Holle's Cry: Unearthing a Birth Goddess in a German Jewish Naming Ceremony

Author(s): Jill Hammer

Source: *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*, Spring, 5765/2005, No. 9, Jewish Women's Spirituality (Spring, 5765/2005), pp. 62-87

Published by: Indiana University Press

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/40326618

HOLLE'S CRY: UNEARTHING A BIRTH GODDESS IN A GERMAN JEWISH NAMING CEREMONY

Jill Hammer

One avenue of inquiry in feminist spirituality has been the exploration of folklore and folk ritual related to women. Folk ritual often contains elements from outside Jewish law and tradition, imported from idiosyncratic or syncretic local custom, and may therefore contain a hint of the theological imaginings of Jewish women—or even a source of images of the feminine Divine. One of the folk rituals of central Europe is the German Jewish baby naming ritual, used for both girls and boys, known as Hollekreisch (also Holekreisch, Holegrash, or Houlegraash). In this ritual, family and friends gave a child a name (usually a secular name), raised the infant's cradle three times, and, in some areas and periods, called the name of Holle. Scholars now agree that this ceremony, whose origins lie in the Middle Ages, likely stemmed from the legend of Frau Holle, a German mythic figure associated with birth, death, the cycle of seasons, the household, and the underworld.

An examination of medieval Jewish legend and ritual from central Europe confirms that some Jews knew of Frau Holle, whom German women worshipped throughout the Middle Ages in spite of Church decrees forbidding it. Many modern scholars of Jewish folk custom, attempting to understand Holle's presence in a Jewish ritual, have read the Teutonic legends of Frau Holle to suggest that she is a witch and a stealer of children. They conclude that the Hollekreisch ceremony was a ritual protecting the newborn from demons. However, if one examines all the available sources from the Middle Ages to the present about Frau Holle, or Holda—and the numerous almost identical Central European goddess-figures associated with life, death, witchcraft, and children, such as Perchta, Frau Gode, Frau Venus, Frau Harke, Frau Frick, and Frau Stampa[1]—she appears as an ambivalent figure. In European legend, to

be sure, Holle rode on winter nights with terrifying spirits of the dead; in the tenth century, Burchard of Worms spoke of the women who rode with Holda or Holle as witches and named Holle a demon.[2] Yet according to many folklorists who have studied the legends of the period, Holle also presided over a well of infant souls, rocked babies to sleep when their mothers dozed, and brought gifts to children at the winter solstice.[3] It is at least probable that the ceremony of Hollekreisch, at one time, had ambivalent meaning: it was both a protective circle around the child to guard it from Frau Holle's fearsome qualities, and an invocation of Frau Holle's benevolence, urging her to grant the child life and prosperity. Thus, the ceremony may have addressed the needs and feelings of the woman who had just given birth and had to release her child into a world that was both abundant and frightening.

Many European home birth rituals invoked separation from the earth, and from nature, as a fundamental necessity for entering the human community.[4] An understanding of Holle as a representative of the earth's forces of birth and death and a symbol of the mother's womb itself has not yet been applied to the ritual of Hollekreisch, though this understanding clearly can be read into the ceremony. A new examination of Holle's role in Hollekreisch, one that decodes earlier scholars' reactions to her and appropriately revises our understanding of her function, might uncover an as-yet untapped source for birth ritual and for explorations of the divine feminine. This revisionary work would be a kind of "re-remembering"—not a recovery of original meaning, but an opening up to the possibility of new meaning rooted in long-standing imagery.

Future readers of the Hollekreisch ritual might choose to regard Frau Holle as an example of a divine feminine figure immanent in birth and death, embodying both the joy and the terror of creating new life, and representing the necessary, but perilous, separation of the child from the womb. Such an image would challenge internalized rabbinic norms that seek to control the unpredictability and femininity of birth—blaming women for death in childbirth, declaring the blood of childbirth impure—and substitute a more balanced view of the sacredness and danger of the life cycle. Indeed, Holle stands in a long line of mythic matriarchal figures, like Rachel and Leah, who are associated with birth and naming. Feminist theologians cannot and should not reduce women either to their birth function or to their traditional association (by male theologians) with death. But they can examine how we might speak about fertility and mortality in new theological terms that speak

to women's experience of childbirth and parenting. Investigating Holle as a largely positive figure could provide a useful tool for imagining a feminist theology of birth, life, and death.

