

PSYCHOTHERAPY, WOMEN, AND THE FEMININE IN JUDAISM

by

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This talk was given as one of a series held in 1985 and 1986 on 'Judaism and Psychotherapy' at Leo Baeck College, a centre for the study of Judaism and the training of rabbis and teachers within the Reform movement. The series was attended by very large numbers of people, the greater proportion of them women. Like many of those present I had, after many years of being separated from Jewish tradition and the community, begun to look again at my spiritual ancestry.

"What does psychotherapy tell me about being Jewish that Judaism hasn't told me?". This seems to be the question behind this series of seminars. It has certainly been mine. It leads me however to ask "How is it Judaism hasn't told me about being Jewish?" - and I think that is very much a woman's question. We suffer a sense of alienation: the feminine diaspora. For women it's **their** religion, just as for Jews it's **their** country. We never quite belong: it's never quite ours . . .

First, a word about the Jewish origins of psychotherapy. Psychoanalysis was fathered by Freud. When all is said and done, Freud was a Jewish father, patriarch; bourgeois, rational, subtly controlling. He was undeniably a great innovator, a brilliant and imaginative thinker, a humane and

caring healer. But he was also very much the husband of a bourgeois Jewish mother. Like many Jewish fathers his attitude to women was essentially patronising and dominating; and his impotent frustration with the world outside that wouldn't accept him, made him something of a bully in his own domain.

Some of this legacy has remained in analytic practice. It has been challenged by many thinkers, including feminists. (1) Later I shall take up the question of hysteria and the hysterical woman (Freud's typical patient), and how it relates to cultures, like the post-Haskalah* environment Freud lived in, which deny and suppress the chaotic, mysterious aspects of birth, sex and death: those hidden forces that Freud was conjuring up but was unable to cope with.

* *Haskalah* (lit. 'enlightenment'): the emancipation from ghetto life and entry into Western culture in the 18th-19th century, in effect undermining the religion.

If Freud was the Jewish Father of psychotherapy, obviously Melanie Klein was its Jewish Mother. Her work is of great significance: it has worn better than Freudian practice and has been widely influential, particularly in Britain. But she too was the product of that bourgeois intellectual Vienna, and the heart and soul of her Jewishness, though implicitly motivating her work, is not given positive assertion. Her focus is, characteristically, on the feeding relationship and the mother-child relationship. But spirituality is a question of breathing and heartbeat, and the anxious Jewish mother smothered and traumatizes the breathing and closes the heart with her coldness, a coldness that most Jews might deny but which is undoubtedly there. And the possessive Jewish father dominates the mind and appropriates the language, so that the inner voice - particularly the voice of woman - is silenced.

These Jewish parents of psychotherapy were depressed. Their systems were much concerned with pathology: distressfully introspective. It was the Christian, Jung, and his followers who interested themselves in the transpersonal, the spiritual, the mystical, in breadth rather than depth, and all those areas which we associate with the right brain or feminine principle. Subsequently, there were other Jewish developments - but first a word about masculine and feminine, male and female, men and women.

There is right-brain, left-side functioning, which is often called feminine: it fosters the Yin, anima

qualities: the poetic, lateral, intuitive; feeling, surrendering, being.

There is left-brain, right-side functioning, the masculine principle: the Yang, animus energy: it fosters the logical, defining, directing qualities; scientific, rational, controlling, doing.

Everyone has both, but for reasons of nature and nurture, women have more of the feminine tendencies and men more of the masculine. The proper balance of the two energies is acknowledged to be positively creative: health and evolution depend on it. Our Western society has come to place far more value on the left-brain mode, and this has been reflected in the way male control, doing, science, rationality (or what purports to be) has increasingly dominated our culture. It has also itself encouraged the polarisation which has made male and female behaviour and men's and women's roles so markedly different.

Bringing the two together in better balance, both in the individual psyche and in the world out there in men-women relationships, has always been a principal motive in psychotherapy, and in religious mystical traditions including the Jewish. Sexual union, bisexuality, androgyny are both real and symbolic expressions of that move toward harmony.

