who bless and pray for the child. In this rite Broner has dispensed with the priestly blessing that is traditional and has substituted the women who gather at Simha's house for the priest.

The second rite is the hymenotomy which Broner has invented to compensate for the exclusion of females from the *brit milah*. Part of the *brit milah* ceremony is the circumcision of an eight-day old boy.

The *Daily Prayer Book* explains the significance of the circumcision rite in the following way:

> Circumcision is the abiding symbol of the consecration of the Children of Abraham to the God of Abraham. As the sacred rite of the Covenant, it is of fundamental importance for the religious existence of Israel. Unbounded has been the devotion with which it has been kept. Jewish men and women have in all ages been ready to lay down their lives in its observance. The Maccabean martyrs died for it.... In the dread days of the Inquisition obedience to this command meant certain death (1024)

The rite itself includes readings from the *Torah* and the Psalms, a blessing by the *mohel*, the specially trained man who performs the circumcision (Posner, et al:231), a blessing by the father immediately after the circumcision, prayers for the child during which the child is named, the blessing of

wine by the godfather, a few drops of which are shared with the infant, and the sharing of the cup of blessing with the mother (1025-1029). A festive meal follows the rite. Plaskow did not concentrate on duplicating this physical manifestation of the covenant in her rite. Broner, on the other hand, introduces the hymenotomy in *A Weave of Women* to address the exclusion of infant girls from this fundamental initiatory rite of the Jewish faith.

Simha says in the presence of the group, "Here I am acting upon the command that is not yet written that the daughter of eight days shall be pierced" (1985:22). In the corresponding prayer of the traditional rite the father says "I am here ready to perform the affirmative precept to circumcise my son, even as the Creator, blessed be he, hath commanded us, as it is written in the *Torah*, And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you" (*Daily Prayer Book*:1025). When some of the others ask how the hymenotomy is to be done, Gerda explains that it can be done with "any sharp cutting instrument," but she does not specify what kind of instrument is used. It has to be small enough and sharp enough to pierce a very tiny membrane without damaging the vagina or the labia. The same description for the blade is used in the *halakhic* prescriptions for the circumcision of boys, but is more specific about its shape and function.

> *Milah* must be performed with a sharp cutting instrument. Tradition prescribes that a double-edged knife, rather than, for example, a scalpel, be used for this purpose. This custom is based upon the verse "Let the praise of God be in their mouth and a double-edged sword in their hand" (Psalm 149:6)... use of a single-edged instrument does not, however, render the *milah* invalid (48).

The piercing focuses on the stress traditionally placed on virginity by the Orthodox Jew and the ritual exclusion that pre-marital intercourse guarantees for women. There is no comparable test for men unless there are witnesses. Broner has chosen to rectify these problems in her novel by having Gerda take the place of the traditional *mohel* to pierce Hava in the presence of family and friends. After the piercing one of the women prays that "she not be delivered intact to her bridegroom or judged by her hymen but by the energies of her life" (25). Instead of sharing wine with the baby from the cup and then passing the cup to the mother, Simha daubs wine on her

nipple when the baby begins to cry and then puts her to her breast to nurse (25).

This rite addresses the problem of exclusion in four ways- first, by celebrating the arrival of an infant girl with more ceremony than is traditional; and second, by questioning the tradition that a woman's worth should be judged by the state of her hymen. Third, it also places women in non-traditional roles, as *mohel* and as *sandek* or holder in this covenant-making rite. But the most significant difference between this ceremony and the traditional rite is that the infant girl is brought into a community of women. Tova says to Hava, "Now you are one of us" after the piercing takes place (25). In "Honor and Ceremony Among Women" Broner emphasizes this theme. She writes, "Gender preceded modern religion. We were women before we were Jews, Christians, Moslems. It seems only natural, historical, and just, therefore, to make religion respond to our origins" (234). Instead of centering the rite around the throne of Elijah, which is the traditonal focus of the circumcision rite (*Daily Prayer Book*:1025; Posner, et al:231), this rite centres around the Throne of Miriam (Broner 1985:20-22). The baby is named for Eve Hava, the mother of the human family (56). According to Broner traditional Judaism commemorates the spiritual awareness and faithfulness of men more than it does that of its women. She suggests that this naming of the matriarchs contributes to a more balanced account of the Jewish heritage and faith.

Hava's welcoming and hymenotomy are rituals which both reflect and increase the sense of community felt by the women who meet at Simha's house. These rites provide a setting in which they can express their commitment to the group in personal and meaningful ways. Dahlia offers a song, Antoinette, the poet, recites lovely words of welcome, and Hepzibah the religious woman offers heart-felt prayers. Simha, crowned with a garland of spring flowers, sits enthroned with her daughter and is praised and pampered by loving attendants. Hava's father, "the *kibbutznik*," brings a basket of gifts for his daughter from the people of his community. This simple ceremony reflects Broner's attempts to elevate the position of women within a tradition which does not welcome daughters in the same way it does sons. The hymenotomy

attempts to suggest the seriousness with which these women embrace their commitment to the group. Is the reader offended by the inclusion of such a ritual violation of this infant's body? Does the image of a "sharp cutting instrument" pressed against the labia and hymenal membrane startle us? Perhaps Broner is suggesting that it should. The women use the opportunity of Hava's piercing to recall and share the stories of their own piercings: the casual affairs, the rapes, the gentle lovemaking. It does not suggest the making of a covenant with God, but the entrance into a community of women who know that they cannot protect this baby from the sexual violence that she is liable to encounter as she grows up, and into a community of women who know that God has not protected them from similar violence and humiliation. With this rite the women are controlling the piercing of Hava in the only way they can, through performing it properly, correctly, amongst friends. This is their idealized version of how a piercing should take place. They pray that Hava will not experience the pain and humiliation that some of them had to endure.

In *Violence and the Sacred* (1972) René Girard writes that the function of violent rituals is to purify violence (36), and that there is always an ambivalence associated with any ritually violent act. He notes that such a sacrificial act "assumes two oppposing aspects, appearing at times as a sacred obligation to be neglected at grave peril, at other times as a sort of criminal activity entailing perils of equal gravity" (1). The hymenotomy anticipates a crisis that Hava is liable to face in the future, although Girard suggests that such rites refer to an original act of violence in the past (249). The women seem to incorporate both notions in this piercing rite. They know that Hava will be "pierced" eventually and they want it to be a positive experience for her; and yet they use this ritual occasion to recall their own "piercings," in the past. The discussion after the hymenotomy suggests that, if a girl must be pierced at all, it should be done correctly, ceremoniously, and amongst friends. In the context of traditional Judaism they are making Hava ritually impure by this act. They are challenging the tradition that a woman's worth can be judged by the state of her hymen. The ambivalence of the rite is suggested by Tova's declaration, "now you are one of us." The baby is pierced,

violated, passive, ceremoniously counted and named within the community of women.

Hava reacts to her ritual inclusion appropriately. She opens her mouth and screams. Simha comforts her with her breast, which by virtue of the consecrated wine poured over it, appears to suffice for the holy cup, the "cup of blessing" that in the traditional rites of *brit milah* is merely passed to the mother to share. Simha's breast becomes the cup and the source of the wine milk mixture that is to consecrate her daughter's entrance into this intimately woven community of women. The ritual violation of Hava's body suggests the ruthlessness with which a community will impress the importance of communal identity onto a group. This paradoxical rite is concluded with a purposeful and powerful image or symbol of the nurturing and sanctified power of the feminine. In this rite the cup of blessing holds not only the consecrated wine of the covenant, perhaps referring to the legacy of misogynism and violence associated with patriarchal Judaism, but also the nurturing and comforting milk of the Mother.

Adolescence: Bar and Bat Mitzvah

The *Bar Mitzvah* ceremony takes place when a boy reaches thirteen years of age. For a month before the rite a boy is instructed on how to put on the *tefillin*[16], or phylacteries, and on how to handle the *Torah* (Posner, et al:235).

> *Bar Mitzvah* classes are intensified ... The boy and his instructor can convene for up to three lessons weekly. At this time rehearsals with the rabbi commence in the sanctuary.... During the rehersals, the boy practices the following rites: transference of the *Torah* from the ark with the appropriate prayers, the *Torah* parade around the sanctuary, the reading of the *Torah* from the scrolls, and appropriate *Torah* blessings (Fishbane 176-177)

During the ceremony itself the father thanks God for relieving him of any responsibility for the misconduct of his son (Posner, et al: 236). From this moment on the boy is considered a man and responsible for himself. He is now able to participate as a full member of the congregation and can be counted in the *minyan* (quorum of ten) required in order to hold services. A sermon, blessings and a speech by the boy follow the reading from the *Torah*. Afterwards a festive meal is shared by family and friends.[17]

Since 1923 a more recent development in Jewish ritual tradition has been the inclusion of the *Bat* or *Bot Mitzvah* which takes place for a girl when she reaches the age of twelve years (Posner, et al:235; Garfiel:170). In some versions of this rite the young girl reads from the *Torah* and *Haftorah* and takes part in various prayers and blessings (Posner, et al:236). In Orthodox congregations only the father and brothers of the girl are called to the *Torah*. A sermon is given and gifts are presented to the girl (Posner, et al:236). The *Daily Prayer Book* does not make reference to the *Bat Mitzvah* at all, although prayers to be recited at such a rite for girls are included in *Gates of the House: The New Union Home Prayerbook* (1978) published by the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues, London (123).[10] An interesting observation has been made by Koller-Fox (1976) concerning the religious education offered to boys and girls in Hebrew schools. She writes that when she opened a discussion with ten year old students about whether or not women should be included in the *minyan* and given *aliyot*, the normally talkative girls were unusually quiet. When asked why they had not joined the discussion, the girls said that they did not understand the terms that were being used. "The girls were not curious about those aspects of the service which they did not see as a concern of theirs" (32).

The importance of including young women in the community through the use of rituals such as the *Bot* or *Bat Mitzvah* has been made quite clear by Koller-Fox.

> [The] *bat mitzvah* is unique. Although the *bat mitzvah* girl is seen as a daughter on this occasion, part of the significance of the day is a separation from childhood and the family. This is the one occasion in Jewish life in which the girl is asked to confirm her personal membership in the Jewish people and to link her fate with theirs. Coming as it does in the throes of puberty and the beginnings of adolescence, this is the occasion of the maximal intersection of the issues of identity as a woman and as a Jew (33).

However, the traditional *bar mitzvah* rites for boys are a time when they are ritually removed from their mothers and sisters. In some congregations women are seated separately from the men. They do not participate in the

same way that their husbands and sons do. This ritual separation from the world of women marks a major transition in the life of a boy. From his *bar mitzvah* on he is treated as a man. Such a rite for girls in this context is, of course, meaningless. A girl must pass into a stage in her life where womanhood *and* adulthood are affirmed together. Becoming a "daughter" of the *mitzvah* or commandments implies that the girl accepts the social, as well as, ritual roles that the commandments suggest. In his article, "Infelicitous Performances and Ritual Criticism (1988), Ron Grimes refers to this kind of rite as ritual "misapplication" (111). A *bat mitzvah* is meaningless unless the status of women within the tradition is such that a young girl feels that she is indeed passing into something she has never experienced before. The *bat mitzvah* should celebrate the girl's passage into adult life. Meaningful participation in communal ritual is one of the goals sought for by Jewish feminists today.

> One of the major problems with *bat mitzvah* as it stands is that it is often the last time that girls are allowed to participate in the synagogue service They are taught all the skills necessary for the occasion and then are never called upon to use them again (Koller-Fox:36).

The future development of this rite, in my view, must coincide with a commitment on the part of Jewish congregations to welcome the equal participation of young women in the various rites associated with *aliyot*. Otherwise, the rite itself will suffer from this implicit inner contradiction and the ritual power of the ceremony will be lost.

Broner includes such a ritual in her novel as a fantasy created by Rina, one of the young "wayward girls:"

> The whole family will prepare for her *bot mitzvah*. The women will throw candy down upon her from the upper balcony. She will be wrapped in a full-length prayer shawl and sing the holy words from her birth section of the *Torah* and *Haftorah*. At the meal of the *Leviathan*, presents will be heaped upon the velvet seat of her chair (200).

Rina's fantasy of *The World to Come*[19] is fabricated to contrast with the reality of her life. In writing about Rina (and Shula) Broner discusses the value of daughters in the traditional Jewish context. "Daughters are the ultimate insult to a family. If a man cannot duplicate himself, it means that

he is dominated by the image of his wife" (200). This fantasy *bot mitzvah*, in which Rina is honoured and her growing body is celebrated, challenges the practice followed by Jewish mothers when their daughters come of age.

> In one way the mothers of Shula and Rina are alike. Each slapped her daughter in the face in honor of the tradition when the girl began to menstruate. It is supposedly so that the girls will have rosy cheeks. But it is because, from now on, she can sin and her sin can swell, a growth, an abscess on the family name.... You must slap your daughter so that she will remember to keep locked the secrets of her belly, discreet the words of her mouth, downcast the longing in her eyes (200-201).

Broner paints a very bleak picture of how girls pass into womanhood in this cultural and religious setting. She makes it clear that if young girls are ever going to experience the joys associated with womanhood traditions such as the slap on the face will have to be forgotten. The responsibilities implicit in the passage from girlhood to womanhood need not be introduced in such a cynical and demeaning way. Rina's fantasy *bat mitzvah* suggests a sweet embrace not a slap from the women around her. Obviously, this is the picture that Broner would prefer to project in her feminist vision of Rina's *The World to Come*. The Bat Mitzvah should celebrate the sexual and social maturity of a young woman. Rina's fantasy *Bat Mitzvah* reflects the changing attitude toward girls within the more progessive Jewish congregations. She stands before the congregation reading from the *Torah*. The paradox expressed by this particular rite is that the other women of the congregation are still separated from the ritual centre of the synagogue. She envisions them showering her with candy from the traditional gallery, not as encouraging her from the mainfloor. It seems a misapplication of the *Bat Mitzvah* rite if the young woman steps down from her first experience of *aliyot* and must climb the stairs into the synagogue's gallery or take her seat on the women's side of the traditional *mehitzah*.

Adulthood: Simha's Wedding

An important ritual occasion within the Jewish community is the wedding ceremony. In Broner's novel a marriage takes place between Simha and Hava's father after they have both shared the grief of her tragic death. According to Jewish tradition marriage is considered a state of perfection and

must be consecrated in the presence of the rabbi and witnessed by the congregation of the people (Posner, et al:34). In *A Weave of Women* Simha's friend Terry and Shlomo Sassoon share the officiating duties. Since Sassoon is a rabbi the wedding is officially sanctioned, but it is Terry who pronounces the couple married. After Sassoon delivers a sermon on marriage, Terry delivers a "herman" to Simha.

> May the house not be a cage. May love not be a trap. May routine not be your undoing . . (293).

Instead of the traditional vows, Terry instructs Simha to repeat the words "I promise to live", three times. Terry then tells the groom to repeat "I promise to love" three times. Once they both repeat the other's vow, Terry pronounces them "love and life" (293). The *Daily Prayer Book* teaches that

> Marriage is that relationship between man and woman under whose shadow alone there can be true reverence for the mystery, dignity, and sacredness of life. Scripture represents marriage not merely as a Mosaic ordinance, but as part of the scheme of Creation, intended for all humanity . . the purposes of marriage is twofold (a) posterity, and (b) companionship (1006).

Concerning women's place in Jewish culture the *Daily Prayer Book* insists somewhat apologetically that

> A conclusive proof of women's dominating place in Jewish life is the undeniable fact, that the hallowing of the Jewish home was her work, and that the laws of chastity were observed in that home, both by men and women, with a scrupulousness that has hardly ever been equalled. The Jewish Sages duly recognized her wonderful spiritual influence, and nothing could surpass the delicacy with which respect for her is inculcated: "Love thy wife as thyself, and honour her more than thyself. Be careful not to cause a woman to weep for God counts her tears. Israel was redeemed from Egypt on account of the virtue of its women. He who weds a good woman is as if he had fulfilled all the precepts of the *Torah*" (Talmud) (1009)

Terry's "herman," or feminist sermon for Simha's wedding stresses the more modern view that women can pursue interests and responsibilities outside the home, that the house not become a "cage," or Simha's life mere routine. The *Talmud*[20] instructs Jewish men to love and be kind to their wives because God keeps track of her sadness by "counting her tears." Problems seem to arise when women step outside the domestic sphere, or when

fear of God's wrath does not prevent a man from physically or psychologically abusing his wife. These are some of the problems that Broner addresses in this novel. The stories told by the women in the novel show that the *Talmud* itself is powerless to insure the safety of women in a sexist society. It becomes quite clear that women are only considered good and moral when they move within the traditional sphere of family and home. Broner is quick to point out that even the traditional household is unsafe for many women and young girls. Hepzibah's daughter Rahel is sexually molested by her own father who considers himself to be a very pious man (68). If the fear of God does not protect these individuals Broner asks us to consider: Who can? Who should? Who will? In his article "The Status of Women in Halakhic Judaism", Saul Berman notes that aside from the deprivation women feel when it comes to positive symbols of their identification as Jews and women, another serious problem for them is their "disadvantaged position in areas of marital law" (116).

> From the complete silence at the traditional wedding ceremony to the problems of ***agunah***[4], the law seems to make women not only passive, but impotent to remedy the marital tragedies in which they may be involved (115).

In Broner's novel, Mickey's "marital tragedy" is made more humiliating by the callous indifference of the rabbinical court which refuses to take her word that she is in fact being beaten and abused. Berman speaks to this kind of horrible injustice when he writes:

> The attempt to suggest that refusal by women to pliantly accept the fate to which they are subjected demonstrates a lack of faith in the divine will, would be more convincing if the evil decree fell more equitably among both men and women (117).

The wedding ceremony that Broner presents in this novel speaks directly to this kind of blatant misogynism. It provides an alternative view of marriage and male-female relationships which honours and affirms the contributions a woman can make outside the traditional roles of motherhood and domestic service.

