

# The Prophetess as Priestess: Women, Revelation, and the Sacred

*Jill Hammer*

*The Kohenet Hebrew Priestess Institute, founded in 2006, facilitates the creation of transformative Jewish ritual that is embodied, earth-based, feminist and inspired by traditions of women's spiritual leadership. The Kohenet Institute looks at biblical, Talmudic, and mystical sacred roles of women — such as prophetesses, wise women, mourning women, pilgrims, and shrinekeepers — to learn about the ways women have contributed to Jewish experience of the sacred and to bring these traditions forward into contemporary life. As co-founder of the Kohenet Hebrew Priestess Institute, I have been avidly pursuing the traces of ancient priestesses in the Bible and beyond. This article is part of a larger exploration of the roles of priestesses or quasi-priestesses in Israelite and Jewish life.*

In the fall of 2011 I dreamed I was giving a lecture on the Bible — something I frequently do in waking life. In the dream, I was telling the participants in the class about the missing letters in the Bible, pointing to a chart of letters that did not exist but had once existed, and somehow still did exist in their latent potential within the biblical stories. One of the letters had the sound *ng*, and I wanted to name myself after this letter. When I woke up, I had the sense that the dream was somehow real.

So, I got on the Internet and discovered that the Bible really does have a missing letter. The Hebrew letter *ayin* is a composite of two letters — the *ayin*, which looks like an eye, and the *ghayin*, which might once have looked like a twisted cord, and probably had the sound *ng*. Certain root words in biblical Hebrew can only be explained if you know that they once contained the letter *ghayin*. The Hebrew *ghayin* fell out of use in the early biblical period, though it still exists in Arabic.<sup>1</sup>

For me, the *ghayin* is a symbol of what is missing from the spiritual traditions we have received. Its twisted cord shape is the umbilicus, the missing truths of our mothers — and it is the connection to the sacred, which must be rediscovered in every time and place. It reminds me of the voices of prophetesses, often hidden under the surface of history.

The prophetess reveals hidden information. This may come in the form of a prediction about the future, or a revelation about the past — or a statement about the truth of the present. It may even come wordlessly, through the drum and the dance. The prophetess describes the world in a way that makes us see it differently. She, like her male counterpart the prophet, is a vehicle for revelation.

The prophetess is one of the most prominent sacred roles of women in the Bible. Biblical prophetesses are poets, musicians, dancers, dreamers, foretellers, judges, and guides of kings and tribes. What is not usually noted is how often these women are connected to the priestly cult and/or oracle shrines. In other words, they are serving, like many of their ancient Near Eastern counterparts, as oracular priestesses. This means they are not isolated voices but an integral part of Israelite cultic life. Understanding the role of prophetesses in this context can help us learn about how Israelite and Jewish women have contributed over time to processes of revelation.

### Three Prophetesses of the Biblical Period

The prophetess in the Bible is an ambivalent figure. Many references to prophetesses are positive. However, in Proverbs 31:3, the mother of King Lemuel sternly admonishes him:

*Do not give your strength to women,  
Or your way to the machot melachin.*

This Hebrew phrase is often understood to mean “those who destroy kings,” i.e., women. However, *machot* is a cognate of the Akkadian word *mahhutu*, an ecstatic prophetess (the male form was *mahhu*). Such prophetesses were part of the king’s court and gave him oracular advice. In the epic Enuma Elish, an enraged goddess Tiamat goes into a frenzy and becomes “like a *mahhutu*.” The phrase in Proverbs means “the king’s prophetess,” and shows ancient Israelite ambivalence about the power of prophetic women.<sup>2</sup>

The three prophetesses who have a significant presence in the Bible — Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah — all receive messages from God. Two of the three are creators of poetic song. Miriam, called a prophetess in Exodus 15, is the sister of Aaron the high priest and of Moses. She is named specifically as sister of Aaron, and she engages in ritual music-making. She might be a mythic ancestor of a guild of female Levites who used music and prophecy, or she might be a representative figure standing in for the priestesses of ancient Israel.

