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“YOUR BELLY IS A HEAP OF WHEAT”

A Torah of Fat Liberation

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I am in synagogue, holding the Torah¹ in my arms like a sleepy toddler. I am singing ancient words of God’s Oneness. My ear presses into the velvet of the scroll’s cover and through its musty fuzz I can nearly hear Torah whisper to me, “Your *pupik*² is a wine goblet...Your belly is a heap of wheat....” (Song of Songs 7:3). These words in praise of the rounded belly sing out from my people’s ancient source of wisdom and resonate in my own bones. In this moment, I am exactly where I want to be: joining my community in prayer, cuddling with Torah, her rolls against my rolls, her animal skin so close to mine.

We are promised in biblical words that Torah is “a tree of life for all who grasp her” (Proverbs 3:18). And in this moment, my roots in Jewish tradition, my roots in feminism, and my roots in fat liberation intertwine tightly and as I hold on to Torah with my own two arms, I feel myself held. I feel a deep sense of belonging, a deep sense that I can bring my whole self—body and mind, fatness, womanhood, and all—into relationship with my religious tradition. In this moment, I know that my birthright is to grab hold of Torah and, in this loving embrace, find a source of both personal spiritual support as well as sustenance for the ongoing work of creating a world of justice and joy.

What’s more, I believe that every body is deserving of this kind of loving embrace. Everyone who wishes to³ is worthy of forging a deep connection with their own religious and spiritual tradition(s) and drawing on the wisdom of their people for their own growth and healing and for the healing of the world. When put in these terms, the idea seems self-evident: fat people who feel drawn to do so, as well as our allies, should simply embrace and be embraced by our religious traditions for the sake of the liberation of all bodies.

Unfortunately, fatphobia—along with sexism, racism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, and other oppressive systems—too often acts as a barrier to full

belonging in religious life. Our path to the richness of our traditions is blocked and we are left feeling less-than and undeserving of our own portion. In what follows we will explore how anti-fatness undermines our ability to fully embrace and be embraced by our traditions. I will then propose an antidote: a Torah of fat feminist liberation—an overflowing spring of changemaking in a wounded world.

In order to bring my whole self to this work and to this chapter, it is important to note how my body, like any body, carries its own particular mix of identities, roles, marginalizations, and privileges. I am a fat white female rabbi. Unlike many women I know who are Jewish leaders, I grew up in a time and a specific Jewish religious context in which I did not experience myself as a path-breaker—the rabbi at my own bat mitzvah was a woman. As a child I attended a Reform synagogue and the Reform Movement began ordaining women as rabbis in 1972, the year before I was born. As an adult, I have certainly been in many Jewish contexts where being a woman and a rabbi has been at best anomalous and at worst rejected or even scorned. However, it was important to my own development to have this foundational childhood experience of a Judaism that was as available to me as it was to my brothers.

As a white, cis, Ashkenazi⁴ woman who has children and is married to a man, I carry privilege and am given access to participation and acceptance in Jewish⁵ life that is not always offered in the same way to Black Jews and other Jews of color, to non-Ashkenazi Jews, to queer and trans Jews, and to Jewish women who are single or do not have children. My reflections on Jewish life in this chapter are very much coming from my own perspective, as it is shaped both by my marginalization as a fat woman and by the various forms of privilege I have. Nevertheless, I do intend this work to be available to be used by all to whom it speaks. While the stories I bring here come largely from Jewish communal life and the texts I draw on come from the Jewish tradition, I aspire to make Torah accessible to seekers of all faiths or no faith at all.

I feel deeply blessed that in my own life, Jewish tradition has bolstered my fat feminist journey for as long as I can remember. We are commanded, as Jews, to tell the story of *yetziat mitzrayim* (the exodus from Egypt) as if we ourselves had experienced this epic shift from slavery to freedom. There is also a tradition of creatively translating the word *mitzrayim* not as “Egypt” but as “The Narrow Place.” Once I stopped dieting as a 16-year-old—after having been at it since age seven—I quickly began to feel that moving away from diet culture was my own experience of *yetziat mitzrayim*: freedom from Narrowness, from narrow ideas about what bodies should look like, and from a cultural ideal that erroneously valued thinness (physical narrowness) above all else—especially in those of us who are female-identified. Linking my own journey with the story my people have been telling for thousands of years lends it a deeply comforting weight, a sense that my own liberation from body hatred is tied up with the liberation of millions of others from all kinds of places of stuckness.

