

Melissa Raphael

Ananei-kavod / Clouds of Glory: A Jewish Perspective on the Angel of Beauty Moving Over the Face of the Female Religious Subject

When the ethnographer Frida Furman asked Jewish women in a neighbourhood beauty parlour in Chicago how they felt about looking Jewish, most of them thought, or had been told, that they looked Jewish. But it wasn't what they wanted to hear. A combination of American anti-Semitism and the Americanization of Jewry had conveyed the message that Jewish looks were undesirable.¹ The aesthetic norms to which these client-friends aspired were not ethnic norms, let alone theological ones. This is hardly surprising. As I argued in my recent Jewish theology of art, the paucity – perhaps even impossibility – of images of Jewish women *as Jews* even in modern Jewish art and photography suggests that the making of images of Jewish women is effectively doubly discouraged under the Second Commandment to that of men. The reasons for this are at least two-fold. Biblical idol polemics sexualise the sight of a woman, making looking at her body dangerously akin to looking at (“lusting after”) an idol.² And among observant Jews female appearance is regulated by the requirements of modesty (*tznius*) which hides the female body as a means of preserving the male sole claim to its sexuality and reproductivity.

Yet despite the Second Commandment, images of pious Jewish men as full religious subjects are repeatedly reproduced in modern Jewish art as objects of aesthetic appreciation (perhaps most notably in the work of the Austro-Hungarian painter Isidor Kaufmann (1853-1921), but also in the work of Marc Chagall, David Bomberg, and others too numerous to mention). In both religious as well as secular Jewish culture, beautiful images of the Orthodox Jewish male at prayer, study or in ecstatic dance have become, both loosely

¹ Frida Kerner Furman, *Facing the Mirror: Older Women and Beauty Shop Culture* (Continuum: London and NY 2009), 65-90.

² Melissa Raphael, *Judaism and the Visual Image: A Jewish Theology of Art* (Continuum: London and NY 2009), 65-90.

and precisely speaking, iconic. Rabbinic literature acknowledges, indeed lists, the rabbis who were not only learned but beautiful.³

By contrast, images of Jewish women as religious subjects and agents of revelation are extremely rare and probably almost un-paintable (as in Isidor Kaufmann's early twentieth-century *Girl in Synagogue*, *Girl with Flowers in her Hair*, *Friday Evening*). Where the sexual distraction of Orthodox Jewish women's religious performance requires the screening of her public visibility, it remains uncertain what it could mean for the female Jewish face and body to disclose the sublimity of its own sacral agency. Without priestly garments, there is no role or costume for the Orthodox woman's body to be made Jewish; that is, accommodated within the Jewish visual tradition. This is also, if differently, true of the non-Orthodox Jewish woman since the visual sacral cues of the liberal traditions are originally derived from those of Orthodox men, or these have been repudiated in the name of reform.

The figuration of the female sublime is not only an issue for Jewish women. Within the secular academy, feminist aesthetics has asked if it is possible to represent women using feminist artistic practices that are non-objectifying. So too, the representation of women as embodiments of the divine has been a critical element of the spiritual feminist or theological project,⁴ just as it has been in that of Christian feminism. For despite Christianity's incarnational theology,

“There is no iconographical tradition in the Christian West that identifies spiritual struggle or the cultivation of a centred religious self with the female body. Here too, the female body (other than that of Mary) is represented ‘as the object of fascination and scorn’ not as the ‘revelation and subjectivity [that would] correct and complete the Christian affirmation of the body.’”⁵

The degree to which a feminist aesthetics, theological or otherwise, can prevail over an ever more pornographic culture of representation is open to debate. But one might be encouraged by Elizabeth Grosz's conviction that:

³ See further, e.g., Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (University of California: Berkeley 1993), 213-217 and *passim*.

⁴ Cynthia Eller, “Divine Objectification: The Representation of Goddesses and Women in Feminist Spirituality,” in: *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 16 (2000), 23-44, here 23-24.

⁵ Margaret Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Vintage: New York 1991), 144.