The Arabic word *kahin*, cognate to *kohen/kohenet*, means both priest and diviner — and in ancient Israel, prophecy was very important to the power of the priesthood. The high priest of Israel carried the *urim* and *tummim*, divination tools, inside the sacred breastplate, and Moses and Samuel are depicted as serving in both prophetic and priestly roles.

In Numbers 12, Miriam and Aaron criticize Moses' marriage to a Cushite woman, clearly as a way of discrediting him. The argument begins with *va-tidaber/and she spoke* — suggesting that the critique is coming primarily from Miriam. The siblings fume, “Has YHWH spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?” Miriam and Aaron are making a bid to be viewed as prophets on an equal footing with Moses, perhaps asking for more power for their own priesthods.

God summons Miriam, Aaron, and Moses to the Tent of Meeting, the cultic center, and arrives in a pillar of cloud to reject the claim of Miriam and Aaron.

*When a prophet of YHWH arises among you, I make myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses, he is trusted in all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, through my image, not through riddles, and he beholds the likeness of YHWH. Why did you not fear to speak against my servant Moses?* [NUMBERS 12:6-8]

This statement affirms that Miriam and Aaron, like Moses, are prophets as well as members of the priestly house: they receive messages from the Divine in dreams. It also makes a categorical distinction between “ordinary” prophet, on the one hand, and Moses, who is associated with a face-to-face encounter with the Divine — one that produces the Torah, a body of fixed and written revelation. This passage speaks not only to Moses' privileged place

above Miriam and Aaron, but to the privileging of Mosaic prophecy (associated with Torah and the later textual tradition) above dreams and visions such as the ones Miriam and Aaron claim to have. Moreover, the conversation takes place in the community cultic center, reminding us of Moses' authority over the priestly ritual. While Aaron is the high priest, it is Moses who decrees the laws of the priesthood and even sets up the Tabernacle. This story places the priesthood definitively under the authority of Moses-style revelation: "Why did you not fear to speak against my servant Moses?"

After God speaks, Miriam becomes covered with white scales — *tzara'at* — and becomes ritually impure. Aaron begs Moses to pray that Miriam be healed. Moses does so, but God replies, "If her father spat in her face, would she not bear her shame seven days? Let her be shut out of camp for seven days, and then let her be readmitted" [NUM. 13:14]. Miriam leaves the camp for seven days, and then she is readmitted and the camp moves on. She is not heard from again until her death.

The punishment of Miriam is humiliating precisely because she is a priestess as well as a prophetess. *Tzara'at* is ritually defiling; it is the opposite of being a priest. Aaron refers to Miriam as being "like a dead person," and human death is anathema to the priestly sancta. To add to the irony, seven days is the length of a priestly ordination. Through this ordeal outside the camp, Miriam seems to lose whatever priestly status she has. This textual event may represent the humiliation and removal of priestesses from the priestly cult at some point in Israelite history.

---

The punishment of Miriam is humiliating  
precisely because she is a priestess  
as well as a prophetess.

---

Ironically, the ritual for bringing a person with *tzara'at* back into the community is an anointing of the ear, hand, and foot — a very similar anointing to the priesthood. In a way, this story confirms and rejects Miriam's priestesshood at the same time. The similarity between the ritual for "lepers" and the ritual for priests makes one think of Miriam as a kind of rejected priest — which in fact she is.

Only traces remain of Miriam's leadership. Yet the prophet Micah [6:4] refers to Miriam as one of the three leaders of the Israelite nation in the wilderness. Later rabbinic legends depict her as the source of a mysterious moving well of water that sustains the people in the wilderness [cf. B. Taanit 9A, Song of Songs Rabbah 4:14]. This water is a symbolic representation of Miriam's priestesshood, which seems connected to water — her dance by the Sea, her standing by the Nile with the infant Moses.

The oracular priestess role doesn't end with Miriam, however. The second biblical prophetess is also a wielder of tribal power. In Judges 4:4-5 we hear:

*Deborah, wife of Lappidot, was a prophetess; she judged Israel at that time. She used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah, between Ramah and Beth El in the hills of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her for judgment.*

Judges were charismatic military leaders and governors, inspired by God to preserve the Israelite tribes. Deborah is described as both judge and prophet. The palm tree of Deborah is probably a shrine or pilgrimage location — the people “went up” to her, and the verb is the same as “to go on pilgrimage.”