However—and this is and should be a deep source of sadness and anger—many of us too often experience the opposite: fatphobia interferes with our connection with our spiritual or religious traditions. This was driven home to me when I first started blogging about Torah as a source of fat liberation. I was not expecting much to come of it, but I put a little “donate” button at the bottom of each blog post. One day I received a sizable donation from someone I had never heard of before. Up until then, any contributions I received had been from my own friends and family. I was curious about what moved this person to make such a generous gift. When I reached out, the donor shared that—even though she was not Jewish—she was supporting our work because she had not been able to participate in her own spiritual community for some years. The weight stigma she experienced there was simply too triggering to the eating disorder she was desperately trying to recover from.

As my work has continued, I have learned just how common it is for anti-fatness to be a barrier to equal access to our own religious and spiritual traditions. Failure to provide a space that is physically accessible to the largest among us is the least metaphorical of these barriers. As someone who enjoys visiting many different congregations, I often find myself spending some portion of services standing up in the back of the worship space because the seating available is too narrow to accommodate my size or too flimsy to allow me to relax in my seat without fear that it will break. And having the right equipment is also not enough: one congregation I have worshiped with frequently actually has excellent sturdy chairs, some with arms (which are too narrow for me) and some without. However, it is not uncommon for all the armless chairs to be occupied or for the unoccupied ones to be in the middle of a row that I cannot access without imposing upon numerous people to get up in the middle of their prayers and make room for me. The number of times someone has noticed my need and offered me a chair that would fit me is exactly zero.

I feel that my size is obvious and that the difference between the size of my body and the width of the chair would be equally obvious. In other words, I feel extremely visible, exposed even. But the lack of a welcoming space makes me feel invisible. This collision of hyper-visibility and invisibility creates an almost Kafkaesque sense of unsettledness. And how can we feel settled when we cannot sit? Every moment of standing while others sit or shifting around painfully in a too-small seat sends the message that only certain kinds of bodies are truly welcome.

While the largest among us experience these physical barriers in ways that smaller people do not, weight stigma—especially in the form of speaking negatively of fatness and fat people—can impact people of all sizes.⁶ Since the beginning of my work on fatphobia and fat liberation in a Jewish context, I have been honored to be entrusted with many stories (too many, really) of many experiences of feeling unwelcome in religious community. A number of people have shared with me how harmful it is when their clergy share their own “weight

loss journey” from the pulpit, often in ways that deeply stigmatize fatness and fat bodies. Others—both clergy and lay people—have reported being bombarded with unwanted weight loss and “health” advice, including being “invited” by people in their communities to join (i.e., buy into) their multilevel marketing dieting schemes.

While people of all genders diet and are prone to speaking too much about their aspirations for and experiences with intentional weight loss, this kind of harm does impact women disproportionately. Casual conversation is a large part of the informal aspect of gatherings in religious communities and women’s “schmoozing” is much more likely to be rife with anti-fatness—often in the form of women judging their own bodies and their own eating—than men’s. The aspired-for intimacy of religious communities is itself an unfortunate culprit here, as too many female-identified people are taught that communal body-shaming is a way of bonding with one another.

It is a blessing that my own fat liberation journey has always felt entwined with my Judaism, yet I am certainly not immune to fatphobia in religious communal contexts. Just in the course of writing this piece, I have received unwelcome (and unwelcoming) comments about my fat body and how it does or does not move. Much of my time in Jewish communal spaces these days is spent running around after a toddler. This prompted a member of my community to say goodbye to me recently with the words, “Shabbat Shalom.⁷ You just keep running after him....” His words trailed off into a smile that may as well have been a wink, leaving me to wonder what the end of that sentence could possibly be. This is a case of the micro-aggression “Mad Libs” that those of us in marginalized bodies are forced to play. What *was* he trying to say about me and my fat female body? “You just keep running after him because it will make you lose weight?” or “You just keep running after him and you’ll eventually get ‘in shape?’” I found both his comment and its incompleteness enraging: Why am I not allowed to be in community without people giving their opinion about my body?!