What Shall We Name the Baby? Beginning to Interpret Hollekreisch

The earliest available source on Hollekreisch is *Mahzor Vitry*, a compendium of holiday and life-cycle rituals from thirteenth-century France. *Mahzor Vitry* contains a medieval ritual similar to Hollekreisch that turned on traditional Jewish approaches to the meaning of birth. An infant boy was placed in his cradle dressed in fine clothes, in the presence of ten men, with a Pentateuch, a scribe's quill, and an ink bottle. The guests would cry, "May this child fulfill what is written in this book!" and recite verses from the Bible.[5] Judah Hehasid (the Pious, thirteenth-century Germany) alludes to the same ceremony in *Sefer hasidim*.[6] The *Mahzor Vitry* ceremony may in fact be a precursor to Hollekreisch, which also involves a cradle and group response, but this early ceremony focuses on the child as a potential scholar of Torah. It was thus unavailable to girls, and the role of the woman who had given birth is virtually invisible.

The ritual of Hollekreisch, on the other hand, was wide open to women and children, as Elisheva Baumgarten has pointed out.[7] Performed throughout Germany, Austria, Holland, Switzerland, and parts of Poland and France from the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries,[8] Hollekreisch was generally held on the fourth Sabbath after the birth of the child, when the mother first returned to the synagogue. Moses ben Isaac Mintz (fifteenth-century Germany), one of the first scholars to record the existence of Hollekreisch, reports that the mother's return to the synagogue was the occasion for "Hol-kreisch."[9] The Hollekreisch ritual he describes, though similar to the one found in *Mahzor Vitry*, has several new elements, including lifting the baby's cradle, the involvement of children in the ceremony, and the word "Hol-" or "Holle-kreisch."

Other medieval and modern sources agree on the details of the ritual. The ceremony was performed at home among family and community members. For boys, Hollekreisch was performed to confer a secular or "cradle" name in addition to the Hebrew name given at the *berit milah* (circumcision); for girls, it conferred what was usually the only name.[10] The children—in many

places, boys for a male child or girls for a female—would gather around the cradle.[11] In some locations the ritual was performed only for boys, in others only for girls. In Austria, Bohemia, Moravia, and Poland it was strictly a girls' naming ceremony,[12] while in both seventeenth and twentieth-century Germany the ceremony was performed for both boys and girls.[13]

Commonly, as reported by Judah Aryeh Leib Alter (known as the *Sefat Emet*) in the nineteenth century, the children would recite the first verses of each of the five books of Moses as well as the final verse of Deuteronomy. Max Warschawski, a French expert on Alsatian Jewry, concurs that this was also the practice in Alsace.[14] Other words and liturgies for the ceremony existed, including wishes that the child be blessed, have a long life, and keep the Torah and the commandments.[15] If the child was a boy, a Bible and a *tallit* might be placed in the cradle.

The children would gather around the cradle and lift it up, usually three times. Each time they lifted the cradle, they would cry "Hollekreisch! Hollekreisch! What shall the child be called?" (In German: "Wie soll das Kindchen heissen?" In Yiddish: "Wie solls pupele hasse?") The adults present would answer with the name of the child. The ceremony concluded with sweets for all the children.[16]

Numerous Jewish legal scholars assert the existence and legitimacy of the Hollekreisch ceremony while acknowledging its somewhat foreign origin. For example, *Yosef ometz*, a seventeenth-century collection of laws and customs, concludes its pages by quoting Mintz and giving an explanation of the term *Hol-kreisch* in the context of a baby-naming ritual for boys:

> In our exile we have changed our ways; we give our children two names, a holy one by which he is called to the Torah, which is given to him at circumcision, and a secular one. . . . It is given to the child on the first day that his mother rises from childbed and goes to the synagogue. This is what *Hol-kreisch* means—*za'akat hol* (profane-cry). The custom is to cry out loudly at the time of the naming on that Shabbat.