In Deborah's time, there is no one central shrine but a variety of sacred places. Since the location of her tree is so carefully given, Deborah is probably a shrine priestess who gives oracles to those who come to her. The name Deborah may be related to Greek words for priestess that mean “bee;” the Delphic oracle was called “bee.” The Hebrew word for “bee” is related to “shrine” (*devir*) and “word” (*davar*) — which strengthens the theory that Deborah is a shrine oracle. She would have presided over shrine inquiries and requests for prophecy. While there is no mention of goddesses in the story, it should be noted that the palm tree was sacred to Asherah.

Interestingly, the matriarch Rebekah probably visits a similar oracle when she goes to “seek God” in Genesis 25:22-24 to determine why her pregnancy has become so difficult. Rebekah's nurse, who travels with Rebekah to Canaan when Rebekah marries, is also named Deborah, and that Deborah is also associated with a sacred tree: Allon-Bakhut. This connection is too faint to fully interpret, but it could be that Deborah was a title for oracles in ancient Israel and that oracle-shrines centered on sacred trees.

Deborah summons an Israelite general, Barak, and tells him that God has commanded him to strike Israel's enemies: the warriors of King Jabin of

Canaan and the general Sisera. Barak replies: “If you will go with me, I will go, and if not, I will not go.” Barak either sees Deborah as a holy woman who can guarantee his victory, or wants to make sure she believes in her own prophecy. In response to Barak’s request, Deborah utters an oracle:

*I will surely go with you, but it will not be to your glory, this road you are walking, for into a woman’s hands YHWH will deliver Sisera.*

[JUDGES 4:9]

This seems like Deborah chastising Barak for his trepidation, but as the reader will soon learn, it is a prophecy. Barak will win the battle, the enemy general Sisera will flee, and a nomad woman named Yael will invite Sisera into her tent and kill him while he is sleeping. There is no way Deborah could know this except by divine inspiration. The Deborah story ends with a poem sung by Deborah and Barak, just as Moses and Miriam sing the Song at the Sea together; in it, Deborah refers multiple times to her leadership of the people and her pride in their victory, and also retells the story of Yael, the surprise heroine of the story. Deborah is an oracle — she doesn’t look into a book for her pronouncements, but speaks them as they come to her. Her character may be an example of oracular priests and priestesses who spoke prophecies at Israelite shrines.

In II Kings 22, we meet the third and final named prophetess of the Bible, Huldah. During the reign of King Josiah, a scribe named Shaphan finds an unknown scroll in the Temple — probably Deuteronomy — which demands strict monotheism from the Temple cult and threatens punishment if this discipline is not followed. The scribe reports the scroll’s existence to the king. The king sends the scribe, the high priest Hilkiah, and the king’s minister to the prophetess Huldah, to ask if the scroll is authentically God’s word.

Huldah the prophetess is wife to Shallum son of Tikvah son of Harhas, who is called *shomer ha-begadim*, or keeper of the wardrobe. It is probable that Shallum takes care of priestly clothes, and may well be a priest himself, which would make Huldah a member of the priestly clan (a *kohenet*, in mishnaic terms). Huldah confirms that the scroll is accurate and that the punishments are real:

*Thus says YHWH the God of Israel: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its inhabitants in accordance with the words of the scroll...*

*As for the words which you have heard, because your heart was softened*

*and you humbled yourself before YHWH... I will gather you to your fathers and you will be laid in your tomb in peace. Your eyes will not see all the evil I will bring upon this place. [II KINGS 22:19-20]*

Huldah goes beyond confirming the words of the scroll. She adds to the scroll by prophesying that because the king has listened to God, he will have a peaceful reign and will not see the exile that is to come. King Josiah then conducts a purge of all gods, goddesses, and religious practices not connected to YHWH. Josiah's soldiers burn the Asherah, and her devotees are expelled from the Temple. Huldah acts as the *mahhutu*, the king's prophetess — supporting the king's power over the people's religion.