This marriage is unique when compared to the traditional Jewish cultural context, because it celebrates the coming together of two individuals who

wish to retain their independence and separate lifestyles. They decide that Simha will spend six months of the year on the kibbutz with Hava's father and the other six at *Havurat Shula* the women's community founded in memory of Shula.

In the essay "Reclaiming the Covenant: A Jewish Feminist's Search for Meaning" (1985), Ellen Umansky discusses the historical position of women in Judaism. She states that in traditional Judaism women's lives are always centred in the home. Although in theory this role is equal to that taken by men, Umansky suggests that in reality this domestic role reduces women to a "subordinate if not inferior position" (27). Umansky suggests that changes associated with "modernity" have created a new set of values and social expectations based on liberal notions of individualism and freedom. New opportunities in education, social and economic mobility contrast sharply with "the more limited opportunities available to them in traditional Jewish society" (28). Women began to wonder, according to Umansky, whether they could be, or ever had been, fully Jewish as women and still pursue these more modern goals. The marriage ceremony reflects Simha's desire to commit herself more fully to Hava's father; but not to the exclusion of her own interests or female friends. In the traditional prayer book the purpose of marriage is described as two-fold: for posterity or the raising of children, and for companionship. It would seem that Simha's views of marriage certainly stress the joys of male-female companionship, but not to the total exclusion of the intimate female relationships with the women of *Havurat Shula*.

Death: Mourning and Burial Rites

The final life-cycle event is the passage from life to death. When Hava dies the women of the house wash her body and prepare it for burial in a family plot on the Mount of Olives. Simha recites the prayer "On Seeing Falling Stars" (Broner 1985:134). In the *Daily Prayer Book*, this prayer is listed with several others which praise God for his creation. It can be recited on witnessing Lightning, or on seeing Falling Stars, Lofty Mountains, or Great Deserts (991). Broner has introduced this prayer earlier in the novel as one recited to honour God, Mother of the Universe. "When Simha

sees a falling star she blesses Her from whose womb it fell, that monthly red dropping" (113). In her article "The Traditional Piety of Ashkenazic Women" (1987), Chava Weissler refers to a prayer from the *Seyder Tkhines u-Vakoshes* that is recited for a woman with a "difficult star" for children, that is, whose children are stillborn or that die in infancy (259). Simha prays half-heartedly. She feels like cursing God for what has happened to her baby. Some of the women give her presents that had been intended for Hava. Hepzibah, a religious woman who adheres to the *Halakah* more than any of the others in the group, begins to recite the usual Memorial Prayer *El Moley Rachamim* (*Daily Prayer Book*:1073), but is interrupted by Simha before she finishes the first sentence. Grieving, Simha absolutely refuses to praise God.

> No psalms, none of David's *mezmorim*, nothing sacred, no instrument plucked, no harp or lyre, for under Simha no rock solidified and over her no wings sheltered. The Great Hand was careless, palms wet, allowing slippage (134).

Simha responds to the death of Hava as if she herself has died. The Memorial Prayer contains the request that God "shelter him [the deceased] for evermore under the cover of thy wings; and let his soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life" (1073). Simha is not responding as if it is Hava who has been abandoned by God, but herself. When they actually proceed to the burial Simha refuses to follow the others when they place stones on the grave. Instead she says to them all "I am a stone" and puts herself on the grave (134). When they return to the house Simha does not enter. She sits on the ground outside the door. She will not eat, sleep or attend services. Soon the other women realize that she is becoming ill, that she is being eaten up by grief for Hava's death, and that she is refusing the ritual solace offered to her through the Jewish tradition. She does not want to participate in one of the fundamental aspects of the Jewish response to death and tragedy. The *Daily Prayer Book* emphasizes believers' obligation to re-assert their connection with God even at the very point in time when grief and sorrow overwhelm them.

> The first teaching of the Burial Service is, ***Resignation to the will of God.*** In the very moment of the death of the loved one, when grief is most poignant,

> the survivors are to assert their faith in the absolute and unfathomable justice of Providence. .. This teaching "His will, not ours, be done" is but a restatement of the Kaddish [prayer] (1074-1075)

Hava's funeral amplifies the problems of despair and religious doubt in Broner's novel. All the prayers and blessings heaped upon Hava at her birth do not save her from a horrible and tragic death. The traditional funeral observances fail to help Simha deal with her grief or to resume her relationships with the community of women and God. An alternative rite that takes place at the Dead Sea is created by the group to deal more thoroughly with Simha's grief. Traditionally, after the death of a family member, a male relative recites *Kaddish* in order to show that the survivors wish to assume the relationships they had prior to the death (Preisand:60-62). An alternative rite by Terry and shared with the whole community gives Simha and Hava's father an opportunity to deal with their grief and to re-establish ties with the group and with God. The fact that Terry, and not a male relative, leads the rite emphasizes Broner's inclusion or elevation of women theme within the context of the Jewish culture and ritual tradition. The *Safat Yam* rite that the community creates and performs ritualizes the death and rebirth of Simha as a way for her to work through the death of her baby. Simha decides that that she must journey to the lip of the sea, *safat yam* (140). The group hires a driver to take them all to the Dead Sea. Terry takes charge and warns the driver that they are in mourning. "You are taking us for a burial. If you commit sacrilege, desecration or profanation, the spirit of the dead will wail in your ears forever and will drown out all events" (141). When he asks who has died, one of the women responds "our baby" (141). On arrival Simha rushes into the waves, folds her arms over her breasts and closes her eyes. She lets the sea rock her. The waves wash over her "dead" body. The *kibbutznik* gently steers her back to the sand where the women stand and lift her like pallbearers to their shoulders. They lay her down on the beach. Terry stretches out on top of Simha and kisses her on the mouth. This action brings to mind the raising of the widow's son by Elijah in 1 Kings 17:8-22. Terry begins to affirm life and the community of women around Simha through a series of instructions and declarations. .to kiss the

sea and to repeat "I accept salt in our lives and in our friendship"(142). The others add their own affirmations to the rite. e.g., "Gather a handful of sand I accept the shift of sands..." and "Look at the waves...I accept continuity and change ." (144). Terry ends the rite by picking up a shell from the beach, separating it and giving one half to Simha. She says "I accept being broken in my life and in my friendship". She embraces Simha, holds her by the hands and tells her to "Accept support". Simha responds by saying "I accept firm embrace in my life and in our friendship" (144). Where once Simha refused the embrace of God because of the death of her child (134), here she accepts the embrace of her friend Terry and finds that it is sufficient to revive her.

Broner uses this rite to stress that "God's" presence is felt in the context of connectedness and community and can be experienced through the intimacy that exists between one woman and another. God is understood by these women as awesomely immanent, as close to them as each other's breath, the love of each for the other.

This rite works for Simha. She is restored to the group and to herself. Life is affirmed in a way that is more effective than the traditional service. How could Simha have said with any sincerity, "God's will be done" as is customary in the traditional *Kaddish*? Some things do not have to be accepted. Simha's despair at the violence and cruelty of Hava's death is shared by her friends, but they do not let it paralyse them. They decide to act. This rite suggests that it is *not* God's will that Arab and Jew must hate and kill each other, or that innocent children be murdered in the name of such a God. Terry is able to guide Simha back to the realization that such a God does not exist. The sacred in their experience lives and breathes through each of them. It is felt through the kisses and embraces of family and friends. Standing together on the "lip" of the Dead Sea the mourners praise the creator who speaks to them quite clearly through this kind of community and the natural world that washes around them. Through rites such as this Broner's insistence that Arab and Jew can live together is most strongly suggested. Her ritual work with Arab and Jewish women who are striving to move toward common goals by emphasizing common experiences provides

illustrations of Victor Turner's suggestion that groups that exemplify his notion of "communitas" not only alleviate the stress and anxiety of a culture in conflict, but that they are sometimes effective in eradicating the conflict itself. In light of the explosive reality in the Middle East today such a goal might seem unattainable. The point of rites such as these is that they provide a taste, or a glimpse of what could be, and that while the performers are engaging in such rites, on at least this level, they are an embodiment of this vision of peace.

Not only are there specific rules pertaining to burials in traditional Judaism, there are also detailed prescriptions that deal with the manner and length of mourning. The "Principal Laws of Mourning" apply to the deaths of the father, mother, sister, brother, wife, husband and child. Half-sisters and brothers are mourned as well (*Daily Prayer Book*:1066). The first thing that the mourner does is make a tear in his or her clothing. This symbolic rending of the garments is referred to as *keriah*. As the person tears the label or collar, he or she says "Blessed be the righteous Judge" (1066). After the funeral *shivah* begins. These are the official days of mourning that last for seven days. During this time the mourners must stay in their homes. One way in which Simha refused to accept the death of her baby was to sit on the ground outside her house. Entering would have meant that *shivah* had begun. Mourners must sit on low stools and wear soft shoes or slippers. They must not take part in any amusement or festivity unless it is the marking of a religious festival, in which case the mourners submerge their sorrow "in the spiritual rejoicing of the House of Israel" (1067). This restriction lasts for thirty days, and in the case of the death of parents, one year. The thirty day period is referred to as *Sheloshim*. A light is kept burning in the house to symbolize the soul of the person who has died (1066). The anniversary of the death of the family member, *Yahrzeit*, is marked by the lighting of such a candle in the synagogue and the recitation of *Kaddish*, or mourner's prayer (*Daily Prayer Book*:1085-1087, 1099).

The telling of Shula's story introduces an occasion in Broner's novel that deals specifically with the observance of mourning rites. It is discovered by the social workers at the Home for Wayward Jewish Girls that Shula is a

very talented artist. They support and encourage her to pursue this interest by arranging a scholarship for her to attend an art college in Germany. Generally, her trip is very enjoyable and her fears of travelling so far from home are forgotten. Problems begin to develop, however, on the last portion of her trip as she is travelling from Greece to Munich. She is told that she must share a compartment with some men who are travelling on the train as well. They are friendly and courteous at first but soon start to bother Shula and make her feel uneasy about sitting with them. While the train is moving through the countryside the men attack her and mutilate her body. They "eat" away her face and breasts. By the time she is found the murderers have disappeared. No one is charged for her murder and her family is told by the German officials that young girls should not travel alone so far away from home. The news of their friend's death shatters the group of women and girls that have become Shula's second family. When the news of her death reaches them, Hepzibah declares that a week of *shivah* must begin.

> Mirrors are covered, pillows are removed from couches and all the girls are in slippered feet. When ten girls over thirteen years of age gather, there is a *minyan*. They don prayer shawls, adjust their *yarmulkes*[sic] and pray for Shula's soul (280)

A *minyan* of males over thirteen is usually required in order to hold services. Women were not traditionally counted in the quorum, although Reform Judaism recognizes the full religious equality of women. In 1973 it was decided that women could be counted in Conservative congregations, but only if the rabbi of the local congregation approved (Posner, et al:34-35). Posner, et al note that:

> The active participation of women in the prayer services is a comparatively recent phenomenon, started by Reform and later adopted by Reconstructionists and some Conservative congregations. The "Women's Lib" movement has had a definite influence on this trend...there are halakhic opinions permitting women by themselves (without men) to conduct services...[but] Chassidic congregations would be horrified [by this practice] (35).

In this novel, the girls in Hepzibah's care are treated in the same way that thirteen year old boys would be. They are considered adults and capable of the responsibilities that come with adulthood. One of their obligations is

to mourn for their friend Shula. The *shivah* rites provide a communal way to respond to her death. They help them to focus on their identity as a group even in the face of the tragic loss of one of their number. In this rite Broner suggests that the girls are part of the larger family that has grown up around Simha's house. Shula is mourned as a sister would be mourned. In this way, Broner stresses her feminist vision of sisterhood through the use of a traditional Jewish ritual practice. All women-young and old-are sisters. They must, therefore, be honoured and mourned as such.

Traditional and Innovative Festivals and Worship

In order fully to appreciate the use of ritual in this novel it will be useful briefly to describe the traditional Jewish ritual cycles and to provide some sense of the festivals that mark these times. Since the Jewish calendar might be unfamiliar to readers who are not of the Jewish faith, and because it is different from the calendar used by non-Jews, see Table One included in Appendix One.

The Jewish calendar follows the western Semitic division of the year into twelve lunar months. The new moon or *Rosh Chodesh* is considered the first day of the month and is referred to as holy. According to the Jewish calendar each month or *yerah*, meaning moon, lasts for 29 or 30 days. The New Year or *Rosh Hashanah* is calculated from the new moon of *Tishri* or the seventh month. However, the year is also calculated from the new moon of the spring month of *Nisan*. The early Hebrews divided the year in two, based on the agricultural calendar which marked the beginning of the dry season in the spring, through the summer, to the beginning of the rainy season in the fall. The festival year based on the reading of the *Torah* follows this division and begins in the spring month of *Nisan* with the first major festival of *Pesach* or Passover (Douglas:178). The Jewish festival year is also divided into those festivals that are calculated according to the movement of the sun, and those festivals that are calculated according to the waxing and waning of the moon. Arthur Waskow describes the sun cycle festivals as "four seasons of the year, four moments of history, four stages of human life, [and] four states of spiritual consciousness" (1982:XIX). An outline of his categories follows in Appendix One, Table Two.

The festivals calculated according to the moon begin with *Rosh Hashanah* because the month of *Tishri* is the seventh month and "just as Judaism makes holy the seventh day and the seventh year, so it makes holy the seventh month" (Waskow:xx). *Rosh Hashanah* is a feast celebrating beginnings and according to tradition marks the creation of Adam, and therefore marks the birthday of the human race (xx)[4] For more details describing the lunar festivals refer to Table Three, Appendix One.

Tkhines: Ashkenazic Women's Traditional Devotional Practice

Although the festivals and the marking of the weekly Sabbaths are the most obvious manifestations of Jewish ritual practice, Chava Weissler suggests that we consider another equally informative source of Jewish ritual expression. In her discussion of the *Seyder Tkhines* and the devotional literature written by women, for women, during the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries in Yiddish, she refers to a ritual tradition that developed as a direct result of of women's exclusion from, or separation during, public prayer. The development of such a tradition is quite understandable when we consider that few women received even the basic Jewish education, or could read, write, or speak the Hebrew language. Women were traditionally excluded from those areas of Jewish public life such as the "talmudic academy, the rabbinical court, the kabbalistic conventicle, and the Hasidic gathering" where these skills could be developed and utilized (245). The study of the various collections of *tkhines* exposes a dimension of Ashkenazic Jewish culture that focuses specifically on the religious experience of women. So, as Waskow suggests in his consideration of Jewish festivals and holidays, various cycles and seasons are experienced and celebrated by Jews all over the world. However, women within this system have created a series of prayers and rites that mark or hallow seasons and events of particular interest to them. It has been suggested by Edwin Ardener that where the language of scholarly and religious discourse is different from the language of the ordinary person beliefs and ideas are often expressed through ritual innovation and the arts (in Abel:30).

Although is it impossible at this point to do a complete analysis of the similarities between Broner's use of ritual and the prayers and ceremonies

referred to by Chava Weissler, I will at least attempt to do so as far as my sources allow. It is clear that both the *tkhines* and Broner's innovative rites focus more directly on the biological or sexual aspects of women's experience and do so in a reverent and affirming way. Within a tradition in which menstruation and the vaginal discharges after childbirth are considered unclean, both provide a positive setting in which to affirm these basic functions of the female body. Weissler writes that the *tkhines* "hallowed women's biological functions and domestic routines. Menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth were considered *religious* events, important subjects of prayer" (249). Broner has written that the reclamation of these conditions or events in a woman's life reconnects her to the source of a very powerful ritual experience (1982:241). Both include mention of the matriarchs in ways that are not usually found in the the traditional liturgy and devotional material. I have already referred to Broner's inclusion of these female figures in her narrative and ritual work. Weissler notes that

> One aspect of [the] *tkhine* leaps to the eye. [It] is the inclusion of the matriarchs, Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel. This contrast with the Hebrew liturgy, where male figures only are mentioned. Many *tkhines* (as well as other genres of women's literature) give important place to the matriarchs, as well as to other, more obscure biblical women (266).

The *tkhines* also include prayers that deal specifically with contemporary concerns of these Ashkenazic women. For instance, prayers asking that God preserve and protect Jewish boys from press gangs which used torture and confinement to discourage participation in Jewish ritual and family life are included in these texts.[20] These prayers can be compared to those created by Broner and others to deal specifically with the torture and abuse that their "daughters" must endure as a consequence of sexism. Both reflect the contemporary concerns of Jewish women and the social realities into which they have been born.

In Broner's novel there is frequent mention of characters casting or protecting themselves from the Evil Eye. This does not reflect the Orthodox view as presented in the *siddur*. It is, however, part of a folk culture that is reflected in the *tkhines* discussed by Weissler (250). In the novel, Shula is asked how she learned to spit (part of the protection against the Evil Eye).

She replies that she learned it from her grandmother (7). Rina paints the Evil Eye on the palms of her hands and on all the objects that the group has gathered to throw at a fanatic Talmudic scholar who had stoned an American tourist. It becomes an important part of their "rites of revenge" (233). It is interesting to note that the customs associated with the Evil Eye are shared by a Jewish girl from Poland (Shula), and Rina who is an Arabic-speaking Jew from Morocco. Even the Hassidic[26] dancers who challenge Simha at the Temple Wall refer to its power and shrink back when Simha looks directly at them suggesting they believe she has the power of the Evil Eye in her stare (65).