The writer seems uncomfortable with the custom inasmuch as he associates the giving of a secular name with the state of "exile," and he sees the ritual primarily as an instrument for conferring a secular name.[17] He does not associate the name with any legendary figures. Rabbi Jacob Moellin (the Maharil,

born in the fourteenth century in Mainz) gives an almost identical description of the ritual, as does Rabbi Israel ben Shalom Shachna of Lublin in the sixteenth century.[18]

Medieval Jewish scholars seem to agree that the purpose of the ritual was to bestow a secular name, but it may also have been to involve women in the ceremony and celebrate the birth of new life (not only the entry into the covenant, as in the case of *berit milah*). The consistent connection of the ritual with the mother's rise from childbed, and the home-based nature of the ceremony, seem to indicate that the Hollekreisch ceremony gave the mother an important role. Hayyim Schauss, whose research was based on interviews, eyewitness accounts, and historical writings dating from the seventeenth century, indicates that in some areas of Germany, a synagogue ritual preceded the ceremony. The mother of the child walked to worship with the local *rebbetzin* and donated a new wrapper (wimple), with the infant's name sewn onto it, for the Torah scroll.[19] This allowed the mother and her ability to give birth to be celebrated along with the new child—which may be precisely why the ceremony became associated with, or was originally rooted in, the legend of Frau Holle.

Nahalat shiv'ah, a seventeenth-century commentary on ritual, prayer, and life-cycle ceremonies, noted that Hollekreisch was fading from urban centers and being replaced with a naming blessing in the synagogue for baby girls.[20] However, a twentieth-century Swiss painting shows that families continued the practice of Hollekreisch well into the modern period. The ritual occasionally was performed in the United States.

A modern account shows that the ceremony changed somewhat over time. According to Hilde Gerstley, a 90-year-old woman raised in Southern Germany,[21] Holegrash was an intimate home ceremony for both male and female children, held after Sabbath morning services three or four weeks after the birth. Immediate family, along with all the children of the village, would gather around a basket holding the newborn. An honored relative with a Jewish education was invited to recite a psalm and would also drape over the basket a gift of a silver chain bearing a *hai* (the Hebrew letters representing life) or the first initial of the child's name. Then the children would lift the basket, and one of them would recite a four-line German ditty naming the child:

Hoch empore wollen wir sie heben
Und ihr einen Namen geben

__ soll ihr Name sein
Moege __ gluecklich sein.

Gerstley translates this as follows: "We lift you high above / and give you the name ____ [the child's name in both Hebrew and German] / May you always be happy and healthy." Then all the children would receive sweets.

Calling out "Hollekreisch" does not appear in Gerstley's account, nor does the poem or giving a medal appear in earlier sources. When asked what the meaning of the word Holegrash was, Gerstley had no idea, nor had she ever heard of Frau Holle. She equated the ritual with the *simhat bat* of today: a joyous ceremony to name a child. Indeed, she reported that German Jews who came to the United States dropped the Hollekreisch ceremony and began to use *simhat bat* or synagogue baby naming ceremonies instead.

Hollekreisch was retained, in all likelihood, precisely because it bypassed Jewish systems of meaning focused on covenant and scholarship, in which the birth of a daughter meant little, and focused on the mystery of birth itself. Later Jewish scholars attempted to determine its origin. They speculated that the ceremony's name derived either, following Moses Mintz, from *hol-kreisch*, a compound of the Hebrew word for "profane" (*hol*) and the German word for "cry,"[22] or perhaps from the French *haut-la-creche* ("raise the cradle").[23] However, most modern scholars, basing themselves on German folklore connecting Frau Holle with the birth of children, agree that the word "Hollekreisch" refers to Frau Holle and should be translated as "Holle-cry."[24]

Riding with Holle: Frau Holle's Identification with the Demonic in Jewish Interpretation