One form of fatphobia in religious and spiritual contexts is especially damaging: the use of religious teachings themselves in the service of stigmatizing fatness and fat people. It is no wonder then that religion has largely been seen as oppressive in the worlds of fat activism and Fat Studies. Much of the previous work on religion in Fat Studies has looked at the denigration of fatness and fat people in religious contexts and how fatphobia is expressed in religious terms. When the editors of the special issue of *Fat Studies* (2015) on fat and religion issued their call for submissions, nearly every article they ended up including looked at how religion—mostly Protestant and evangelical Christianity—is deployed in the service of fat oppression.⁸ When being fat is seen as sinful, there is no shortage of powerful imagery, doctrine, and religious coercion that can be called upon in the “service” of “helping” lost souls find their way.

From off-handed comments to rows of chairs placed too closely together, and from fatphobic sermons to “well-meaning” input about the “fattening” foods at

kiddush,⁹ religious communal life can feel like a hazardous maze that we are too often left to navigate alone. It does not have to be this way. We can take hold of our religious and spiritual traditions while rejecting and refusing to replicate the oppressive ways in which those traditions have too often been deployed against both fatness and femaleness. Spiritual and religious communities have plenty of work to do to make both structural and cultural shifts if they wish to be more welcoming to people of all sizes. One integral piece of the change that needs to happen is to begin recognizing the potential for our traditions themselves to be sources of body justice and fat liberation. To this end, I propose a Torah of fat liberation.

To begin, let’s take a step back: What is “Torah?” To fully embrace and be embraced by this “Tree of Life,” we need to begin with a sense of what it is. The word itself is often (mis)translated as “law,” and while it does contain *mitzvot*¹⁰ (commandments) and other instruction about how to live one’s life, this interpretation leaves out too much of Torah’s richness for our purposes. Additionally, translating Torah as “law” has too often been used as a tool of Christian supersessionism: framing Torah (and by extension, Jews) as outdated and devoid of relevance. A better translation of the word itself is “teaching.” But even that does not help us fully grasp what Torah *is*, nor what it can be in our lives. How could it? As one ancient rabbi said of Torah: “Turn it over and over again for it contains everything.”¹¹ We could even imagine Torah itself as fat: richly marbled with multiple significances, spreading out across boundaries of meaning. Torah’s multivalence is a source of delight, but it can also be confusing. So before we get to the delight, let’s unpack more of what we mean when we say “Torah.”

As we saw in this chapter’s opening image, a Torah is a scroll that is handwritten on parchment, kept on two wooden rollers, and “dressed” in a covering that is often beautifully decorated. One or more scrolls of Torah are kept in a special cabinet (the ark) in every synagogue. Each scroll of Torah contains exactly the same words: the first five books of the Hebrew Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), sometimes called the Pentateuch or the Five Books of Moses. In the context of Jewish prayer services, we read selections from this Torah scroll (or *sefer Torah* in Hebrew) on the Sabbath, on festival days, on the New Moon and on Mondays and Thursdays. “Torah” can also refer to the contents of these first five books of the Hebrew Bible in any other form: printed in books, sung in songs, or scrolled through in an app.

From this most-focused of its meanings, the significance of “Torah” grows and grows, spreading out in concentric circles. Sometimes people use the word to refer to the entirety of the Hebrew Bible or *tanakh*.¹² “Torah” can also mean both the Written Torah (i.e., *tanakh*) as well as the Oral Torah. “Oral Torah” refers primarily, but not exclusively, to the Talmud, a set of rabbinic writings compiled from the 3rd through the 5th centuries CE.¹³

Beyond these sacred texts themselves, the meaning of “Torah” then leaps up from the printed or calligraphed page to refer to all of Jewish wisdom as it has

been handed down through the generations. This can include biblical texts, the teachings of highly regarded commentators, Jewish legal works, as well as mystical texts. We can also speak—sometimes with a tongue in a cheek and sometimes less so—of finding “Torah” in all kinds of other “texts:” the works of contemporary poets and songwriters, the surprising verbal constructions of young children, a particularly moving work of art, the way the wind moves the leaves of a tree, the lines on the face of a beloved elder.