It is interesting, to say the least, that a woman oracle takes this role. This may be a co-opting of prophetesses — a way of saying that women too support the new monotheism, and that there is a role for them in the new religious model in spite of the restrictions on women's cultic participation. This text may have been written after the Exile to affirm the sacred status of the Deuteronomic code — and to encourage Israelite/Jewish women to adopt the new view of Judaism and the new view of revelation, in which oracles must be subordinated to the law that has been revealed, as it says in Deuteronomy: *A prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything that I have not commanded, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, is to be put to death [DEUT. 18:20].*

### **Prophetesses in Later Times**

The New Testament portrays several prophetesses. In Luke 2:36, Anna is a prophetess who prophesies the coming of Jesus as Messiah. She is portrayed as a woman who is constantly in the Temple: "She was a widow of about eighty-four years, who departed not from the Temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day." As with Miriam and Deborah, there is a connection between the prophetess and the priestly cult.

Between the first century BCE and the first century CE, in Thyatira in modern-day Turkey, there was a shrine to a sibyl or prophetess named Sambathe (sometimes called Sabbe). She is said to have been Jewish, though this is disputed. A body of poetry called the Sibylline Oracle was believed to be her work, though scholars now believe it is a composite.

In the early second century CE, the Roman satirist Juvenal makes fun of a Jewish beggar-woman who interprets dreams for a fee, calling her "an interpreter of the laws of Jerusalem, high priestess with a tree as temple, a

trusty go-between of high heaven” [JUVENAL VI, 544-545]. This tells the reader that Jewish prophetesses existed in Roman times. Juvenal mocks the prophetess as a priestess with a very poor temple indeed, but he does see her as a priestess — and, like Deborah, she is associated with a tree. These textual fragments continue to show the connection between prophecy and being a priestess of the shrine of a deity.

The Talmud, while paying lip service to prophetesses such as Sarah and Abigail (who are not actually prophetesses as I conceptualize them here), makes every effort to denigrate prophetesses and reduce their power. According to the Talmud, there are only seven prophetesses: Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Hulda and Esther [B. MEGILLAH 14A]. The Talmud makes sure to mention that Miriam’s only prophecy is that her brother Moses will be born and redeem the people. Particularly harsh words are reserved for Huldah and Deborah:

*Rabbi Nachman said: Haughtiness does not become women. There were two arrogant women, and their names are hateful: one is called “hornet” [Deborah/bee] and the other “weasel” [Huldah/ weasel].*

[B. MEGILLAH 14B]

The Talmud continues in this vein, indicating that Huldah was consulted about the scroll in the Temple only because her cousin Jeremiah was out of town. Perhaps the Talmud is uncomfortable with prophecy in general because spontaneous prophecy overturns the rabbis’ ideas about law and interpretation. But women prophets are particularly troublesome because they go against rabbinic leadership norms, and therefore are denigrated.

---

Women prophets are particularly troublesome  
because they go against  
rabbinic leadership norms.

---

However, the Talmud does have a “female prophet” of its own — a divine one at that. The sages of the Talmud (200-600 CE) believed that the age of prophets was over. Nevertheless, sometimes it was possible to hear a *bat kol* — literally, “the daughter of a divine voice.” This daughter-voice was an echo of the divine word, declaring God’s wishes in times of uncertainty.



The sages believed that the bat kol was the last remnant of the prophetic gift [B. YOMA 9A].

The Talmud tells several stories in which people testify to the truth and the bat kol confirms what they say. In one story, the bat kol speaks in the court of King Solomon. Solomon is judging the famous case of two mothers [1 KINGS 3]. Two women, prostitutes, come before Solomon, with a living infant and a dead one, both claiming to be the mother of the living child.

Solomon orders a sword to be brought. He proclaims his judgment that both the dead child and the living one shall be divided, with half of each child given to each mother. One woman cries, "Give her the live child, and do not kill it!" The other woman callously insists, "The child shall be neither mine nor yours; divide it." Solomon declares that the live child shall be given to the woman who was willing to give it up, "for she is its mother."