What role did a German mythic figure like Holle have in a Jewish ceremony? Regrettably, most scholars of German legend do not mention Hollekreisch or discuss its origin.[25] Researchers of Jewish custom have found some evidence to connect Holle (and her associates Frau Venus, Perchta, Frau Harke, and others) with Lilith, the she-demon of Jewish lore, for both mythic figures ride at night and are associated with children and death. These scholars were right that Holle was associated with the forces of mortality. Yet they somehow missed her equally strong association with the forces of life. Perhaps because

of their familiarity with Lilith, who, unlike Holle, had no "positive" role as a protector of children, nature, and fertility, and perhaps because of their discomfort with European goddesses of birth and death, researchers of Jewish folklore generally have seen only one side of Frau Holle's character—as the demonic enemy of newborns, opposed to the forces of God. Yet in many folk contexts, Holle likely operated on an entirely different axis, one neither transcendent nor demonic, but immanent within the forces of nature and birth.

In an 1887 article, Josef Perles explicates his theory that Holle played a demonic role similar to Lilith in the Hollekreisch ceremony. Perles gives a summary of Jewish sources related to Holle, Holda, Frau Venus (a cognate for Holle in Germany), and Mother Earth, including magical, legal, and mystical texts.[26] In this context, he cites a number of magical spells—incantations to spirits or spiritual beings, accompanied by actions such as burying a mirror at a crossroads, performed with the intention of bringing about a desired effect. Some medieval Jews did work magic, just as rabbis of the Talmud used healing spells, and medieval texts recorded the spells they used.

Perles quotes spells invoking Frau Holle or Frau Venus as a protector or a bringer of love. One example is the protective spell found in the thirteenth-century writings of Baruch Ahrweiler: "ver Holda git mich urloup, dass ich ga in iuren hof un breche ein blat, das mich si guot" ("Lady Holda, allow me to go into your garden and break a leaf, so that it will be good for me").[27] The Meissner, Holle's mountain in Hesse (the area of Germany most associated with Holle), is regarded as her garden, and flowers are a common offering to her.[28] Frau Holle appears in this spell as a powerful healing figure who is not subsumed into God but appears to exist separately and to be connected with nature. Nevertheless, Perles adduces these spells as evidence that Holle is a demon and asserts that the circle of children around the infant's cradle is meant to keep her from approaching.

In support of this interpretation, Perles quotes the *Tannhauserlied*, a German medieval poem in which a man is held captive by Frau Venus and pleads to her for release, and a fifteenth-century Jewish manuscript from Munich that mentions a love-spell invoking Frau Venus. He establishes the connection between Venus and Holda/Holle by quoting Grimm to the effect that the Venusberg is known in the region of Munich as Holle's mountain. Some of the legends Perles quotes about Frau Venus certainly could support his claim that Holle and Lilith are similar, but he also cites folklore in which Frau Holle or Frau Venus appear benevolent. He skips over these without comment.

As Grimm indicates and as many medieval church documents attest, witches were said to ride with Frau Holle; one of her medieval titles was "queen of witches." In Germany, a person who awoke with messy or matted hair was playfully called *hollenzopf* and was said to have ridden with Holle—*Er ist mit der Holle gefahren.* Perles quotes a thirteenth-century Jewish halakhic source, *Or zarua*, that refers to matted hair as *Holle-locke*. *Or zarua* ordains that *Holle-locke* should not be shaved even when immersing in a *mikvah*, where one would normally attempt to separate matted hair, because "it" is dangerous (presumably, because the matted hair is demonic, though it is not clear from the text exactly what it symbolizes). Perles also mentions that in southern Germany parents would threaten misbehaving children that Holle would punish them.

Quoting the commentary of Nachmanides on Gen. 4:22, according to which the demons Lilith, Na'amah, Igrat, and Mahalat all come from the mountains of darkness, Perles identifies these mountains with the Hexeberg (witches' mountain) of Germany, although since Nachmanides did not come from Germany, it seems unlikely that he knew of the Hexeberg or of Frau Holle. Perles then quotes M. Grunbaum's[29] assertion that the role of Na'amah in Jewish literature is similar to that of Holle and Venus in German legends. Finally, Perles indicates that both Holle/Holda and Lilith/Na'amah are depicted as having long, wild hair,[30] and that both steal children. Perles's theory of the similarity between Holle/Holda and Lilith is intriguing. But Lilith was never worshiped or invoked for benign purposes, while many Germans—and, it appears from Perles's sources, a number of Jews—did invoke Holle as a benevolent figure, and some even prayed to her regularly, in spite of Christian religious decrees against her.