The differences between the *tkhine* and Broner's devotional or ritual material that I would like to suggest seem to reflect the sociological changes that have occurred over the past few decades in the lives of modern Jewish women. Broner's novel reflects the shift in activity from the domestic sphere to that of the areas of business, social work, and the arts. She incorporates the experiences of women accustomed to freer travel than the women Weissler has referred to in her work. Lesbian women and women who have chosen celibate lifestyles are referred to and affirmed in Broner's novel which reflects the growing pride and self-acceptance these women feel about themselves. Broner also stresses the mystical aspects of Simha's religious experience, whereas Weissler points out that women in earlier times were not encouraged to participate in these pursuits. The *tkhine* reveal the social and religious context that Ashkenazic women found themselves in.

> In all the examples, the woman, by reciting these *tkhines*, expresses her acceptance of traditional Jewish conceptions of the desirability of male offspring and of menstruation as a state of impurity. The *tkhines* give no evidence that women questioned their social status, their role, and their fate in the Jewish world (Weissler:261).

The significant difference between the *tkhine* material and the customs, prayers, and rituals in *A Weave of Women* is the influence that feminism has had on Broner's work. The rites and ceremonies that she introduces in this novel do challenge the position of women in the Jewish world. Whereas the *tkhines* hallow the events and concerns of Jewish women within the framework of Judaism, Broner's work challenges some of its basic assumptions. She asks us to consider the value of a tradition which honours the

birth of boys over that of girls, for instance. Broner's novel reflects the changes that women are experiencing as we near the end of the twentieth century. Both the *tkhine* collections and Broner's novel are "non-linear" or non-chronological in structure. Weissler points out that the *tkhines* seem to have their own peculiar organizing structure based on those issues of specific interest to women. They do not follow the weekly or monthly festival pattern that characterizes traditional Jewish liturgical life. Judith Kegan Gardiner suggests that women's literature is typically less linear, unified and chronological than "generic prescriptions of the male canon" (in Abel:185). Broner's novel is indicative of this trend in that it is structured as an intricate weaving of personal stories and does not conform at all to the typical narrative form. The story line moves forward and backwards and even laterally as the group of women at Simha's house tell how and why they came together as a group. The narrator's voice shifts through first, second, and third person, which Gardiner suggests is also typical of women's work (in Abel:187). Although Weissler has not worked as closely with all the devotional literature of the period she considers in her article, it is quite clear that the *tkhines* she has studied reflect this emphasis on women's personal experience and not on traditional calendar or liturgical time.

Elaine Showalter notes that two distinct voices can often be heard in a particular culture; one that can be referred to as the "dominant" voice and the other as "muted". When we focus on the muted voice of women's culture a more comprehensive picture of their experience can be drawn. She notes that when we listen carefully to this voice "the orthodox plot recedes, and another plot hitherto submerged in the anonymity of the background, stands out in bold relief" (in Abel:34). Handbooks of women's prayers reveal aspects of the Jewish culture that are underplayed or ignored in orthodox or traditional collections. This is exactly the point that Weissler is making in the study of the *tkhines* in Yiddish. She writes that if there are prayers for certain events in a woman's life this must mean that women have given them a special religious significance (247).

> Despite the fact that, according to some authorities, women were exempted from the duty of daily prayer—many women daily recited the Hebrew

> liturgy and attended synagogue at least on Sabbaths and holidays. They thus participated in this overall rhythm of Jewish life. Yet, to the extent that they also recited *tkhines*, they defined for themselves an alternate rhythm as well. An inventory of the occasions for which *tkhines* exist shows us a world organized very differently from that of the *siddur* [Hebrew Prayer Book], a world structured by the private events of the woman's domestic life as much as by the communal events of the Jewish calendar (247).

Of the 120 prayers recorded in the *Seyder Tkhines u-Vakoshes* (Order of Supplications and Prayers), only 30 to 40 deal specifically with the synagogue service. There are prayers for each day of the week, for Sabbaths, and fourteen for the period between the beginning of the month of *Elul* and *Yom Kippur*. There are only four prayers to be recited in conjunction with the holidays and festivals that I have cited above. These include one prayer to be recited when the *Torah* is removed from the Ark and paraded through the congregation, two for the festival of Sukkot, and one to be recited in conjunction with Rosh Hashanah (248).

Amplifications of the traditional liturgy were included in the *tkhine* collections. The recitiation of paraphrased prayers in Yiddish would allow a woman to participate in her own way throughout a ceremony that she might not be able to follow because of her ignorance of the Hebrew language.

> A woman could recite a *tkhine* when she entered a synagogue ..., while the cantor chanted the prayer "Grant Peace"..., or on the Days of Awe when the *Torah* scroll was taken out of the Ark (no.31)... a few of the prayers in this collection are Yiddish translations or paraphrases of Hebrew prayers, such as the *qaddish*[kaddish], Psalm 119, or *Pereq shirah* (248-249).

Women were obligated to fulfill commandments that specifically pertained to their social role and were required by tradition to undertake three religious duties that set them apart from men. *Tkhines* were written to be recited during the fulfilment of these particular vows. The vows include: *hallah*, the separation of a piece of dough when baking bread to commemorate the giving of priestly tithes; *niddah*, the separation and purification rites associated with menstruation; and *hadlaqah*, which pertained to the lighting of festival and Sabbath candles (248).

Other *tkhines* suggest levels of Ashkenazic women's experience that would be entirely overlooked if our only source of information were the authorized or orthodox versions of devotional tales and prayer books. Included

in the *Seyder Tkhines* are several which deal specifically with pregnancy and childbirth, four supplications for members of a woman's family, one to be recited by widows in order that they receive continual blessings from God, prayers for speedy recovery from illness, for rain in time of drought, for food and a good livelihood, and eleven concerning visits that must be made to family graves. Finally, Rosh Chodesh, or the celebration of the New Moon, is referred to four times and it is made quite clear that women considered this holiday to have special significance for them. Weissler notes that women did not take part in any activity that required heavy labour on this day (248). More attention is paid to the hallowing of a woman's reproductive cycle and her work in the home in these collections of *tkhines* than was usual in the traditional *siddur* or prayer book (249).

These prayerbooks do not follow the traditionally accepted order of service, and reveal "an organizing principle" unlike the typical *siddur*.

> Prayers connected to the synagogue service are scattered among the other *tkhines*, which are grouped, roughly, according to themes such as fast days, the days of Awe, pregnancy and childbirth, and visiting the cemetery (249)

They also include prayers that reveal a kabbalistic influence, but that do not suggest a mystical or hidden meaning which is typical of this genre. The *sefirot*[28] is not referred to, and only once is the recitation of the divine names mentioned, and this is to note that such prayer was not appropriate for women (251). What is retained though are references to angels, demons and strategies to protect oneself from the Evil Eye.

The overall significance of these *tkhines* and the others found in collections written by Ashkenazic women, is that they provide scholars today with a clearer picture of the private or domestic lives of religious women from these periods of Jewish history. We are also able to see the influence that women's social position within Judaism has had on their ritual expression and religious life.

Further study of the *tkhines* would be of great help to those interested in the development of contemporary feminist rituals, especially for those women interested in the contributions being made by Jewish writers and ritualists today. Broner's novel can be set more securely within this tradition

of *tkhines* than in the development of the traditional *siddur*, although it is clear that Broner has utilized the prayer book quite liberally in her novel as well. A more comprehensive survey of women's devotional literature and the collections of *tkhines* which have been referred to by Weissler would be necessary in order to complete a deeper analysis of Broner's book on this level. Perhaps in the future work of this kind will be made available to interested students and ritualists alike.

Festivals and Worship in A Weave of Women

A Weave of Women is an example of a woman's novel that is not linear in structure. Its narrative development is only loosely chronological. The action of the novel begins in winter when Hava is born and ends in late summer after Simha and the kibbutznik are married and the group has moved into a new home. The stories told throughout the book spread out like spokes of a wheel around a hub which turns slowly through these spring and summer months. Most of the stories recall incidents from the past and tell about how the women came to Simha's house. However, one of the stories reaches out into the future as Rina fantasizes about her life in *The World to Come*. Waskow describes the festival and ritual lives of Jews as

> the cycle of the seasons, the round of the year, the festivals of joy with which the Jewish people dance our praise of God. There are moments of dryness, sadness, in the cycle—but beneath them there is a deeper joy in the circling of the year (x).

Broner's novel seems to reflect this movement as she weaves the ritual elements of time and space into the daily rhythms of her various characters. I have dealt with the rituals associated with the life-cycle. Now I will explore those rituals that are associated with the wider circles of community celebration and liturgical praise.

In this novel only two major festivals are described in any detail. They are the early spring *Purim* festival and the summer celebration of *Lag B'omer*. I will consider the significance of these holidays to the development of Broner's main themes and then discuss the worship practices and ritual innovations that are introduced.

Purim is the holiday in which the *Megillah* or Scroll of Esther is read in every synagogue around the world. It relates the tale of Mordechai and

Esther and tells how they overcome the wily Haman. In the *Daily Prayer Book* we read that "when the righteous was delivered out of the hand of the wicked, and the enemy was put in his stead, the Jews ordained for themselves to celebrate *Purim*, and to rejoice thereon every year" (957). Recent scholarship suggests that the book of Esther was written in order to explain and develop an earlier Persian festival that had been adapted and celebrated by Persian Jews (Waskow:116). It has also been suggested that it was written after the Persian period as an ironic response to the difficulties endured by Jews during the later Hellenistic period.[29] Gaster suggests that the *Purim* festival is one of the clearest examples of cultural transmutation, in that it probably has its roots in a much earlier Persian New Year festival that took place on or around the vernal equinox (1966:215-217).

> ...The original form of that feast must have involved: (a) the selection of a new Queen, corresponding to the selection of Esther [over Vashti]; (b) the parade of a commoner *qua* king, corresponding to the parade of Mordechai around the streets of Shushan [Esther 6:11]; (c) a fast, corresponding to that ordained by Esther [4:15-16]; (d) the execution of a felon; corresponding to fate meted out to Haman [7:10, 9:25]; and (e) the distribution of gifts [9:22] (218).

Gaster also notes that the word *purim* connects with an Old Persian word for "first," as in first day, or first season, and that in colloquial Arabic the word *phur* means New Year (221). Waskow notes that the story is developed around two distinct literary jokes.

> In one of them, Haman's efforts to impale Mordechai, destroy the Jews, and elevate himself are rewarded with precise irony: Haman himself is impaled, his own party is massacred, and Mordechai and all the Jews are elevated to great power and honor (116).
>
> The other joke is very similar in structure, though sketched in ink less bloody: King Ahasuerus ...depos[es] Queen Vashti—so that all other husbands will never again have to take orders from their wives. He ends the tale by taking orders precisely from his wife—the new Queen Esther. As Haman's murderous, anti-semitism carries him to his own death, so Ahasuerus' contemptuous anti-feminism carries him to his own stultification. The joke is on the tyrant (117).

It is quite clear why an author such as Broner would include the Purim story in a contemporary novel about the lives of modern Jewish women.

The jokes referred to by Waskow centre around the two themes that I have identified as Broner's main concerns: the violence associated with racism, and the objectification and abuse of women because of sexism. *Purim* is a festive holiday during which people poke fun at the world. Waskow refers to them as the days "of merriment and buffoonery, parody and satire, the loony day of full moon in the pre-spring month of Adar" (115). Dressing up and playing the fool is expected. At this time masquerades and pantomimes are performed in families and in larger groups (Gaster:221-225). Plays are created and performed by young and old, and the children especially use this time to play tricks on their elders (Waskow:121). Even the evening service is an opportunity to enjoy the frivolity as children are allowed to make clamouring and crashing noises with a variety of gadgets and noisemakers whenever they hear the name Haman during the evening (Feit:103; Gaster:229; Waskow:121). The commandment to drink until one cannot distinguish the difference between "cursed is Haman" and "blessed be Mordechai", is derived from a Talmudic source which suggests that it is in this state of total confusion and vulnerability that one must put one's entire trust in God's providence (Feit 1987:90). Another suggestion is that one must drink enough to become drowsy and go to sleep. Feit writes that "when sleeping one demonstrates the belief that God will protect him and will 'return' his soul in the morning" (90).

Besides the commandment to read from or hear the *Megillah* there are three other *Purim* laws that must be followed. These are giving gifts to the poor; sending food packages as gifts to friends; and preparing and sharing a festive meal (Zevin 1982:119). Feit suggests that these laws promote unity and friendship among the Jewish community (90).

Broner writes in *A Weave of Women* that *Purim* is the time for breaking laws.

> All the stars converge at *Purim* time, the season for the breaking of laws: the laws against drunkeness, transvestism, and the law against teaming together unlike animals.... The women gather to play games of chance, to deal the Priestess of the Tarot, the Empress of Justice, to throw dice or move the cup across the Ouija board (115).

The women drink cherry brandy and eat special holiday food. They make a point of overindulging themselves and "it is according to the law

that they do so. It is written that one must drink until the good cannot be distinguished from the bad" (117). *Purim* parades pass by their windows as they sit together to recount the tales of Vashti and Esther, Ashtar and her rituals of pleasure (125).[30] To tell or hear the *Megillah* is an obligation that Jews have turned into an occasion to celebrate all that is associated with gaity and spring. And yet the more serious message of the story of Esther is never overlooked in the religious services held during *Purim* or in the discussions that follow during the various family gatherings and meals. The fact that the telling of the story is commanded by tradition suggests that its ultimate meaning is central to the religious experience of the Jew.[31] The bass note that sounds ominously throughout this light-hearted season reflects the awful reality of genocide, of fanatical hatred and the hysterical fear of the unknown, of the mysterious stranger in our midst.

Broner weaves this horrible reality into the *Purim* celebrations she describes in her book. As the women sit and discuss the courage and passion of these two great cultural heroines, a dark cloaked figure is working his way toward them with nothing but evil mischief and hatred in his mind. One of the women of the group had met and made love with a young Arab prince during a desert retreat in the Sinai (89). Dahlia had gone there to rest after a singing tour she had made through Israel. An Arab family made her acquaintance and invited her into their tent. She was treated graciously by the *mukhtar*, tribal judge. I will quote from Broner's novel at length here in order to share the sweet vision she creates to capture the spirit of reconciliation between these two people, between these two cultures, which I feel Broner is trying to emphasize in her writing and ritual work.

> The tents are soon visible in the small oasis. They are under the date trees. The dates have ripened. Dahlia is helped from the camel and looks lovingly above her. The son, a prince, really, lifts his robe above his knees and climbs the tree, knocking off dates for her. They are the sweetest she has tasted in the Land. They are beginning the Ceremony of Hospitality, the Ritual of Grinding Coffee. Neighbours will hear the drumming and will know the mukhtar has company...."This is how Ibrahim *avanu*, our father, lived," says the mukhtar.... "Yes," says Dahlia, "but I am the daughter of Sara and not of Hagar" (95).

The *mukhtar* asks if Dahlia is afraid to be with them and reassures her that he will do nothing to harm her. He tells her that "It is against our

laws to harm our guests ... I am your host. Food, fruit, liquid, company—or even, I myself— even that much you may request" (96). Eventually Dahlia replies that she would like to know the *mukhtar's* son. The father instructs the young man to take Dahlia back to her own campsite. When they arrive they build a wind break and settle down together. They become correct and ceremonious with each other. Dahlia massages his body with oil and they make love.

> This is for the boy, the Ceremony of Initiation. The ingredients of such a ceremony are one lovely young boy, one loving and experienced woman.... It is necessary to have a bottle of olive oil. This aids in exorcising the demons of nervousness.... In the initial rite one should avoid reflections—mirrors and eyes. One should also avoid laughter and chatter. This is a time of body prayer. The boy will never forget this rite (99).

Dahlia and the young Arab separate without a word and both return home to their families and friends. But the boy decides to search for Dahlia and finally tracks her down during the *Purim* festivities. His travelling companion is a radical Palestinian nationalist who is disguised as an Orthodox Jew with a long beard, fox fur hat and a caftan (117). The climax of this *Purim* celebration occurs when the young Arab and the companion burst in upon the celebrating women. Simha has just finished reciting the Priestly Blessing over the group.

> *Shehena* bless thee, Shine her face upon thee, Turn her face unto thee in peace (131).

Just as she begins to sing "*shalom*," peace, the companion rushes into the room and demands to know which one of the women is Dahlia. In order to protect her from harm, the young man looks around the room and points wildly at Simha. A hammer is raised into the air and comes down on the infant Hava's skull. She has been resting in her mother's arms. The baby dies instantly from the blow. The companion says to the young Arab "We cannot allow a Jewish woman to defile the tribe" (132). He does not struggle when the women begin to hold him down and punch him "because he has committed his holy act" (132). Simha holds the baby in her arms and begins to wail. The police arrive and take the two intruders away. Broner writes:

> The *Megillah*, the tale, is told. In the legend there is relief from from the enemy, sorrow is turned into gladness, mourning into holiday. In life, only some of this is possible (132).

One of the women in the group has decided to tell the *Purim* story in her own particular way. For Terry, Esther is a "political animal" and the story is a parable about making choices. Terry's interpretation of the *Purim* message is in contrast to the two traditional themes that come together in the *Purim* story that have to do with the absolute acceptance of God's will for one's life, and the acceptance and defense of one's tradition in the face of prejudice and possible death. Gaster discusses these themes in his exploration of the *Purim* season.

> In its original form, the dominant note of the story of Esther was, perhaps, an emphasis on the element of chance in human affairs.... In Judaism, however, what appears to man as blind chance is really but part of the design of God. The whole story serves as an examplar that "God moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform" (1966:230).