To return to developments in psychotherapy since Freud and Klein - very much American Jewish inspired or developed, and gradually

finding their way back to Europe, particularly Britain. Here in the next generations many of the elements missing from Freud and Klein emerged in the freer atmosphere away from Vienna. These 'new therapies' are those which I have experienced and practised with individual clients and groups. Loosely termed 'humanistic psychology' and 'transpersonal psychology', they constitute an ever-expanding field of activity and exploration. Some of the major influences were Jewish, and attention has been drawn (2) to the rabbinic and Chassidic qualities of this work, in spite of its exponents' unawareness of it. Indeed it is here that many of us have begun to explore and discover, through psychotherapy, how we are Jewish.

Wilhelm Reich was a young colleague of Freud's, from a very different social background. His radical work, leading to the development of bioenergetic therapy by, among others, Alexander Lowen and Stanley Keleman, is based on a belief that body, mind, feelings and spirit are wholly connected, and that sexual energy is a vitally healthy life force. Fritz Perls's Gestalt therapy, with its insistence on here and now experiencing and vitality, its concern with inner and outer realities, its practical attention to "creative digestive process", owes much to Jewish perspectives. The mystical and transpersonal have emerged strongly in Maslow's attention to peak experiences and transcendence, and coincidentally in music and dance therapies. Roberto Assagioli's psychosynthesis is a powerful mode of exploring the spiritual. It has marked similarities

with Kabbalistic systems and practices and has provided us with an invaluable language. Its very name, psychosynthesis, in opposition to psychoanalysis, suggests its purpose. The work of Jacob Moreno, the 'father of psychodrama', has been powerfully influential in the development of interpersonal groupwork and dynamic therapy of all kinds. It is Jewish in its appreciation of ritual, and in its Talmudic sense of the relativity and adaptability of the stories we tell ourselves and act out in our lives. Arthur Janov's Primal therapy, with its intensity, its concern with the location of traumatic pain, has seemed to me to be meeting a Jewish need to express the suffering that has been so buried. The silent scream, which Rabbi Nachman of Breslov described as a condition of Jewishness, is surely the Primal Scream which Janov aims to release.

In the wake of the war the existential therapies were developed inevitably by all whose sense of meaning and purpose was devastated by the genocide of Auschwitz and Hiroshima, including holocaust survivors such as Bruno Bettelheim, Viktor Frankl and Eugene Heimler. Martin Buber's contributions leaned heavily on Chassidic tradition, and his bridging of the Jewish-Christian polarisation is crucial. No psychotherapist or counsellor can now avoid questions of the meaning of life, the condition of survival, the understanding of evil, which are posed by the past holocaust and the potential future holocaust. We have to be spiritual guides, and that has meant looking at our spiritual roots. At a workshop for therapists from Britain and Europe which I co-led with Roger Evans at the Institute of

Psychosynthesis three years ago, it emerged unexpectedly, and without any premeditated consideration, that many of us were deeply motivated and challenged by the horrors of the war, and needed to make reparation and reconciliation.

The development of feminism and feminist therapy, much of it by Jewish women, has again radically changed modes of psychological work. And in general now the boundaries have shifted, and therapy is feeding and being fed by many other disciplines and practices - politics - philosophy - religion - literature - sociology, and coming out of its narcissism. The distinguished post-Jungian, James Hillman (again, half-Jewish), is perhaps the leading contemporary thinker in these expanding areas, and speaks of psychological work as 'soul-making'. That his work, and the work of many of the feminists, derives from Jung is significant, for it is characteristically the Christian who develops and broadens what the Jew initiates but confines. And it is in the Jungian tradition that two British non-Jews recently wrote a book on menstruation which is of the first importance for Jewish, as for all women "**The Wise Wound**". (3) It was in that eye-opening book, and in another, on Kabbala and modern psychology, (2) that I discovered the existence of a Hebrew goddess, which, as the cliché has it, "changed my life" and helped me understand at last what being Jewish, for a woman, might mean.

