

PLATE A

All the Women of the Bible

The top page, a paper cut, consists of the names of the Four Mothers and two quotations from Proverbs praising women.

The wisest of women builds her house. (Proverbs 14:1) He who finds a wife has found happiness. (Proverbs 18:22)

On the base page are the names of all 115 women mentioned in the Bible, in the order in which they appear.

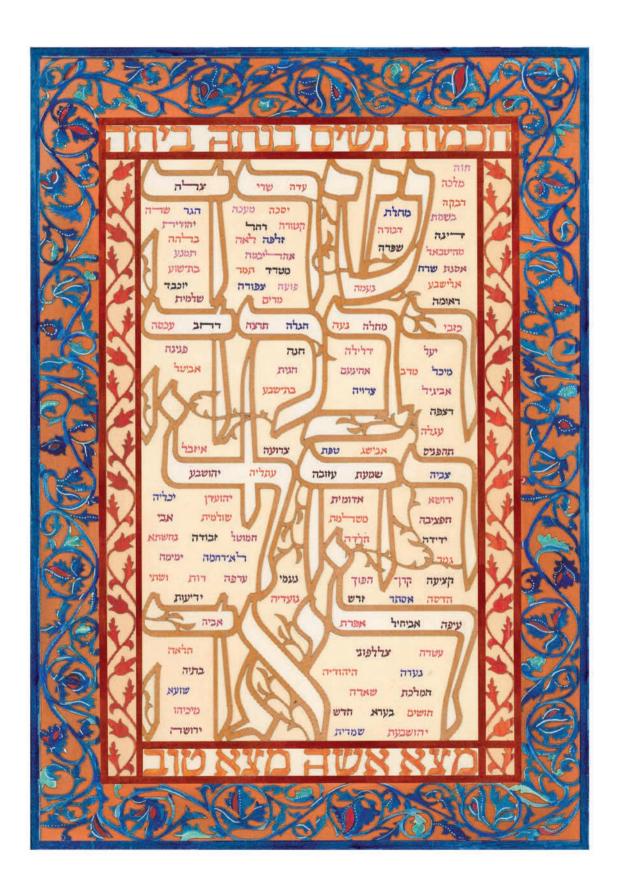




PLATE B

Eshet Hayil

The first text in the book is the classic *Eshet Hayil*.

Eshet Hayil are the first two words of the twenty-two verse poem with which King Solomon concludes the Book of Proverbs. The initial letters of each line form an acrostic of the Hebrew alphabet. This poem is customarily recited in tribute to the woman of the household as part of the introduction to the *Shabbat* meal on Friday evenings, after returning from synagogue and singing *Shalom Aleichem*.

The color of the squares highlighting the initial letters gradually moves in twenty-two steps through the spectrum of the primary and intermediate colors, beginning with red, moving to yellow, then to blue and returning to red. This cycle serves as a metaphor for the spectrum of womanly virtues.

The Kabbalists imbued the practice of reciting *Eshet Hayil* on Friday night with additional meaning by regarding it as a welcome for the *Shehinah*, the feminine manifestation of the Divine Presence on earth. The artistic rendering here captures this merging of tribute to the finite and infinite by weaving throughout the poem the entire micrographic text of *Shir Hashirim*, the biblical book of the Song of Songs. *Shir Hashirim* portrays the great love story of God and His people in the language of a human love story. It is traditionally read at the onset of the Sabbath and on Passover, the anniversary of God's initial redemption of His people.