In the Talmud's version of the story, a bat kol whispers to Solomon that the caring mother is in fact the true mother:

*"The king said: "Give her the living child, do not kill him, for she is his mother." How did he know? Maybe she was deceiving him! [Maybe she pretended to be compassionate in order to trick the king.] A bat kol went forth and said: "She is his mother." [B. MAKKOT 23B]*

The bat kol appears as a voice of personal intuition, of prophecy within embodied human experience. Solomon knows which woman is the child's mother, even if he cannot prove it. The bat kol precipitates Solomon's own words ("She is his mother") as if the Divine Presence is Herself without speech, and relies on the words of humans to express prophetic truth. In this story, the bat kol is a kind of prophetic voice, defending a powerless human voice with Her own.

## The Mystics in the Middle Ages

In the medieval era, a variety of women prophetesses lived in mystical communities such as Safed in Israel, and within the Sabbatean and Frankist sects. Hayyim Vital, student of the kabbalist Isaac Luria, documented many of these women. While they did not have shrines, these prophetesses continued the tradition of oracular speech that we see in the Bible.

Rachel Aberlin lived in Safed in the 1570's and 80's. Her husband had been close to Luria, and she herself was the sister of a prominent kabbalist. Aberlin saw visions. Vital reports that as he was preaching in Safed in 1578,

Aberlin saw a pillar of fire above his head and the prophet Elijah supporting him as he spoke. Vital writes:

This woman is accustomed to seeing visions, demons, souls and angels, and most everything she says is correct, from her childhood and through her adulthood.<sup>3</sup>

Vital and Aberlin became close friends, sharing and interpreting dreams. Aberlin became Vital's supporter and patron. She had a *hatzeir/court* in Safed where kabbalists could meet and work with one another. The mystics were far more comfortable with prophetesses than were the earlier sages. This may have been because they valued spontaneous experiences of God, and also because their respect for the divine feminine made them somewhat more willing to pay attention to women's spiritual lives.

While in Damascus, Vital met another prophetess: a young woman, daughter of Raphael Anav. He reported in his diary that the spirit of a sage possessed the girl and gave instructions to the community concerning repentance and the Messiah. The spirit departed the following week, but the young woman continued to see visions and dreams, by means of "souls and the departed, and angels, and also by means of that spirit on occasion." She even spoke with Isaac Luria himself. These experiences are all congruent with kabbalists' beliefs about mystics channeling souls.

At one point, the daughter of Anav summoned a local kabbalist (who had offended many local female ecstasies), invited four deceased sages and an angel to enter the assembly through a mirror, and criticized the sage at length. She then went on to chastise the community for its moral failings, and concluded by denouncing Israel Najara, a prominent mystic poet, for sexual transgressions. In her role as spirit channel and enforcer of ethics, the daughter of Anav continued the fiery voices of the prophets.

### **Modern Incarnations**

Today, we might see women with a strong sense of mission and justice as prophetesses. In that sense, activist Jewish women like abolitionist Ernestine Rose, anarchist Emma Goldman, and feminist Betty Friedan stand in the prophetic tradition. These women also spoke spontaneous oracles regarding the inequalities of their day.

Visionaries, artists, and poets who uncover hidden truths and expose them to our sight may also be acting as prophets. Kohenet Institute graduate

Ellie Barbarash has been a community organizer, labor activist, mother, and musician. Her drum and flute grace many Kohenet Institute ceremonies, and she also engages the practice of speaking truth to power. She writes:

The prophetess fills in what is missing: what's not said but everyone feels, when you know something's there but no one will talk about it. Talking about patterns that need to be understood. Disclosing and unpacking half-truths so everyone can witness them dissolving into clarity. Courage is a sacred language. Telling the truth is a form of prayer.

Many modern Jews (including Freud) have found value in paying attention to visions discovered in dreams. Modern Hebrew priestesses continue to dreams and visions as a source of intuitive wisdom and iconoclastic ideas. Elisheva, a Kohenet Institute graduate, had a dream while in Turkey that speaks to the buried yet partially visible feminine at the base of human history:

Traveling in Turkey, I had a powerful dream about a bearded father busying himself in the house, and I went down to the basement, in the rocks, underground to find my mother writing and working next to a goddess shrine. The symbols speak for themselves.

