

# In Whose Image?

Andrew Ramer

*I understand what Flaubert meant when he wrote, "I am Madame Bovary." While I have written midrashim on many different characters, for some reason that may have nothing to do with being a gay man; the pieces I love writing the most are all about women. Perhaps there's a female voice embedded deep inside me. Fed on stories from my mother's mother, it's through writing and telling them myself that I find my place in the world and try to make sense of it. But to say that I have a "female voice" inside doesn't explain my process, and I haven't ever wanted to exchange my genitals for another set. (Well, perhaps something Andromedan, beyond the male/female dyadic choices available on Earth.) Rather, it's tone and feeling, mood, sensibility, perception, a certain way of living in the world, which I label "female" and enjoy writing from, as Sarah, Dinah, Serakh, and Huldah.*

*Is my writing a form of verbal drag? I don't think so. But if we're created male and female in the image of God, it's the female of a man named Andrew who gives voice to herself by writing midrash. I'm not talking about what Jung called my "anima" — that would be as inaccurate as equating the Shekhinah with the Goddess. The Shekhinah isn't God as Woman; she's the male God's female sidekick — Supergirl to his Superman. When I write as a woman it's not the female part of me writing, it's the female me writing.*

*"To create is sacred, because it's all we know of God," Tennessee Williams said. The Torah tells us that God spoke the world into being. We live in words, live through them. Writing brings me close to the Creator, as I understand Her. And the curious paradox of writing with my man body is part of Her great Mystery. It's an invitation to transcend without leaving anything behind, to be male and female, real and a fictional character, all at the same time. For me, nothing is better than this. Good meals and good sex end. But stories go on and on, as does She.*

## A Midrash on Chaye Sarah – Sarah's Life

Sarah stood on a rise, looking down at the circle of tents, all bathed in a soft warm light. She was coming from her morning prayers beneath the sacred tree, on her way back to build a fire and prepare the morning meal. She'd stood on this spot many times before. But something was different this morning, a clarity in the air, a stillness over the camp. And her heart was flooded with joy for this life of hers, so far from her birthplace, so different from any life she'd imagined when she was younger.

Below, her two eldest daughters emerged from their tent, fifteen year-old Atirat and thirteen year-old Yonat, both of them born in Haran. They didn't see her because they too were caught up in the magic of the morning. And then her third daughter Kalilah emerged, age eleven, who'd been born in Canaan a year after they arrived. Kalilah paused, looked around, and the splendor of the morning grabbed her in its embrace. Turning back to the tent, Sarah could hear Kalilah call through the flap to her youngest sister,

"Quick. The sun." Eight year-old Davah stepped out, just in time to see the fiery orb rise up above the hills, radiant and golden.

For a moment Sarah and her daughters were woven together in a web of shimmering light. Then Abraham emerged, holding three year-old Isaac in his arms, the son of her flesh that Abraham had so longed for. Standing there, it seemed as if her husband and children were inside her. Sun, sky, land, all that too was inside her. Then Isaac turned in his father's arms and saw Sarah standing above them. "Eee-mah," he called out, his little voice breaking the stillness, sending the light flashing out in a thousand directions. "Yes, this is my life," Sarah said to herself, waving down at him. "And it's a good life." Laughing, she gathered up the corners of her robe and headed down to join her family.

*Genesis 24:1 says, "The Eternal blessed Abraham with everything." Rabbi Yehuda in Baba Batra 16b says that if Abraham had everything, he must have had a daughter as well as sons.*

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December 2007

Tevet 5768

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