tarian and elitist model that women and minority communities ought to view with great suspicion. Such a philosophic method is not only detrimental to women and to any notion of legitimate diversity within Judaism; it also belies our self-conception as Jews as a community deriving from historic memory and reliving that memory in contemporary forms. It replaces historical self-understanding with timeless truths to which we are expected to have – a static relation. . . .

Judith Plaskow, 'Beyond Egalitarianism' (1990)

An interesting paradox is emerging in non-Orthodox Jewish communities. The very success of egalitarianism – the gains in equal access for women to educational opportunities and fuller participation in Jewish religious life – has generated new questions and uncertainties about whether egalitarianism is enough. Over the last twenty years, barrier after barrier has fallen before women. We have found ourselves being counted in *minyanim*, going up to the Torah, leading services, becoming ordained as rabbis, and studying Talmud alongside boys and men. These new opportunities, however, have brought women up against the *content* of the tradition, and in doing so, have pointed to the need for changes far deeper and more frightening than the process of simply making available to women what all in the community acknowledge to be of value.

A rabbinical student finds herself studying a text that renders invisible her existence and experiences as a woman. A woman is called to the Torah and reads that daughters can be sold as slaves (Exod. 21:7–11) or that a woman's vow can be annulled by her father or husband (Num. 30). Women seeking to expand our Jewish lives discover that a tradition that seems to have a blessing for everything offers no Jewish forms for marking menarche or menopause. Ironically, it is only in gaining equal access that women discover we have gained equal access to a male religion. As women read from the Torah, lead services, function as rabbis and cantors, we become full participants in a tradition that women had only a secondary role in shaping and creating. And if we accept egalitarianism as our final stopping place, we leave intact the structures, texts, history, and images that testify against and exclude us.

Many non-Orthodox Jews are now stuck in a position of acknowledging the justice of women's claims to equality, but not knowing how to bring about deeper changes. Or feeling content that in some institutions the goal of equality has been achieved. Or feeling uncomfortable because even where the goal has been achieved, something is not quite working. If none of the steps toward equal access is easy, at least each is definable and measurable; one change opens to the next (e.g., learning opportunities spur the desire to use one's learning), and each is concrete and generally linked to a specific context of struggle (e.g., the Conservative movement, a particular synagogue). Beyond egalitarianism, the way is uncharted. The next step is not nearly so obvious as fighting for *aliyot* or ordination. Beyond egalitarianism, Judaism must be transformed so that it is truly the Judaism of women and men. It must

J. Plaskow, 'Beyond Egalitarianism', *Tikkun* 5 (1990)

become a feminist Judaism focused on women's issues, but a Judaism that all Jews have participated in shaping. But how do we move from here to there? How does egalitarianism become the starting point for a fuller process of transformation?

I would suggest that there are at least five stages that any community has to move through on the path from egalitarianism to feminism or genuine equality. My treatment of these stages will be schematic, both because of limitations of space and because the content of any stage will be determined by the needs and problems of particular communities.

- The first stage is *hearing silence*. Indeed, the impetus to move beyond egalitarianism stems from hearing the silence of the Jewish tradition and of particular Jewish institutions and events concerning the history and experience of women. Silence is difficult to hear. When a silence is sufficiently vast, it fades into the order of things. We take it for granted as the nature of reality. When I went through three years of graduate school without reading a single word written by a woman, it took me a long time to notice. After all, men are theologians; whom else should we study? Women have a long history of reading ourselves into silence. From childhood bedtime stories to the biblical narratives, from male teachers to male books on male Judaism, women learn to people silences with our own shadowy forms.

Rebekah, Bruriah, and other individual women, a class on women in the Bible or a panel at the Y, are not disproofs of women's silence in Judaism. These are names and occasions we need to turn to *after* we have listened to silence, not in order to fill or deny it. Otherwise we miss the jolts against whose background particular women and events emerge: 'you shall not covet your neighbour's wife' (Exod. 20:14) (who is the community being addressed?); the absence of Miriam's prophecy or the record of Huldah's teaching (the hints in normative sources that there is so much more to women's leadership than the sources choose to tell us); a talmudic discussion of whether a girl penetrated before age three should receive her full *ketubah* (*Ketubot* 11a, b) (would women scholars ever have asked this question?); *a contemporary discussion of this talmudic debate that assumes this is a reasonable question*. Women were agents throughout Jewish history, fashioning and responding to Jewish life and carrying its burdens. But women's perceptions and questions did not give form and content to Scripture, shape the direction of Jewish law, or find expression in liturgy.

- The second stage is *making a space to name silence*. Both hearing and naming silence can refer to the large silences of Jewish history or the smaller silences within any particular movement or community. Hearing silence is often a private experience. Whether a community will move beyond egalitarianism is in part determined by whether or not it creates the space for people to name the silences they hear. Often in particular egalitarian communities women's silence is interpreted either as accidental or as personal choice, or it simply leaves people resentful or befuddled. 'We just don't happen to have many women who feel competent to lead Torah discussions.' 'I don't know why more men than women speak. A woman is leading the discussion; anyone can participate.' The historical and structural impediments to women's speech thus get dismissed or overlooked, and the community is absolved from responsibility.

