

## **Cheselyn Amato**

### **Reflections on being a Jewish woman and an artist in relation to the Torah**

I love the Torah. I love it because of the magnificently compelling and enduring imagery that sweeps me off my feet – the unyielding joy of layered meaning – the unfailing way that the spirit, mind, heart and body are invited, encouraged, delighted to engage in a magnificent poetics of themselves – there is no greater way to see oneself and the world around us. I love it because it is so strange and difficult, a document that chronicles the struggle to choose the way of love over so many other ways of being and becoming. The Torah is a testament, a witness itself, to human being's effort to become more whole, to devise tools that can be used over and over again; that stay strong and dependable, that can be improved and renewed, whose limitations and failures are admitted, revealed and evaluated, whose successes are celebrated and sung. The Torah is evidence that human being is a fluid and evolving thing; it is a way of being in relationship; it is a way of striving to love and be loved.

I myself am a woman with one foot in consciousness that attaches with infinite and undated origin to Jewish being - back to the beginning, to the emergence of Kabbalah, to the waves of immigration out of Europe and around the world during the late 1800's and early 1900's to the United States in particular, to the cataclysm of the Holocaust to this moment. And, my other foot is in a consciousness that is intensely attracted to and engaged by the contemporary moment – by the sheer state of collective human being, undifferentiated, without identifiers, without signifiers, per se. I am a woman borne of feminism who has lived the life of imagination and the life of procreation – I have exercised/experienced both external and internal powers of creation – in my work as an artist and as the mother of children. Permission to straddle both kinds of creating has been given to me during the course of my life – and a bit crazy-making it is.

Loving the Torah that does not know how, at times, to speak about woman as we would wish, as we deserve, is painful. There is an imbalance on the literal level that I cannot make vanish...feels sometimes like living with incompatible loyalties – the language – the voices that concretized the Torah were limited as we all are as humans. Part of the beauty of Torah is the limitations that cannot even be avoided in it, in the Word itself – there will always be something unjust in this world when compared with the light of justice in whose image we strive. Still, sometimes the way it appears – how things are – does make me sad and scared...but I know that the dance and mystery of the feminine and masculine dimensions are critical to, are key to, the process of becoming one and whole. The struggle with the feminine that goes on in the Torah tells us about where our greatest vulnerability is as a creation in the form that we are. Still, I want Shekinah's voice to be fulfilled now, and so we will make space for Shekinah to dwell amongst us in our Torah of Indwelling!! Thank you, Women of the Book, for the time has come!