



SHALOM HARTMAN INSTITUTE מכון
OF NORTH AMERICA שלום הרטמן

On the Jewish Canon and Male Privilege

Elana Stein Hain

Introduction and Q&A: Sarah Mulhern

Sarah: Welcome everybody. We're so excited to be studying this crucially important topic with Dr. Elana Stein Hain and over 600 live participants from all over the world. We'll be taught today by Dr. Elana Stein Hain who is the scholar in residence and director of faculty here at the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America. Elana also leads our Created Equal research team, a team of scholars who meet weekly to research issues of gender and ethical leadership in the Jewish tradition.

Sarah: The #MeToo movement has brought increasing awareness of sexual violence and discrimination faced by women in the workplace and beyond to the fore. Among the multitude of important questions this awareness raises, as a Created Equal research team, we have turned our attention to the ways, both positive and negative in which the Jewish tradition intersects with these issues.

Sarah: Today's webinar will be the first of a three part series of presentations resulting from our work, which will go on to focus on images of the feminine and masculine in the Jewish tradition and how these cultural heritages impact our community and it confronts #MeToo.

Sarah: Today, Elana will focus on questions of how and whether we can turn to our Jewish textual heritage for guidance as we address sexual violence, recognizing as we do, both the wisdom of that tradition and its deeply patriarchal nature. How do we learn from Jewish texts written exclusively by men for primarily an audience of men in the moment of #MeToo? Following Elana's presentation, we'll have a period of Q and A. For those of you watching live, you can contribute questions on the Shalom Hartman Facebook page. With that, Dr. Elana Stein Hain.

Elana: Thank you so much Sarah. We're really happy that people have joined us for this important conversation. I have to start with actually two verses from the Psalmist that really, for me, frame this whole conversation. The first is [Hebrew]. "How I have loved your teaching or am loyal to your teaching. All day, it is my conversation and my meditation."

Elana: I really come to this conversation about male privilege in the Jewish tradition as a person who feels a privilege to be able to study Torah each and every day, to be able to

shape my views about the world, my relationship with God, my relationship with human beings, with fellow Jews and with myself by the Torah that I am privileged to learn.

Elana: The second verse, the second pasuk that I'd like to bring to bear in our conversation today is another from the Psalmist from the very same chapter. [Hebrew] "If not for the Torah having been my delight", or, literally "If not for your teaching having been my delight, I would have perished in my own suffering."

Elana: That's important too, to the conversation that I'm going to have today. Torah, for me, has always been a source of strength, has gotten me through really important difficult moments in my life and challenges and I wouldn't be anywhere without it. It's with this these two pesukim, with these two verses on my mind as, I think the humility that we need in looking at a corpus that has shaped a people, that has shaped a society and civilizations, that has a commanding ability and a compelling sense of justice and ritual and what the meaning of life really is to ask this question with the humility that is required by this question and the humility that is required by what we are seeking to address.

Elana: With that in mind, I'd like to ask the following question: How does a 2017 modern human being, a reader of the Jewish cannon respond to the male privilege that is inscribed in the Jewish cannon?

Elana: Let's define our terms. I'm specifically talking about a reader. I'm not talking about behavior. I'm not talking about the way that people enact their Judaism. I'm specifically talking about the way a person who opens a book of the Bible, of the Tanach, who opens up a Talmud, responds to its male privilege.

Elana: The reason why I'm doing this is because no matter how un-egalitarian or egalitarian a Jewish life you lead, we all open those same texts and those same texts, actually what unites across those spectra, those same texts have that male privilege that all of us have to encounter, no matter how liberal or conservative we are.

Elana: What do I mean by the Jewish cannon? What I mean by the Jewish cannon is the Bible, is the Tanach. What I mean by the Jewish cannon is the Talmud, is early rabbinic literature and then the 1,500 years of explanation of that rabbinic literature.

Elana: What I mean by male privilege, generally speaking, our cannon, those 2,000 years of interpretation, that original Talmud, that original Bible that proceeds those 2,000 years of interpretation is really taught, spoken from the perspective of men or is speaking to men primarily.

Elana: Now, how do I as a woman who considers these texts sacred and compelling to me, how do I understand and respond to this male privilege?

Elana: The theologian Judith Plasko puts it very succinctly and you have this on your source sheet as number one: "Like women in many cultures, Jewish women have projected as other. Named by a male community that perceives itself as normative, women are part

of the Jewish tradition without its sources and its structures reflecting our experience. Women are Jews, but we do not define Jewishness." I would add in parentheses, even if in certain ways we do, in so many ways we don't.

Elana: "We live, work and struggle, but our experiences are not recorded. What is recorded is formulating our experiences in male terms."

Elana: Before we move into what I would call a taxonomy of different approaches to responding to male privilege in Jewish tradition, I want to talk for a moment about why this matters. I can think of at least three reasons why this matters and I'd imagine that those viewing have their own reasons for being interested in this conversation.

Elana: The first is as a person of faith, I really need our sacred cannon to be relevant. I really need it to be able to speak to a 21st century person. I really need it to reflect the values that can be in dialog with today's world.