“Women’s specificities, their corporeality and subjectivities, are not inherently resistant to representation or depiction. They may be unrepresentable in a culture in which the masculine can represent others only as versions of itself, where the masculine relies on the subordination of the feminine. But this is not logically or biologically fixed. It can be contested and changed.”⁶

But change will only come slowly, if it comes at all, since all beauty, not only female beauty, has long been theologically peripheral. Grace Jantzen was right that

“Perhaps nothing is more indicative of the displacement of beauty in the symbolic of Western modernity than the refusal of theologians and scholars of religion to enter into serious engagement with the biblical theme of beauty.”⁷

History is about politics and war, about “what happens”. Beauty does not “happen”, is not construed as an event, and is therefore not a part of “history.”⁸ In a manner wholly consistent with the theological aesthetic of the Hebrew Bible, Jantzen affirmed that beauty is the result of God’s activity, not of God’s essence.⁹ With Isaiah, Jantzen urged us to “give unto them beauty for ashes” (Is 61:3). Theology should turn its attention from the dark sublimity of sacrificed, burnt bodies; burnt cities – the bitter end of hope – to the joyous creation of new things that flourish and shine forth a beauty in which we can delight.¹⁰

Jantzen’s theological aesthetic is not, however, unprecedented and discourse on beauty is becoming ever more prominent in the academy. As noted by Aiden Nichols, “What we are dealing with in theological aesthetics is the study of how we come, enraptured, to see God, the world and ourselves...with new eyes, thanks to our perception of the form of God’s self-disclosure.” For all that is lovely is so “only in so far as God shines forth in it.”¹¹ Jewish thought

⁶ Elizabeth Grosz, “Notes Toward a Corporeal Feminism,” in: *Australian Feminist Studies* 5 (1987), 1-17, here 15.

⁷ Grace M. Jantzen, edited by Jeremy Carrette / Morny Joy, *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* (Routledge: London and New York 2009) vol. 2: *Violence to Eternity*, 138.

⁸ Jantzen, *Death and the Displacement of Beauty*, 60.

⁹ Jantzen, *Death and the Displacement of Beauty*, 140.

¹⁰ Jantzen, *Death and the Displacement of Beauty*, 141-145.

¹¹ Aiden Nichols, “Von Balthasar’s Aims in his Theological Aesthetics,” in: *Heythrop Journal* XL (1999), 409-423, here 415-416. Gerard Manley Hopkins’ 1918 poem *God’s Grandeur* conveys much the same; for him the world was: “charged with the grandeur of God./ It will flame out, like shining from shook foil/... Because the Holy Ghost over the bent/ World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.”

occasionally shares (indeed, finds) the same trajectory. The biblical language of glory is the language of revelation (*gilui*) and if God is the *fons et origo* of beauty then God's self-revelation in the human (for Jews as image or *tselem*, not incarnation) is definitively and dynamically beautiful. God's glory is, as A. J. Heschel affirms, an act and a process, not an essence or substance of God. Divine glory is "the effulgence of a living presence,"¹² which is, of course, identified as the Shekhinah, a female image for the immanence of God.¹³

And there seems little doubt that women's private spirituality affords experiences where the world, including their own bodies, feels charged with the glory of God. One morning on a retreat, the Christian writer Roberta Bondi looked into the mirror after her shower – wet hair trickling down her nose – and just for once found herself beautiful:

"For a single moment, I had seen myself as God sees me and sees each of us. Stripped of all of the daily judgments we render against ourselves and each other... In short, what I saw that day in the mirror was the image of God within me, which makes each of us beautiful just as we are."¹⁴

But what interests me is how private epiphanies before steamed-up bathroom mirrors might become part of the public religious perception of female beauty. I want to know if female appearance can be more than that of hopelessly over-determined form alone; if the weight of negative sexual and moral associations borne by female appearance will, in fact, overwhelm any theonomous, meta-patriarchal possibility that it can become, of itself, a revelation event. In what consists the numinous impression – the *mysterium, tremendum et fascinans* of the female face?

