

“Hearing Silence:”

Women’s Absence and Presence in the Torah

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“The need for a feminist Judaism begins with hearing silence.”

- Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai*, Page 1

Standing Again at Sinai, Judith Plaskow, 25-26

Entry into the covenant at Sinai is the root experience of Judaism, the central event that established the Jewish people. Given the importance of this event, there can be no verse in the Torah more disturbing to the feminist than Moses’ warning to his people in Exodus 19:15, “Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman.”...At the very moment when Israel stands trembling waiting for God’s presence to descend upon the mountain, Moses addresses the community only as men....At the central moment of Jewish history, women are invisible. ...How can we ever hope to fill the silence that shrouds Jewish women’s past?

Shemot 32:1-4	שמות לב:א-ד
When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us a god who shall go before us, for that fellow Moses—the man who brought us from the land of Egypt—we do not know what has happened to him.” Aaron said to them, “[You men,] take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” And all the people took off the gold rings that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. This he took from them and cast in a mold, and made it into a molten calf. And they exclaimed, “This is your god, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!”	וַיֵּרָא הָעָם כִּי־בִשָּׁשׁ מֹשֶׁה לָרֶדֶת מִן־הָהָר וַיִּקְהָל הָעָם עַל־אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו קוּמָה עֲשֵׂה־לָנוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ לִפְנֵינוּ כִּי־זֶה מֹשֶׁה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלָנוּ מִמִּצְרָיִם מִצְרַיִם לֹא יָדַעְנוּ מַה־הָיָה לוֹ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אַהֲרֹן פָּרְקוּ נְזָמֵי הַזָּהָב אֲשֶׁר בְּאָזְנֵי נְשֵׁיכֶם בְּנֵיכֶם וּבְנֹתֵיכֶם וְהָבִיאוּ אֵלַי: וַיִּתְּפוּקוּ כָל־הָעָם אֶת־נְזָמֵי הַזָּהָב אֲשֶׁר בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶל־אַהֲרֹן: וַיִּקַּח מִיָּדָם וַיִּצַּר אוֹתוֹ בַּחֶרֶט וַיַּעֲשֵׂהוּ עֵגֶל מִסֶּכָּה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלֶּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלָנוּ מִמִּצְרָיִם:



Bamidbar Rabbah 21:10	במדבר רבה כא:
“And the daughters of Tzlofchad approached:” In that generation [of the Jews in the desert], the women shored up what the men breached. You find that Aharon said to them "Remove the earrings of gold that are in the ears of your wives" - and the women did not want to and they protested against their husbands, as it is stated "And the entire people removed the earrings of gold, etc." And the women did not participate with them in the [building of the] Golden Calf. And so [too] with the spies that put out calumny...But the women were not with them in that counsel, as it is written beyond this section, "As God said to them, 'You shall surely die in the desert,' and not a man remained from them except for Calev the son of Yefuneh" - [it is written] "a man," but not a woman; because of [the men] not wanting to enter the land. But the women approached to request an inheritance in the land. Therefore, this section is written adjacent to the death of the generation of the wilderness (that came out of Egypt) -- as from there did the men breach and the women shore up.	וְתִקְרַבְנָה בָּנוֹת צְלֹפְחָד: "אוֹתוֹ הַדּוֹר הָיוּ הַנָּשִׁים" גּוֹדְרוֹת מֵהַ שְׁהֲאָנְשִׁים פּוֹרְצִים, שָׁכַן אֶת מוֹצֵא שְׁאֵמֶר לָהֶן אֶהְרֹן "פָּרְקוּ נְזָמֵי הַזָּהָב אֲשֶׁר בְּאָזְנֵי נָשִׁיכֶם," וְלֹא רָצוּ הַנָּשִׁים וּמָחוּ בְּבַעֲלֵיהֶן, שְׁנֵאֲמַר "וַיִּתְּפְּרוּ כָּל הָעָם אֶת נְזָמֵי הַזָּהָב וְגו'." וְהַנָּשִׁים לֹא נִשְׁתַּתְּפוּ עִמָּהֶן בְּמַעֲשֵׂה הָעֵגֶל, וְכֵן בְּמַרְגְּלִים שֶׁהוֹצִיאוּ דִבָּה...אֲבָל הַנָּשִׁים לֹא הָיוּ עִמָּהֶם בְּעֵצָה, שֶׁכְּתוּב לְמַעַל מִן הַפָּרָשָׁה: "כִּי אָמַר ה' לָהֶם מוֹת יָמֹתֵי בְּמִדְבָּר וְלֹא נוֹתֵר מֵהֶם אִישׁ כִּי אִם כָּלֵב בֶּן יִפְנֶה," אִישׁ וְלֹא אִשָּׁה. עַל מֵה שֶׁלֹּא רָצוּ לִנְסֹת לָאָרֶץ, אֲבָל הַנָּשִׁים קָרְבוּ לְבִקֹּשׁ נַחֲלָה בָּאָרֶץ, לִכְךָ נִכְתְּבָה פָּרָשָׁה זוֹ סָמוּךְ לְמִיתַת דּוֹר הַמִּדְבָּר, שֶׁשְּׁמִשָּׁם פָּרְצוּ הָאָנְשִׁים וּגְדְּרוּ הַנָּשִׁים
Tur, OH 417	טור א"ח תי"ז
...the festivals were established parallel to the Avot — Pesach parallel to Avraham..Shavuot parallel to Yitzchak...Sukkot parallel to Yaakov...And the twelve Rashei Chodashim of the year, which are also called ‘festivals,’ are parallel to the twelve tribes, and when they sinned with the Calf it was taken from them and given to their wives, to commemorate that they did not participate in that sin.	הַמוֹעֲדִים נִתְקְנוּ כִּנְגַד אֲבוֹת פֶּסַח כִּנְגַד אַבְרָהָם... דְּכִתִּיב (בְּרֵאשִׁית יח) לוֹשִׁי וְעָשִׂי עוֹגוֹת וּפֶסַח הָיָה, שְׁבוּעוֹת כִּנְגַד יִצְחָק שֶׁתְּקִיעַת שׁוֹפָר שֶׁל מִתֵּן תּוֹרָה הָיָה בְּשׁוֹפָר מֵאִילָנוֹ שֶׁל יִצְחָק, סוּכוֹת כִּנְגַד יַעֲקֹב דְּכִתִּיב (בְּרֵאשִׁית לד) "וְלִמְקַנְהוּ עָשָׂה סוּכוֹת" ו"ב רֵאשִׁי חֲדָשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה שֶׁגַּם הֵם נִקְרָאִים מוֹעֲדִים כִּנְגַד י"ב שְׁבִטִים וְכִשְׁחֲטָאוּ בַּעַל נִיטְלוּ מֵהֶם וְנִיתְּנוּ לְנִשְׁוֵיתֵיהֶם לִזְכָּר שֶׁלֹּא הָיוּ בְּאוֹתוֹ חֲטָא