Elana: Secondly, for anyone who puts Jewish text as central, whether in the education of our young people, in our adult education spaces, in the way that we formulate the ideas that we want to live by, we have to understand that we hope that Torah, that the Jewish cannon, that Jewish text will actually shape our assumptions and our perspectives about the world. If that is true, and I do hope that that will continue to be true, then the male privilege of that tradition must be addressed and must be discussed because that too continues to shape our assumptions and our perspectives.

Elana: The third is this #MeToo moment. You may have noticed a spade of articles that try to the #MeToo moment by asking, "What Jewish tradition has to say to #MeToo" and the criticism that came in the wake of those articles. What I realize is we should really take a step back because what we have to realize is that anybody who writes an article about how Judaism can respond to #MeToo, in some way, whether implicitly or explicitly is likely trying to think about the question of how we look at an actual cannon and tradition that does see male orientation as the default orientation in order to speak to moment where we're actually criticizing that kind of male privilege.

Elana: This warranted, I think, an ability to take a look at some of those #MeToo responses and say, "What's going on here implicitly with regards to trying to understand Jewish tradition, the modern world and male privilege?"

Elana: Tova Hartman in her book *Feminism Encounters Traditional Judaism*, posits three different approaches that a person might take towards male privilege in Jewish tradition. There's affirmation on one side of the spectrum, which essentially says, "This is the way that it's meant to be." There are plenty of people in the Jewish world and beyond for whom affirmation is a very comfortable place. I'd like to argue as a feminism, as a feminist rather, that this too is a form of agency that I can't take away from anyone.

Elana: On the other end of the spectrum is rejection, people who say, "I want to go in a radically different direction. I can't be bound by this. I'm going to fight against this as

opposed to be in dialog with it as equal dialogical partners. I'm going in a different direction." This, too, is an act of agency.

Elana: That said, I'd like to locate our conversation in her middle category, re-interpretation. The middle category is for people who feel a need and a desire to converse with these texts, to be held by these texts and also to figure out how these texts can continue to, shall we say, continue to provide real deep conversation around the issues that matter to us most today.

Elana: Our taxonomy, I'm going to give you a brief overview and then we're going to dive into each one separately. The four are the following: The first is dualism. It's a dualistic approach that essentially says, "God and human beings are different. While God is perfect in God's desire for equity and God's desire for fairness and people to be treated and perspectives to be represented from all different sides of the human experience, human beings are flawed and quite simply, it takes human beings a very long time to get there." This is God of liberation theology, not the God that reifies the power structures that exist, but the God that seeks to help the marginalized and the oppressed gain the voice that they need. What we've seen reflected in 2,000 years is human being's continued evolution into understanding what might be a divine perspective.

Elana: The second approach is a tool from within tradition itself. I call this "The Midrashic Approach." Midrash or homiletics essentially posits that you can reinterpret, that you can re-appropriate traditional themes and texts to continue a conversation between the lines. This approach will see, actually has two very opposing ways that it could go, but the Midrashic approach, what's lovely about it in my perspective is that it's found in the tradition itself. We have books and books of Midrashic work. Here, the feminist Midrash would essentially be asking the question: "Yes, our texts do offer a male perspective, but how can we continue the conversation and reinterpret in order to have female perspectives in the frame as well?"

Elana: The third approach I call "precedent". Now, it's not really a legal approach, but I do think that it comes from a legal perspective and a legal way of thinking, which is to say, just find an example in Jewish tradition, in Torah, that highlights empowered women or that highlights a perspective of a woman as an active agent or simply her perspective at all and take those moments and name them as the bright spots. Name them as the bright spots that can be expanded, that can serve as an example for ways in which Torah and the Jewish cannon already contains our ability to be the modern day, what we might call "The modern day Devorah", the judge, or "The modern day Yalta or Bruria", the Talmudic scholars and sages, or even what the mystical tradition adds in terms of viewing God, viewing the divine both with masculine and feminine aspects. Take those examples and seize upon them.

Elana: The fourth in our categories is redefinition. Very simply, if the Torah, throughout history has been speaking to the default human being, while the default human being used to be male, the default human being today includes more than men. The Torah was speaking to a certain group and now is speaking to everyone.