There are, in fact, occasional scriptural indications of how human appearance can reveal an agent's relation to God; where the beauty that is the image of God in the human becomes a public object of experience. In the synoptic gospels' narration of the Transfiguration, Jesus is clothed in a dazzling light that reveals the truth of his being – not merely to himself, but to others. His beauty or glory situates him publically in his own tradition and in his relationship to God (Matt 17:1-9, Mk 9:2-8, Lk 9:28-36). Clouds of glory moving across the sky

¹² Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (John Calder: London 1956), 82.

¹³ See further, Gen. R. 1:6; 1:10.

¹⁴ Roberta Bondi, "Shining with God's Glory: Surprised by Beauty," in: *Christian Century*, 29 August – 5 September 2001, 5-6, here 5.

inaugurate a new redemptive regime that carries with it a new aesthetic episteme: in their light and shadow the disciples see the body of Jesus standing in his own tradition, alongside the figures of Moses and Elijah, but at the same time, when their eyes recover from the blinding light, they see no one but the ordinary human figure of Jesus alone (Matt 17: 8). Jesus' glory was not a fixed attribute of his body *qua* object of perception, but was an impression of power, contextualised within and produced by the history of Israel's relationship with God.¹⁵

Yet the visual dimension of the human relationship with God has so far only been configured by men whose notion of the numinous impression under-emphasises what Rudolf Otto termed the *fascinans* or captivating element of the holy, and exalts in its crushing majesty. Concomitantly, the *fascinans* of female appearance is too often reduced to its power of sexual captivation. A particularly egregious case in point is the collection of glossy photographs taken by the Jewish actor Leonard Nimoy (better known as Spock, from the television series *Star Trek*), entitled *Shekhina*.¹⁶ In the publisher's press release, Nimoy is reported as having imagined Shekhina "as ubiquitous, watchful and often in motion." So far so good. But aesthetically, Shekhinah is put to very dubious use as a means of transmuting male sexual desire into a spiritual aspiration for the transcendent. In Nimoy's photographs the clothed female body "symbolizes transcendental truth, while the uncovered figure evokes profane desire." The "most intriguing" photographs, claims the press release, are "those in which the figure is half clothed, half naked, conveying the conflict of spirituality and desire." Women are, as ever, and Nimoy is applauded for the "profundity" of this representation, "Shekhina and succubus at once."¹⁷

Of course, Jewish scholars deride the book. As Zachary Braiterman wrote to me in a recent email,¹⁸ "Yeah, the Nimoy's are awful." But, he continued, "at issue, what does it mean to see God in a woman? The question is made more troubling when it's a man, a male artist, who wants to see God in a woman." Zak referred me back to the much more interesting case of the Jewish artist R. B. Kitaj's identification of his wife Sandra, a notable beauty, as the Shekhinah.¹⁹ In 1994 a retrospective exhibition of his work at the Tate

¹⁵ See further, Luke Ferretter, "The Power and the Glory: The Aesthetics of the Hebrew Bible," in: *Literature and Theology* 2 (2004), 123-138, here 126.

¹⁶ Leonard Nimoy / Donald Kuspit, *Shekhina* (Umbrage Editions: New York 2005).

¹⁷ http://www.umbragegallery.com/blog/?page_id=253 (accessed 3 August 2009)

¹⁸ Personal correspondence by email with Zachary Braiterman, 14.7.2009.

¹⁹ R.B. Kitaj was a member of the School of London, as he had dubbed it, with Lucian Freud, David Hockney and Francis Bacon.

Gallery, London, was panned by critics. Shortly afterwards, his wife, the American artist Sandra Fisher died at 47 of a brain haemorrhage. Kitaj blamed her death on his critics (claiming that they had tried to kill him, but got her instead.) After Sandra's death, Kitaj moved from London to Los Angeles, and in the years before his suicide in 2007, he came to identify her with the female spirit of God. Still passionately erotically attached to her, he painted a series of pictures depicting himself and Sandra as angelic beings (see for example, *Los Angeles No. 11*, *Los Angeles No. 3*, 2003).

