

Remarks by Blu Greenberg for Everett Book Award

A book does not have to be unique to win the Everett prize, but it doesn't hurt either. This extraordinary work – THE TORAH, A WOMAN'S COMMENTARY, edited by Dr. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Rabbi Andrea Weiss – is the first of its kind in several ways:

It is the product of 200 different commentators, which is not how as we tend to think of Torah commentary – usually as the work of one special, famous, learned person.

It is unique in that all of these 200 contributors are women, a fact that begins to correct the centuries old imbalance in authorship of Torah commentary, the 'patriarchal gloss' as Sarah Sager calls it. A Women's Commentary represents the fact that women are no longer held at arms' length or are simply recipients but are now co-workers in the holy task of interpreting and explicating Torah. Standing back a moment, it is a sobering thought to realize that we have never had such a work before, and it is heartwarming and amazing to contemplate that such a work has come to pass – and in our lifetimes!

A Women's Commentary is unique in its format – and I am sure that its editors will speak more of its gender neutral or gender inclusive translation, and its special sections, for besides commentary there is the 'Another View' section on a single theme, the rabbinic exegesis section, a contemporary and very personal reflection section, and a poetry section – all of which give great color and depth to each parsha.

And finally, unique in that it is the first interdenominational Torah commentary in history, I am sure, [and possibly the first for all other religions as regards their canonical texts]. Here are the voices of women from across the entire spectrum of Jewish life, women speaking and listening to each other with great respect. Although this work was initiated, funded, shepherded, overseen, edited, and largely produced by two extraordinary Reform Jewish scholars their mostly Reform editorial board and the Women of Reform Judaism, it does not have the feeling of being owned by any one group. Which explains, I think, why it has so quickly become the property of the whole Jewish people, indeed, as any good Torah commentary should.

But I believe the real reason it has won the coveted Everett prize is that it is a fresh, new work of insight and love brought to bear on that which is --and has been --most precious to our people, for centuries, for millennia. Women's sensitivities and world views, women's ways of understanding-- which are abundant here-- are neither better nor worse than men's. But often they are a different way of looking at the world. And so the interpersonal relationships of Genesis, the liberation and revelation of Exodus, issues of power and purity of Leviticus, the sense of peoplehood and of homeland in Numbers, and the nearness to God and majesty of God in Deuteronomy, women's lives and laws and absences and presence throughout the whole of Torah, women's distinctive *kedusha*, holiness – all of this comes to us in a new light. And all of it takes us – men and women alike – to a rich, new place in our understanding – both of the eternal words of God, of who we are and who we must be as the eternal Jewish people.

This commentary is the first such women's commentary. But it won't be the last. In that sense, this work does not stand as an island but also stands as a model for future generations -- for women as well as men -- to continue in the sacred task of bringing their own insights and passion for Torah as we, the Jewish people, continue walking through history, until the end of

times. And for that too, we owe a great debt of gratitude to all who made this commentary possible.