- Elana: Now, let's examine each. What I want you to keep in mind, though, is that as we read examples of each of these approaches, it's not the example that I'm interested in. It's the assumptions and the contours of each one of these categories. That's much more important than the particular example that we offer. With that, let's dive in.
- Elana: If you'll go with me together to number three on your source sheet, what you'll see is an example of the dualistic approach, God versus human being. We see this approach nowhere else but in the rabbinic cannon itself. Remarkably, an early text describing, an early rabbinic text describing the story of the daughters of Tzelaḥchad in Bamidbar, Numbers discusses just this very dualism, the difference between human beings and God when it comes to gender equity to remind us the five daughters of Tzelaḥchad find themselves in the wilderness with the rest of the Jewish people, dismayed to learn that they have no brothers and therefore, their father's land is not going to be kept in their immediate family.
- Elana: They go to Moses and they say to Moses, "Moshe, can you please ask a question? Can you please answer our question? What should we do here? Our father has had no sons. Can we please inherit as his daughters? Can we please inherit his land?"
- Elana: Just look at what the rabbis do here, a self-reflectiveness that is remarkable for something written over 1,500 years ago. We're in number three. I'm going to read it in the Hebrew and translate.
- Elana: "The daughters of Tzelaḥchad came close. When the daughters of Tzelaḥchad heard, that the land of Israel was due to be divided among the men and not among the women, they got together to take council. They said, 'God's mercy is not like the mercy of human beings. Human beings take more mercy upon men than upon women. But, the one who created the world that is God, is not this way. God's mercy is on both men and women. As it says God is good to all and God's mercy is upon all of God's handiwork.'"
- Elana: This is a remarkable text is that the way the rabbis understand the gumption that led the daughters of Tzelaḥchad to be able to ask for something that was not written into their cannon, men were supposed to inherit and women were not, was their sense of conviction that God approves of this, that God really wants something that human beings can't possibly see.
- Elana: This is incredibly bold. It's bold insofar as how do they know? It's bold insofar as what are the limits of deciding what it is that you think God wants to see versus what's actually canonized in your customs and your laws. It's bold insofar as essentially for a person looking at this today and thinking about what feminism means through a theological frame. It essentially bids us to assert that feminism, like so many other important ideological advances of human beings over the last few centuries and the last many centuries is actually, in some ways, a revelation of the divine will itself. This is radical and this is some of the way that people have responded to Judaism and #MeToo.
- Elana: If we look in number four on your source sheet, my colleague Mijal Bitton in writing, "And he shall rule over you the genesis of #MeToo", is trying to understand the

relationship between Genesis one, Bereshit Perek Alef, in which human beings, man and woman are created together in one body and Bereshit Perek Two, Genesis chapter two in which man is created and woman essentially is made of his rib in order to come to him. Moreover, the punishment of woman, of actually becoming subservient to man.

Elana: She writes: "Let me explain. I read Genesis one as told from the point of view of God. How Hashem, how God created the universe and humanity. In Genesis two, however, God describes the same event, but from an anthropological, that is, human point of view. [Hebrew] The Torah presents a human point of view in which the original creation narrative is transformed from one in which men and women are equal to one in which men have dominion over women."

Elana: "In Genesis Two, God describes the way that men and experienced and interpreted Genesis One. It is all about human creation, about our social construction of gender, society and human culture."

Elana: This approach, as I just mentioned, is an approach that seeks to, I would say, in quotes, "rescue the divine". In a sense of saying, "It can't be that God is complicit. Even in our sacred cannon, it can't be that God is complicit in the flaws of human beings and in equity." Similar to the way that people have spoken of the abolition of slavery and the fact that it is mentioned in our Torah, the idea here is that God can see the long horizon and the long view, but human beings, it takes us a long time to actually get there.

Elana: The second approach, Midrash. The person to read a Midrash and understanding rabbinic homiletics and what it's trying to do is absolutely David Stern. The way that he presents, an academic, at University of Pennsylvania, the way that he presents what Midrash is about is exactly, it really captures what people who are trying to use the Midrashic mode of dealing with male privilege and Jewish tradition are trying to do.

Elana: In number six, he describes: "The object of Midrash was not so much to find the meaning of scripture." I'm going to add parenthetically, after all, you can find Midrash you can find rabbinic homiletics that will tell you that certain characters in the Bible had tails. The rabbis don't really mean that they had a tail. They're trying to get at something else.

Elana: Continuing with what he says, "It's not so much to find the meaning of scripture as it was literally to engage its text. Midrash became a kind of conversation the rabbis invented in order to enable God to speak to them from between the lines of scripture in the textual fissures and discontinuity that exegesis discovers."

Elana: "The multiplication of interpretations in Midrash was one way, as it were, to prolong this conversation."

Elana: He's not speaking here about legal Midrash. He's speaking here about what he call Aggadic Midrash, story, the way in which the rabbis took the verses and amplified them, created entire stories out of the gaps in the text, turned things upside down in order to continue the conversation, to prolong the conversation.

Elana: The Midrashic move in terms of understanding how to respond to male privilege in the Jewish cannon essentially posits, "Wait a second. We can re-appropriate some of this conversation to include women's voices and women's perspective."

Elana: As I mentioned was a danger with our first approach in terms of understanding what it is that God actually wants and what the limits are there, in the Midrashic approach, what I find interesting and slightly confounding is that you can really use the Midrashic approach to completely upend the very literal meaning of the text and you can equally use the Midrashic approach in order to offer a new and compelling reading of the literal reading of the text in order to maintain it. These both are using the same strategy.

Elana: I'd like to share an example of each for a moment. If you take a look at number seven, Shani Lebovitz is reading the story of Miriam's, I suppose Miriam's really uncomfortable tense moment with God, in which Miriam has told calumny about her brother, Moses, and as a result, God has made Miriam into a leper. She literally takes the plain reading of the text, in which the reading of the text is, "And God was angry at Miriam and Aaron, who had spoken together, and Miriam became white like snow in her leprosy, and God said to Moses, 'Her father has spit in her face. Should she not go and be in solitude for seven days?'" and she is kicked out of the camp for seven days before everyone can move on. She literally takes this literal meaning and turns it on its head in a Midrashic form in number seven.