One final Jewish spell, quoted by Perles from a fifteenth-century text by R. Salman Runkel, addresses Mother Earth, a figure also associated with Frau Holle: "Ich beschwor dich, Mutter Erd, dass mir mein Wund nit beschwar', bis ich dir zu theil wer" ("Mother Earth, do not make my wound any worse until I belong to you"). The same spell also invokes God as a healer of wounds. While Perles does not connect this spell to Holle, we may learn from it, first, that Mother Earth was a legendary figure whom Jews knew and invoked; and, second, that at least for some, Jewish ritual potentially could include both God and powerful feminine earth-figures. In Germany, "Mother Earth," Erda or Hertha, was a personified goddess, and similar spells invoking Frau Venus and Holle clearly are addressed to personified beings.

Most modern and contemporary researchers of Jewish naming practices rely on Perles's depictions of Holle. Theodor Gaster describes Holle as "the grisly witch who attacks infants. When a child is born, she has to be forfended or 'called off,' and this is what Hollekreisch is designed to do."[31] Gaster explains that the custom of lifting the cradle during Hollekreisch relates to the European idea that the infant must be delivered from Mother Earth. He cites non-Jewish Silesian, Swiss, Hungarian, Italian, and British customs to this effect, including the Silesian custom of laying the newborn on the ground and lifting it up, and the British custom of carrying the child upstairs before it is carried downstairs. Gaster even tells us that in Germany a midwife was called an "earth-mother" (*erdmutter*).

Gaster's assertion that the custom of laying a child on the earth and raising it up was common throughout Europe is supported by accounts of Europeans who in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries still performed rituals such as laying a child on a hearth, or in the earth of a garden, and lifting it up.[32] What Gaster does not mention is that according to these witnesses, the earth was regarded as a positive force, and laying a child on it was believed to make the child strong.[33] The evidence Gaster cites seems to suggest that Holle is the "earth-mother" from whom the child is born, a dangerous but not exclusively a threatening force. This notion is further supported by the identification of Holle with the Germanic goddess Hertha, literally "earth."[34] Yet Gaster regards Holle solely as a child-stealing demon.

Joshua Trachtenberg, in *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, writes:

> Holle was the demon-witch who attacked infants; in this respect she provided a close parallel to the familiar Lilith . . . their connection with the night; the distinguishing feature, long hair, which they had in common; their propensity to attack prior to the naming of the child; all of these made the identification a natural one.[35]

Trachtenberg interprets the various aspects of the ceremony—shouting, throwing the child in the air, the threefold repetition—as magical remedies to drive away Frau Holle. At the end of his article, he quotes several legends indicating that Holle also appeared as a beautiful woman, the goddess of love, but he does not consider the possibility that Holle has multiple aspects.

Trachtenberg does let us know that women worshipped Perchta, one of the goddesses identified with Holle, by offering her their hair, and that German

braided bread was called *perchisbrod.* He discards the idea that this is the origin of the Ashkenazi Jewish custom of braiding the *hallah*, the Sabbath loaves, which were also called *perchisbrod.* Nevertheless, their familiarity with the bread is a hint that Jews knew of Perchta/Holle in multiple contexts, and that her hair might not have been an entirely malevolent image. In fact, Holle's femininity and sexuality may be summed up in her association with hair.

Paul Wexler, in his analysis of the origin of Ashkenazic words, analyzes Hollekreisch along the same lines as Perles, Gaster, and Trachtenberg:

> I think it makes more sense to derive Hole [kreisch] from the German name Holle, the witch or goddess with long matted hair and protruding teeth, who, in medieval Germany, was held responsible, *inter alia*, for gobbling up children and entangling hair at night.[36]

Schauss, based on the earlier research of Perles and of A. Landau, a folklorist and scholar of Jewish ritual, identifies Holle with Lilith and even introduces Lilith into pagan German custom: "In pagan times, when naming a child, the Germans apparently performed the ceremony with shouting and noise to drive away Dame Lilith-Holle."[37] Wexler infers Holle's role in Teutonic legend from the role assigned her by folklorists of Jewish ritual like Perles.