In his *Second Diasporist Manifesto* (2007) Kitaj continued to identify Sandra as the winged Shekhinah, here a muse, accompanying and inspiring him as he worked. The present/absent face of Sandra had become at once the present/absent face of God. Quoting Gershom Scholem's studies of Jewish mysticism, where the Shekhinah is God's presence to a "specific time and event," Kitaj found Sandra/Shekhinah dwelling by the painting on his easel: "Her last portrait by me stands very close where I always glance at Her."²⁰

One cannot but be moved by Kitaj's account of what Sandra's beloved face lent to Kitaj and inspiration is, of course, literally the creative function of breath or spirit. But as Marlena Donahue points out in discussing Kitaj's construal of Sandra's role in his artistic production, the beautiful muse is problematic. The Master's beautiful female muse – "(read: lover, model, mistress, mother, madonna, maker of tuna sandwiches...while I do real work)" – is evident in countless male artists' "muse works." "The muse schtick" writes Donahue, comes with all the sexual-political liabilities that attend "passionate heterosexual love stories in which over and over guy chooses girl, guy beds girl, girl inspires guy and guy creates cultural artifact."²¹ Arguably, Kitaj uses the presence of the Shekhinah to console his loss and eternalise his wife's presence, but the identification says little about Sandra's own subjectivity or her own creativity as an artist.

Where Kitaj gives us a better clue to the function of the Shekhinah in the theological theorisation of female beauty is in seeing the Shekhinah as a principle of aesthetic differentiation. In verse 601 of *The Second Diasporist*

²⁰ R. B. Kitaj, *The Second Diasporist Manifesto: A New Kind of Long Poem in 615 Free Verses* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London 2007), vv. 575, 579. See also, David N. Myers, "Appreciation. R. B. Kitaj (1932–2007) and the Jewish Archive," in: *American Art*, 22 (Summer 2008) 2, 98–100.

²¹ Marlena Donohue, "R. B. KITAJ, May 21 – July 5, 2003 at L.A. Louver Gallery, Venice," <http://artscenecal.com/ArtistsFiles/KitajRB/KitajRBFile/KitajRBPics/RBKitaj4.html> (accessed 29 July 2009).

Manifesto he writes (and I am glossing, rather than quoting) that the Shekhinah receives all things as formless or shapeless but that in her they emerge figured into an image of the divine.

In other words, one might say that the light and shadow of the Shekhinah/glorious moves over the face as a principle of differentiation in which the beauty of the holy is set apart or differentiated from the attractiveness (sometimes considerable) of that which is aesthetically customary and available to common or profane view. The passing of the Shekhinah across the female face is a moment in which a divine-human relationship is announced. It is not a permanent alteration of form from one state to another that might be assessed according to the aesthetic norms of a given market, but a dynamic process in which the divine face/presence in the human is at once veiled and revealed. That is, when God becomes manifest on earth, clouds obscure the revelation event (Ex 19-21; Job 22:13; Lev 16:2).²² Just as in Psalm 18:11-12, where God's presence is screened and canopied by clouds dark and heavy with rain, the beauty in the female face must be protected from relentless over-exposure and from the assault of ever more sophisticated means of correcting and perfecting it. The clouds of glory are sometimes conceived in rabbinic tradition as a sukkah or shelter beneath which divine self-manifestation can occur; here they hide the female face at the same time as their presence announces its holiness. *Kavod* or glory is translatable from the Hebrew as "dignity," "honour" or "respect." As glory, female beauty proclaims the dignity of women as full human subjects made in the image of God: those who can bear the weight (another translation of *kavod*) of revelation.²³ Beauty and justice become a single process.²⁴

²² The clouds of glory are a recurrent motif in the narration of divine presence in the Hebrew Bible. Clouds, for example, hovered over the tents of the matriarchs (Gen. R. 60:16) and over the Israelites' desert tabernacle. Angels manifested themselves as cloud, and a pillar of cloud guided Israel by day at the Exodus (Ex 13:21, 14:19-24).