Elana: "The Hebrew word for anger", she says, "and sparked [Hebrew] can also mean 'linger' and 'glow'. Perhaps God wasn't angry at all. Rather God's glow lingered as a lover who had just heard the song of the soul of their beloved. Miriam was overtaken in spiritual epiphany and her skin became white as snow because she had just seen and touched the likeness of God and felt overwhelmed."

Elana: Feel the complete reversal that this Midrash is offering to the plain meaning of the text. God is angry at Miriam and so she becomes leprous. The way that Lebovitz reads this, there is an ecstatic moment in which Miriam can feel a certain presence of God that turns her overwhelmed and white.

Elana: "Some say that in Numbers 12:14, God says to Moses: 'If Miriam's father were to have certainly spit in her face, she would have hidden the embarrassment for seven days.' Take another look at the Hebrew", she says. "The root letters [Hebrew], to spit, could also mean a green plant, a bud that flourishes within itself. The word for 'she should've hidden', 'she would've hidden', [Hebrew], can also be translated from the roots [Hebrew], 'she will complete'. With this new understanding, we could read Numbers 12:13 as, 'God said to Moses: 'I will bring that flourishes within her to completeness with seven days. She will retreat outside the camp and she will rejoin you.'"

Elana: Some of you listening to this Midrash are saying, "I don't buy it. It's too much of a reversal." Others of you listening to the Midrash are saying, "Thank you for rescuing this moment for me. It's remarkable." The very same strategy can illicit those two perspectives.

Elana: And now, onto the #MeToo moment. Something that I noticed in one of the many Jewish responses to #MeToo was a different kind of use of Midrash by Avital Chizhik-Goldschmidt, the journalist. She uses Midrash to try to uphold certain practices as opposed to upending them in number eight. She's speaking her about the Jewish law of Yichud, of not having one man and one woman be in seclusion together. In fact, it isn't only about one man and one woman, it's about one man and a number of women.

Elana: She writes: "These laws in number eight were probably rooted in a Talmudic view of women as objects of temptation. Laws intended to protect men from sin as much as women from assault in a time when a woman's purity and thus, honor, were everything. This explains why the classic details of the laws actually may not prevent assault. For example, according to Yichud, two men may be alone with one woman, or for that matter, two men may be alone together, but what if instead of dismissing these laws as irrelevant or misogynist, we read them as mandating personal space. Perhaps it is time to reclaim them as acknowledgement of the darkest corners of the human sexual psyche and how they affect our social interactions, something that many Americans today recognize and that most school and university policies about private student educator meetings are beginning to reflect. Whatever its original reasoning may have been, Yichud today has the potential to serve as a powerful tool for women to cope with the realities of a Weinstein world. Demand that others be present. Protect your personal space."

Elana: Some of you watching and listening to that Midrash will say, "I'm not convinced by that at all. That's a completely far-fetched reading of a practice that's been upheld for a long time in order to continue that practice." Others of you watching this will say, "Thank you so much. You've just rescued that practice, which I consider binding and this gives me a way to understand it in an empowered version." The same tool, opposite effects, opposite reactions.

Elana: To me, the question of Midrash and how it's used and the Midrashic approach, it implicates questions of submission. It implicates questions of authority and the questions of really, how far can you take it? On the one hand, it notes the elasticity of the text. It notes the ability to create worlds within the gaps in the text and even to be able to find layers and layers of what the Torah is actually teaching us, but the questions that it's always going to leave us with is, "What's your ultimate goal? What's your ultimate motivation? Are you recognizing the text as an authority and therefore trying to find a way into it? Are you subverting the authority of the text? How are different people going to feel about that use and what it actually says regarding the plain meaning and the original intention of this text and how it layers on or how it might seem to contradict the Midrashic approach?"

Elana: Getting to our third approach, it's very simple. You can find schools all over the country named after Jewish women who were the exception to the rule of male privilege. You can find little Jewish girls named after Jewish women who were the exception to male privilege. This approach, this precedent approach, which I offer, I think really comes from a legal frame where you're trying to find, "What is it that I can retrieve here and say, 'This belongs in here and we can have many more examples that follow this particular model'?" There are lots of them. They're all over the place, which is a

beautiful thing. There is Miriam. There is Devorah, there's Bruria, there's Yalta. There's the kabbalistic versions of the feminine godhead. There's so much that we can understand. There's our foremothers. There's so much that we can use.

Elana: My question about this approach is really the question of whether it reifies the exception. What if I'm not a Bruria? What if I can't model myself after her? What if I'm never going to reach that level? Who are my regular average run of the mill heroes who I can seek to be like? That's where I wonder if the precedent approach, in some ways, doesn't keep us in this conversation of, "Well the default is masculine, but there will always be those women who stand out", as opposed to saying, "The default is everyone."

Elana: That brings us to our fourth approach, redefining categories. Now, redefining categories is sticky because I promised you that we were going to be speaking from the perspective of a reader and not the perspective of how you enact your Judaism. Certainly, the conversation about redefining categories in the way that people live their Jewish lives, that what apply to men now apply to women, many Jewish communities actually live this. I want to speak to people who live this and who don't live this and the way in which they understand the Torah as speaking or not speaking to them.