X A woman of valor, who can find? Her value is far beyond pearls. ⊃ Her husband's heart relies on her and he shall lack no fortune. λ She does him good and not evil, all the days of her life. \Box She seeks wool and flax, and works with her hands willingly. ☐ She is like the merchant ships, she brings her bread from afar. ☐ She arises while it is still night, and gives food to her household and a portion to her maidservants. **T** She plans for a field, and buys it. With the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. \sqcap She girds her loins in strength, and makes her arms strong. υ She knows that her merchandise is good. Her candle does not go out at night. " She sets her hands to the distaff, and holds the spindle in her hands. \supset She extends her hands to the poor, and reaches out her hand to the needy. She fears not for her household because of snow, because her whole household is warmly dressed. \(\mathbb{D}\) She makes covers for herself, her clothing is fine linen and purple. I Her husband is known at the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land. ∇ She makes a cloak and sells it, and she delivers aprons to the merchant. y Strength and honor are her clothing, she smiles at the future. **5** *She opens her mouth in wisdom, and the lesson of kindness is on her tongue.* Y She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. 7 Her children rise and praise her, her husband lauds her. 7 Many women have done worthily, but you surpass them all. $\ensuremath{\mathcal{U}}$ Charm is deceptive and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears God shall be praised. \square Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.

PLATE 1

Hannah's Supplication

The opening of the Book of Samuel tells the story of Samuel's mother, Hannah, who suffered terrible anguish as a result of her inability to bear a child. The Bible records two of her prayers, one in petition for a child and the other in celebration of his birth. The rabbis viewed Hannah's prayers as the paradigm for private prayer, and the *Talmud* derives from Hannah's model various principles as to the form and content of our prayers and the manner in which they are to be recited.

So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drank. And Eli the priest sat upon a seat by the gate post of the temple of the Lord. And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the Lord, and wept bitterly. And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant, and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give to Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head. And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the Lord, that Eli observed her mouth. And Hannah spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought that she was drunk. (1 Samuel 1:9-14)

Hannah prayed in the Holy Tabernacle, the seat of Eli, the High Priest. The illumination of Hannah's Prayer is a reflection of this setting. The twelve stones of the *hoshen*, the High Priest's breastplate, have been set in the border as pieces of women's jewelry. Also included in the border is a *menorah*, a fixture of the Tabernacle, and later of the Temple, and a Jewish star broken in two, symbolizing Hannah's broken heart. The branches within the border represent the fulfillment of Hannah's prayer: The buds at the bottom of the page move outward and upward and are transformed from buds to leaves, to flowers, and finally to fruit at the top. The text around the border quotes the Talmudic passages which deal with the characteristics of prayer, as derived from Hannah's prayer.





"... Who made me according to His will"

The top box of this plate contains the text of the morning blessing recited daily by women:

Blessed are You, O Lord, King of the universe, Who made me according to His will.

The text in the surrounding border quotes the biblical descriptions of the creation of woman. The first chapter of the Bible presents the general description, "God created man in His image, in the image of God He created them, male and female He created them." The second chapter gives a more detailed description of how woman was created from man's body. The two columns that "support" the blessing are taken from the rabbinic *midrash* that elaborates on the biblical descriptions.

"And the Lord God made of the side"

Rabbi Yehoshua of Sakhnin quoted Rabbi Levi: "[God] considered from which part of the body to create her.

He said: 'I shall not create her from the head, so that she shall not bear her head too proudly; nor from the eye, so that she shall not be inquisitive; nor from the ear, so that she will not be an eavesdropper; nor from the neck, so that she will not be haughty; nor from the mouth, so that she will not be a gossip; nor from the heart, so that she will not be envious; nor from the leg, so that she will not be a gadabout. Rather - from the side, which is a place that is always covered'. Thus, each and every organ that He considered using to create her was telling her, 'Be a modest woman; a modest woman!' ".

(Bereishit Rabba 18)

"And He brought her to Adam"

This teaches us that the Holy One, blessed be He, arranged wedding attendants for Adam. Rabbi Yehuda said in the name of Rabbi Simon: "[The angels] Michael and Gavriel were Adam's wedding attendants." (Bereishit Rabba 8)

They said in the name of Rabbi Shimon Ben Yohai: "[God] adorned her like a bride, and then brought her to him." Rabbi Hamma Bar Hanina said: "Do you think that He simply brought her to him under a carob tree, or under a sycamore tree? [Certainly not,] rather, He adorned her with twenty-four types of jewelry and then brought her to him, and this is as it is written: You were in Eden, the garden of God, with every precious stone covering you'".