²³ Orit Kamir, *Israeli Honor and Dignity: Social Norms, Gender Politics and the Law* (Carmel Press: Jerusalem 2005), in Hebrew, acknowledges that glory, honour, dignity and respect are non-interchangeable but proximate meanings of *kavod*. In Zionist-Israeli honour culture, the Hebrew root *kvd* refers to honour – the vengeful disposition to shame or humiliate others who have shamed or humiliated oneself. But since 1992, with a precedent in 1980, another understanding of *kavod* operates in Israeli law – *kvd-ha-adam* – a socio-legal value translatable as human dignity. In contemporary Israeli legal and ethical discourse *kavod*, as human dignity, is sometimes claimed to be continuous with the theological value of *kavod* as signifying being made in the image of God.

²⁴ See further, Melissa Raphael, *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz: A Jewish Feminist Theology of the Holocaust* (Routledge: London and NY 2003), 105-106 and *passim*.

Elizabeth Grosz's study of the intelligence of the body and its surfaces notes, with Irigaray and others, that the dominant modes of representation favour that of the solid and determinate and problematize (the femaleness of) of the uncontrollable or fluid.²⁵ But this is where a counter-idolatrous account of female beauty begins. The beauty of the female face is that over which the cloud of the Shekhinah has moved and settled. No one sees this angel or messenger of beauty so neither the angel nor its object can become an idol or false god. What is knowable is only the transfigurative or redemptive effect of her passing over, just as Esther, hiding her identity/glory, wrapped in the queenly mantle of the Shekhinah, rises like the moon in the night sky defend her people.

Jewish tradition is not oblivious to the transfigurative possibility of female beauty. Granted, when the Talmud lists four women as having been of great beauty: Sarah, Abigail, Rahab and Esther, (BT Megillah 15a), this short list is contextualised within a discussion of female seductiveness. Yet Sarah's beauty can also be differently conceived. In the aggadic literature Sarah stays in her own ceremonial tent, a place of meeting sheltering beneath the clouds of glory. There she institutes the lighting of candles which invite Shekhinah's presence as the inauguration of the Sabbath. According to legend, Sarah's Sabbath candles were inextinguishable. And so too, is Sarah inexhaustibly beautiful – even as a very old woman she knows the erotic pleasure of youth (Gen 18:12).²⁶ In other words, the light of the Shekhinah differentiates between her beauty as narrated in scripture as an object of patriarchal desire and so a liability – even a danger – to herself and her husband that must be modestly concealed, and her beauty as a trans-historical radiance or vitality passed from one generation of women to the next.

Since writing *Judaism and the Visual Image*, I have become more and more convinced that the *unrepresentability* of Jewish women may therefore be – not an affront to women's religious subjectivity – but one of its possibilities. I say this not only in deference to the Second Commandment – though I think it rightly warns that images of the human are all too often alienations of the human – but for good feminist reasons as well. Cynthia Eller's rejection of the visualisation of female divinity in Goddess feminism assists my argument. Noting that spiritual feminism uses reproduced ancient images of goddesses

²⁵ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Indiana Press: Bloomington 1994), 195, 199, 205 and passim.

²⁶ See further, Leila Leah Bronner, *From Eve to Esther: Rabbinic Reconstructions of Biblical Women* (John Knox Press: Westminster 1994), 74-76.

as meditative symbols of the divine that women “feel themselves to resemble,” Eller urges that feminists might instead consider the benefits that might be gained from a kind of auto-iconoclasm.²⁷ Goddess feminists should be cautious in their self-representation because their iconographic choices may “leave in place a tradition in which goddesses can be trivialized – seen as the exotic deities of foreign cultures or the stuff of fantasy novels – while the male god hovers invisibly in the subconscious, exerting an at times overwhelming force.” The male God of western theism is invisible (even if in Christianity, his son incarnates him) and God-He is therefore higher in the divine pecking order than the saints, pagan deities and other numina whose power can be contained in and by their image. The power of the female divine may therefore be self-undermined or demoted by representation. Eller suggests that we refrain from imaging the Goddess because there should be something about female divinity that is “too grand, too indeterminate, too full of potentialities to be captured in an image.”²⁸

Similarly, the problem of the representation of Jewish women as full religious subjects is not solved by trying to represent them as visible images of the divine. For if the Shekhinah – revealed glory (*kavod nivra*) – is clothed only in light then she is naked. She is no more than the illumination of our form, not form itself.²⁹ (Compare Ps. 104:1-4, where God’s glory is a garment