By way of this body of literature, the Holle-as-witch theory arrived in Jewish baby-naming books that relied for their information on the secondary scholarship of Gaster, Trachtenberg, and others. The idea that the original intention of Hollekreisch was to drive away the demon Holle appears in popular works like *The New Jewish Baby Book*, *Celebrating Your Jewish Daughter*, and *A Time to Be Born.*[38] Anita Diamant, for example, writes:

> Although some rabbis trace "Holle" to the Hebrew *chol* ("profane" or "secular"), it more likely refers to an ancient Teutonic goddess Holle or Holda, who played the part of Lilith in the pantheon of German mythology.[39]

These works, like those on which they rely, do not acknowledge the evidence that Holle, unlike Lilith, had multiple aspects and was a deity protective of women and infants.

Scholars of Jewish folk ritual, beginning with Perles, put forward the interpretation of Holle as Lilith because they see genuine similarities between the

two. If this reading remains the dominant one, Hollekreisch will be of little use to modern feminist theologians and ritual-creators. Yet Holle may very well be a useful mythic figure for women. If Lilith embodies the fear women feel during childbirth, then Holle, if we add to our understanding of her character, embodies both that frightening vulnerability and women's power of life. Holle is Eve the life-giver and Lilith the witch joined together. One option for creating a Jewish feminist rereading of Hollekreisch is to turn to other folklorists and analysts of myth who present a more balanced view of Frau Holle.

Dame Holle's Pond: Looking at Other Legends of Frau Holle

The late Dov Sadan, an Israeli folklorist, traced certain images in Israeli poetry to their formerly European Jewish writers' familiarity with legends about Holle. The frequent likening of falling snow to "feathers," for example, may echo one of the most common legends about Holle: that snowflakes are feathers shaken from her eiderdowns. There is a Yiddish saying that when it thunders or snows heavily, "Got hot zich tserkrigt mit der Gotekhe un zey hobn tserisn dos iberbet un tseshit di federn"—God has fought with the Goddess [the God-wife?], and they have torn the featherbeds and thrown down the feathers. This saying and others like it were so widespread that, according to testimony quoted by Sadan, the word *Gotekhe*, goddess, was pronounced differently in different cities of Eastern Europe. In Jewish tradition, of course, God does not have a wife (though the metaphor of God's female consort, the Shekhinah, is widely available in mystical constructions of divinity.) The Yiddish saying is a direct translation into Jewish folklore of a classic German folkloric explanation of thunder: Odin is arguing with Frau Holle. In German lore, Frau Holle is sometimes referred to as Frau Gode, "Mrs. God," a conflation of Frau Holle with Frigg, Odin's wife.[40] Sadan's work suggests that the image of Frau Holle that seeped into Jewish culture influenced, on some level, the way that Jews spoke about God. Certainly, the very existence of a Yiddish word for "she-God" is information modern-day makers of ritual might want to have.

How can we connect the frightening Frau Holle with the "Gotekhe" of Sadan's collected sayings? The gentle snow-images Sadan quotes from Israeli poems suggest that Frau Holle was a kindly image for some Jews of Europe in the nineteenth century—even if she did argue with her husband on winter nights. Sadan does not discuss Hollekreisch, nor does he dwell on the

Germanic legends that associate Holle with the unborn, death, and childbirth. Nevertheless, he does suggest that Jews, to some extent, valued and were changed by the myth of Holle. If one examines a wide range of European legends about Frau Holle throughout history, it is clear that she was not merely a feminine demon, but also a face of the feminine divine. The Jews who put together the ceremony of Hollekreisch from a mixture of Teutonic and Jewish elements borrowed the figure of Holle from the surrounding culture. Interpreting Hollekreisch in a more empowering way requires understanding Frau Holle in her wider context.