Before talking of the goddess, I want to speak of some of the issues that have arisen in my work with women and with Jewish clients: and one of the general points I'd like to make is

that women's psychological relation to men is very similar to Jewish psychological relation to Gentiles. Women, and Jewish clients, have usually come to therapy from a place of mild or severe depression, (often associated with failure of relationships or divorce), specific or generalised impotence, blocked creativity, lack of self-worth, loss of meaning. What has to be worked with often is a form of masochism, an ingrained habit of victimhood, self-denial, repression of all feelings of fear and of anger towards the powerful partner or boss, or world outside. This victimhood becomes powerful in itself, since the victim can manipulate the tyrant from his or her position of self-righteousness and non-responsibility. Result: deadlock, stasis, self-destructiveness, despair. Compounding all this often is the feeling of guilt. The Jewish woman in distress always feels guilty, self-hating, bad, and her suppressed protests come out in the form of sickness, including such debilitating conditions as anorexia or agorophobia. Guilt is a major issue for women and, of course, for Jews generally.

A woman's persistent guilt feelings derive from men's expectations and rejections of her. Mothers and daughters will collude in maintaining their inferior position, constantly ready to feel guilty and then use guilt subtly to control their men, and others around them. Mothers teach their daughters how to be weak, give away their strength and power to men, often despising the men at the same time. And feeling guilty can also give an illusory feeling of power: "I alone am responsible, my badness is important".

Guilt and shame are cultivated very early in relation to our bodies. The rejection of our body's excretory behaviour and of our menstrual and sexual activity is deeply humiliating. The only way to clear guilt-feelings, in therapy, and in our behaviour in the world, is to confront the judgmental powers, either those internalized within us, or those literally out there, and express our anger and sense of outrage at the way we are being controlled, shamed and hurt. Obsessive guilt-feelings and paranoia soon disappear this way. And as Jews we have to express our rejection of those who try to control us by making us feel guilty: those who have suffered, or who have been persecuted, and expect us to feel guilty that we are healthy and alive.

About guilt . . . If I do something I judge subsequently to have been wrong, then I feel regret. Perhaps also a healthy guilt-feeling in my conscience, a sense that I have dishonoured myself, betrayed my own truth. But to allow others to make me feel guilty towards them can paralyse me altogether and take away my capacity to live, and to judge for myself.

It is their envy of my life and growth that causes this inculcation of guilt. Envy is a major factor, a particularly corrosive element in Jewish paranoia. The Ayin Hora* envies our well-being. What Melanie Klein discovered about the mechanisms of envy is of great importance. It is a major anti-

creative force, the shadow in us, and we need to be aware when it's there. Jews envy Christians, Christians Jews, men envy women and women men, and mostly we hide it from ourselves and deny it. We even envy our own well-being.

And everyone envies their God. That comes out ultimately in a destructive cynicism which seeks to kill all positive expressions or feelings of innocence, goodness, love and self-love, of inner worth. Cynical dismissiveness is another strong negative Jewish characteristic, part of the humiliation pattern.

To look again at the victim role. The woman, the Jew, in a group, often becomes a scapegoat, and easily slips into the victimized scapegoat role because of the habit of subservience, of swallowing whatever we're fed. When a marriage or a family is in crisis the scapegoat becomes the "referred patient", the one who ends up sick, physically, mentally, spiritually. This is frequently the daughter or mother of a family; and often she is taking on the father's denied problems.

But what happens, ultimately, is that the scapegoat becomes the redeemer. The one who is most pressurized will also carry the family's need for release, for liberation. Every woman has a bent towards freedom because she has been oppressed, possessed. Thus she comes to therapy wanting to free herself of depression or sickness, of

* *Ayin Hora - the Evil Eye, which may be invoked if one speaks too openly of one's blessings.*

dispiritedness. But one-to-one analysis or therapy is not enough by itself. Women, once they begin to free their spirit through psychotherapy, or simply through walking away from intolerable burdens, need mutual feminine support, courage and imagination, and all the help they can get from other women to strengthen their sense of self, their self-worth, and their right to be, in a suppressive man's world.