When a rabbi—or anyone else—offers a sermon in synagogue, the Hebrew term for it is *d’var Torah* (“a word of Torah”). And the expectation is that a *d’var Torah* will be that particular person’s attempt to make Jewish tradition relevant to the lived experience of the community.

In addition to communal relevance, each of us can have our own individual relationship with Torah. One of my favorite moments at many bar or bat mitzvah ceremonies¹⁴ is when the generations of the bar or bat mitzvah line up—parents, grandparents, and any other elders—and physically pass a scroll of Torah from the oldest relative to the youngest, symbolizing that the entire tradition of the Jewish people is now being offered to and received by the young adult. When I am officiating, I usually say something about how this tradition is being passed to this young person and it is now up to them to make it their own, to find their own way in it, knowing that their way of embracing tradition may be different from those of the generations from whom they are receiving Torah.

Becoming a bar or bat mitzvah symbolizes the beginning of the journey of relationship with Torah, of grabbing on to the tradition in our own way. From this expectation that each of us has our own relationship with Torah, it flows that we may also speak of “a person’s Torah” meaning the particular wisdom that is uniquely yours to offer the world. For example, when we give eulogies for those who have died, we are often trying to share the Torah of the deceased with all those who have gathered to remember them.

Finally, “Torah” refers not only to sacred texts themselves, nor to the entire body of Jewish wisdom as it has been passed down to us, but to the process of engaging with this tradition. The blessing we say before studying Torah describes this process as *la’asok b’divei torah* that means to be occupied or to make ourselves busy with words of Torah. Learning Torah is meant to be more than memorizing or even gleaning wisdom from written texts—though these can also be wondrous activities. Rather it is a process of continually coming into relationship with the tradition: asking what of my own passions, identities, experiences, strengths, weaknesses, and quirks is relevant to this tradition and how the connection I am forging with the text can shed light both on my own life and on the tradition itself.

My confidence in proposing a fat liberatory approach to Torah stems in part from knowing that I am following in the footsteps of those who bring other marginalized bodies into relationship with the tradition. Since the 1970s and 1980s, and especially since the publication in 1990 of *Standing Again at Sinai* (Plaskow

1990)—Judith Plaskow’s groundbreaking feminist approach to Judaism—Jewish feminist activists and scholars have worked to amplify women’s voices in Torah. In the wake of this ongoing feminist project, we have seen the wondrous rise of disability justice approaches to Jewish tradition, queer Torah, and those working to center the voices of Black Jews and other Jews of color. Our “fattening” project is thus part of a larger wave of marginalized voices in Judaism laying claim to Torah, grabbing on to it as our own. I say this both to acknowledge my gratitude for those who have gone before and also because it helps to remember that we are not alone (even though these other movements are not necessarily inherently free of fatphobia).

The rereading of Torah in liberatory ways can itself be seen as an ancient practice. In the book of Numbers, there is a case of a group of daughters who protest that the inheritance laws as Moses has laid them out are unjust. Their father, Tzelophachad, has died and he did not have a son. The law, as Moses has presented it, makes it clear that Tzelophachad’s other more distant male relatives should inherit from him. His daughters claim that they should be allowed to inherit his portion instead. Moses takes their claim to God Godself. God responds, “The daughters of Tzelophachad speak right” (Numbers 27:7). One ancient commentary¹⁵ teaches that God’s response indicates not only that God agrees with the daughters about the inheritance law, but that God actually says that the way these daughters “read” the Torah is, in fact, the way it is written in God’s version of the book. The Torah that Moses and the rest of the people (and especially, one assumes, the men) had been reading until that moment was in need of correction.