Norman Cohn, a scholar of the psychological dimensions of Europe's witch hunts, investigates Frau Holle as a medieval cult figure. He provides us with a Frau Holle that combines Sadan's description with that of Perles:

> Holle . . . is a supernatural, motherly being who normally lives in the upper air, and circles the earth. She is particularly active in the depths of winter; snowflakes are the feathers that fall when she makes her bed. She travels in the twelve days between Christmas and Epiphany and this brings fruitfulness to the land during the coming year. . . . She can sometimes be terrifying—she can lead the furious army which rides through the sky on the storm, she can also turn into an ugly old hag with great teeth and a long nose, the terror of children. Yet in the main she becomes terrifying only when angered. . . . She is also concerned with childbirth—babies come from her secret places, her tree, her pond. . . . She is accompanied by . . . the souls of the dead, including the souls of children and babies who have died unbaptized.[41]

In constructing this view, Cohn summarizes many sources, but he mostly relies on Jakob Grimm, the renowned nineteenth-century German folklorist (and contemporary of Perles and Landau), who was one of the main recorders of Holle lore. Cohn details the Church's campaign to demonize Frau Holle, but he also expresses his conclusion that the people who worshipped her (and there appear to have been many women and men who did) regarded her as a goddess of fertility, dangerous but also generous. Cohn notes that Holle's legend strikes a balance between positive and negative imagery.

In a similar treatment, Carlo Ginzburg, an expert on witchcraft and agrarian cults in medieval Europe, writes:

> Popular German divinities such as Holda [were] endowed with attributes which, in a contradiction frequently encountered, were related to both life and death. Holda . . . was at the same time goddess of vegetation, and thus of fertility, and the leader of the "Furious Horde" or "Wild Hunt" of spirits and witches.[42]

Ginzburg quotes many eyewitness accounts and bits of folklore concerning goddesses with a dual aspect. He even records the existence of a German springtime ritual in which a "good" Perchta battled a "bad" Perchta—thus symbolizing the conflict between chaos and creation.

Lotte Motz, a twentieth-century scholar of German myth and a proponent of the modern relevance of goddess imagery, offers a description of Frau Holle that is very similar to Cohn's and Ginzburg's. Her goal as a researcher is to attack Christian demonization of Northern European goddesses and to show that European women were still worshipping goddesses throughout the Middle Ages. Motz identifies Holle as "the force of nature which is both life-giving and life-taking." Noting that Holle or Holda was one of the Germanic goddesses honored with gifts and feasting at the time of the winter solstice, she associates Holle with the following traits: spinning, reward and punishment, alliance with the young, education of children, alliance with women, association with the wild forces of nature, and dual aspects of appearance.[43] Motz trumpets Holle as a feminine force outside the social universe—an elemental spirit of nature who gives and takes away as nature does, and who is a shepherd of the cycle of life.

Motz does not ignore the frightening stories about Frau Holle. Holle was the leader of the Wild Ride, a mythic hunt in which the spirits of the dead swept across Europe; in Scandinavia, Hel (related to Holle) was the goddess of death and the underworld. In Germany, Frau Holle is said to punish bad children at Christmastime and reward the good ones,[44] and parents frighten unruly children with images of the fearsome Holle. Perchta, similarly, is said to harm naughty children, threaten babies, and punish those who offend her.[45] The Danish figure Huldra is an old woman with a tail who is sometimes said to carry off unbaptized infants. In the village of Trieres in the Tyrol, parents place infants beneath (!) their cradles on Christmas Eve to protect them from Perchta's ill will. Motz contextualizes these stories in relation to Holle/Perchta's role as a wise woman, arguing that the frightening of children is meant to teach as well as to terrify.