I want to put to you a symbol, which is also a reality, of the Jewish psychological condition as I see it. A reality because it developed for me through working in primal regression therapy on the birth process: whole body experiences of birth both as baby and mother.

Visualise an unborn baby, a new soul, a new being, in a womb. The womb is in a woman. The woman is in a home and family. The home is in a ghetto or closed Jewish community. The community in a city, a Christian society. The city in a nation, the world, the earth, the universe. A series of concentric circles.

We know from our studies of group dynamics that what goes on outside is reproduced inside, and vice-versa. By processes of introjection and projection, a pathological state is reached when the outer environment is hostile, overly invasive or overly withdrawn: each of the enclosures will behave similarly. The mother's womb reproduces the alien society. Our experiences in pre-natal regression confirm that for an unborn baby the womb may be hostile: overly invasive or withdrawn, poisonous. Poisoning and paranoia are closely linked and

may originate in the womb. Jewish laws of Kashrut are designed to protect the ghetto from poisoning from the outside. But the emotional poisoning is there. Jewish food is often the bread of bitterness, producing heartburn. We swallow nervously, suspiciously, in the womb itself, what our depressed and anxious mother feeds us.

Now this free spirit, this soul within the baby, is destined to be born, to reach the freedom of the outside world, find a place on earth, and ultimately be taken after death into eternity, How is it going to get out? The womb may be reluctant to let it go because if it grows and breaks out, it may lead to a breaking through all those outer womb walls. Family, ghetto, wide-world may all be split open by the birth of this free spirit.

Whatever that free spirit is, it has to struggle out of a paranoid womb which has been weakening it with its poison. This is a personal and cultural pathology. It is rooted in a negative feminine concept, of the womb, the protected enclosure, being what nurturing and mothering is about: a closed-circuit system. Which both psycho-analysis and religion can easily become. We are afraid of the freedom because it is unsafe: it requires risk-taking and the challenge of responsibility: a real relationship with mother earth and those who people her. Much safer in the womb, the closed Jewish community, the therapy room, but potentially poisonous and uncreative.

Here I return to the question of hysteria, a word that derives from

the Greek for womb. Hysteria was what Freud dealt with in women, and the so-labelled 'hysterical' woman is a commonplace still in therapeutic practice. I want to suggest that the hysterical woman is that free spirit struggling to get out of the seemingly imprisoning and certainly poisonous womb of patriarchal society.

The extreme hysteric goes from one person to another: from husband to GP to analyst to healer to friends, to relatives, constantly complaining, demanding, never satisfied, basically convinced there is no cure. Beating her fists, her head, against the inadequate parent-figures, the tight womb, the ghetto wall, unable to get out. Depression becomes a way of depressing, suppressing her desperation. Depression is far more common in women than men. If the depression lifted, if the imaginary wall were removed, the fear is she might go mad. But what is madness? Most frequently the name we give to unacceptable and therefore uncontrollable emotions: panic fear, hopeless grief and despair, raging anger, tantrums of frustration. "Don't get hysterical" people scold when they meet these expressions of feeling, and that increases the madness. Because if society constantly suppresses such feelings, they become dangerous and destructive to those feeling them, or erupt in inappropriate violence. And as patriarchal society, the masculine, becomes more and more controlling, mechanical, heartless, suppressive, bloodthirsty, rigid, so women, the feminine, will become more and more hysterical or depressed. "Depression is withheld knowledge" said one wise analyst. (4)

Women withhold their knowledge or are forced into silence - often don't have the words for that knowledge because men have controlled the language. Because finally what the hysterical woman has to come to realize is that she does not need to look outwards all the time for her answers: they are within her. The womb walls are largely imaginary, the power of others an illusion. She has her own power and knowledge.