The women in Broner's novel have all had to make difficult choices. The stories that they weave deal with how they all have to make decisions in their lives without compromising their own sense of self-worth and self-determination. Terry begins her version of the *Purim* story with the words "There are two possibilities...we are what we choose" (118). Simha reminds this gathering of modern Jewish women that the exiles in Babylon had to make similar choices. They could continue to mourn, or they could sing and "endear themselves to their captors" (119). Vashti had two choices. She could obey the king and degrade herself, or she could maintain her self-respect and face the consequences, which she did. When Esther wins the attention of the king, she must choose whether to expose herself and die with the other Jews, or keep her nationality a secret and save herself. Terry makes the cynical remark that after Esther has made this choice she was a woman sandwiched between the king and Mordechai, and they then made all her choices for her (129). When Terry finishes her version of the *Megillah* the women talk about the choices that they have made in their lives, and the changes that the choices have inspired. Most of the stories tell about the choice between "staying home" and making their own way in the world. Mickey must choose whether to remain in a marriage where she is beaten by her husband or to strike back and fight against both the husband and the rabbinical court to get a divorce to dissolve their marriage. These women

become the sum of their choices. They do not depend on chance, or on God to protect them. And yet it is at this point in the story that the gathering of women is shattered by the violent death of the baby that they all love and care for. The Palestinian fanatic explodes into the scene and kills Hava just as her mother is finishing the blessing and singing the last *shalom* of the prayer.

According to Posner a special blessing follows the reading of the *Megillah* which "praises God the Saviour for having fought our battles, judged our disputes, avenged our injuries and punished our enemies" (198). This is the horrible irony of Broner's *Purim* tale. Simha is interrupted before she can mouth these words.

One of the women that is connected to the group at Simha's house is Joan, a journalist and playwright from Manchester, England. Her story of how she met the women deals with a difficult and demeaning trip that she had made to Mount Meron during the *Lag B'Omer* celebrations there. This holiday marks the 33rd day of the counting of the barley harvest between *Pesach* and *Pentecost*, which falls on the 18th day of Iyyar. Gaster writes that the counting of the *Omer* or "sheaves" derives from the commandment that " when the first sheaf of barley was offered to God in the sanctuary seven full weeks are to be counted until the final celebration of the harvest-home and the presentation to Him of the two loaves of new bread" (1966:51). Waskow suggests that the 33rd day of the Omer is celebrated in honour of the rabbi Akiba and a group of his students who were killed by a plague on this day (178; see also *Daily Prayer Book*:938-939). Another possible source of the holiday is that it commemorates the day Akiba took his students into the desert to study *Torah* in defiance of a Roman ban. This story might explain the traditional archery contests that take place on *Lag B'Omer*, since it is said that Akiba and his students disguised themselves as bow hunters (Waskow: 178). Some think that the day is related to Anglo-Germanic festivals that take place around May Day which were celebrated with bonfires, as is *Lag B'Omer*, and the shooting of arrows to scare demons away (179).[3]

An important aspect of the *Lag B'Omer* festivities is the pilgrimage people make to the grave of the mystic Shimon bar Yochai near Safed on Mount

Meron. This is an important pilgrimage site for *Hassidic* Jews especially, because Shimon bar Yochai is considered to be the author of the Kabbalistic book *Zohar*. Waskow notes that this book was probably written twelve centuries after his death, however(179). Pilgrims travel to Shimon's grave and light huge bonfires and the *Hassidim* dance there as part of their worship and to honour Shimon's memory. A symbolic wedding between heaven and earth takes place during these festivities. As a result couples often marry on *Lag B'Omer* since weddings are forbidden throughout other times during the "counting of the omer" (179).

In Broner's novel, Joan is on assignment for the *Manchester Guardian* and is looking for a story about the *Hassidim* and the other pilgrims that make the trip to Mount Meron. During this trip she is drawn into one difficulty after another. She becomes horribly depressed. She agrees to have her hair cut by a miserable barber who complains to her about his lack of business. He assures her that it will bring her good luck and then proceeds to hack off her long beautiful hair.

Joan is harassed by the police because she tries to take photographs of the dancers (Broner 1985:250). During the passing of the *Torah* she is told by a group of women that she must throw kisses at it because women are not allowed to touch it as the men are. "Women do it this way" [a woman explains], "They are always upstairs or separated from the *Torah* so they must kiss each other and kiss at the *Torah*" (249). Joan is pushed to follow their instructions to avert bad luck. She has a difficult time storing her gear, and has not been able to take pictures or interview the pilgrims. She is warned that she will be called a whore if she gets too close to the men. A man offers to let her store her things on the bus he is driving. He tells her to get some rest, but while they are having sex in the bus a Kurdish pilgrim sees them. He does, in fact, call her a whore and throws her and her gear off the bus. She is exhausted, humiliated and filthy. It is in this state that Hepzibah and Mihal find her. She wonders why she ever wanted to travel in "The Land". They listen to her story and Hepzibah declares, "This holiday...commemorates the lifting of a seige. We will have to lift the siege of this holiday. Come with us" (255).

Joan's story about her trip to Mount Meron indicated how difficult it is for an outsider to understand the religious practices of other people. She is thwarted at every turn from getting what she thought would be a good story for her magazine assignment. This festival is supposed to be a joyous departure from the sombre mood of the season and yet Joan becomes increasingly depressed as she searches for the meaning of the holiday. Joan is harassed and humiliated by other pilgrims and discovers that at a very basic level women are looked upon as evil and must be kept separate from the men or are completely ignored within the context of this culture and religious tradition.

Joan is taken to meet the other women and they create a new holiday to counteract the negative feelings that have overcome her. For any holiday, they tell her, they need a date, a legend, a blessing, and a meal (256). Simha determines that "Holy Body Day" falls on the "the twenty-first day after the onset of menses..."(258). Because the women have lived with each other for so long they all menstruate at the same time and calculate important dates from the onset of this shared menses. After a ritual cleansing or *mikvah*, they say a *She-hehianu* prayer, "Blessed art Thou, O Mother of the Universe, from whose body we descend, who has kept us alive, preserved us and brought us to this time, this season" (257). Similar blessings are found in the *Daily Prayer Book* (985-995), the difference, once again being that God is referred to in the feminine form in Broner's novel. The women pray that "they be restored to their own Temple, that they no longer be captive, for there is no God of women, there has been no reaping of sheaves in the Land of women and no bringing in of tribute of dry measure"(258). This prayer could be considered a feminist paraphrase of the traditional *Omer* suplications made by Jews after the fall of the Jewish Temple when the presentation of grain offerings to God in this way was impossible.

> May the All-Merciful restore the service of the Temple to its place. May it be thy will, O Lord our God and God of our fathers, that the Temple be speedily rebuilt in our days, and grant our portion in thy *Torah*. And there we will serve thee with awe, as in the days of old, as in the ancient years. We beseech thee, release thy captive nation by the mighty strength of thy right hand (*Daily Prayer Book*:945).

By reworking the *Omer* supplications in this way, Broner emphasizes the dissonance some women feel with a religious tradition that mourns its separation from a place in which it has worshipped God and yet does not recognize that ritual separation or the lack of meaningful ritual expression within the tradition is problematical for women.

"Holy Body Day" concludes with the group of women telling each other stories about the power and beauty of their own bodies. They compose a special song for this holiday and decide to call it "The Women's Song of Songs" (261-262). When they finish singing Joan feels reassured and accepted as a newcomer and her pride as a woman is restored. The group of women share a meal of stuffed fish together and everyone is satisfied. Simha's house, as well as each individual body is honoured as a "Temple" in this way.

Worship of Shehena and the Sabbath

The most significant difference between the traditional prayers and blessings of the Jewish faith and those presented in this novel by E.M. Broner is the use of feminine names for God. For example, in various places throughout the novel "Mother God" (8), "Shehena" (131), and "Mother of the Universe" (257) are used. In her article "Honor and Ceremony Among Women" (1982), Broner explains her use of "Shehena" in some of the experimental rituals that she developed with Naomi Nimrod:

> All the decisions Naomi Nimrod and I made while writing the *Haggadah* were political, for as [Kay] Turner says, ritual is political. We made linguistic changes. We changed gender from masculine to feminine. That was political. We had to rename or name women; we had to rename *Elohim*, the masculine, as Shchena [Shehena], the feminine form. We shook tradition, unrhymed ancient rhymes, changed rhythms of old chants. That would be our political stand (240).

Aside from this general shift from the masculine to the feminine names of God, Broner introduces non-traditional forms of worship in her novel. Simha, for instance, considers herself the priestess of the group. When she describes the choices that she had to make in her life during the telling of the *Purim* story, she says that "I could have stayed home and married, or I could make new births and new prayers" (Broner 1978:130). Just before the death of her daughter Hava, Simha is in the process of pronouncing a *bircas Kohanim*, or priestly blessing (131).

> Simha is of the caste of Cohen, the priestly caste. Because it is a festive holiday, there is recited the blessing of the priest. Simha sings that chant that was sung in the Temple of Jerusalem. – Shehena bless thee, Shine her face upon thee, Turn her face to thee in peace (131).

That Simha would dare to do such a thing is one of the most significant changes that Broner had brought to the traditional way in which Jews worship God. In *Bircas Kohanim: The Priestly Blessings: Backgound, Translation, and Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic, and Rabbinic Sources* (1981) compiled by Rabbi Avie Gold, we read that only the descendents of Aaron are the appropriate bearers of this special blessing from God. Simha is such a descendent, *but* she is a woman. In order that this blessing

be honoured among the people, several laws or *mitzvoh* have been assigned to insure that it is carried out in the proper way. Traditionally, a *minyan* must be present when the blessing is given (90). According to the *Talmud* there are six specific requirements as to how the blessing is given. It must be recited in "the Holy Tongue" Hebrew, while standing, with raised hands, with the "Ineffable Name," face to face with the congregation and in a high voice (Gold:29). Other requirements include that the hands must be ritually washed in water poured over them by *Levite* hands, that the priest has removed his shoes (91), with his *tallis* or prayer shawl draped over his face, and or over his fingers as he gives the blessing (93). Various other prohibitions insure that the purity of the *Kohan*, and the place in which he stands, meet the requirements as outlined in *Talmud* and *Midrash*.[54] Simha stands up to sing the blessing, and lifts her baby Hava up into the air as she begins. It does not appear that the various *mitzvoh* associated with the blessing are kept. She considers herself an authority on such matters, and feels that she is fulfilling her duty as the priestess of this *minyan* of modern women by simply pronouncing the blessing over them in her own way. As radical and shocking as this behaviour might appear to some, the identification between women and the high priest is not a new one. Although it is unusual that a woman would be reciting the priestly blessing, Weissler writes that this connection was made quite overtly during the *hallah* and *hadlaqat* rituals. She provides two prayers that show this connection quite clearly.

> May my *hallah* be accepted as the sacrifice on the altar was accepted. May my *mizwah* be accepted just as if I performed it properly. In ancient times, the high priest came and caused sins to be forgiven; so also may my sins be forgiven with this.... May this *mizwah* of *hallah* be counted as if I had given the tithe...(255-256). Lord of the world, may my *mizwah* of kindling the lights be accepted like the *mizwah* of the high priest who kindled the lights in the dear Temple. "Your word is a lamp to my feet, a light to my path" [Psalm 119:105; quoted in Hebrew]. That means, your words are a light to my feet...may the *mizwah* of my candle lighting be acceptable, so that my children's eyes may be enlightened in the dear *Torah*. I also pray over the candles that the dear God may accept my *mizwah* of the lights as if my candles were the olive oil lamps which burned in the temple and were never extinguished (256).

In these more sophisticated *tkhines* the writer has made connections between *hallah* and spiritual nourishment, and the *Torah* and light. Weissler points

out that these associations are unexpected considering women were not traditionally considered worthy to study the *Torah* or to participate fully in the synagogue service. It does suggest, however, the importance that women themselves placed on their religious role in the Jewish community, at least within the confines of the social reality of the time (256).

Simha's celebration of the Sabbath is also unique. She walks to a different hill overlooking the city every week in order to watch the sun go down. She chooses a new reading from the Pslams and "explicates it line by line" (57). She chooses a new lover every week because "it is *mitzvah*, a commandment and good deed, to make love on Friday night" (57-58). This is of course, in direct violation of the laws that prohibit fornication for all Jews, let alone the *Kyhanim*. Simha invites a different friend to share her Sabbath meal every week. She covers her head with a shawl and says over the candles, "Lady of the Flame...of the spirit and the smoke..." and her companion adds, "Oh, my Lady, *Bride*, thus it is written that You have called the Sabbath a delight...melting, changing lady of the candles, melt among us, dwell among us" (58).

Theodor Gaster describes a more traditional Sabbath prayer in this way:

> The lighting of the candles—at least two—on the eve of the sabbath is assigned to the mistress of the house; and popular fancy supposes that neglect of this duty will be punished by death in childbirth. Shortly before sunset the housewife spreads a clean white cloth on the table and usually places the sabbath loaves (covered with an embroidered napkin) upon it. She then lights the candles and pronounces the blessing: Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who hast hallowed us by Thy commandments and commanded us to kindle the lamp" (1966:274-275).

After the meal Simha walks to the Western Wall area of the Old City and begins to pray. A "religious policewoman" calls her a blasphemer for praying from the prayer book and for doing so with her head uncovered. She has removed her shawl to cover up her baby because the air has gotten chilly. Simha begins to sing with the men who are worshipping on the other side of the *mehitzah* that separates the women's section of the plaza from the men's

(64). Someone from the other side shouts "WHO IS SINGING?" ... it is forbidden for a woman's voice to be raised in song" (64). The policewoman says that it is forbidden to distract the men. Soon a rabbi from the other side appears and shouts at her, as he averts his eyes. It would be a sin to look directly at her. Simha astounds the man by declaring:

> I am the bride ... I am *Shabbat*. I take you to bed with me in white coverlets. I feed you from my table. You know them and yet you pretend not to see me. But I see you. I stare at all of you (65).

Passionately Simha begins to shake down the *mehitzah*. She hates "that which separates her from the side with the *Torah*, with the *bar mitzvah*, with the dancing and the singing, two-thirds of the courtyard" (65).

The plaza of the Western Wall has been referred to as a place imbued with "a spirit of unparalleled democracy", by Posner, et all (34), because spontaneous *minyanim* gather there made up of men from all over the world. The point to be made by this incident in Broner's novel is that women are not considered worthy enough to worship God there in this way. The irony that is revealed in this part of Broner's story is that Simha understands at a very conscious level that even though the men idealize the Sabbath as feminine, as the *Bride* in fact, they do not extend this association to *real* women. Women, as the policewoman points out to Simha, are but a distraction to men.

Even though these activites are a departure from traditional Judaism throughout the novel there are incidents in which Simha and the other women express their adherence to Jewish custom and ritual practice. They dedicate their new home and affix the traditional *mazuzah*,[35] but here too they pray, "O God of Women, Thou hast made us holy by thy commandments and commanded us to affix the *mazuzah*. This designates a righteous house of women" (207). They say the appropriate prayers when members of their group leave to travel long distances (175; 264), but the prayers are directed to "Shehena", to "Our lady", to "Mother God". It is quite clear that Broner uses these feminized names in her novel to draw the reader's attention to the overly masculinized patriarchal forms of traditional Jewish prayer and praise.

Recent feminist scholarship has suggested that the inclusion of feminine names for God is a *mitzvah* in and of itself. According to Rita Gross, the Kabbalah teaches that "one of the causes of *galut* [exile] is the alienation of the masculine from the feminine in God, the alienation of God and the Shechinah" (167). Gross suggests that "each of us can effect the turning of the *galut* by dedicating all our efforts to the reunification of God and the Shechinah" (167). Whether or not Jewish feminism can be justified in this way could be the subject of another lengthy paper.[36] For the purpose of my discussion of Broner's use of female God-language, it is sufficient to point out that she and others suggest that there are deep stores of feminine images and names within the Jewish tradition that already exist and should be brought to the fore.[37] Gross writes that

> A God language does not really tell us about God, but it does tell us a considerable amount about those who use the God language. . . . If we do not mean that God is male when we use masculine pronouns and imagery, then why should there be any objections to using female imagery and pronouns as well (170-171).

Broner's use of female names and images for God in this novel makes the same point. The importance of female God-language has been suggested by Carol Christ.

> The affirmation of female power contained in the Goddess symbol has both psychological and political consequences. Psychologically, it means defeat of the view engendered by patriarchy that women's power is inferior and dangerous. This new "mood" of affirmation of female power also leads to new "motivations"; it supports and undergirds women's trust in their own power and the power of other women in family and society (1979:278).

Gross notes that when a woman uses the feminine forms in her own worship it is a sign that the woman has entered into "the ritual covenant community of Israel" in her own right (172). What might have seemed preposterous in the past, she suggests, does not seem so unacceptable in many Jewish congregations today. For those women who wish to stay within the Jewish tradition but who feel the necessity for inclusive prayers and other forms of worship, Janowitz and Wenig have proposed an alternative which attempts to balance both of these concerns.

> Our [Sabbath] prayers, then, are not a critique of the classical liturgy from a feminist perspective, but an affirmation of our choice to remain within

> the tradition and to sanctify our everyday lives as women . . . Through our prayers, we define ourselves as women in terms of our relationship with God . . . [they] acknowledge women's participation in these rituals by using women's own words in the prayers and blessings they are to recite (1979-174-175).

Broner's use of such rituals and prayers in *A Weave of Women* develops her inclusion and elevation of women theme. It also allows her to address the problems associated with those aspects of the tradition which separate Jewish, Christian and Moslem women from each other. By emphasizing the feminine values as they apply to our understanding of God, Broner can use the vestigial ritual forms associated with pre-biblical Goddess worship to create ritual events where women's religious affiliation is secondary to the experiences they share as women. Her inclusion of the *Purim* story and its emphasis on the courage and intelligence of Vashti and Esther amplifies this theme. The connections she makes in this story between Vashti/Esther and Ishtar are quite clear. She feels that it is integral to the development of contemporary feminist spirituality to "unearth" images and prayers that already exist and to apply them to the ritual palette for use by women today, although the creation of new rites is of great importance as well. The "restoration of Vashti" as an appropriate role model for girls and women during *Purim* (and in their day to day life) has been considered in an article by Mary Gendler (1976). She suggests that modern Jewish women should recognize the significance of Vashti's defiance as a positive affirmation of their own desires and demands for respect.