This dream reflects a task of the priestess: recovering the face of the feminine buried in our tradition and in human history. The mother in this dream is not one mother but all of our mothers. The basement is the underworld, the world of the earth and the sacred feminine, and the basement is also the repressed image of the mother at the core of civilization.

At the Kohenet Hebrew Priestess Institute, we frequently use spirit journeys like the one below to create a kind of waking dream. In this way, we access some of the sense of spontaneous prophecy that our ancestors once had. We also pay attention to our dreams, and engage in dream circles, dream incubation, and other rituals related to dreaming. These practices and others like them were part of the traditions of biblical prophets and prophetesses, talmudic sages, and male and female kabbalists. Kohenet co-founder Taya Shere writes below about dream practices everyone can use to enhance the oracular power of their dreams.

## Spirit Journey: Discovering the Prophetess Within

You are standing at the entrance to a cave in the desert. You hear a drumbeat within the cave. You enter. At the center of the cave is a wellspring. Drink the water. Feel its healing power within you. As you drink from the well, a woman appears beside you. She guides you to each of the four walls of the cave.

On or near the eastern wall, you see young Miriam waiting by the Nile. The basket with the baby Moses floats near her. Your guide urges you: "Reach out and pluck a reed from the Nile." You bring the reed to your lips and blow. Notice the sound: high or low, sweet or sad, mellow or sharp. "Your song," the guide says. You blow and listen carefully, honoring this song.

You turn. On or near the northern wall, you see Miriam dancing by the sea. Many women with drums accompany her. A drum is at your feet. "Your heart," the guide says to you. Strike the drum and listen to its sound. This is the strength of your heart. Give this strength an honored place inside you.

You turn. On or near the western wall, you see Miriam alone in the desert. Her skin is white, scaly, diseased. Sand blows around her. She is writing in a scroll. "Your truth," your guide tells you. Read the scroll, which contains your story. Take as much time as you need.

On or near the southern wall, you see Miriam as an old woman resting inside a tent. Her eyes are closed. Around her are many loved ones. At the foot of her bed are many pebbles. "Your dream," says the guide. You close your eyes, and Miriam shares with you an image from her final dream.

Your guide brings you back to the well at the center of the room. Thank her. She places her hands on your head and utters a blessing, giving you the gift of inspiration. As you reach the cave's entrance, turn back and look. The well is gone. A wind lifts you over the desert sands and carries you back to yourself.

# She Who Receives Visions: The Practice of Dreamwork

*Taya Shere*

We read in the Talmud [B. BERAKHOT 55B], “A dream uninterpreted is a letter unread.” According to the Zohar, the interpretation of a dream is more important than the dream itself. We offer here core practices of a *Ba’alat Halom*, a Dream Priestess. May your exploration of dreams and their power bring healing and transformation.

## **Sacred Sleep**

Practice a regular sleep routine. Wake and retire each day at roughly the same time. You might offer traditional Jewish prayers right before sleep (such as the Shma and surrounding evening prayers) and first thing upon awakening (Modah Ani). Or, you might craft prayers to recite regularly, or offer spontaneous prayer each evening and morning.

## **Keeping a Dream Journal**

Keep your dream journal by your bed, with pen and flashlight. Recording dreams as soon as possible upon waking, before getting out of bed, is ideal to maintain the most detail. If you are not able to record your dream immediately upon awakening, do so before leaving the house that day.

While the most common way to record dreams is in writing, work in whatever medium is most resonant for you when you are recording your dreams. Sketch, paint, sculpt in a way that captures the story of your dream.

## **Dream Incubation**

Basic dream incubation — asking for insight through dream — includes clearing your mind before sleep, and grounding and centering yourself. The practice of *sh’eilat halom* is asking a dream question. As you are drifting asleep, call to mind your dream question, along with a prayerful request for guidance. You might bring your prayer shawl, a sacred text, or another ritual object to bed with you in support of your dreaming journey.

The practice of mystical weeping is a dream incubation technique discussed by Isaac Luria, Chaim Vital and later Hasidic teachers. Falling asleep weeping is said to clear the soul and to open one to receiving a dream message.