²⁷ Eller, “Divine Objectification,” 24-26, 27, 31. Eller recognises that counter-cultural images of the self as Goddess, or the use of body art (where the woman artist’s own body becomes a performative image of the Goddess) can be effective means of overcoming the self-appraising critical estrangement of self and body towards a form of autonomous self-representation of female beauty and embodiment. But Eller is not persuaded that such images of women are as helpful as they seem. She is concerned that images of women as Goddess, despite their feminist mediation and context, still objectify women in “reducing them to their sexual parts.” Naked still, something important may have been “lost in consenting to one’s own representation” a reduction that “extends to the representation of deities” (30-31). Essentially uterine images of women may confirm the standard visual coding of the female nude, at best only re-situating it in a better different sexual-political context. She feels that such images cannot transform the patriarchal norms of the culture as a whole, where the representation of men is non-biological and the reproductive elements of their bodies – namely their penises – are still kept hidden from sight (36-37).

²⁸ Eller, “Divine Objectification,” 41-43.

²⁹ Rav Saadia Gaon, the tenth-century Judeo-Aristotelean philosopher, uses the term Shekhinah in his *Beliefs and Ideas* as a way of diverting anthropomorphic attention from an infinite God towards a created angel called *kavod* (glory or honour) in the Bible and Shekhinah by the rabbis. (See Saadia ben Joseph haGaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, Samuel Rosenblatt trans., Yale University Press: New Haven 1948, Treatise II, chapter 10) Saadia’s notion of the

of light, carried on the wind.) In early Jewish mysticism the angels flap their wings to shield their eyes from her brightness.³⁰ “Her light diffuses through clouds, just as once, in the Temple, she hovered above the people like a mother over her children, lighting the faces of those below.”³¹ As light, as an angel of revelation, the Shekhinah enables us to see beauty in ourselves and in the other, but she does not incarnate beauty or confer it on any privileged few.

To end where I began, perhaps the unknowability of the Jewish woman’s face is what sacralises her beauty, not what makes it unthinkable or unpaintable. This is not to make the traditional religious move of spiritualizing and moralizing beauty away as the para-ethical quality of an act or disposition or seeking, puritanically, to veil female beauty from all sexual attention. But nor, against our prevailing culture, can female beauty be entirely a human work. What, fleetingly, appears cannot, finally, be bought or crafted or captured in an image, though the cosmetic arts can quite properly advert to what is pleasing to a woman in her own face. The glory of the Shekhinah is not a resident material form but a shaft of light or beam moving across the darkness, illuminating the image of God in the human face. It is the image of God that is the beginning and end of beauty – and that image is not stamped onto the face as a royal head is stamped on a coin. Rather, just as, in the beginning, spirit moved over the face of the waters, all and any beauty *happens* in the creative-restorative moment in which God looks upon the world in its entirety and once more sees that it is *tov*: that it is good; that it is beautiful.³²

Dieser Artikel vertritt die Ansicht, dass eine Theoretisierung dessen, was es bedeutet, Gott in einer Frau zu “sehen,” auch eine Darstellung der weiblichen Schönheit beinhalten könnte, die nicht mehr als eine Summe von physischen Eigenschaften

kavod nivra – revealed, created glory – a visible light was highly influential on the development of Jewish mysticism’s vision of the Shekhinah. Saadia breaks with biblical and rabbinic tradition in so far as, for him, the *kavod nivra* denoted, not God, but an intermediary figure or angel of revelation appearing in clouds or smoke and visible to human eyes. From the end of the thirteenth century, possibly (in the view of Peter Schafer and Arthur Green) under the influence of twelfth Spanish Christian Marian theology in the Zohar, the *kavod* is increasingly hypostasised in the figure of the Shekhinah. (See Joseph Dan, *Kabbalah: A Very Short Introduction*, OUP: New York 2006, 47-48.) Maimonides, however, regarded the Shekhinah as the light of the glory of God alone.

³⁰ See Leah Novick, *On the Wings of Shekhinah: Rediscovering Judaism’s Divine Feminine* (Quest Books: Wheaton, Illinois 2008), 73.