(Yehezkel 28:13) (Bereishit Rabba 8)

Separating Hallah

Blessed are You, O Lord, King of the universe Who has sanctified us with His mitzvot and commanded us to take hallah

This is the first of three plates that focus on the three *mitzvot* that are traditionally viewed as associated with women. *Hallah* is the part of the dough separated out as a gift for the priest when baking (Num. 15:7-21). The special loaves baked for *Shabbat* and holiday meals are called *hallot*, as their preparation provides the opportunity to perform the duty of separating out the *hallah* portion. *Niddah* is the status of a woman during and following her menstrual period. *Hadlakat nerot* is the lighting of *Shabbat* and holiday candles. The blessings associated with these *mitzvot* are often referred to by their acronym *Hannah*, honoring Hannah the mother of the Prophet Samuel, whose prayer is seen by the rabbis as the model for personal prayer.

Since the destruction of the Temple, *hallah* cannot be given to the priests, as they cannot observe the Temple-related laws of ritual purity which would allow them to eat the sacred portion. Instead, symbolically, a small part of the dough is separated and burned at the time of baking. The text of the blessing said at that time is followed by the traditional prayer said by the woman after performing the *mitzvah*. The surrounding border evokes the colors of wheat sheaves and baked bread. While this *mitzvah* is performed whenever one bakes bread, we often associate "taking *hallah*" with baking *hallot* for the *Shabbat* table, and so a braided *hallah* has been placed at the bottom center of the page. The text is framed by the border design of an illuminated 17th century Italian *ketubah* (marriage contract) and evokes the imagery of *Shabbat* as the "partner of God". The "carved stone relief" of the border testifies to the permanent eternal covenant between the Jewish People and God.

May it be Your will, Lord our God and God of our forefathers, that the commandment of separating hallah be regarded as though I had fulfilled it in all its details and requirements, and that the lifting of the hallah, which I now hold, be considered like the sacrifice that was offered upon the altar, and which was accepted with favor. And just as in former times the hallah was given to the Cohen, and that served as atonement for one's sins, so may it be an atonement for my sins, that I may be as one born anew, clean of transgression and sin, that I might fulfill the commandment of the holy Shabbat and these holy days, with my husband (and our children), to be nourished by the sanctity of these days. May the reward for the commandment of hallah be that our children always be nourished from the hand of the Holy One, blessed be He, in His great mercy and kindness, and with great love. May the commandment of hallah be accepted as though I had given a tithe. And just as I hereby fulfill the commandment of hallah with all my heart, so may the mercy of the Holy One, blessed be He, be aroused to protect me at all times from sorrow and from suffering, Amen.





PLATE 4

Prayer Before Going to the Mikve

Blessed are You, O Lord, King of the universe Who has sanctified us with His mitzvot and commanded us to immerse ourselves.

The traditional observances pertaining to the woman's *niddah* status, during and immediately following her menstrual period, deal with one of the most intimate aspects of Jewish life. A woman's *niddah* period testifies to the loss of potential life - the loss of a child who has not been conceived - and, as such, she is symbolically "tinged with death". Since death represents the paradigm of ritual impurity that can be removed only by immersion in a *mikve*, a pool of "living water", the woman must immerse herself in a *mikve* before she engages in the potential creation of life by resuming sexual relations with her husband.

The text of the traditional prayer is surrounded by the aqua blue of water and is followed by the meditation said by women as they leave the *mikve (Huppat Hatanim*, Rabbi Raphael Meldola, Livorno, 1797 edition). The series of borders evokes the barrier between the couple that is washed away by the living waters. There is a special *mitzvah* for the couple to have marital relations the night of her immersion, and the micrographic text weaving through the waters of the border spells out the traditional meditation for a sanctified and fruitful sexual union, one that will result in a healthy child.