It would be foolish to claim that Torah could be read as simply one declaration of fat feminist liberation after another. There are definitely parts of the Bible that have been and are still used to stigmatize fatness in ways that are hard to simply “reread.”¹⁶ For example, it seems clear that King Eglon (Judges 3:12–30) is being made fun of for his fatness. And there is no doubt that the text is using fatness as part of its critique when it says that “Jeshurun grew fat and kicked” (Deuteronomy 32:15).¹⁷ But when we understand Torah as a process of engagement with the text, and when I bring my own fat, female body into contact with the text, I find the dance of body and text to be richly rewarded.

I can take it upon myself to grab on to the text and dance and wrestle with it and dive into it and hold on tight and say to Torah as Jacob says to God/the angel with whom he wrestles, “I will not let you go until you bless me” (Genesis 32:26). And Torah’s fat liberatory blessings are abundant: from its opening chapters, in which we learn that all human beings, all human bodies, of all sizes, races, and genders, are created in the Divine image, to Exodus’ cries for freedom from Narrowness, to the clear knowing that fat itself can be a blessing as when Isaac blesses his sons with the blessings of “the fat of the earth” (Genesis 27:28).

But where to begin our wrestling? Torah’s vastness should prompt both humility and audacity. None of us can know or learn or teach all of Torah. But each of us can bring to Torah our own particularity and find those teachings, those

verses, those letters that are most our own in any moment. One of the great joys of gathering with other fat women has always been learning how individual our bodies are: the particular rolls on my body do not actually match yours exactly; each of us on the outside, and how much more so on the inside, has our own unique geography. In a society that seeks to dehumanize us and treat us as a mass of undifferentiated “headless fatties,”¹⁸ grabbing onto Torah each in our own way necessitates claiming our own uniqueness even in the smallest of ways.

I am often asked what Torah has to say about fatness. If I claim to be teaching a Torah of fat liberation, what verses, stories, or commandments actually deal with fatness? The stories and verses I mentioned above (e.g., the story of King Eglon and the blessing of the “fat of the land”) are absolutely worthy of further exploration. I have a growing list of just such places to visit in Torah. My list includes my curiosity about how and when “*bari*,” the word used to refer to a fat person or animal in *tanakh*, stopped meaning “fat and healthy” and started meaning merely “healthy” as it does in Modern Hebrew. And I certainly hope I or my students will one day give the fat (male) rabbis of the Talmud a proper Fat Torah analysis.¹⁹

However, this approach of scouring Torah for verses that deal in their most *p’shat*²⁰ (simple) way with fatness and fat people is far too shallow for our purposes of learning and teaching a Torah of fat liberation. When we begin instead by surfacing our own needs and desires, and most of all our own questions,²¹ we can approach Torah’s vast expanses with a fat liberatory lens. I can be reading the book of Psalms and suddenly a verse jumps out at me as being “all about” fat liberation in ways I had never seen before. Let me offer three brief examples of fat liberation Torah that have emerged from my own process: creating sacred space through welcoming guests; the creative and destructive power of speech; and loving the body as it is.²²

A Torah of welcoming can serve as an antidote to the physical barriers to accessing religious and spiritual community faced by the largest among us. *Hakhmasat orkhim* (welcoming guests) is an obligation established by our founding matriarch and patriarch, Sarah and Abraham, as they rush to attend to the needs of the strangers who appear at their tent one day (Genesis 18:1–15).²³ One teaching in the Talmud even suggests that being welcoming to guests is more important than welcoming God Godself.²⁴ Following in Abraham and Sarah’s footsteps, we too can aim to welcome all bodies into our sacred spaces by properly assessing and caring for the needs of all. When we do this we fulfill the prophetic vision “My house will be a house of prayer for all people” (Isaiah 56:7).

Teachings on the powerful creative and destructive power of speech can be used to address the ways that bodies and eating are talked about in religious communal life. The book of Proverbs (18:21) teaches that “Death and life are in the hand of the tongue.” The Talmud strengthens this teaching, stating that not only can the tongue deliver a deadly blow as easily as a hand, but that the nature of speech is such that, while our hands can only kill through direct contact, our

speech—like a sharpened arrow—can cause harm even at a great distance.²⁵ If we want our religious communities to be spaces of belonging we would do well to take this Torah to heart when thinking about speech that denigrates fatness, praises thinness, and polices how we eat.