> I propose, then, that Vashti be reinstated on the throne along with her sister Esther, together to rule and guide the psyches and actions of women. Women, combining th attributes of these two remarkable females—beauty softened by grace; pride tempered by humility; independence checked by heartfelt loyalties; courage; dignity—such women will be much more whole and complete than are those who seek to emulate Esther. The Lillith, the Vashti in us is valuable. It is time that we recognize, cultivate, and embrace her! (247).

Broner shares Gendler's interest in the restoration of Vashti to a place of honour and respect. Vashti is pointed to as a model of courage in the face of those who would degrade and dishonour women. Simha as priestess and

mystic reflects Broner's hope for the position of women in the future, beyond the limitations imposed on them by a patriarchal religion and culture.

Healing Rites in *A Weave of Women*

Throughout my discussion of life-cycle rituals and worship I have emphasized how innovations to traditional rites and ceremonies are used to develop Broner's inclusion or elevation of women theme. Healing rites are devised throughout the novel to deal with the brokenness of women's spirits as well as their bodies. These rites are created and performed by the women in the group to deal with the brokenness and rage they feel as the result of the racial and religious chauvinism that characterizes Jerusalem.

I define sickness as brokenness or fragmentation, as it is experienced in the spirit, mind, or body of an individual; or as disorder and dysfunction when applied to a community or group. Healing is the mending of these fragmented parts, i.e., integration, restoration, the creation of order out of chaos (Sullivan 1987:233). Sullivan describes two kinds of healing action. One is referred to as inspirative and the other as extractive. Examples of inspiration as a means to heal are the laying on of hands by a holy person, massage, or the anointing of the body with sanctified substances. Examples of extractive means are confession, exorcism, and any other rite or ceremony which focuses on purification or purgation as its primary function (226-232). In Broner's novel there are several individuals who are in need of some kind of healing. Joan and Deedee come to the attention of some of the women precisely because they are found in such a broken state. Broner makes it quite clear that the city of Jerusalem is also in need of healing. Several incidents in the novel focus on the disorder and violence that are associated with the tension that exists between various religious and political groups. A third area of healing that is important within the context of Broner's novel is the relationship between men and women. Broner suggests that the source of these various problems is a deeply-ingrained misogynism that characterizes patriarchal Judaism, Islam, and Christianity and a tendency in these groups to stress their differences rather than celebrate their similarities. Broner's inclusion of Ceremonies of Hospitality would suggest that she feels there are

cultural similarities between Arabs and Jews because they are both "desert people" and honour the same founder of their faiths—Abraham.

Healing by Inspiration

In *A Weave of Women* Broner uses several healing rituals that can be categorized as "healing by inspiration". Early in the story we meet the only male character who is introduced by name. Shlomo Sassoon is a rabbi from Kashmir who is a "learned practitioner in Yoga and Halakah" (16). He believes that his practice of "righteousness" has given him supernatural powers. He calls himself "a seer" and proceeds to prove his claim by telling Dahlia things about herself that he could not know (17). He offers to relieve her of her pain and confusion. "I will put my hands on your shoulders. My strength will enter you" (18). Dahlia relaxes and rests quietly. Shlomo then blesses the group and leaves.

Sullivan notes in his essay on healing , that often the most important figure or symbol in any given religion can be a source of healing (226). Shlomo identifies his dedication to Yoga and the following of the *Halakah*, or the Jewish laws of righteouness as the source of his power.[38] The *Torah* is believed to have healing powers in and of itself. In his book, *Judaism and Healing: Halakhic Perspectives* (1981), David Bleich cites a reference to support this suggestion.

> There is no affliction for which there does not exist a cure; the therapy and medicament for every affliction is discernible...If you seek that misfortune befall not your body engage in the study of *Torah*, for it is a therapy for the entire body (Tanchuma, Yitro 8) (vii).

The interchange between Dahlia and Shlomo Sassoon is a very clear example of the healing power of a laying on of hands, or inspiration rite based on the power derived from the sacred *Torah*.

In another ritual, water is used to "cool the passions" of a woman named Vered who is having trouble coping with the sexual advances of men. She asks for the group to "make me less passionate" (34).

> Simha and Terry give Vered water to drink, cold water from their large clay pitcher...they pour droplets on her wrists. They leak water down the tight cleavage and ask her to unhook her bra...her girdle. They give her a striped

> Arab robe...slippers and ask her to withdraw her feet from the high-heeled shoes she wears to work, on dates, even on visits to the women (34).

In this rite water is used to relieve Vered of the "heat" brought on by an artificial costume that has been assembled to entice men. In the flowing robe and soft slippers she can relax and get to know her body in a new way. This emphasis on the freeing of the body from fashions that restrict, bind, or distort is a common concern for many feminists. The use of cosmetics, the wearing of seductive clothing, or clothes that are awkward or painful to wear has been interpreted by writers such as Germaine Greer to be the subtlest form of internalized oppression (1971:49-50).[39] The danger of internalizing "false self-images" is focused on by Broner in another rite. In this healing rite, Simha engages in what she calls "oil and naming magic" (51). Once again we are introduced to a laying on of hands or anointing rite in which a liquid has been set off, consecrated to a particular use, and applied to the bodies of the women who meet at Simha's house.

> Simha is the princess of the oil. She is the giver of names.... First she rubs baby oil on Hava..."I name you Life and Breath." Simha brings out a bottle of olive oil.
>
> "I am allowed to whisper over the oil in the bottle but not in the hand...for the oil has the curing power and not my human hand (51).

The recognized source of healing power in this rite is *Sheheria* or Mother God, for whom Simha stands as an embodiment for the group.

Extractive Healing Rites

After Simha has massaged and anointed the women with the oil she tells them that the next part of the ritual involves the exorcism of various demons. At this point, the rite shifts to what Sullivan refers to as an extractive healing rite. The women tell stories about those parts of their pasts that embarrass or oppress them. They confess their sins and indiscretions to each other (52-55). Simha continues the ritual by affirming the more positive self-images they create for themselves. She gives them new names that reflect their internal transformations. This naming ceremony reflects a trend in feminist literature identified by Carol Christ (1980) in her discussion of "women writers on spiritual quest" in which she suggests that a new naming of the self often

accompanies a new-found respect and honour for the female body (120). According to Jewish tradition, the taking of a new name symbolizes one of the ways that persons can blot out their sin, especially in the context of the other rites associated with *Yom Kippur* (Waskow: 3-4). When she is done with the naming magic, she tells them that the final part of the rite is the casting out of demons, an exorcism.

> [Simha addresses the demons directly] My thoughts reduce yours to shadows, to thoughts from the unborn.... Leave these women or my womb will swallow you, and you will never be expelled... Leave these women, or I will call you by such names that if you have shape it will shudder from you. If you have hair, nails and teeth, they will fall from you.... Leave these pure women, or I will curse you, the black of soot, the yellow of chamber pots, the brown of donkey dung and you will be known as the refuse of demons (56).

Simha moves through the house opening windows, doors, and cupboards until "a great cooling Shabbat wind comes blowing through" (56).

Rites of confession such as these are examples of extractive healing. Aside from the various storytelling sessions that the women engage in to share their shortcomings or fears to each other, Broner has introduced a confession rite that includes the asking of forgiveness. In this encounter Dahlia comes before Simha and prostrates herself. To prepare herself for the meeting with Simha she "pours ashes on her head, rends the collar of a blouse, wraps a mourning shawl around her" (147). She sits outside the door of the house all night and is found in the morning when Simha opens the door. Dahlia and Simha have not spoken since the attack by the Arab fanatic who killed Hava.

> "*Slahee-lee*, forgive me." Dahlia prostrates herself on the stones of the street. "Rise," says Simha. "It is a sin to humiliate yourself." Still Dahlia lies prone. "I have waited for you to come so I could tell you that the accidental needs no forgiving." Simha would embrace the singer, but Dahlia grovels (148).

Dahlia asks that Simha forgive the young Arab and speak on his behalf before the judge. Simha asks that Dahlia allow her to hate because the pain of Hava's death is still so intense. The pain is all that she has left. Hatred has become her child. Dahlia says, "Only the priests can decree. You are both, Simha, the sufferer and the law, the priest and the subject"

(148). Simha takes some time to think about what she should do and decides to go to the judge and speak on the young man's behalf. He is sentenced to two years in prison. The killer is sentenced to life in prison. In this exchange Dahlia is relieved of her guilt at having brought trouble to the group, Simha is relieved of her hatred and the Arabs serve appropriate jail terms. A semblance of order has been achieved between the women, in that their friendship is restored, and between the Jewish and Arab communities because justice has been carried out to everyone's satisfaction.

An exorcism of a *dybbuk* or spirit also takes place in the novel. Mickey has been trying desperately to be granted a divorce from a husband who beats her. The rabbinic council does not allow her to leave Haifa. They do not believe her stories of abuse, or that her husband has committed adultery. What proof does she have? Mickey answers "my word". Her word is not sufficient for the council. Broner writes that there are two sayings among Talmudists. "If you listen to a woman too long, you begin to stink,"and "Better to burn the words of the *Torah* than to give them to a woman" (1985:102). Mickey is sent back to her husband and the beatings continue until she goes mad. When Hepzibah finds her in a cafe she is barely recognizable. She has grown fat and unkempt. Hepzibah takes her to Jerusalem to see if the group can help her. They decide that Mickey is possessed by a desperate *dybbuk* that must be sent off. Simha tells the other women what they must do. They must stare back at the Evil Eye that is in Mickey. They must lay pure hands on her and say prayers for her. Dahlia is to sing to the *dybbuk* to break her heart with sweetness and free her from her pain. They ask the *dybukk* to leave. They feed it fresh food which is gobbled down madly. The *dybbuk* wails "I am still hungry" and Simha asks for what. The *dybbuk* answers that the hunger is for men. This is the madness, that a woman would crave that which beats and humiliates her. Simha instructs Antoinette to tell the *dybbuk* that it is possible to live without men; with friends, books, work (108). Simha demands that the spirit leave Mickey, and free her from her compulsion to eat (110). Simha says that she is the spirit of the prophet Miriam and must be obeyed. The spirit resists. Hepzibah then tells the group that they must divorce the spirit of Magda (the *dybbuk*), from

Mickey. They must repeat the words 'I divorce you' three times, "in the tradition of our nomadic people, the way of our Bedouin ancestors. " (112). Simha then asks Magda Mickey to "cleanse the defilement from you. Say, three times, 'I divorce you,' and the name of your husband " Magda Mickey shouts out the words and then collapses on the floor. When she comes to her senses Mickey looks up into the faces of the women and smiles.

Sullivan suggests that purification or extractive rites are healing in the sense that they re-establish ritual order and rid the individual or community of evil (233). I have already considered exorcism rites in this light. I have chosen to include excommunication in this category of healing rites because the expulsion of disorder or evil referred to by Sullivan (233) is described by Broner in the context of such a rite.

As is the case in many of the rites and ceremonies I have considered in this paper, the excommunication of Gloria is a communal experience. The rite is developed and performed by the whole community of women. The other reason that I include the excommunication of Gloria here, is because this rite symbolizes more than all the others, Broner's concern for " honor and ceremony among women" (1982). Gloria dishonours her friendship with the other women. To Broner, this is the most serious sin a woman can commit, a sin for which there can be no forgiveness (1985:280).

Gloria is a converted Jew from California who has emigrated to Israel. Throughout the novel she is portrayed as a woman who is not quite right, always a little off base, not to be trusted. Gerda finds it difficult to feel comfortable with Gloria and tries to warn the other women about getting too close to her. When the women are sitting together confessing their "sins" to each other Gloria tells them that she is sexually attracted to children and likes to tease young boys.

> "I'm being perfectly honest with you," says Gloria. "I like to have virgins. I do. Men dig it. Why shouldn't I? It doesn't hurt them. They don't bleed all over and cry and make a mess. They either come or they don't." I enjoy being a teacher...the pride of evoking response, the teaching of the cub scout the cub position, the goat the butting position, the puppy the licking position" (53).

The women are disgusted by her monologue. One woman covers her ears. Gerda says to the group "Stop her..she [is] a demon" (53). Broner continues,

"If only the women would listen to Gerda" (53). In another part of the story Simha has invited Gloria to share the Sabbath meal with her. Gloria is rude and eats most of the special food that Simha has made.

> Can a hostess complain? She [Simha] is descended from the culture of Sara and Avraham and their tent. This is the culture of hospitality to all the nomadic. "You shit!" yells Simha, and puts her cloth napkin over the remaining *tsimmes*. Gloria shrugs, then lies on the Arab rug (59).

It is apparent that Gloria has no respect for Simha. Gloria complains when things do not suit her, and is obnoxious when she does not get her own way. Eventually the whole group begins to understand the effect Gloria has had on their cohesiveness. They perceive her as a threat. Gloria is a flirt. She joins a protest against a politician who was once Vered's lover, goes up to his office to confront him and ends up on the floor with him having sex. She makes the rounds. Soon she has seduced all the other men: the divorcing husband, the kibbutznik, the men whom the women have either loved or hated. She tries to seduce Shlomo Sassoon, but he ignores her. The women feel betrayed and used. They decide to act. They summon Gloria to the house one night. It is dark except for black candles which have been set up in the corners of the room. In a call and response pattern they begin to chant their own *mitzvoh* in the name of Mother God.

> Honour thy friends for thou art the accumulation of them. Thou shalt not break up the family. Thou shalt not kill feeling. Thou shalt not tempt the weakened in spirit, the foolish or the lonely. Thou shalt not steal...attention, time, affection, memory. Thou shalt not bear false witness against a woman friend. Thou shalt not covet that which is precious and hard won by another. Thou shalt not covet that which is discarded by a friend, that which has humiliated a friend, for in coveting, thou also would humiliate the friend. Thou shalt not replace a trusted woman friend with a new male face (280-281).

As the candles are blown out the women say "We divorce you... we separate you from us...you are put out of the community" (283). Gloria's name is "obliterated...eliminated...annihilated" (283). Someone puts a pillowcase over her head and a hand over her mouth and then she is left alone. When she turns the lights on she has no idea where she is. She is in an unfamiliar place.

By using this dramatic rite, Broner shows the importance that she places on the ideal of sisterhood as it is understood by feminists. The women that pass into and through each other's lives in this novel depend on each other for companionship and support. They function as a family. It is significant that in this setting such a harsh judgment would be meted out to one of the group. I think that it is Broner's way of emphasizing just how important cooperation and mutual respect are to the development and maintainance of "sisterhood". Excluding Gloria from any further fellowship with the group is similar to the work of a surgeon who removes a malignant tumour from a person's body with the hope that the cancerous cells have not invaded other areas of healthy tissue. This kind of separation from those who have disregarded various laws or customs and therefore shown disdain for their religious tradition is practiced by Orthodox Jews, and is similar to the "shunning" practices of some Mennonite or Amish communities within the Christian tradition. These practices seem harsh to the outsider but they reflect the seriousness with which the individuals within these communities take their adherence to the laws and customs which distinguish them from other groups. In both these cases adherence to these customs stands as a reminder that a special relationship with God has been undertaken and to disregard them would be tantamount to turning one's back on God. In her book, *Purity and Danger* (1966), Mary Douglas writes that "the analysis of ritual symbolism cannot begin until we recognize ritual as an attempt to create and maintain a particular culture, a particular set of assumptions by which experience is controlled (128). Douglas discusses how important external boundaries are to a group, or to a society. "Its outlines contain power to reward conformity and to repulse attack"(114). She also suggests that acts, such as Gloria's breaking of the women's commandments, can be seen as "social pollution", or the transgression of the "internal lines of the system" (122). Although Douglas has based her analysis on what she refers to as primitive societies, I think that her insight concerning the social function of ritual action is helpful to our understanding of the group's insistence that Gloria be excommunicated. By excommunicating Gloria, by physically removing her from the group, Simha and the others are giving "visible expression" (128) to the fundamental

premise of the group, that one must honour and respect one's women friends. The paradox suggested by this rite is that the group must ritually dishonour one of their number i.e., excommunicate Gloria in order to maintain the purity of the group. They feel justified because not only did Gloria "cross the line" by seducing these men, she also endangered the others with her "social pollution"(139). The sisterhood of women symbolizes the spirit of "Shehena" and in this respect Gloria did in fact turn her back on all that *Shehena* God meant to the group. For this, according to Simha, there is no forgiveness (Broner 1985:280).

Sullivan suggests that entire groups are capable of transmitting healing power, especially when the rites centre on communal activities that solidify the group (231). Broner's weave of women embodies the healing power of *Shehena* in the various rites and ceremonies they perform. Just as Shlomo believed he has was able to heal by the power of the *Torah* in his life, these women believe that the healing power of *Shehena* is released in and through them by virture of their connectedness and love for each other.

To this point I have dealt primarily with those healing rites performed for members within the group. Some of these rites have centred on the elevation of women theme in that they help members of the group deal with self-image problems that are related to the experience of sexism. Joan, Vered, and Mickey are helped in this way. Dahlia is strengthened and her spirit renewed by the healing touch she receives from Shlomo. In this novel there are other healing rites that concentrate on the very real sickness associated with the violence and prejudice between the three major religious groups that live in the city of Jerusalem. The death of Hava during the *Purim* festival is an indication of the animosity that exists between the Arabs and the Jews in Israel today. Broner uses rituals associated with forgiveness and justice to deal with this particular problem within the context of her novel. There is one more incident in the novel that deals with the problem of violence motivated by religious fanaticism. In this case, however, the incident centres around an Orthodox Jewish youth instead of an Arab nationalist, and a young American tourist named Deedee. Deedee's story will conclude my discussion of the use of healing rites and ceremonies in Broner's novel.