Master of the world: You have sanctified Your nation, Israel, from all the nations, and commanded them to purify themselves from their defilement and to bathe their bodies in pure water. Lord my God, may this bathing and immersion be pleasing and acceptable to You like the purification of all the pure, righteous women of Israel who purify and immerse themselves at the proper time. Hear my voice, for You hear the prayer of Your nation, Israel. May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart find favor before You, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

PLATE 5

Candle Lighting

Blessed are You, O Lord, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His mitzvot and commanded us to kindle the Shabbat candles

Shabbat is welcomed into the home on Friday night with the lighting of candles. The traditional blessing is in the central border. It is surrounded by one of the traditional prayers added after lighting the candles which comes from "The Prayer Book for the Married Woman", written for Yehudit Kutcher Coen, Italy, 1786 (5546), and is now kept in the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York. The blessing is wrapped in the welcoming arms of flowers which traditionally adorn the *Shabbat* table. This design rests on a royal blue background, evoking the presence of the *Shabbat* Queen. The lower text is another prayer recited after the candles are lit. The verses inside the outer border are the verses from Psalm 119 that begin with the Hebrew letter *nun*, the first letter of *ner* - candle.

Furthermore, the design incorporates two references to the idea of *shlom bayit*, harmony and peace in the home, a concept traditionally associated with the *Shabbat* candles and the aura of tranquility and spirituality which envelops the Jewish home with the onset of *Shabbat*. At the top of the page, set into the blue filigree border, is a quote from the *Shulchan Aruch*, the Code of Jewish Law (*Orach Chaim* 263:3), based upon a discussion in the *Talmud* (Tractate Shabbat 23b) which states: "One who does not have enough money to buy both *Shabbat* candles and wine for *Kiddush* should buy candles, because there is no *shlom bayit* without the light of the candles." Around the bottom edge of the page, also set into the blue filigree, is a statement of Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel (*Avot d'Rabbi Natan*, 28:3), proclaiming the importance of *shlom bayit*: "One who establishes peace in the home is considered by God to have established peace among all the people of Israel."

May it be Your will, Lord our God and God of our forefathers, that the Temple be rebuilt soon in our days, and grant us our portion in Your Torah; there we shall serve You in awe as in ancient times and as in former years. Then the offering of Yehuda and of Yerushalayim will please God, as in ancient times and as in former years. May it be Your will, Lord my God and God of my forefathers, that You be gracious to me and to my sons and daughters, and to my father and mother, and to my husband, and to all my loved ones, and grant us - and all of Israel - good, long life; remember us for goodness and blessing, recall us for salvation and mercy, bless us with great blessings, make our home complete, and cause Your Presence to dwell among us. Grant me the privilege of raising children and grandchildren who are wise and understanding, who love God and fear the Lord, people of truth, holy offspring who cleave to God and bring light to the world through Torah and good deeds and all manner of labor in service of the Creator. I pray You, hear my supplication, in the merit of Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel and Leah, our matriarchs. Cause our light to illuminate and never be extinguished, and may Your Countenance shine that we may be saved, Amen.









Gott fun Avraham

Shabbat is bid farewell on Saturday night with the *Havdalah* ceremony, said over a cup of wine, with spices and a glowing candle in hand. Before the recitation of *Havdalah*, it was customary in many European communities for women to recite "*Gott fun Avraham*", a Yiddish *tehinah*, a non-canonnical petitional prayer in the vernacular, attributed to Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev. The prayer is framed with the *Havdalah* blessing, which separates the light blue hues of the evening from the darker blue of the weekday. The micrography presents texts from the Saturday night service at the conclusion of the *Shabbat* in the shape of a spice box with its fragrance in the form of blessings surrounding it and flowing upwards.

God of Avraham, of Yitzhak, and of Yaacov, protect Your people Israel from all evil in Your praise as the beloved Holy Shabbat takes leave. May the coming week arrive bringing perfect faith, faith in scholars, love of and attachment to good friends, attachment to the Creator, Blessed be He, faith in Your Thirteen Basic Principles, and in the complete and close redemption, speedily in our days, in the resurrection of the dead and in the prophecy of our teacher Moses,

peace be upon him.

Master of the Universe, since You are the One Who gives strength to praise You, and to serve only You and no other.

May this week arrive for kindness, for good fortune, for blessing, for success, for good health, for wealth and honor, and for children, life and sustenance, for us and all Israel.

Amen.