Finally, let’s come back to the verse with which we opened: “Your *pupik* is a wine goblet...Your belly is a heap of wheat...” (Song of Songs 7:3). One important way to confront the fatphobia we encounter in religious and spiritual spaces is to learn and teach a Torah of appreciating our bodies exactly as they are. The Song of Songs is an excellent place to start. A sensual love poem in which the voices of two lovers sing words of praise and longing, its verses contain one image after another in the search for language to adequately describe the wondrousness of one’s beloved. Her lover’s eyes are “like doves...bathing in milk” (Song of Songs 5:12). Or she imagines her love as a gazelle bounding over hills of spices (Song of Songs 8:14). He imagines his lover as a palm tree; its clusters are her breasts (Song of Songs 7:8).

It is a text that is so earthy and juicy that the ancient rabbis express some trepidation about including it in *tanakh* at all. Concerned that it would cause Torah to fall into the gutter, Rabbi Akiva, the great defender and lover of Song of Songs, warned that “Whoever warbles his voice with the Song of Songs at taverns, making it some sort of [profane] song, has no portion in the World to Come.”²⁶ At the same time, Rabbi Akiva was clear about the Song’s place in the tradition, making it known that “the whole world is not as worthy as the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; for all the writings are holy but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies.”²⁷

While often imagined as an allegory of the loving relationship between God and the people, the Song of Songs’ meaning is richest when we allow it to span all manner of relationships, including our relationships with our own bodies. In a society that pathologizes fat bodies—especially the bodies of fat women—and wishes we would disappear, it is wondrously uplifting to find these ancient words in praise of a round female belly! The richness and variety of the Song’s body imagery invites us to find ways of appreciating the uniqueness of each body. It calls us to truly look at ourselves and at one another with a gaze that is attentive and loving.

And how important this can be especially for those of us who are most vulnerable to others wishing that we did not exist in our fat bodies, wishing us away. That man who told me to keep running after my son failed to finish his sentence of what exactly he was hoping for me, but it was clearly some kind of change in my body. There he was in synagogue rejecting the body that he was seeing in front of him, attempting to render invisible and nonexistent that which simply is.

Thousands of years ago, the Psalmist sang “Were not your Torah my delight, I would have perished in my affliction” (Psalms 119:92). As fat people, we never know where the next micro- or not-so-micro-aggression might come from. This

sad fact renders even sweeter and more live-giving our encounter with a verse singing of the simple goodness and beauty of a woman's belly that is like a heap of wheat: golden, sun-warmed, sustaining.

Fat people deserve access to our religious and spiritual traditions just as much as we deserve competent healthcare, equal pay for our work, and fair treatment in educational settings. Learning and teaching Torah in liberatory ways is one important piece of making this possible. Continually deepening our connections with our own sacred texts and traditions creates change on two different levels: within our own hearts and in the world. In Jewish tradition, these two modes of healing are referred to as *tikkun halev* (repairing or healing the heart) and *tikkun olam* (repairing the world).

As I hope I have demonstrated from my own relationship with Torah, it can and ought to be a source of personal support and spiritual enrichment. Rooting myself deeply in a feminist, fat-liberatory approach to Torah gives me something to hold onto in the turbulent work of fat activism. My hope for us all is that grabbing hold of Torah for ourselves can be a fulfillment of the teaching of Proverbs (3:18) that “She is a tree of life to those who grasp her, And whoever holds on to her is happy.”

At the same time, Torah can be the medium through which we create a better world. One rabbinic text from the 5th century begins by describing Torah as preexisting the rest of reality.²⁸ In this imagining, God looks into the scroll of Torah in order to create the world. The Torah is the blueprint for existence itself. Jewish tradition also understands human beings as having the capacity to be God's partners in the ongoing work of creating the world. Thus, engaging with Torah can also be the process by which we understand what we want our reality—our selves, our communities, our society—to become and uncover the wisdom we need to guide us in the work of changemaking. May we look into a Torah of fat liberation and create communities where all bodies belong.