Woman's knowledge is under-rated and under-valued, even by many feminists. It is intuitive knowledge and body knowledge - of creative life and death cycles and processes. Through menstruation, childbirth, menopause, a woman's body knows the creation of the new and the destruction and death of the old. A woman has blood-connection and blood-familiarity. She has a monthly cycle, connectedness to the moon, and a strong pull toward the earth, the ground. She has strong psychic capacities, a propensity for significant dreaming, often pre-cognitively. She has a particularly powerful whole-body, whole-emotion physicality and sexuality. Men have always been afraid of those powers, which are too similar to the untame-able mysterious powers of our mother earth. Judaism cultivated the menstrual taboo and the domestication of women. Christianity cultivated virginity, and persecuted witches. Hundreds of thousands, possibly millions of ordinary women were tortured and put to death in Europe alone in the Middle Ages.

These highly creative feminine powers are essentially spiritual. They can be developed in a benign or

malign way, like any power, but they are a natural spirituality, religious, connected with dimensions beyond to the borders of life and death. When men and women honour these mysterious feminine qualities they do so with humility and awe. Mysticism is the religious area in which they are most honoured. At the same time, in simple everyday living women can act as mediators between those other dimensions and the male way of experiencing and being. They can act as pace-makers. Themselves attuned to the rhythms of the heart and the universe, they then pace their men and their children - just as, after their babies are born, holding them close to their bodies, they become a pacemaker for the newly beating heart of the child.

Who is the Hebrew Goddess? (5) Briefly - She derived initially from the pre-Mosaic Sumerian earth-goddesses: Ishtar, Astarte, Ashteret. The little stone figurines of these goddesses were kept and worshipped for a long time by the populace, and the rabbis tactfully didn't interfere, but simply left them out of the script(-ure).

Then there was Lilith, precursor of Eve, variously known as the consort of God, then the consort of Adam, who refused to adopt the sexual missionary position and was generally too liberated and recalcitrant to be acknowledged. She has the dark, shadow, blood powers of creation and destruction, the serpent goddess qualities of sexuality, that the patriarchy had to control: she therefore was given a bad name as a consort and mother of demons, a killer of mothers and

babies in childbirth, and so on. She is the black witch aspect of the goddess.

The Shekhinah was originally the presence of God on earth, the mist, the divine manifestation. The word was feminine and she became deified. She then took on much of the feminine that the jealous patriarchal God seemed to lack - the more tender, gentle, receptive qualities, the comforting presence. She was sexual as well as maternal. And she was present in the Temple, where there were statues of male and female divine figures embracing. It is said that when the Temple was destroyed she fled in horror, and she waits to return, always exiled, until Israel is restored to God, or the Temple restored to Israel, and Israel's exile ended. Legend says she comes to earth every Shabbat - and the Shabbat is sometimes seen as yet another deity - the Sabbath bride - and brings her benign presence to the home. And her particular joy is in the Sabbath sexual union of man and woman, a pleasure in itself and a symbol of the spiritual union she longs to achieve.

The fourth manifestation of the goddess was the Matronit, who was very much a composite figure revived and assembled twelve centuries later by the Kabbalists in their writings: she has many of those other qualities and she is in turn Virgin, warrior, lover, mother: a powerful multiple energy.

These archetypes seem to me to be very important ones for Jewish women to relate to - and Jewish men - and there is no doubt that the goddess needs to be acknowledged.

But her nature is complex. At the moment some of us are asking for the Shekhinah to return. That is because she is in exile, and so are we, and we too need to have the experience of return: the return of the spirit to the temple of the body, be it the body politic or our actual bodies. She is in many ways that schizoid part of ourselves that flees from intolerable suffering, splits off, and hesitates to come back into the body, or into a world, where there is so much pain. And it may be that it is her condition always to be in exile, that she can only be effective outside the pale, not incorporated into an unhealthy body or an unhealthy religion. It is certain that the Shekhinah can't come alone, can't transform the situation on her own; she is only partially creative. Lilith has to come also. She is sometimes referred to as the 'hard outer shell' of the Shekhinah. We have to own that shell and the shadow in ourselves: the negative, the dark goddess, the envy, the corruptive and destructive qualities that can also be used to vitally creative ends. That way we are led back also to mother-earth and her unpredictability, and our need to respect her, not abuse her, and to live in intelligent relationship with her.