Deedee is a young Christian American who is visiting Israel as a tourist. She is travelling lightly with a pack on her back and wearing the usual clothing associated with this kind of travel, shorts and a light shirt. While she was visiting Jerusalem, Deedee caught the attention of a young Talmudic scholar who tried in vain to keep this scantily clad American beauty out of his mind. He became obsessed with her appearance and tried to make her acquaintance even though he knew to do so would break several of the commandments and customs that he adhered to as an Orthodox Jew. This young man's zealousness and desire for ritual and moral purity is indicated by his faithful adherence to Orthodoxy. He followed the *halahkic* laws scrupulously and was proud of his achievements as a *Talmudic* scholar. The remarkable thing about this young man is that he "proved" his love of learning and for the *Torah* by engaging in violent acts. He and an equally passionate group of fellow students considered themselves the "patrolling angels of God" (220).

> There are invaders in the Temple site. These are unnatural creatures from pagan lands with great heads of hair, mustaches, round or square glasses, their homes like a hump on their backs. They are black ones, black as the excavated earth in the Golan and dark as deep within the center of the globe. There are yellow ones with cameras like snouts, like trunks from their bodies. There are the Christians spying, blond vikings who come here speaking tongues from the Tower of Babel (215-216). I am as the seven eyes of the Lord that range throughout the earth. It is my responsibility as a Jerusalemite to purge the city (217).

As observant Jews they believed it was their duty to punish those who did not abide by the law. Unsuspecting tourists and thoughtless Gentiles were perceived as the enemy in a holy war against impurity. One Sabbath day they came upon a tourist trying to make a telephone call in a public telephone booth. They rushed toward him and beat him to the ground. When they are finished with him he is critically injured and in need of hospital care. This beating was to encourage this man to be more observant of the Sabbath laws that forbade the use of the telephone on this day. In another incident the scholars attacked and mutilated a physician whose speciality was the study of histology or tissue structure. They ambushed the man, beat him, tied a sack over his head and crushed his skull. When this part of their campaign was completed they cut into his body and removed his internal organs. His

crime, according to these young men and to Orthodox Jewry generally, was the performing of autopsies and medical experiments using dissected tissue." They believed that this doctor should enter Paradise in the same state as his desecrated patients, sliced into sections and with his vital organs removed (219). This group was also fond of slashing the arms of young girls it found immodestly dressed in short sleeves.

Unfortunately for Deedee, it was to a member of this group that she offered a portion of her picnic lunch during a sight-seeing tour of the Old City. The young man was fascinated by her free spirit and, of course, by her physical attractiveness. He took the food that she offered him and ate it, blatantly ignoring the strict dietary laws of his faith. Soon he was unable to control his desire for her body as well. The girl enjoyed his company and encouraged his advances. Before long they were making love and exhausted from her travelling, the heat, and their lovemaking she fell asleep. The young scholar was full of remorse for what he had done. He got up to run away. When he reached the top of the hill of Hinnom he turned and looked once more at the young girl's body lying on the rocks below. An idea occurred to him that was to seal Deedee's fate. He picked up a rock and aiming carefully threw it with all his might at her head. One rock followed another until Deedee was battered and crushed. "I will bury her in a pile of stones, as whores of all time were treated" (224). A passing taxi driver startled the young man and inadvertently saved the girl's life. She was taken to the hospital critically injured and left by nursing staff and doctors to die.

> She is dying. All the signs are there, double vision, numb fingers and toes, bloody pillow and sheets, blood through the nostrils, ears, rectum and pouring from under fingernails. And she wants to die (225-226).

The women fight with the nurses to release Deedee into their care, to die among kind faces, or to be healed (227-229). While Deedee is in the hospital the group of women make crosses for her out of various materials, thinking that having the symbol of her Christian faith would have some healing effect. They call out the names of the parts of her body because she can not feel them. They assure her that "Deedee is present and accounted for" (231). When they are questioned about the appropriateness of a group of Jewish

women making crosses. Mickey replies..."What's the difference.... As long as it casts out devils. It got Dracula, you know. He ran from the cross" (231). They wash and care for Deedee's body until she gains strength and can sit up and eat. The viciousness of this attack on a visiter to their Land enrages them. They decide that they will track down the fanatic and repay him for his violence against Deedee.

The women who meet at Simha's house choose their weapons: The Evil Eye, The Purified Stone, Blood, Sounds that Shatter the Air, and The Weapons of Home (i.e., pots, pans, and ladles) (233). Rina paints the Evil Eye on her palms, and on everything that they will throw at the young fanatic. They boil the stones they will use to stone him. They collect cauldrons of blood from the slaughterhouse, from Deedee's seeping wounds, and from Joan's menstrual cup. The women practice making raucous noises with their voices and with the pots and pans (234), and assemble a long list of curses that are drawn from their collective and individual rage at past injustices and the violence that they have endured (234-235). Once Hepzibah has found the address of the scholar, they assemble all their equipment, put on *Purim* masks, or paint their faces, don wigs and scarves and walk in an unruly procession to his house. When they reach his door they start to throw dishes at the house. They break the windows and hurl blistering curses at the young man. They rush past his mother and drag him out into the street. "He is stood up like the victim of a firing squad" (237). His mother rushes forward and pleads with the women to have them stone her instead, but the women push her away and take the stones out of their pockets. They have poured the cauldrons of blood all over the man as they curse him for spilling Deedee's blood. Just then a taxi pulls up and Deedee herself emerges, shaking and still swathed in bandages. She starts to speak to the crowd gathering to watch the women stone this respected scholar dripping with stinking blood. "Let she who is without sin cast the first stone" (238). The women fall back. They are stunned to see Deedee standing in front of them. They allow the police to take the young man away as he pleads with Deedee to forgive him, which she does. When the women return to the house they drink together until they all start to doze off. Deedee lies peacefully in their midst. Gloria turns

to Hepzibah and says, "Deedee has risen." and Hepzibah replies, "Deedee has risen indeed" (238).

In this story about Deedee and the *Talmudic* scholar the tension between Gentiles and Jews, men and women comes to a dramatic climax. Through her courage and Christ-like presence, Deedee forces the women to consider that although she has been broken in body, they have been broken in spirit. In their rage and hatred they have forgotten who the real enemy is. They have returned "an eye for an eye" , or tried to, before she stood before them and challenged them for taking the same self-righteous posture they found so repulsive in the young man. The group, in this sense, is in greater need of healing than Deedee is. Simha's heart still broken over the death of Hava, Mickey's bitterness and hatred of her husband and the religious authorities, and Joan's feelings of humiliation and helplessness still hold them in their grip. The shock of Deedee's presence and the forcefulness of her words shatters the madness of the scene unfolding outside the young man's house. Mickey's words about the appropriateness of the crosses in Deedee's hospital room turn out to be prophetic. She said that they would chase demons away, and even Dracula was defenceless when faced with the sign of the cross. Dracula, as every horror film fan knows, drinks people's blood in order to maintain his own sick life. This is an effective image of the constant blood letting that goes on in the Jerusalem setting of Broner's novel. The spilling of blood promotes the spilling of more blood.

> Why does the spirit of revenge, wherever it breaks out, constitute such an intolerable menace? Perhaps because the only satisfactory revenge for spilt blood is spilling the blood of the killer; and in the blood feud there is no clear distinction between the act for which the killer is being punished and the punishment itself ... Vengeance, then, is an interminable, infinitely repetitive process. Every time it turns up in some part of the community, it threatens to involve the whole social body... and that is why it is universally proscribed (Girard 1977 14-15)

The source of Deedee's healing power is in the words of Jesus. She embodies his words as she stands before the group of women and forces them to weigh the consequences of their actions in their stone-filled hands. When Gloria and Hepzibah repeat the words of the Easter service "Deedee has risen... Deedee

has risen indeed" the reader understands that not only has Deedee risen from her sickbed. She has also risen above the bloodletting that has stained the streets of Jerusalem. Deedee receives the violence not as a victim, but as a victor. She transforms the situation into an opportunity for the women to face their own violent rage and to transform it through the cleansing and purifying act of forgiveness. She shows the women around her the redeeming power of Jesus Christ. Meekness, not weakness is affirmed here, and the gospel of forgiveness changes the scene from one of cursing and revenge into a contemporary parable about the saving power of love.

This embodiment of the scriptures is by no means foreign to the followers of the Jewish faith. Neusner writes in *Midrash in Context: Exegesis in Formative Judaism* (1983) that

> Since rabbinical documents repeatedly claim that, if you want to know the law, you should not only listen to what the rabbi says but also copy what he does, it follows that, in his person, the rabbi represents and embodies the *Torah*. God in the *Torah* revealed God's will and purpose for the world. So God had said what the human being should be. The rabbi was the human being in God's image (137)

In this way Neusner suggests that the rabbi can be understood by the people he serves as "the word made flesh" (136). By casting Deedee in the role of teacher rabbi Broner has at once elevated the position of women, (since it has only recently been accepted that women can adequately fulfill this role), and has also enriched the Christian tradition of the suffering and saving power of Christ. By superimposing a female form over the well-known image of the suffering servant or Christ, Broner incorporates the countless tears and silent pain of battered women all over the world. "Deedee has risen. Deedee has risen indeed" are the appropriate words to close her chapter on this story of love's triumph over self-righteousness and hate.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have considered the development of contemporary feminist rituals as a response to the traditional exclusion or restricted participation of women in patriarchal religions. By studying the work of E.M. Broner I have been able to pay particular attention to traditional as well as innovative rites and ceremonies associated with the Jewish faith. I have noted her participation in the creation of a Women's *Seder* and a *Rosh Hashanah* ritual which are celebrated in New York by Jewish feminists every year (Schneider 1984:96,110). The major focus of this paper, however, has been the comparison of rituals created by Broner in her novel *A Weave of Women* and traditional Jewish rituals and worship practices. I have attempted to show how and to answer why Broner has used ritual exploration and innovation to come to terms with the problems associated with sexism and traditional Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Now I will conclude by offering a critique of several related themes and devices, in Broner's work: symbolic inversion, ritual creativity, feminists exclusivism, ritual violence, and divine immanence.

In *A Weave of Women*, and in her ritual work with other feminists, Broner has chosen to address the conflict between men and women in patriarchal cultures by creating rituals in which women's "structurally inferior" position (V. Turner in Babcock:289) is reversed. They are placed into positions, roles, and responsibilities of dominance and power. They create and perform innovative rituals which defy the conventions of traditional Judaism. For instance, Simha pronounces the priestly blessing over the group of women who have gathered to celebrate the *Purim* festival. The group shares in the exclusion of men from particular ritual events, just as women have traditionally been excluded by men. One of the most obvious expressions of status reversal or inversion is the fact that Hava's father is referred to merely as

"the *kibbutznik*" throughout the entire novel. I would suggest that this is an example of what Babcock refers to as "symbolic inversion."

> "Symbolic inversion" may be broadly defined as any act of expressive behavior which inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or in some fashion presents an alternative to commonly held cultural codes, values, and norms be they linguistic, literary, artistic, religious, or social and political (Babcock:14).

By setting the novel in modern Jerusalem and by choosing an Orthodox context into which she has placed her characters, Broner has ample opportunity to utilize this status reversal or inversion theme. The elevation or inclusion of women in this strictly patriarchal and obsessively ordered setting allows her to paint her picture of the lives of her characters in broad jarring strokes. The characters come across as caricatures, exaggerated, and typically shallow or one dimensional. They seem to be going through the motions prescribed by scripts marked "the mystic," the "social worker," the "wayward girl," or "the poet." The settings in which the conflicts are played out are typically ones in which ritualization occurs: within the walls of Simha's house, at the Temple Wall, on the street during parades and street plays or during the *Purim* festival. Barbara Babcock has noted that

> all symbolic inversions define a culture's lineaments at the same time as they question the usefulness and the absoluteness of this ordering...they remind us of the arbitrary condition of imposing an order on our environment and experience, even while they enable us to see certain features of that order more clearly simply because they have turned it inside out (29).

Victor Turner writes that such inversions have an "existential quality" related to his notion of "communitas."

> This is a relation between human individuals outside normative social structure, perhaps sometimes a metasocial relation, but which in any case assumes that human beings are concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals, and not in their basic humanity segmented into roles and statuses and divided by particularistic group loyalties (in Babcock:287).

The "weave of women" in Broner's novel exemplifies this notion of communitas. Relationship is recognized within the group as the most important aspect of women's experience. The belief that what they share as women precedes whatever religious or social class they have emerged from suggests they have a "metasocial relation." The problem that seems to be addressed

but not adequately solved here is Broner's attempt to come to terms with the "particularistic group loyalty" (Turner in Babcock:287). The women have overcome the particularism of the various religions they have been associated with, but have done so by emphasizing the pre-eminence of the feminine over the masculine. This does nothing to further the development of mutuality between the sexes which I have suggested is an integral feminist principle. Throughout the novel this continually ritualized polarization between males and females tends only to deepen the rift between them. It does not, as Myerhoff suggests, add to our belief "that the contradictions embraced by their symbols have been erased" (199). Even the one ritual which is supposed to symbolize the coming together of the male and female-the wedding of Simha and the *kibbutznik*-is carried out with an ironic twist. They decide (although it seems more likely that it is Simha who decides) that they will only live together for six months of every year. Their unity is expressed and maintained by a lengthy separation.

Broner makes reference to the Demeter and Persephone myth in describing this marriage arrangement. In this Greek myth Persephone is abducted and raped by the God of the Underworld Hades. Her mother Demeter negotiates with Hades until it is agreed that the daughter Persephone will spend six months of the year in the Underworld with Hades and six months of the year in the world with her mother Demeter. By referring to this myth is Broner suggesting that it is Simha who has been coerced into this arrangement, symbolically raped and abducted? Since the *kibbutznik* has been marginalized and demeaned in the novel and ritually excluded from the rites associated with Hava's birth (i.e., he is reduced to the role of attendant at the crowning and enthroning ceremony and barred completely from the hymenotomy), I would suggest that it is the *kibbutznik* and not Simha who is playing the part of Persephone in an even more radical and paradoxical symbolic inversion of the Demeter-Persephone myth. Traditionally, the *kibbutznik* would have more status than Simha because he is a man. By reversing or inverting their positions Broner focuses the reader's attention on the injustice of sexism. The significance of fiction writing to this process has been referred to by Victor Turner. He writes,

> In the metaphorical liminality of art, literature, drama, festival, all kinds of variations on normative themes are devised, some of them stressing inverse symbolism or reverse behavior (in Babcock 294).

Broner has created dramatic effects by using the technique of symbolic inversion in this novel. Through the power of language she has created a mythic reality that challenges the traditional Jewish paradigm. But the heavy emphasis on ritual language leads to the second difficulty I have with the novel. The emphasis Broner has placed on ritual language prevents her from being fully successful in capturing the animate, or the meditative aspects that sometimes characterize ritual performance. Many of the rituals that are presented in the novel depend on the words and directions provided to the participants in the form of scripts. For instance, in the marriage rite both Simha and the *kibbutznik* are instructed to repeat the words that Terry has prepared for them (293). Similarly, the participants in the *Safut Yam* rite after Hava's death are told to act in particular ways and to repeat particular phrases according to Terry's direction. As the others join in with their contributions to the rite there is a repeated emphasis on verbal direction before an actual movement takes place (142-144). Even the embrace shared by Terry and Simha at the end of the rite is preceded by the direction to Simha that she accept it. I suggest that this is one of the limitations that a writer must come to terms with when she chooses to write about ritual itself. The subtlties of silent pauses, quiet stillness, or spontaneous activity are not portrayed well. Writing about ritualization is always problematic because ritual has a quality that precedes the verbalization of a mood or a thought. In a sense Broner is attempting the impossible in her narrative work concerning ritual. She must use words to direct and describe actions, sounds, and the manipulation of objects, which limits the kinds of rituals she can use.

Broner's creation of rituals in this novel reflects the Jewish tradition from which many of her rites are derived. There is a strong emphasis in Judaism on the power of words. The reading and reciting of *Torah* is the key to the unfolding of the liturgical year and, its veneration characterizes many Jewish festivals (see Appendix Three). Broner's novel reflects this traditional emphasis on the written and spoken word.

As effective as Broner's use of rituals based on symbolic inversion is, self-contradictory rituals are also created by the group. The self-contradictions detract from Broner's overall success in maintaining her elevation of women theme. Rituals take place which violate rather than affirm members of the group. I question whether Hava's hymenotomy and the excommunication of Gloria are helpful in acting out a projected ideal cherished by the community. The hymenotomy frames the welcoming of the infant into the community but presents a self-contradictory meaning. This rite is supposed to welcome an infant girl into a loving and supportive community of women, and yet the ritual action constitutes an assault and violation of a baby's tiny body. The piercing instead of embracing of Hava amplifies the ambivalence felt toward a religious tradition in which circumcision has become the most obvious symbol of the faith. René Girard suggests that ritual violence functions in ways that attempt to purify violence, or to control it, but I do not want to suggest that this justifies the violence of a ritual such as the hymenotomy.

Often things that are created for literary effect (Linner:124) do not necessarily reflect accurately the author's belief system or over all intent. However, the irony of the hymenotomy is particularly sharp. Broner (Schneider:599) seems to believe that the hymenotomy is an appropriate ritual with which to welcome female children into the Jewish community. Its paradoxical message suggests that an ideal piercing contains all the elements that are in the ritual—ceremonious or correct attitude, the presence of loving and intimate friend(s) and a sense of cele ation or an affirmation of womanhood and yet the primary action of the ritual itself reinforces the notion that women can be exploited as vulnerable passive victims. In *Jewish and Female*(1983) Susan Weidman Schneider refers to the piercing ceremony which, she says, orginiated with Mary Gendler, and to an interview with Broner concerning her use of the hymenotomy in her novel. Schneider suggests that the hymenotomy creates more problems than it solves because it can be interpreted as ritual abuse and violation. She refers to the practice of Ethiopian Jews, the *Falashas*, who "perform ritual clitoridectomy on the new born girls, a tradition derived perhaps from the practice of this genital mutilation in surrounding cultures rather than from Jewish tradition" (599). It seems

unlikely that women today would want to submit their infant daughters to such a rite, especially when criticism has been levelled at the circumcision rite itself. Schneider writes, "Some of the anxieties both men and women express around the issue of circumcision as mutilation are discussed in Zalmann Schachter-Shalomi's *The First Step: A Guide for the New Jewish Spirit* and Barbara Cohn's "Circumcision: A Mother's Ambivalence " (599). The hymenotomy adds to the seriousness of the ethical considerations pertaining to, and the identification of, circumcision as ritual abuse. Jews attach a great deal of significance to the physical sign of the covenant that they have made with God. Broner's novel exemplifies the ambivalence because she seems to approve of the rite and yet herself clearly associates the hymenotomy with stories describing rape and violation.