Notes

- 1 “Torah” means many things, as this chapter aims to flesh out. In this opening image, I am using the word to refer to the hand-scribed scrolls of parchment that contain the first five books of the Hebrew Bible.
- 2 *Pupik* is Yiddish for belly button; often used affectionately. Many translations of this Biblical verse use the English “navel.”
- 3 Genuine desire is key here. Religious coercion has no place in the kind of relationship I am describing.
- 4 Roughly, “Ashkenazi” refers to Jews from much of Europe and Russia, whose ancestors primarily spoke Yiddish.
- 5 I am referring here mainly to Jewish communal life in the United States. Some of these dynamics play out differently in Jewish communities in other parts of the world.
- 6 The statement that weight stigma in some form can impact people of all sizes is not meant to minimize the fact that not all people are subject to the same kind or amount of weight stigma.
- 7 “A Peaceful Sabbath.”

- 8 The notable exception was Mycroft Masada Holmes’ call to religious communities to join in the struggle for fat liberation, using Torah itself to urge this change. There have been some efforts in recent years to imagine what a fat liberatory Christianity would look like. See Morgan (2018) and Beck (2018).
- 9 *Kiddush* is a blessing made on Shabbat and other holy days to sanctify the day. But it also refers to the communal snack or meal that often follows prayer services on those days.
- 10 Jewish tradition holds that Torah, in fact, contains 613 *mitzvot*; these are rarely enumerated in full.
- 11 Pirkei Avot 5:21.
- 12 “Hebrew Bible” is the term that Christian scholars began using when it became too obvious that “Old Testament” was inherently anti-Jewish. The Jewish term, *tanakh*, is an acrostic of Torah (the Five Books of Moses), *nevi'im* (Prophets), and *k'tuvim* (Writings).
- 13 The date of the completion of the Talmud in its current form is a topic of some debate with most contemporary scholars believing that it was still being redacted and edited into the 7th century CE.
- 14 A bar or bat mitzvah is a coming of age ceremony in the Jewish tradition. At the age of 12 or 13, a Jewish child is considered to become responsible for keeping *mitzvot* (commandments). The bar or bat mitzvah ceremony usually takes place in the context of a prayer service. Bar mitzvah is the masculine form and bat mitzvah is the feminine; good work is currently underway in various Jewish communities to find less gendered ways of referring to this milestone.
- 15 Sifrei Bamidbar 134:1.
- 16 I would claim that, on the whole, the Hebrew Bible provides much less blatant ammunition for fatphobia than it does for misogyny, racism, homophobia, and transphobia. A fuller analysis of this claim is beyond our scope here.
- 17 Here fatness seems to be a stand-in for complacency.
- 18 A term coined by fat activist Charlotte Cooper.
- 19 I’m looking at you, dear fat rabbis of the Talmud whose bellies were so big that, if they stood tummy to tummy, a team of oxen could drive under the arch their bellies formed (apparently they were also either very tall or had very short-legged oxen). These stories are very gendered and the men’s fatness is highly sexualized. See Baba Metzia 84a.
- 20 Jewish tradition asserts that there are four levels at which verses of Torah can be understood. *P’shat* refers to the literal meaning of the words themselves and is seen as the lowest of these four levels of understanding.
- 21 Some would argue that this approach detracts from the idea that we should study Torah “for its own sake,” as if it were possible to approach the text without our own agenda. I find it more useful and more honest to acknowledge that we have our own desires and our own interests. Learning broadly in Torah and not narrowing our focus prematurely or too often can still be a goal, but we need not exclude the kind of learning that focuses on our own questions.
- 22 These three themes are not meant to be exclusive of other themes or in any way comprehensive. They are an invitation to each of us on our own journey with Torah.
- 23 Spoiler alert: The people turn out to be angels of God and/or God Godself depending on how you read the text.
- 24 Shabbat 127a.
- 25 BT Arakhin 15b.
- 26 Tosefta on Sanhedrin (12:10).
- 27 Mishna Yedayim 3:5.
- 28 Bereishit Rabbah 1:1.

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