Elana: Ilana Kurshan in, I think this has become in some ways her book, *If All the Seas Were Ink: A Memoir*, this has become in some ways a calling card for what it means to be someone who is engaged in Torah study and deeply engaged in modern life. Reading her book as she essentially uses her study of the Talmud as a memoir for her life is really a remarkable synthesis between the human being's experience and the human being's faith and how they fit together.

Elana: Ilana writes in her introduction to the section of Talmud that is about women, per se, she writes in number ten: "As a modern woman reader of Talmud, I was fascinated by the rabbis' assumptions about women's attitude towards marriage and children and I wondered whether they still resonate with women today. After my divorce", she writes, "I thought about whether it is still true, as the rabbis insist that [Hebrew], that a woman would prefer to be married than to be alone, even if, as the rabbis go on to assert, her husband is the size of an ant. Does this principle hold in an age, when at least in many parts of the world women can own property, live independently and have children out of wedlock with undue social sanction."

Elana: Here, you can see and you can feel that she's blending not only readership, she's also blending, "What should the rules be today?", but I want to focus on the readership element.

Elana: "It soon became clear to me that by the Talmud's standards, I am a man rather than a woman, if man is defined as an independent self-sufficient adult, whereas woman is a dependent, generally living in either her father's or her husband's home.

Elana: In some ways, this was a relief because I could regard the Talmud's gender stereotypes as historical curiosities rather than infuriating provocations." I would add again in parenthesis that if your courts still rule that way, I'm not sure that that equally applies.

Elana: "The Talmud did not offend me", she writes, "because I was defying its classification through my very engagement with the text. So many of the classical interpretations of the Talmud reflected gendered assumptions and these texts have the potential to take on radically new meaning when regarded through feminine eyes.

Elana: Though plowed through by generations of scholars before me, the Talmud was fertile ground for gleaning new insights and fresh perspectives."

Elana: What's remarkable about this perspective in my opinion is that she isn't simply talking about if the Torah's original audience, even for things that seem completely gender neutral was male, today it can also be female. She's also saying that the female learner adds deeper layers of understanding and different layers of understanding to the text that she is now able to read and learn and feel addressed by.

Elana: This is a remarkable contribution, but as with each, I'm going to have to problematize it. I'm going to have to problematize it in two senses. Number one, even if a woman is now able to consider herself the audience of the Torah, the Torah is still by and large, and I mean by this both the Bible and rabbinic tradition, the Torah is still by and large not going to reflect her experience. She has to bring her experience to bear.

Elana: The second goes back to the conversation about authority because not every reader is going to be able to understand what it means to be addressed by the Torah in the very same way. For some, being addressed by the Torah means that you can add your insights, but the authority still rests in the texts itself. How to negotiate that is going to differ community to community and person to person.

Elana: What we've tried to present here is the beginning of a conversation, the beginning of a conversation for those who consider Torah essential, for those for whom Jewish texts and the Jewish canon should have a shaping effect and a shaping impact and relevance in life, how we can understand without simply affirming nor with rejecting the male privilege that is inscribed in Torah, how we can actually grapple with it, how we can talk about it, how we can be explicit about this gap and how we try to mind it.

Elana: What I've tried to do is be thoroughly intellectually honest, thoroughly intellectually honest both in asserting that as a person of faith who believes the Torah should shape the way that I think of the world, that there are things that are difficult for me to understand and they're difficult for me to accept at face value and also totally intellectually honest at noticing that each and every one of these responses, each and every one of these strategies is going to have big questions attached to it and is going to have challenges attached to it.

Elana: Before we get to the Q and A, I want to leave you with three points. Number one, I think it's really important that we are explicit about the ways in which we are thinking about

this question of male privilege in the canon, that we do not rely on our students to ask us, "What did Dina think?", but that we proactively talk to them about the importance of bringing Dina's voice into the room, that we not wait for a #MeToo moment in order to recognize that we need more women's voices in the teaching of Torah and that it's always been the way that men have dominated the conversation, but that we proactively do something about it. That's number one.

Elana: Number two, I would say on a very personal note. When I think about these challenges and I think about the reasons that I decide to be in the camp of reinterpretation as opposed to the camp of rejection and as opposed to the camp of affirmation, what I think about is really what do I consider to be the point of all of this? What's the point of Torah? What's the point of the Bible? What's the point of rabbinic tradition? Being somebody who sincerely believes in the goals of the Bible and the goals of rabbinic tradition, that is the goals of bringing humanity closer to God. That is the goals to bringing humanity to their best selves. That is the goal to bringing the Jewish people to represent something divine in this world, that I'm willing to confront these challenges. I'm willing to stay in this conversation because I really believe in the text that I'm talking to.

Elana: The third, I would say, is something that's a more general point. It's not that I'm trying to say, "Everything has been male dominated forever, so what's the difference here?" I'm not trying to say that. The reason I'm not trying to say that is because I expect more from a system that is sacred, a system that has divine roots, that has divine origins and humanity at its best, but I think it is really important to note that if we want to hold onto a past and live that past into its future, we have to confront this question in every single discipline. Everything was dominated by male privilege forever. If we're really dedicated to stringing the past into the future, then we need to confront these questions as individuals, as communities, as educators and as learners. Thank you very much.

Elana: We're going to open it up to some question and answer. I'm going to invite my colleague, Rabbi Sarah Mulhern to join me back here at the table.