The excommunication of Gloria presents another disturbing and contradictory rite. In this ritual a woman is dishonoured, ritually and symbolically exterminated by the group in order to show how important the honouring of women is to them. The rite is a shocking inconsistency when considered in light of Broner's insistence that the honouring of women is the most important theme of her ritual work. In the hymenotomy and excommunication Broner has gone beyond criticizing the patriarchal worldview. She symbolically violates her own belief system in order to define it, which undermines her vision through a medium she herself has praised as especially appropriate for feminists—ritualization.

Broner's novel utilizes religious language in order to express the numinous aspects of women's experience but does not appear to promote institutional religions or one particular religion over another by doing so. She insists that identification with one's gender should precede a woman's identification with Judaism, Christianity, Islam or any other patriarchal religion and suggests that this shared experience of womanhood can and should provide the source of a more authentic expression and interpretation of the sacred for contemporary women.

One of the aspects of women's spirituality that is being expressed through contemporary women's fiction, according to Carol Christ, is the development of a "communal mysticism" (1980:121-123). She has noted that women's lit-

erature can be studied as an alternative source of theological revelation because she feels that it provides a radical approach to the sacred and "reveals the powers that provide orientation in people's lives" (1980:2). I believe that Broner's "weave of women" expresses this development. The source of power revealed in this novel appears to emerge from the strong ties and relationships that develop between the women who meet at Simha's house. Empowerment is associated with this strong group identification. Each of the women has gifts and talents which are expressed within the group and which are used to affirm the feminine in individual members. This mutual affirmation usually takes the form of ritualized behavior created and performed by the group. The honouring of women by women is the most important feminist theme in the book. Women are honoured in these rites by virtue of their shared womanhood—no one woman is elevated at the expense of another. Although the women meet at Simha's house, she is not the leader of the group *per se*. Each member of the group has an opportunity to initiate rituals and to direct the women in their performance. Terry, for instance, leads the group in the *Sufat Yam* rite after Hava's death, and Hepzibah is considered the authority on dealing with the exorcism of the *dybbuk* which plagues Mickey. The whole group contributes to the creation of the commandments recited at the excommunication of Gloria. The group itself becomes the source of its own law. This appears to suggest that the covenant adhered to by the group is not between the women and a transcendent other. It suggests instead that a social contract has been negotiated between each individual and the group. "Mother God" or *Shehena* is revered as the communal spirit who connects the individual threads of the women's lives to the larger tapestry of the group's experience. She is the "webster" or the "weaver" of their communal experience. This concept of the divinization of women's relationships, or mystical sisterhood, emerges as a manifestation of what women engaged in the feminist spirituality movement would refer to as the sacred or the divine feminine, or metaphorically, as the return of the Goddess.

The ability to speak out, to tell oneself into being by recounting one's story to the group, to be incorporated into the larger picture, becomes a significant religious experience, an embodiment of this spirit. The "weave

of women" speaks metaphorically of a radically immanent experience of the sacred as it expresses or embodies the numinous aspects of the women's communal experience. Broner's work focuses quite sharply on this shared communal experience of sisterhood and recommends it to women over adherence to any other particular traditional or historical religious faith. Women are encouraged to explore this experience of the sacred as divine feminine in their lives. In *Ordinarily Sacred* Lynda Sexson (1982) writes that "religion ...is concerned with individual insight and vision rather than with institutions and their histories"(2). In this novel women's experience, especially Simha's, is viewed as a possible source of theological revelation. Simha is referred to as the mystic of the group. Her house is invested with meaning as a sacred place and normally mundane objects take on the power of the sacred because the women have recognized that their presence together sacralizes the space. For example, after Hava is born the women prepare the Throne of Miriam by covering one of Simha's chairs with a colourful bedspread and various pieces of fabric and lace. They create a special place to carry out the hymenotomy that is similar to the Throne of Elijah of the traditional Jewish circumcision rite. The objects and spaces of Simha's house are "metaphorically saturated" (Sexson:3) with religious meaning based on their experience of *Shehena's* success in the weaving together of their disparate lives. The Throne of Miriam functions as a potent symbol for Broner's elevation of women theme. Simha's breast replaces the cup of blessing in the hymenotomy ceremony. Sexson suggests that such positive feminine images need not be expressed in traditionally sanctioned ways, because women's experience of the sacred "burst|s| out of the traditional confines, or never find|s| its way into them."(3). This is one of the most significant points made by feminists challenging the exclusivity of patriarchal religion. It also seems to be one of the motivations for the women responsible for the *tkhine* collections referred to by Weissler. The traditional *siddur* or prayer book did not address women's concerns or include rites or prayers written for and by women and so women initiated such rites and prayers for themselves. In this way women participate in the enrichment of a religion and culture that is more intimately theirs, that speaks more directly and meaningfully to them.

Sexson suggests that the religious, when it is freed from the confines of the the status quo, resembles what we would recognize as the aesthetic.

> Both the religious and the aesthetic are informed by and produce an effect on the worldviews from which they arise. In some sense then, art and religion can be described as the notation of moments which discover or rediscover one's worldview, create or re-create one's philosophical depth. Art is the creation of an imaginative universe-and the entering into creation. Peculiar moments in ordering lives, saturated by metaphor or personal symbol-making, are the stuff of religion (3)

This is precisely why Carol Christ has suggested that the study of women's stories: fiction, poetry, song, autobiography, biography and talking with friends is so important (1980:1). She feels that investigations into the depths of women's experience of the self and the world are bound to expose "new visions of power and personhood" (11). Broner's novel attempts to provide a vision of power and personhood that has been derived from her understanding of sisterhood, or the communal mysticism she has associated with the divine feminine which takes the form of radical immanence.

I suggest that Broner's exploration of feminist themes illustrates a broader cultural shift from the belief in a transcendent being that stands at the centre of the universe, to an understanding of the sacred as an immanent presence expressed in the interconnectedness of human and natural phenomena. Calinescu refers to this experience as a shift toward the expression of a "de-centered cosmos, away from a time honored aesthetic of permanence, based on a belief in an unchanging and transcendent ideal of beauty, to an aesthetics of transitoriness and immanence, whose central values are change and novelty" (Calinescu in Doty:214). Western culture generally is experiencing a decentering or the "shattering of a coherent worldview" which Doty says began by the time of the European Renaissance with the rise of modernism itself (233). *A Weave of Women* illustrates this difference as a turning away from a central powerful transcendent reality, God, to an immanent, multidimensional self-awareness which is revealed in the faces of the women sitting in a circle telling each other stories. Each in her turn becomes the centre or focus of the group. At the same time each story includes all the other stories. The feminist vision of sisterhood connects the various points of

the women's stories into the overall story of women's oppression. Sometimes it simultaneously suggests powerful strategies for liberation.

Rosemary Radford Ruether (1983) discusses the transition Western culture has experienced from the traditional expression of "God ess" as a transcendent reality "surrounding ordinary human life that one imitates in ritual activity, thereby blessing and protecting the life processes" (237) to a more immanent experience in a sacralized daily life. Broner's characters reflect this shift in their discussion during the telling of the *Purim* story. Traditionally, *Purim* is a time to trust in the protective and redeeming providence of God. The injunctions to drink until drunkenness, which makes one powerless and vulnerable and absolutely dependent on God, emphasize this theme. Terry's interpretation of the *Megillah* encourages the women to challenge this religiously induced passivity and to become more self-reliant. She inspires them to work toward meaningful change by making appropriate choices in their lives. They realize that they must look out for themselves and for each other.

The group lives the vision of engaged feminism by consolidating its community into the expanded version of the *kibbutz* called *Havurat Shula* or the "friends of Shula." Ruether suggests that feminist spirituality expresses its tendency to stress the immanence of the sacred dimension through an incarnational theology.

> The working assumption of this feminist theology has been the dynamic unity of creation and redemption. The God ess who underlies creation and redemption is One. We cannot split a spiritual, anti-social redemption from the human self as a social being, embedded in sociopolitical and ecological systems. We must recognize sin precisely in this splitting and deformation of our true relationships to creation and to our neighbour and find liberation in an authentic harmony with all that is incarnate in our social, historical being (1983:215-216).

Ruether might refer to the formation of *Havurat Shula* as one example of the embodiment of "an integrative feminist vision of society" (232) based on a communitarian ideal. One could interpret this weaving of women's lives into an integrated community as a move toward secularism even though religious language is used to describe it. Ruether warns that the limitation

of such groups "lies precisely in their inability to move beyond the small voluntary group and create a base for a larger society" (233). I suggest that the particular limitation inherent in this community is its exclusion or dishonouring of men. Throughout the entire novel the characters of Shlomo Sassoon and Vered's brother are the only men who are referred to in positive terms or engage in positive relationships with the group.

In my discussion of Broner's novel I have concentrated on describing the various rituals created and performed by the women who gather together at Simha's house in the name of *Shehena* or Mother God. On one level the rituals might be considered to be within the the context of Judaism, and yet the characters use the rituals to draw attention to the problems of sexism within Judaism and to criticize the tradition itself. Ellen Umansky (1985) addresses this problem in her article, "Reclaiming the Covenant: A Jewish Feminist's Search for Meaning:"

> The continual exclusion of women from positions of secular and religious leadership within the Jewish community, the extent to which women's spirituality–past and present–is still ignored, the lack of formal ceremonies celebrating important life cycle events of women, and the liturgical description of God as "God of our Fathers" (but not of our mothers) makes me angry and sad.... It's not Judaism itself that angers me but those who seem to have forgotten that Judaism has never been monolithic and that in every period of Jewish history Judaism has developed and grown (28).

Schneider (1984) has identified three ways in which modern Jewish women are dealing with these problems. She writes that some Jewish women are searching for "aspects of Jewish life that they can feel connected to as women, whether through studying women in Jewish history, or examining source texts for clues to women's input..." (29). A second method used by other feminists is the attempt to transform the tradition by equalizing or "humanizing" it (30). The third course, one which I feel Broner has taken, has been described by Schneider as a "feminizing" alternative in which women inject "women's content and experience into Jewish life by such practices as holding a feminist Passover *seder* or including women's experiences of liberation into the classic tale of the Jews liberation from Egypt..." (29). Marilyn French refers to the idea that Broner attempts to "stretch" the Jewish male

tradition by including these elements in her work (in Broner 1985:x). In this sense Broner's novel and rituals can be described as an approach to feminism which merely utilizes aspects of the Jewish tradition in order to draw our attention to women's exclusion from it. On one level Broner's novel reflects the anger and sadness expressed by women such as Ellen Umansky. However, the writing of fiction allows Broner to do more than reflect the social reality of her time. A fiction writer can invent creative solutions to old problems that go far beyond the conventional or acceptable means to a particular end-in this case the eradication of oppressive sexism. *A Weave of Women* focuses the reader's attention on the horror and violence of sexism in a dramatic way. Broner's characters recount painful and humiliating incidents in their lives that have arisen as a result of some men's cruelty and callousness towards women. It appears as if the cruelty toward women in the novel provides a justification for the negative portrayal of men generally and the denigration or marginalization of the innocent, naive "kibbutznik" character in particular.

A Weave of Women is an attempt to come to terms with the basic conflicts between men and women. It provides the reader with a reversed, or "feminized" (Schneider:29) vision of Judaism's worldview. My question is whether simply reversing the status of men and women adds to our understanding of sexism. Does Broner's novel merely provide an opportunity for cathartic release or does it provide a revelatory spark, a glimpse of something new or different in the struggle to deal with the primary conflicts between men and women? In Sexson's discussion of the sacred she writes,

> Texts are not bodies of information but embodiments of interpretation. They are mythic, and contain as well the methods for demythologizing themselves. Text tells the secret of discrimination as well as conjunction, of separation as well as connection, of iconoclasm as well as myth-making.... Text functions to originate, focus, and embrace the interpretation of the self and the world (29).

Language functions in the gap between reality and meaning in what Doty refers to as "mythic discourse."

> Mythic discourse (whether it appears in materials traditionally defined as mythic, or in modern/postmodern literature) represents one human project

> to close this ontological gap, and mythic expression seems essential when it aims at universal symbolic meanings that compromise the impossibility of closing the gap, functioning both as compromise or temporalization and as hypothesis. "It is the nature of language itself to be symbolic and the nature of myth to be the rhetoric of that attempt" (187)

Literature, Doty suggests, can function for modern societies in the same way that myths have for traditional societies, because " the meaning of a fiction is always *potentially* mythic" (189). Ritual action also functions in the same way since it sacralizes daily life (Ruether 1983:237) or brings to mind the projected ideals cherished by the community. The paradox of *A Weave of Women* is that Broner must use religious language to represent and give meaning to a world which her characters perceive as godless and radically secular. Traditional prayers are ineffectual. Invoking the protective benevolence of *Shehena*, or Mother God, does not guarantee safe passage for Shula who is mutilated and "eaten" to death. According to Rabbi Phillip Rosensweig of the *Beth Jacob* congregation in Kitchener, Ontario, the traditional understanding of Jewish prayer does not include a coercive or "magical" quality at all. Prayer is a sign that an individual has engaged his or her mind and body in an intimate dialogue with God. God has promised to be present in every situation the Jew finds him or herself in. Prayer assures the believer that he or she has not been abandoned by God, that he or she will never be alone. That Jews have continued to understand their relationship with God, and their obligations to pray in this way throughout their bleak history is an astonishing fact. A Jew is challenged to listen for God's voice in every situation, and in every moment that he or she is alive. The degradation and horror of sexual violence that is described by Broner in her telling of the story of Shula's vicious rape and murder seems to undermine this traditional Jewish view of prayer. There is a sense of outrage at the "carelessness," or the callousness of God.

> Incoming passengers try to rouse her and turn her head toward them. From every orifice her seat mates had drunk her, biting the flesh of her nose, opening her mouth, eating her tongue, the ears. Her face is leprous, sections missing from their hunger. She was a communal lunch, the licked bones (1985:275).

In another incident just as Simha is finishing the most powerful and empowering blessing of her own, as well as, the traditional community's worship

practices *Bircas Kohanim*, her infant daughter Hava is killed by a devoted and zealous son of Islam. The absurdity of this scene rocks the reader's mind with stunning effect. What we are left with is a throbbing void, the ontological gap referred to by Doty. Where is *Shehena* in this awful moment? In the novel we read "The Great Hand was careless, palms wet, allowing slippage" (134). The awful truth that these women seem to face is that they are powerless against such evil in their lives.

It is clear that Broner is trying to deal with problems of defining polarities: male female, good evil, order disorder, sacred profane and the assigning of appropriate values to them. If we isolate the primary conflicts that seem to be operating in this novel we recognize that they each have definite qualities or values that are meaningful and distinct. The definition of each pole and the differences in degree between the poles themselves are culturally determined. Tradition says that *this* is sacred and *that* is not. For instance, in the novel Simha considers her walk to the Temple plaza a religious experience. The Orthodox men, however, consider her presence near them as polluting. To stay within the context of a particular culture one adopts or recognizes the meanings or values associated with it. One of the problems addressed by feminism is that the patriarchal worldview or culture assigns negative value to "female" or "disorder" and then defines them as "evil" or "polluting" so that the equations become male=good, female=evil, order=sacred, disorder=profane or polluting.

Feminist criticism of patriarchal definitions of social values calls our attention to the notion that "reality is merely a social construct, a collusive drama, intrinsically conventional, an act of collective imagination" (Myerhoff 1977:199). In *A Weave of Women* and in the actual ritual work carried out by Broner the emphasis is on creating an alternative "social construct" in which women are elevated and men less valued.

If we consider the work Broner has engaged in as a ritual innovator or performer, as well as her novel, we can see some of the problems that immediately arise when she tries to superimpose an exclusive vision of feminism on an already established ritual tradition. The Women's *Seder* in particular is problematic because its exclusivity contradicts the very nature of the

traditional *Seder* form. Broner seeks to inject the *Seder* with experiences meaningful to women. In contrast, Waskow's version of the *Seder* emphasizes the equalization of the status of Jewish men and women (1982:156). The traditional *Seder* celebrated during *Pesach* is meaningful because of its ability to bring Jewish people together whatever their age or sex. Each can have a role to play in the re-enactment or explication of the Exodus story. Each can contribute insights and revelations to the process based on his or her individual experience of oppression and liberation. The problems associated with women's participation in the Passover *Seder* have not been ignored by contemporary Jewish men and women specifically as they reflect women's position in Jewish society.

> The emblem of Passover for many women has been plain hard work. One year my mother-in-law; coming out of the synagogue kitchen, where she and other women of the congregation had been slaving away to prepare a communal *seder*, asked, "Rabbi, for this we came out of Egypt?" (Schneider 106).

Most contemporary innovations in the *Seder* focus on a more equitable sharing of the preparation duties (Schneider:107-108) or on a sharing of the reading or recitation of *Seder* prayers. Waskow has suggested that the traditional *Seder* has sufficient internal warrants to support feminist themes that can be explored by men and women together.

> Even liberation itself—out of *mitzrayim* the tight spot, across the broken waters of the Reed Sea—was a birth, or a conception in the first stages of what became a birth on crossing Jordan. *Torah* shows us that the process cannot be fulfilled until men are also a part of it. But it is the women who first understand the path, because they bring it something unique in their own life experience (156).