Having said all that I want to take a paradoxical step further. Those archetypes, like all symbols and myths, are there to be recognized and transcended. The Hebrew goddess in all those aspects has so far been kept at a distance by her male creator: Lilith banished, the Shekhinah in exile, the Matronit enshrined in print. Only the Shabbat is with us, for one-seventh of our lives. An alienated deity. What is

only faintly suggested by the patriarchs is the possibility that the goddess is actually here all the time, and this is what I would like to assert. She is here, she does dwell amongst us, she is in our bodies, our imagination and in our unconscious. If we can believe that, she ceases to be alienated. If we want to manifest our spirituality, then we only have to trust that it will find its form. We don't have to ask where and when is the spiritual revival going to happen. It is happening: here and now in these meetings - which have been attended predominantly by women. It remains only to discover what we women want that has brought us here, articulate it and keep it moving. There must be enough energy, intelligence, love, wisdom, devotion and chutzpah in this room to move mountains.

How then can we talk about the feminine in Judaism? As far as Judaism in the sense of orthodox doctrine is concerned, we know woman's place is secondary and inferior, though she is afforded considerable legal and emotional respect - provided she keeps her place. She is menstrually untouchable. In the synagogue the sexes are separate and unequal. All this has turned many women, and men, away from orthodox Judaism.

In the Kabbala however there is a powerful appreciation of the feminine, its mysterious qualities and its many-sidedness, and of woman's sexuality. But the Kabbala was kept secret and closed to women. So the goddess, and feminine spirituality, has been enclosed in the womb of men's Kabbala, waiting to be born.

Looked at another way, it's as though the men, sitting all day over their books, cultivated beautiful fantasies about the goddess, who probably wasn't much like the wife and daughter at home.

So what were they like at home? And what are Jewish women now? Do we have archetypes, stereotypes? The Jewish Mother is almost archetypal, a mythical figure who is threatening enough that jokes have to be told about her: the all-giving, overfeeding, smothering woman who maintains the home. Obviously mother is of great importance where the family unit needs holding together, but for a woman to be that and that alone is bad for her, and bad for the family. In America they have the archetypal "Princess", the much-prized daughter, apple of her father's eye. She transforms into the Jewish Mother as soon as she loses her virginity - or so the myth goes! I see other archetypes and stereotypes; the Jewish business-woman or entrepreneuse, the Jewish woman organiser. And one which seems particularly European, the Jewish maternal-intellectual-academic, very respectable, not too sexual.

Now all these are what feminists call "daughters of the patriarch", not really women in their own right. For many first and second-generation Jewish women it is often that they are actually being what their fathers couldn't be in the world: educated, effective, affluent; and their personalities are strongly masculine, even under an attractive feminine appearance. And for subsequent generations these are still roles in which women's energy and creativity are

relating to the male world and its values, and, are approved of by it, because men can cope with, negotiate with, or subtly manipulate the woman in those roles.

But woman is much more than maternal, competent, clever and efficient, and those roles rarely allow her to express fully her creative humanity and spirituality. Even where women have begun to take greater part in synagogue life, it is still very much in terms of power in the patriarchal sense. The creativity of Jewish women is expressing itself outside the synagogue: in teaching, music and other arts, poetry, fiction, theatre, participation in other religions, healing and medicine, and of course counselling and psychotherapy which have become secular sources of spiritual help and guidance for so many people who are not affiliated to any established religion. I would guess that many Jewish women therapists and counsellors are being the rabbis they were never able to be within Judaism itself.

Women can revitalize Judaism (and if they don't, it looks like dying altogether in the diaspora) and I think that what psychotherapy - the 'Unofficial Judaism'? - has taught us can be a major contribution. Women have to find their truth and their voice and speak. We can work from our heterodoxy and our position as outsiders: it is a gift that we are free to make an alternative religion outside the constricting control of the established orthodoxy. We can take what inspiration, what aspects of tradition or ritual we want and blend them with our own inner spirituality and our own modes of expressing that spirituality.