Sarah: Thank you Elana for that beautiful and provocative presentation. We received a large number of questions. We'll highlight a few for you to address at this time.

Sarah: First, I want to address two questions together, which both seek to interrogate some of your fundamental assumptions. Michael Ruvin of Cambridge, MA writes: "To what extent, if at all, is it problematic to teach a Jewish studies curriculum based exclusively on primary text from the canon written by men, for men as you said in the first place? What is gained and what is lost by including or focusing on secondary literature written by women for the sake of gender balance?"

Sarah: On a similar approach, David Morris New York City, NY wrote: "Is this an issue on which Jewish sources have something unique to say? Even if you could separate the Jewish values on this issue from the historically anthropocentric approach for the texts, why is it legitimate or even valuable to do so?"

- Elana: I love these questions. I love these questions. I love these questions.
- Elana: We're going to start with the first one and I'm actually going to pick the two apart a little bit. We're going to start with the first one because this actually happens.
- Elana: I was giving a class on love, hatred and loyalty and I quoted a, I quoted Martha Nussbaum, a contemporary philosopher to explain the neo-Aristotelian understanding of love. Somebody came up to me afterwards and he said, "You're in shiur context. You're in a Torah teaching context. Why didn't you cite Maimonides? I mean, Maimonides was Neo-Aristotelian on this. Why did you cite Martha Nussbaum?"
- Elana: I actually thought a lot about it and what I realized is that I need to cite both. I think that being able to cite both and be able to show some of the continuities and some of the discontinuities is really important. As I always say, and you might catch me in a lie if I ever don't do this, I really try to make sure that I have a woman's voice on every source sheet that I provide. That is not because I finish my source sheet and then I try to find a woman. It's because I am reading women's voices on Torah all the time.
- Elana: In terms of that second question, "Does Judaism have anything unique to say?", let's be honest here. If you're somebody who believes that, I don't know, Jewish law is binding, then you want to know what Jewish law has to say about this. You want to know how Jewish law implicates men. You want to know how Jewish law implicates women, so you want to talk about it. If you believe that Judaism is full of big ideas, even if you don't find it binding, then you're thinking about, "I'm interested. I'm a Jew", let's say, or, "I'm a person who is interested in religion." By the way, I'm sure there are many people watching this who are not Jewish, but they're interested in religion. Then you might say, "I'm interested in specifically what a religious tradition has to say." It might be about personal identity. It might be about religion. What does religion have to add to the conversation?
- Elana: I have to say, I don't need the response to #MeToo to be Jewish. I keep these separate in my own mind in the sense that I want #MeToo to be responded to by people taking actions to make sure that people don't get harassed in the workplace or anywhere else, men, women or anyone else for that matter.
- Elana: I also, as a Jew, as a learner of Torah, I want to be able to know what my tradition says about it because I care what my tradition says about it, not because I think the Torah anticipates #MeToo in a way in which a person making HR conversations... The culture was completely different. That's the way I would put it, meaning they're all important to me, but they don't have to be a Venn Diagram. The reason we're doing this project is because I think what we're trying to say is we're trying to say, "We need to work on #MeToo. We're going to work on that. We need to think about gender dynamics within the Jewish world. Let's think about that through a Jewish lens because we're thinking about gender dynamics through a Jewish lens."
- Elana: When you listen to Paul Nahme talk on masculinity where he's talking about the 19th century Yeshiva of Volozhin, where he's talking about Yeshiva boys studying Talmud and

he's saying, "This is how we can create the new man", that's a remarkable contribution. Or, you listen to Arielle Levites saying, "Let's talk about Chava (Eve) and Lilith and the monstrous feminine in Jewish tradition and let's have a conversation." It's because we're trying to talk about the Jewish community. It's not because I'm going to bring you a text that's going to solve everything for the #MeToo ... I'm not and I shouldn't and that would be wrong and I think a misappropriation of the tradition, I would add. My short answer to your short questions.

Sarah: Given that, you may want to reject the next set of questions because acknowledging that the project of the Created Equal team is in that second category, we did receive a large number of questions really pushing in the first category and wanting to know what Elana Stein Hain has to say about how, on a more practical level, more applicability level, the Jewish community can move forward on these issues.

Sarah: A few examples: Carol Weiner from New York City says, "How do we begin actually doing this in the Jewish communal world and the larger Jewish community? Respect, equal pay, benefits for women, they all feel so far away."

Sarah: Debra Nussbaum-Cohen of Brooklyn wrote: "What do you think are our first steps as we shift both Jewish and secular culture away from male privilege?"

Sarah: I wonder if you want to respond in any piece of that.

Elana: Here's what I would say: I think that everybody has their own audience. Everybody has their own concentric circle of influence. In your concentric circle of influence, people are motivated and feel compelled by different kinds of discourse.

Elana: For example, if you are in an HR environment, you have to figure out what is going to be the most practical and compelling way to start a conversation about this. Is it by imposing certain sanctions if things are done wrong? Is it by having a company-wide discussion? Is it by lobbying Congress? That's one conversation.

Elana: The places where we're having conversations, we're asking the questions of Jewish leaders, "How do you want to live by the best Jewish values you can?"