### **Dreaming in Community**

Eve Ilsen, in the tradition of kabbalist Colette Aboulker-Muscat, leads a group dream incubation in which participants sleep in the same space, heads all pointing to the center. They are guided in a day-review practice and also an incubation prayer before sleep.

Dream circles are groups of friends who gather regularly or semi-regularly to support each other in dreaming. Dream circle practices and rituals may include prayer, space for dream sharing, and interpretation or dialogue. Gather a dream circle with folks in your community. Or, try a dream *hevruta*: having a friend with whom you share and interpret your dreams.

### **Dream Interpretation**

In Kohenet dream circles, in accordance with the kabbalistic teachings of the contemporary mystic Colette, we receive and respond to a dream as if it were our own. When we hear a dream, we listen to it imagining that we had dreamed it. When we respond, we begin, “In my dream of this dream...” We share what we notice or are moved by, or what we feel is important symbology.

The Talmud records the practice of convening a Dream Court, invoking the support of three trusted friends to transform a disturbing dream for good by proclaiming it so. Another dream ritual is to ask a trusted spiritual teacher or companion to provide a positive interpretation of a frightening dream. For a text of a simple Dream Court Ritual, see *The Jewish Book of Dreaming* by Vanessa Ochs and Elizabeth Ochs. When a Dream Court is not feasible, it is traditional to pray for the transformation of one’s dream in a prayer service during the priestly blessing.

### **Healing and Medicine Dreams**

On occasion, we are gifted with healing or medicine dreams. These dreams have a unique quality, a sacred energy and a physicality to them. When we awaken, we are aware that simply by the act of dreaming, something has transformed. Medicine dreams are gifts from Spirit. Upon receiving them, it is appropriate to give prayers or make offerings of gratitude.

## Resources

For a wonderful overview of dreaming practices, work with *The Jewish Dream Book* by Vanessa Ochs and Elizabeth Ochs. For dream-supportive prayer practices, read *Entering the Temple of Dreams* (evening prayer) or *Minding the Temple of the Soul* (morning prayer) by Tamar Frankiel. *Kabbalah and the Power of Dreaming: Awakening the Visionary Life*, by Catherine Shainberg, is in the tradition of French-Algerian kabbalist Colette Aboulker-Muscat.

### NOTES:

- 1 See Jeff A. Benner, "Letters missing from the Hebrew alphabet." [http://www.ancient-hebrew.org/4\\_missing.html](http://www.ancient-hebrew.org/4_missing.html).
- 2 Ismar J. Peritz, "Woman in the Ancient Hebrew Cult," in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 17 (1898), p. 111-148.
- 3 J.H. Chajes, *Between Worlds: Dybbuks, Exorcists, and Early Modern Judaism* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), p. 114.

This article has been adapted from the fourth chapter of *The Hebrew Priestess: Ancient and New Visions of Jewish Women's Spiritual Leadership*, by Jill Hammer and Taya Shere (Ben Yehuda Press, forthcoming 2014).

**RABBI JILL HAMMER, Ph.D.**, is the Director of Spiritual Education at the Academy for Jewish Religion, and the co-founder of the Kohenet Hebrew Priestess Institute. She is the author of six books, including *Sisters at Sinai: New Tales of Biblical Women* (Jewish Publication Society, 2001) and *The Jewish Book of Days: A Companion for All Seasons* (Jewish Publication Society, 2006). She is a ritualist, a poet, and an essayist. Her work has been published in journals and anthologies such as *Lilith Magazine*, *Mitzvah Stories*, *Religion and Literature*, *The Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, and *The New Jewish Feminism*. She lives in Manhattan with her wife and daughter.

**TAYA SHERE**, co-founder of the Kohenet Institute, plays passionately in the realms of transformative ritual and embodied vocalization. Her chant albums, *Wild Earth Shebrew*, *Halleluyah All Night*, and *Torah Tantrika* have been heralded as "cutting-edge mystic medicine music." Taya is a Somatic Experiencing Practitioner and a student of Continuum Movement. Taya guides life-cycle ceremonies in and around Washington, DC. She makes home, music, and other magic in Oakland, CA.