³¹ *Sefer ha Bahir*, 76; Zohar Hadash Eikah 92c-92d; Zohar 1: 202b-203a; BT Megillah 29a.

³² See Raphael, *Judaism and the Visual Image*, 44-50.

verstanden wird, die den Normen eines gegebenen ästhetischen Marktes entsprechen, sondern vielmehr dem, was *geschieht*. Das heißt, dass weibliche Schönheit nicht von der Substanz her, sondern epistemologisch verstanden wird: Sie ist ein Mittel, durch das das göttliche Zwischen zwischen den Gesichtern erkennbar wird. Die *Shekhinah* wird in der jüdischen Tradition allgemein als Licht vorgestellt. Als ein Engel der Offenbarung erscheint sie in einem dynamischen Wechselspiel von Licht und Schatten – die „Wolken der Herrlichkeit“, durch die Gottes Gegenwart zugleich verborgen und offenbar wird. Von den Rabbis als *sukkah* oder Schutz vorgestellt, unter dem ein Erscheinen Gottes geschehen kann, kann man die Wolken der Herrlichkeit aus feministischer Sicht auch in dem Sinne verstehen, dass sie die Würde des Gesichtes vor einer schonungslosen fotografischen Überbelichtung und vor der Korrektur und Perfektion seiner Erscheinung bewahren. Dadurch, dass sie ihren Gegenstand in Dunkelheit hüllen, schützen die Wolken der Herrlichkeit das weibliche Gesicht vor vernichtenden ästhetischen Urteilen. Doch durchdrungen von Strahlen verwandelnden Lichts verkünden sie zugleich seine Heiligkeit. Das hebräische Wort *kavod* kann man mit Herrlichkeit, Würde, Respekt oder Ehre übersetzen. Wo das göttliche *kavod* als der Glanz der *Shekhinah* verstanden wird, der auf dem Angesicht leuchtet, wird das Gesicht nicht mehr als eine Summe von Gesichtszügen verstanden, die gern oder ungern anzusehen sind, sondern als ein prophetisches Geschehen, das die Würde oder die Ehre von Frauen als vollwertige menschliche Subjekte verkündet – schön, nach dem Bilde Gottes geschaffen.

Este artículo postula que al reflexionar sobre qué significa “ver” a Dios en una mujer se podría representar también la belleza femenina, ya no entendida como la suma de propiedades físicas que corresponden a las normas impuestas por el mercado estético, sino como algo que *sucede*. O sea, que la belleza femenina no depende de la sustancia sino que se entiende epistemológicamente, es decir que es un medio a través del cual se puede reconocer la interfaz divina entre los rostros. La *Shekhinah* se representa por lo general en la tradición judía como la luz. Aparece como el ángel de la revelación en una interacción dinámica entre la luz y la sombra – las “nubes de gloria,” a través de las cuales la presencia de Dios se esconde y se revela a la vez. Para los rabíes las nubes de gloria equivalen a *sukkah*, es decir, refugio en el que puede aparecer Dios; desde un punto de vista feminista las nubes de gloria se pueden interpretar como algo que protege la dignidad del rostro de una sobreexposición fotográfica sin miramientos y de la corrección y perfección de su aparición. Debido a que envuelven a su objeto en la oscuridad, las nubes de gloria protegen el rostro femenino de juicios estéticos aniquiladores. Sin embargo, llenas de rayos de luz transfiguradora, anuncian a la vez su santidad. La palabra hebrea *kavod* significa gloria, dignidad, respeto, honor. Al entender el *kavod* divino como el resplandor de la *Shekhinah* que brilla en el rostro, éste ya no es la suma de rasgos físicos, hermosos de ver o no, sino que es un acontecimiento profético que anuncia la dignidad o el honor de la mujer como sujeto humano de igual valía – hermosa, hecha a imagen de Dios.

Melissa Raphael (*1960), is Professor of Jewish Theology at the University of Gloucestershire. Her most recent studies include *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz: A Jewish Feminist Theology of the Holocaust* (Routledge, 2003) and *Judaism and the Visual Image: A Jewish Theology of Art* (Continuum, 2009).