Christian women are ahead of us in this. They have a firmer grasp of Christian doctrine, since no-one denied them access to it, and have been re-visioning their theology. We have been so alienated from our theology that we would have to get a hold on it again to effect change at that level. There have been some developments in America but they are minimal compared to the spiritual work of Christian and non-affiliated feminists. (6)

But that is only one level: there are many others. What I personally would like to see is a restoration of Jewish mystical practices - meditation in particular - work with dreams - refinement of the art of loving, sexually and in other ways - cultivation of new rituals, music, dance, poetry - the creation of new modes of celebration and prayer. Incorporating our imagination. I would like to see drama used, as it was in the Greek religion and in the medieval church, as a way of finding meaning in Biblical stories and making new meanings also. I'd like to see all those Jews who are now expressing their spiritual values elsewhere expressing them together, as a conscious affirmation of life and humanity and therefore of divine purpose. In togetherness - community. **Chaverut**.

Indeed one of the principles of the feminine is inclusion - the goddess manifests herself in everyone. She does not exclude herself from you, nor exclude you from her attention because you've broken some rule. Like a caring mother she accepts all her children, the bad and the good.

And she is not exclusively Jewish. I believe that only in links with other religions - in the Western world with Christianity in particular - will we bring life to our own religion and begin to make whole, holy, what has been divided, and heal humanity's wounds. I hope that ultimately women will begin to forgive men, and Jews will begin to forgive Christians, and that may set an example of reconciliation which the world sorely needs.

Two years ago I co-led a workshop entitled **The Hebrew Goddess**, with a colleague who is a transpersonal counsellor. We had led many workshops using mythology to explore different life themes, and both of us, being Jewish women, decided to try this. Twelve people took part - six of us were Jewish and six Christian; the aim was to explore what this missing element was in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. As the time grew nearer we two began to get anxious. Had we done our homework? Should we know more about theology? - though we had never worried too much about that in the past, relying on the archetypal qualities of myths to work in their own way, through fantasy, discussion and psychodrama. And I said, "Look - if twelve people come together wanting the Hebrew Goddess, she will manifest herself". It's only recently that I saw the statement, which I'd doubtless once known, that wherever there is a Minyan,* there the Shekhinah will be.

And she was. Through our interactions, our identifications

* *Minyan* - a gathering of ten adult men, the minimum requirement for communal prayer.

with aspects of the goddess, the conflicts between men and women in the group, the dreams that were dreamed on both nights, the psychodrama we set up, of a Christian and a Jewish family relating to each other and to their gods, we came finally to a realisation that the goddess could indeed come to us, but would not want to be 'up there' in heaven with the patriarchal God. Her presence is on earth. And the harmony, the 'togetherness' finally achieved at the end of the workshop between men and women, Jews and Christians, even with their outstanding unresolved problems, was a mark of her presence.

I'd like to leave you with the dream which was dreamed on the Saturday

night of that weekend by one of the women - the woman who the next day took the role of the goddess in the psychodrama. When she described it to us, we realized that here was a dream for the whole group, and perhaps for more than just that group.

There had been some kind of conflict or violent war, followed by devastation. Then the scene changed to a building that seemed to be a synagogue (though she had not been in a synagogue for a long time). A ceremonial ritual was taking place, and it was all women: they were moving round in a circle, and holding books of religious writings in their hands.

References

- 1) See, for instance, **In Dora's Case**: Freud: Hysteria: Feminism. ed. Bernheimer and Kahane. Virago 1985
- 2) **The Way of Splendor**: Jewish mysticism and modern psychology. Edward Hoffman. Shambhala 1981
- 3) **The Wise Wound**: Menstruation and Everywoman. Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove. Gollancz 1978 Paladin 1986
- 4) John Layard, quoted in **The Wise Wound**.
- 5) See **The Hebrew Goddess**. Raphael Patai, Ktav, 1967
- 6) For a general survey, see **Sexism and God-Talk**. Rosemary Radford Ruether, SCM Press 1983

* *Alix Pirani will be conducting a one-day "Hebrew Goddess" workshop for the AHP on November 16th. Information from Mary Fee, 01-607 7852.*