Communities need to set aside the time for members to speak the silences they hear. This might happen in an open meeting specifically called for the purpose. Participants might be asked to name the places where they feel silenced or hear women's silence. Discussion must take place initially without judgement and without challenge or cross talk, simply as an opportunity for people to speak their pain and their experience. Sometimes it helps to go around and give each person a chance to say something. Certainly, no one should speak for a second time until everyone who wants to has spoken once. The list of silences would provide a concrete agenda for a community to address.

- The third stage is *creating the structures that allow women to speak*. What these structures are in particular contexts will emerge from the list of silences. In congregations where men dominate the Torah discussions, it might be decided that men and women will call on each other in alternation. In a Talmud class where women feel that the text ignores their questions and experiences, it might be agreed that women will lead the discussions for a certain period, with the understanding that the class is there precisely to hear women's questions of and responses to the text. In any context in which women are apparently free to speak but seldom take the opportunity, a programme on gender differences in socialization, discourse, and learning styles may help both men and women to understand the personal and institutional barriers to women's participation, and to analyse the gender style of their own institution and events.

Crucial to allowing women to speak are women-only spaces – not women-only spaces that are auxiliaries to male ones, but spaces in which women meet to discuss and explore their experiences as women. Men can listen to women, but, by definition, they cannot be the ones to end women's silence, and there are many forces that prevent women from finding their voices in situations in which men are present. Women's discussion groups, Rosh Hodesh groups, retreats, and spirituality collectives are spaces in which, to use Nelle Morton's phrase, women 'hear each other into speech'. These spaces are sources of energy, empowerment, and creativity that potentially enrich the whole Jewish community.

- The fourth phase is *taking the authority to fill in silence*. Once silence is named and space created, there is nothing to do but to take courage to speak. This is what is happening all over the country as women compose new blessings and liturgies, create rituals to celebrate important turning points in our lives, research our history and write new midrashim, reclaim our sexuality and explore our concepts of God. This is the phase where we create the *content* of feminist Judaism, and its timeframe is open-ended, its agenda sufficiently broad to include every facet of Judaism.

Much of this exploration and creativity, however, is taking place outside the boundaries of particular Jewish movements or institutions. Whether feminist innovations will ultimately be integrated into the tradition depends to some extent on the earlier phases I have discussed. It is difficult for women to dare to take the authority to speak. But that authority will be acknowledged and welcomed only when members of the larger community open themselves to hearing silence and thus recognize the need for the inclusion of women's voices. Thus, to take one concrete example, through midrash, story-telling, and historiography, women are creating women's Torah. But women's Torah will be accepted and taught as Torah only as

Jews acknowledge that at least half of Torah is missing. Will Hebrew Union College or the Jewish Theological Seminary confront the contradiction of educating women in institutions in which Torah is still defined entirely on male terms? That depends on whether they hear the silence built into their curricula.

• The last phase is *checking back*. Speaking into silence entails enormous risk. It involves changes that are uncharted and whose direction is finally unpredictable. Not everything spoken into silences will be true or worth saying, and not everything said will finally feel Jewish. Any change that a community takes in the direction of transforming Judaism will necessarily involve feedback and evaluation. Did a particular liturgical or curricular change work? Whom did it empower? Did it create new areas of silence? Did it open new areas of Jewish experience and exploration? Did it feel Jewish? Why or why not? What is our operative understanding of 'Jewish', and does it need to be expanded? Would we want to continue our change or experiment again? Would we want to teach the change to our children?

While such evaluation is crucial, it is equally crucial that it *follow* speaking into silence rather than precede it. Too often, questions concerning the appropriateness and boundaries of change are the first ones raised when feminists begin to alter tradition. Judgement is demanded in advance of any real experimentation. Will it be Jewish? is asked as a way of maintaining silence and continuing the status quo. But once we hear the silence of women, it becomes clear that repairing that silence will take all the creativity Jews can muster. Experiments in form, in content, in new relationships between women and men will all be necessary to make Judaism whole. There is time to decide the shape of the Jewish future – but that time is after those who have been silent have spoken.

Abraham Isaac Kook, 'Fragments of Light: A View as to the Reasons for the Commandments' (1910)

. . . The free movement of the moral impulse to establish justice for animals generally and the claim of their rights from mankind are hidden in a natural psychic sensibility in the deeper layers of the Torah. In the ancient value system of humanity, while the spiritual illumination (which later found its bastion in Israel) was diffused among individuals without involvement in a national framework, before nations were differentiated into distinct speech forms, the moral sense had risen to a point of demanding justice for animals. 'The first man had not been allowed to eat meat' (Sanhed. 59b), as is implied in God's instruction to Adam: 'I have given you every herb yielding seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed – it shall be to you for food' (Gen. 1:29). But when humanity, in the course of its development, suffered a setback and was unable to bear the great light of its illumination, its receptive capacity being impaired, it was withdrawn from the fellowship with other creatures, whom it excelled with firm spiritual superiority. Now it became necessary to confine the concern with justice

A. Kook, *The Lights of Penitence, Lights of Holiness, The Moral Principles, Essays, Letters*