



**The Hebrew University of Jerusalem**  
**האוניברסיטה העברית בירושלים**

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In the matter of Sarah Shapiro's charge of plagiarism against Naomi Regen, I do not see any basis whatsoever for the charge of plagiarism.

These are two very different books, which have almost nothing in common, except that they both deal with ultra-orthodox Jewish women.

Naomi Ragen's *Sotah* is a fictional novel, which focuses, in relation to three sisters, on issues of romantic, sexual love in the ultra-orthodox community in Jerusalem. The novel most closely follows the story of one of these sisters Dina, whose experience is the most painful and dramatic of the three, as she is forced into exile by the local morals police for what seems to be adultery but isn't. All three sisters are confronted with having to come to terms with the requirements of and restrictions on marriage in the community, which, by the end of the book, they each do successfully, albeit in different ways. Two of the sisters – Dina and her younger sister – resolve their issues by moving to a different Orthodox community in Safed. The novel constitutes a severe critique of the Jerusalem community, but it is also very positive concerning Jewish and Orthodox religious values.

*Growing with my Children: A Jewish Mother's Diary* by Sarah Shapiro is a factual (non-fictional) journal kept over a period of approximately two years by the author herself. It deals primarily with motherhood, not with marriage, and it focuses on the problem of anger (not sexuality), centrally in relation to the mother and her children but in general, religious, terms as well. The book contains a lot of advice concerning anger management and raising one's children, much of which is what Shapiro herself learned by struggling with these problems.

Shapiro deals almost not at all with marriage; and if there is a weakness to Regen's novel it is that she deals too little with the issue of motherhood, especially after Dina is forced to abandon her baby. The issue of motherhood comes up primarily in relation to the eldest of the three sisters, the sisters' relationship to their own mother, and as a critique of secular American Jewish life in NYC. It is not, however, central to the story of romantic love, sexuality, and creative self-fulfillment.

Since Ragen's book must have been researched both through her reading articles, books, journals, etc. and also, likely, through interviewing people (she notes a newspaper article that stimulated her imagination), it is possible that she read Shapiro's journal and that some of it stuck in her mind. Since she is writing realistic fiction, i.e., fiction that purports to represent a real community, such echoes of Shapiro's journal – if they at all exist – would be within the realm of a proper use of research materials in a fictional text, especially if they were put in the mouths of characters and do not constitute the book's advice as such (to the credit of the novel, it does not offer any advice; it simply raises problems and resolutions to those problems). In truth, however, as I went over the lists of presumably plagiarized phrases, I didn't find anything among them that seemed to me to constitute borrowing of any sort whatsoever. Most of what Ragen is supposed to have stolen seems to me no more than clichés of language and even of religious or folk wisdom popping up in her characters. Things like: can a fish become a lion? Or, when you bump into the wall are you angry at the wall? or, you should be happy, after all you've got x, y, z; or, God will punish me; or, doesn't God have more important things on his mind; – all of these are just clichés of our culture: we've all said them at one time to others or even to ourselves or had them said to us.

In the interests of full disclosure, I need to mention that a couple of years ago Sarah Shapiro contacted me to represent her in this matter; we also had a subsequent phone conversation. I declined to offer my assistance. I also did not at that time read either of the texts. Nor did I enter into the dispute in any way.

I find the charges of plagiarism not just untrue but, to be blunt about this, quite ludicrous.

All best wishes,