Elana: Because we're doing that, what we want to do in this Created Equal curriculum, and it's not really a curriculum, it's a set of conversations, what we want to do in this set of conversations is we want to say, "Let's look at Jewish tradition for what it has to say about change, about leadership, about ethical quandaries", recognizing, and this is why in some ways, this discussion that we're having today is prior to all of that because we have to recognize that, yes, we do have a very gender-imbalanced cannon. In order to be able to honestly come and say, "Look, we're not going to sit here and talk about how gender maps on exactly to 2017", that's not what we're going to do, we're going to mind Jewish tradition Created Equal team, we're going to mind Jewish tradition for what it has to say in general about how you make change around the ethical issues, not specifically gender, but it would be wrong / I think it would impede progress not to be

able to say, "Friends, when we learn these texts, we have to make sure that women are represented in some way." Those are two separate parts of the project.

Elana: I mentioned at the beginning that the part of the reason why I think this is so important is because I will continue to teach my children parasha every week. I will continue to teach them Torah each and every week. I hope that what I teach them in parasha will actually really impact the way they think about the world.

Elana: Now, if I'm teaching them parasha every week and all they hear about is men, men, men, men in the way that I tell it, well then I'm impacting them. This conversation about being explicit about the gap and having strategies to confront it as opposed to hiding from it because we're afraid of what it'll do, to my mind, this will make people more interested in having the conversation because you're being transparent, you're being honest. You're not pretending that something is simple when it isn't. This is everything from the past moving into the future. There are no simple answers.

Sarah: That's interesting you bring an example of teaching parasha to your sons because a number of people actually also asked about this question of education as you're an educator and when to begin to introduce some of these questions of the problematics of the male voice of the tradition, when and how to frame that for younger learners.

Elana: I think this is, given that I do not teach in a school context and my experience through this is through guest classes for kids or through my own kids, this is a question for educators in K through 8, in 9 through 12. This is a question for educators on college campus because I think you can ask the exact same question about anything that relates to problematics. When do you introduce problematics? I have a different question, which is, forget about problematics, forget about problematics, when do you start introducing female voices? Meaning, somebody told me, a high school educator told me recently, she said, or previously a high school educator, she said, "When we learn about the story of the rape of Dina, I had my students do a project", and this is in Genesis for those who are watching who are not as familiar, "I had my students do a project writing Dina's perspective. What do you think Dina thought in that moment?" Not because the text said it. Not because they thought it was authoritative once they did it, but because she wanted her students to recognize that there's another piece of the story, which, for whatever reason is not captured there.

Elana: That's not saying anything about problematics. Yes, a student might raise her hand and say, "Why isn't that in the text to begin with?" Then, for that student, that could be a conversation, but it doesn't have to be in a sense of problematics. I would add, I approach this topic with such trepidation because I know that there are people watching for whom opening this can of worms itself is an act of sacrilege, that it is problematic to open this can of worms. My perspective is, it really depends on where you are. For some people, it is so essential to open this can of worms for them to be able to feel a sense of commitment and belonging in a religious tradition, in a Jewish culture, in Jewish text, regardless of your religious orientation or your not religious orientation towards this, but for some people, it can be incredibly destabilizing and it can be highly problematic. I think it's a question for educators that I hope people will be taking up and continuing to think about especially in this #MeToo moment and I kind of

know that people already are. For those watching who are in that bucket, we're looking to you for your leadership. We really, really are.

Sarah: As we talk about leadership and the role of Jewish communal leaders and educators, there's a very interesting question that we received from Jonathan Freirich of Buffalo, NY about the idea of hierarchy in the first place.

Sarah: He writes as follows: "Are all hierarchies bad? Is it possible to utilize the privileges of authority to alleviate oppression? How do we appropriately take on the responsibilities of authority or privilege if we have it? Can we use our power in a hierarchical system to establish and maintain an egalitarian society? How do we exercise power for good without abusing it?"

Sarah: It's a big question, but one I think really is fundamental to this whole discussion, so I hope you'll address it.

Elana: Let's be honest. Jewish tradition is built on hierarchy. We have a God who is above the whole program. We have leaders who came in the form of a Moses, who came in the form of Devorah who came. Right? We have leaders. We have a rabbinic tradition that speaks in hierarchical terms. We have priests, Levites and Israelites. I am often reminded of my very plebeian status of being a mere Israelite, not from the priestly line by anyone who somehow can trace themselves to a priestly line.

Elana: Now, that said, I think the question is about how you allow different perspectives to be represented. What I'm dealing with here very simply is the fact that women's voices are not represented. It would be like describing the entire temple cult ritual only from the perspective of the high priest and not from the perspective of anybody else, when that is something that actually really informed the lives of everyone. I want to know what the person who didn't make it to Jerusalem for that temple worship is thinking about and doing in their house. In some ways, this is history from below.

Elana: I would start with that very basic point. To my mind, and I'm very idiosyncratic about this and I recognize that and you and I argue about this all the time and many people argue about this and rightly so, the step that I'm talking about is simply representing people's perspectives. It's that simple. Just start with that. Where you want to go with hierarchy, dismantling, this, this. I don't know. That's going to depend on what your notions of authority are and how you interpret the Jewish text and Jewish tradition and what's binding and what's not binding. Everybody's going to have their own opinion on that. I'm going to have my own opinion on that and somebody else is going to have their own opinion on that, but I think there's something that anyone who is in that middle category of reinterpretation can understand, which is we want women's perspective. We want women's scholarship. We want women's voices. We want women's wisdom, not because they're women, because they're people.