In these contemporary *Seders* in which men and women explore liberation themes together mutuality is expressed, as are new ways of living out one's experience as woman (or as a man) and as a Jew. When the roles are reversed and women assume responsibilities traditionally associated with men like reading from the *Torah* or reciting prayers–the inversion functions as more than a safety valve for the frustration of the people involved who have traditionally been excluded. It can generate real changes in the way men and women relate to each other and in how women and men feel about themselves. By participating in modern inclusive *Haggadahs* men and women are

engaged in a ritual dialogue concerning liberation on a symbolic as well as a real level. Such *Seders* celebrate a shared exodus from patriarchy but *not* from the tradition itself. Turner suggests that

> one aspect of symbolic inversion may be to break people out of their culturally defined, even biologically ascribed, roles, by making them play precisely the opposite roles. Psychologists who employ the sociodrama method as a therapeutic technique claim that by assigning to patients the roles of those with whom they are in conflict, a whole conflict-ridden group can reach a deep level of mutual understanding. Perhaps ritual or dramatic inversion may operate in a similar way, breaking down the barriers of age, sex, status, class, family, clan, and so on to teach the meaning of ...generic humanity (in Babcock:287-288).

Broner's *Pesach* celebration is a "Women's *Seder*," which emphasizes feminist concerns and seems to encourage and celebrate an "exodus" from the tradition itself. Schneider (1984) refers to this *Seder* created by E.M. Broner as a transitional rite. Exclusive feminist rites are meaningful and extremely important to women trying to free themselves from the oppression associated with sexism. Just as Mary Daly (1984) and Rosemary Radford Ruether (1985:4-5) have suggested, women such as Broner have taken this step because they feel they are in the midst of a crisis situation and insist they need the freedom and security they experience in women-only groups. Groups such as those directed by Broner tend to stress mutuality and loyalty between women rather than the building or maintaining of relationships with men. They do not necessarily encourage the turning away from a particularist point of view or a hierarchical ordering of the sexes but provide a feminist alternative by suggesting that women step outside of the conflict into supportive environments which exclude men where they can develop their psychic or spiritual experience in new ways. The communal structure of feminism as expressed in Broner's "weave of women" is elevated to a position from which the patriarchal ordering of traditional Judaism can be criticized. It does not really solve the basic conflicts inherent in Jewish tradition between men and women. Because its focus is "feminist" more than "Jewish" the transformation or empowerment of women to overcome oppression in their own lives is valued over the traditional transmission of the Jewish faith and ritual practice.

The mixed *Seder* in which men and women are encouraged to share the rituals, roles and responsibilities functions more in this transformative or generative way. For those women who wish to stay within the Jewish community Schneider suggests that the Women's *Seder* might be celebrated in conjunction with other innovative mixed *Seders* as women work through their liberation process and gain confidence in their new roles as ritual creators and participants (107-110).

I would like to end my discussion with a suggestion made by William Doty that readers are engaged in the process of their own myth-making when they read a writer's work (189). He writes that

> the reader seeks to vest the particular text with mythic meaning that will close, for a time, the ontological gap, just what the metaphorician-writer sought (or the mythic economy sought) in the text's production (190)

Does Broner's novel help to close this gap between the experience of sexism and the meaningful resolution of its primary conflicts? Because the vision that is promoted in this novel tends to elevate women by victimizing or denigrating the masculine, I suggest that the conflict is deepened. Symbolic inversion as it is used in this novel focuses the reader's attention on the problems associated with the exclusion of women in the ritual life of a community, as well as on the physical and psychological violence that women must endure in a sexist society. I suggest that the symbolic inversion as it is utilized in this novel functions as a lens to focus the reader's attention on the injustice of sexism as it effects women's lives. It successfully reveals the pain and frustration of women alienated from a society and religious tradition that does not value them as human beings. However, there are few moments of integration or mutuality between the sexes when we come to the end of the novel. The community of *Havurat Shula* is still a community marginalized within the larger context of the society, and Simha and the *kibbutznik* live together by agreeing to live apart. This vision expressed Broner in her fiction is not generative in terms of the Jewish culture. Its aim is to empower and transform individual women so that they can deal more effectively with the problems associated with sexism in their lives.

To summarize, ritual is used in this novel by Broner to focus our attention on the problems of sexism in patriarchal religions. By inverting the positions

of men and women she forces the reader to see that such orderings are merely social constructs and can be changed. The difficulty seems to arise when women still in the process of their own liberation have to make choices that seem to alienate them from "well-meaning" men or from women who have not yet recognized on a conscious level the problems that sexism generates in their lives. The problem is especially acute for those women who have been raised in a culture or religious tradition which seems inherently patriarchal and psychologically abusive. If a woman decides to turn her back on such a tradition, she has to face the fact that she is separating herself from an extensive ritual tradition which, although obviously sexist, functioned as a significant factor in the development of her family and community life. The effect that such a break with her primary groups of association has on a woman can be devastating. The need for a strong support group, a "weave of women," going through the same process therefore cannot be overstated. The idea of sisterhood and the recent development of rituals associated with the women's spirituality movement are a very clear expression of the problems women are facing when they feel abandoned by the traditions into which they have been born. Broner's novel is a response to this feeling of abandonment.

A Weave of Women raises many of the issues that are facing Jewish, as well as, non-Jewish feminists today. Ritual creation, innovation, or adaptation is crucial to the development of individual women, as well as to the communities from which they come. The ritual process itself facilitates opportunities for transformation because it provides a framework in which people can reflect and meditate on the significant moments of their lives and to discover where dissonance occurs. Ritualizing allows for change. It stimulates change, and yet by virtue of the fact that it also has a preserving quality, it stablizes communities in times of crisis by providing age-old formulas that guide and connect. By using Jewish rituals in this novel Broner has been able to express her desire for change (because her innovations are so shocking or make the sexist treatment of women so explicit), and yet she has not been able to accomplish this task without creating a new set of problems. Feminist rituals can be equally sexist and even abusive. During this period of cultural crisis when men and women are struggling to re-define their roles

and responsibilities in terms of their religion and society, the real challenge is to try to carry on with this transformative process in mutually enhancing ways. When this cooperative effort is impossible to sustain, communities such as the one presented in *A Weave of Women* or refered to by Ruether as "feminist exodus communities" (1985:57-74) are available to provide alternative places in which women can explore their spirituality free from the threat of sexual harassment or the confusing and abusive stereotypes presented to them in patriarchal institutions. Whether or not these communities will survive as permanent expressions of radical feminist separation or will only serve as temporary gathering places in which women are empowered and strengthened so they can influence the wider society and transforms it, is yet to be seen.

Notes

1 Gustavo Gutierrez, although not feminist, has also suggested that the articulation of a community's experience is integral to the liberation process itself. "We definitely will not have an authentic theology of liberation until the oppressed themselves can freely and creatively express themselves in society and among the people of God, until they are the artisans of their own liberation, until they account with their own values for that hope of total liberation which they bear within them" (in McAffee Brown 1980:76).

2 For a discussion of antiritualism see Doty (95).

3 Some of these stages are birth, childhood, youth, adulthood, marriage, parenthood, old age, and death (Turnbull 1983:15; V. Turner 1969:168; Van Gennep 1960:23).

4 A position exemplified by post-Jewish feminists such as Naomi Goldenberg (1979) or post-Christians such as Mary Daly (1984).

5 The rituals created by Aviva Cantor (1979) or collected by Rosemary Radford Ruether (1985) exemplify this approach.

6 The term "founded places" refers to the defining of ritualization as "formative gestures in the face of receptivity during crucial times in founded places" by Grimes (1982:67).

7 For discussions of psychotherapeutic counselling from a feminist perspective see Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach (1982); Miriam Greenspan (1983); and Marion Woodman (1983, 1985).

8 Rita Gross discusses her conversion to Judaism and then to Buddhism in an anthology edited by Mary Jo Meadows and Carol A. Rayburn, *A Time to Weep and a Time to Sing* (1985). See especially "Three Strikes and You're Out: An Autobiography at Midlife" (Gross 1985:30-460.

[9] Several books have been written in recent years concerning women's pre-biblical, or Goddess heritage see, for instance, *When God Was A Woman* (1976) by Merlin Stone; *The Female Experience and the Nature of the Divine* (1980) by Judith Ochshorn; *The Hebrew Goddess* (1976) by Raphael Patai; *Mother Worship: Theme and Variation* (1982) edited by James J. Preston; *The Goddess: Mythological Images of the Feminine* (1981) by Christine Downing; and *Eve: The History of an Idea* by John A. Phillips (1984).

[10] For a similar Christian suggestion see "The Human Situation: A Feminine View" by Valerie Saiving, in Christ and Plaskow (25-390).

[11] For an analysis of how *Bar Mitzvah* rites in contemporary Judaism work in this way, see "Contemporary *Bar Mitzvah* Rituals in Modern Orthodoxy" by Simcha Fishbane (1987:167).

[12] For a discussion of the moral and psychological development of these characteristics in women see Gilligan (1982).

[13] Hebrew word for priest. See *Levite* in Note 14.

[14] *Levite* is another name for a Hebrew priest. The tribe of Levi was subdivided into those men who descended from Aaron responsible for the sanctuary duties or who carried the sacred vessels during the wandering period and those who assisted the priests.

[15] For an excellent example of this process see "On the Birth of a Daughter," in *The Jewish Woman* (1976:21-30). In this article Daniel and Myra Liefer describe how important the home birth of their daughter was to them and how they created a *berakhah* or special blessing when the baby was born because there was no such rite for them to follow. When the three of them were alone (mother, father and baby) they performed their own daughter-blessing ritual.

[16] These are small boxes containing scripture verses worn on the arm and forehead by Orthodox males over thirteen during the weekday morning prayer. Directions to wear them are found in Exodus 13:1, 13:11; Deuteronomy 6:4-9,11:13-21.

[17] For a discussion of traditional and idiosyncratic *Bar Mitzvah* rites see Fishbane (170-171).

Garfiel suggests that variations have arisen precisely because the inclusion of girls in this way challenges assumptions made about who is able to read the *Torah*. She writes that "some synagogues have made the *Bat Mitzvah* ceremony exactly like the *Bar Mitzvah*, calling up the girl to the *Torah* on her thirteenth birthday. Others, unwilling to make so radical a break with tradition, have introduced a variety of ceremonies for the *Bat Mitzvah* at the Friday Evening Service when the question of being called up to the *Torah* does not arise (170).

For a discussion of the Jewish conception of "the world to come" see Garfiel (185-187). The idea of "the world to come" developed during the Second Temple period. It was believed that a major catastrophe would terminate the *Ha-Zeh*, this world, and usher in the *Ha-Ba* , "the world to come". During this new age the righteous would be crowned and continually enjoy the radiance of the Divine Presence. Rina also refers to the sea monster *Leviathan* who is mentioned in Job 40:25-32 and described as powerless against God in Psalm 104:26. The *Talmud* says that it is killed by God and its flesh cut up and preserved to be eaten by the righteous in the *World to Come*.

Rabbinical commentaries on the oral and written laws compiled over a period of eight centuries beginning with the Babylonian exile.

A married woman in danger of remaining in permanent "widowhood" because she has been left by her husband and there has been no decisive evidence that he is dead. In this condition women cannot remarry.

A skullcap that is worn during prayer.

For a more detailed discussion of the calendar and such problems as the inclusion of a second month of Adar see Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, *The Festivals in Halachah: An Analysis of the Development of the Festival Laws* (New York: Mesorah, pp.321-323).

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin says,

> Thus, the calendar moves from Nisan, from the month representing our own national concerns, to the month of Tishri, which symbolizes the universal, the needs of all nations. This progression reflects the concept that the Jews as a people achieve their full function—in the ultimate sense—when their efforts result in bringing perfection to all people. Kabbalistically speaking, the redemption comes when the world—including all its

inhabitants—attains fullness and completion. . "seven" . is symbolic of completion, for the world was created in seven days.(1985:24)

[25] See Weisler's endnote concerning the Russian draft laws (1827-1855) used to coerce young Jewish boys into Christianity by separating them from the influence of their families and their ritual practice (274).

[26] Literally, "pious ones" or members of a mystical revival movement founded in southern Poland and the Ukraine during the eighteenth century. Today found mostly in Israel and the United States.

[27] In a recent interview with Cantor Abraham Fisher, Beth Jacob Synagogue, Kitchener, Ontario, it was explained that throughout this period the most knowledgable woman would stand up in the gallery before the other women and lead them in these various *tkhnies*.

[28] The ten emanations of God written about in Kabbalistic literature particularly the *Zohar*, an Aramaic work probably written by Moses de Leon in the thirteenth century but traditionally ascribed to Simon ben Jochai who lived in the second century.

[29] This point was suggested to me by Dr. Lawrence Toombs in a conversation.

[30] The *Daily Prayer Book* notes that Hadassah, Esther is probably derived from Istar, meaning "star" (955).

[31] Waskow points out that even in those congregations that exempt women from most of the other commandments, this commandment to hear *Megillah* applies to them as well. Except for the very youngest children all are included in this obligation, and even if someone has no one to celebrate the holiday with, he or she must read it themselves alone (120).

[32] For other connections with European festivals see Gaster (1966:75-77).

[33] It is traditional for three year-old boys to have their hair cut on this day to mark their first step into the observances of their life as a Jew. It is believed that Sarah weaned Isaac when he was three years old, and so "this is the traditionally defined age for a child [traditionally, a boy] to...obey the commandments...to wear a four-cornered garment with *tzitzit* [fringes]...[and] to wear the hair with *payot*...that is earlocks (Gaster:179).

[34] Writings based on the discovery of meanings other than the literal in the Bible used as an instrument to impart contemporary relevance to Biblical events.

Small scroll with the first two paragraphs of the *Shema* ("Hear O Israel" found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9) 11:13-21 that is nailed to the doorpost to sanctify a Jewish home and, to be a continual reminder of the Divine Presence.

[36] Carol Christ makes note of this interpretation of the Kabbalah by Gross, in her (Christ's) article, "Women's Liberation and the Liberation of God" (1976). She is careful to say, "I recognize that to reinterpret these symbols [i.e., God in need of liberation, or God seeking Shechinah] from the perspective of women's alienation in patriarchal culture goes beyond the probable intent of their kabbalistic formulaters, and that such an interpretation does not exhaust their significance "(17).

[37] Phyllis Trible has explored this area with interesting results; see for instance "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation" in *The Jewish Woman* edited by Elizabeth Koltun (217-240).

[38] *Halakah* includes the written law *Torah*, those laws derived from commentaries on the *Torah*, the Prophets and hagiographa, rabbinic writings and local custom (Werblowsky and Wigoder 1965:168-169). Jacob Neusner assures us in his book, *Midrash in Context: Exegesis in Formative Judaism* (1983), that each of these collections, "the Scripture, the Mishnah, the sages—all spoke with equal authority" (136).

[39] See also "Flight from Feminism: The Case of the Israeli Woman" by Clapsaddle in Koltun (207-209).

[40] According to David Bleich in *Judaism and Healing: Halakhic Perspectives* the performing of autopsies by Jews is forbidden. For a discussion of this question and the various interpretations of this law, refer to pages 162-168 of this book. Alternatives to dissection that include dye injection and blood testing are discussed in this chapter.

Appendices

Appendix One

MONTH	NAME	EQUIVALENT	SEASON
1	Nisan	March April	Spring
2	Iyyar	April May	Dry season
3	Sivan	May June	Early figs
4	Tammuz	June July	Grape harvest
5	'Av	July August	Olive harvest
6	Elul	Aug Sept	Dates figs
7	Tishri	Sept October	Early rains
8	Marheswan	Oct Nov	Ploughing
9	Kislew	Nov December	Sowing
10	Tebet	Dec January	Rains snow
11	Shvat	Jan February	Almond blossoms
12	'Adar	Feb March	Citrus harvest

(Douglas 177)

Appendix Two

NAME	SEASON	SOURCE	SPIRITUAL EMPHASIS	LIFE CYCLE
1.Pesach	Spring	Exodus	Creativity	Birth
2.Shavuot	Summer	Moses at Sinai receives Law	Revelation	Puberty
3.Sukkot	Fall	Sojourn in the Wilderness	Fulfulment Redemption	Midlife
4.Sh'mini Atzeret	Winter	Death of Moses	Inwardness Review	Death

(Waskow:xix-xx)

Appendix Three

NAME	MONTH	SOURCE	SPIRITUAL EMPHASIS
1 Rosh Hashanah	1 Tishri (New Moon)	Solemn rest (Lev 23:23)	Renewal
2.Yom Kippur	10 Tishri	God forgives the sin of the Golden Calf Scapegoat Sacrifice (Lev.16)	Facing Sin
3.Sukkot	15 Tishri (Full Moon)	Torah calls for a feast for Harvest	Harmony Joy
4.Sh'mini Azeret	22 Tishri	Torah calls for solemn assembly,and burnt offering (Lev.33:36)	Self-Restraint
5.Simchat Torah	23 Tishri	End of Torah reading,and beginning of new cycle at Genesis 1:1	Joy in Torah
6. Hanukkah	25 Kislew	Maccabees re-dedicate Temple 166 B.C.E.	Hope for Salvation
7.Tu B'shvat	15 Shvat	Tithe year ends	Praise to God
8.Purim	14 'Adar	Esther saves Mordecai from the Persian	Levity and Joy

		King	
9 Pesach	Nisan	Exodus	Thanksgiving
10 S'phirat Ha-Omer	15-21 Nisan	Torah calls to cut the barley (Lev 23.10)	Hope in the Face of Despair
11. Shavuot	6 Sivan	First Harvest Festival	Oneness with God
12. Tisha B'av (Burnt Offering)	9 'Av	Mourning the destructions of the Temple (586 B.C.E. 70 C.E.)	Self-Evaluation Fasting

(Waskow 1982)

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