Sarah: As you raise up this question of voice, we also heard from a number of people who looked at the contemporary cultural and moment and saw a movement towards privileging the voices of people who have been previously marginalized and quieting the

voices who have been previously less marginalized or empowered. Different kinds of reactions to that, but a question that emerges from that is: Where are men's voices in this conversation? What is the role of Jewish men in this conversation? Is it to take a step back and allow women's voices to come forward or are there active contributions that Jewish men can be making in this work?

Elana: I love that so much also. I think that's a very challenging question because on the one hand, it seems like there is this sense of, "Oh, thank goodness. This can of worms has opened. We're finally talking about what happens of women, all kinds of aggressions and women get to finally say what they've felt and experienced", and that is great and you want to let that out. What you don't want to do is you don't want men to think they don't belong in the room for that conversation. Of course they belong in the room.

Elana: The zero sum game mentality, that is actually what we have experienced throughout human history, which is, somebody is up, somebody is down. How can we actually partnership? How can we create more of a partnership conversation?

Elana: Another approach to male privilege in Jewish tradition for the #MeToo moment is men asking themselves, "What does Jewish tradition require of me as a Jewish man? What does it mean to be a Jewish man?" To be honest, I don't think we talk about that enough, nearly enough about masculinity in general and about Jewish masculinity in particular, which is why I'm glad that Paul is going to be releasing his web video on detoxing masculinity from a Jewish perspective. I definitely think men belong in the conversation.

Elana: I think what we need to watch out for in general are voices trying to overshadow each other. We don't want all the women's voices overshadowing the men's voices and we don't want the men's voices overshadowing the women's voices. Sometimes that means that people need to take turns talking. This might be a moment where women have to just talk and women have to just share what's going on and men have to listen. Then, we might come to a place where there can be more conversation. People could disagree with me. Maybe 600 people just disagreed with me, I have no idea, but it is my feeling that there is no one way to create this sense of balance and partnership. It doesn't necessarily mean that we can all talk at once and it doesn't necessarily mean that the sequences are exactly perfect. It's messy, but if we're in this for the long haul, what we'll recognize is we need to something that raises all ships, not simply that puts people in the spotlight that haven't been in the spotlight before. That's a start, but you need partnership. You need conversation. You need dialogue.

Elana: I think we saw some of that mirrored recently at our conference, at our small convening on power and privilege where men and women were in the room discussing this. There were points at which men said that they felt like outsiders to the conversation. Then, there were other points at which they said, I'm so glad I felt like an outsider to the conversation because I learned things that I never would've known before. We all need to think about this question, which is not a way of punting, but a way of keeping the question open.

Sarah: It's a great question and a great answer.

Sarah: I want to end with just a final question about your focus on reading in particular versus possibly bringing this conversation to other realms of Jewish life.

Sarah: We got a number of questions about, for example, Francine Dick from Ontario wrote: "If women are not full spiritual participants in the realm of Jewish practice, can they ever be seen as equals in Jewish communal contexts and in the intellectual tradition?"

Sarah: I wonder if you just have a few sentences to add about the implications of this conversation about reading and textuality for other areas of Jewish life, whether that be ritual practice or Jewish communal leadership or even sociology.

Elana: Sure.

Elana: I would say that feminism is within a constellation of values for me personally. In that constellation also comes commandedness. In that constellation also comes authority. In that constellation also comes tradition. When I think about these questions, I'm much more comfortable thinking about these questions as a reader than as an actor because I don't actually know the answer to her question, meaning I don't actually know if women can ever be considered equals if men and women are not doing the exact same thing in a ritual context, but to me, that's not the only question. To me, the question is also: What does tradition have set out for men and women to be doing and how they should be acting? I'm learning to navigate that myself as I continue to get older and as I continue to raise children.

Elana: What I realize is that everybody is going to have a different answer to that question because those questions of authority and commandedness and change and evolution, people answer them differently. I would be intellectually dishonest if I said to Francine, was it Francine? Francine, I think that I was you.

Elana: I would be intellectually dishonest if I said, "Oh no, yeah. Separate is equal. Separate is equal. Separate is equal."

Elana: We learned in this country that separate is not equal. That was something that we learned in grade school. We learned that and I can't deny that, but what I can say is I'm bound by the way that I understand tradition and the way that tradition has understood the limits and possibilities for men and women and people feel bound or not bound by that in different ways. That's certainly provocative, I hope.

Sarah: I want to end by saying that we just asked you a lot of questions. I wonder if you can just leave us with what's the one question that all of us who have been learning from you and with you today should take with us?

Elana: Great.

Elana: The question that I would leave people with: What are you going to do to include more women's voices in the Torah conversation and in religious conversation in general?

What are you going to do because each of us as ambassadors in making this a more beautiful, a more compelling, a more exciting tradition to be a part of.

Elana: Thanks so much for joining.

Sarah: Thank you.