Motz is interested in women's experience, and her conclusion is that veneration of Holle survived so long because Holle was not only frightening but also meaningful to the women who worshipped her. Reporting on church documents from the Middle Ages attesting that male and female witches went on rides with Holle, Motz suggests that these rides belonged to traditional rituals honoring goddesses.[46] Martin Luther, she notes, attempted to stamp out Holle-worship, saying of her: "Here comes Dame Holde with the great nose . . . and goes about to contradict her God and give him the lie"; he compares "nature rebelling against God to the heathenish Hulda with the frightful nose."[47] Yet Motz also brings evidence that "Christian" women were worshipping Holda or Perchta with fervor and performing rituals to her, in defiance of the Catholic and later the Protestant Church (as discussed by Burchard of Worms in the tenth century and much later by Luther). In the home, holidays were celebrated in her honor, and women cooked special dishes for her. In legend, Holle initiated young girls into the values of thoughtfulness and generosity and the performance of household tasks such as spinning.[48] Motz's research shows that Holle was worshipped in the fifteenth century, around the time when the ritual of Hollekreisch appeared. Holle was not simply a legend; she was for centuries a functioning goddess.

Women, it seems, felt empowered by their connection to these birth and death goddesses, as evidenced by their loyalty to the cults of the goddesses in the face of danger from the Church. Motz's medieval sources, including the testimonies of eyewitnesses to forest-riding rituals and of disgruntled clerics whose parishioners were lighting candles to Perchta, make it clear that Holle's cult was popular with women and girls. The theory that goddess figures were appealing to women is helpful in understanding how Hollekreisch could have come into being. Since women were the devotees of Holle, we can speculate that Hollekreisch was created by Jewish women, who borrowed a birth ceremony from female neighbors and combined it with existing Jewish elements.

Hilda Davidson, a folklorist of northern European myth who collects legends related to women and goddesses, also focuses on Holle's dual aspect. She informs us that Holle brought presents for children in her wagon on New Year's Eve, attended by a troop of children—the unborn, or those who had died unbaptized. Holle grew flowers and fruit in her garden and awakened the apple trees in spring. Davidson writes:

> There is . . . a widespread and ancient link between a spinning goddess and human destinies . . . Again, the dual nature of these goddesses is very marked: the local spirit might appear as a benign White Lady rising from her pool, or as an ugly monster . . . Such legends are a valuable source of evidence for the nature of the belief in the protective goddesses who especially helped women and children.[49]

Jakob Grimm provides the source material for the wide variety of Holle lore that supports the readings of Davidson, Motz, Ginzburg, and Cohn. Grimm was not interested in the religious rebellion of women, but he was interested in recording as many myths of Teutonic goddesses as he could find. He begins his treatment of Holda by telling the reader: "Holda is the kind, benignant, merciful goddess or lady"—this is, in fact, Grimm's translation of Holle's name, which comes from *hold* (kind or propitiating).[50] Grimm goes on to say:

> In popular legends and nursery tales, Frau Holda (Hulda, Holle, Hulle, Frau Holl) appears as a superior being, who manifests a kind and helpful disposition towards men, and is never cross except when she notices disorder in household affairs.[51]

Grimm associates the legends of Holle with the areas of Hesse, Thuringia, Lower Saxony and Franconia—all places where Hollekreisch was performed.

Bringing together multiple legends gleaned from old texts and individual accounts, Grimm, like Sadan and Cohn, describes Holle as a goddess of weather who shakes out her featherbeds to make snowflakes, lights her hearthfire to make fog, and washes her laundry to make rain.[52] If she appears haglike in some tales and frightens children, she also appears as a fair white lady bathing in fountains and is consistently associated with wells.[53] Holle is a guardian of flax and spinning; she blesses those who cease their spinning during the twelve days from December 25 through January 6 and curses those who work during her holiday. There is a legend that Holle spun the Milky Way with her wheel, and in some parts of Germany and Holland the Milky Way is called *Vroneldenstraet* (Frau Holda's road).[54] In one of Grimm's stories, Holle stops at an inn, asks a kind but poor man to fix her broken chariot, and leaves behind a broken axle that turns to gold (almost like a legend of the Baal Shem Tov).

Grimm, who is no feminist, does not seem eager to interpret Holle as powerful or awe-inspiring. Yet in Grimm's notes we discover the legend that children

were drawn from Frau Holle's pond (a lake that can be visited to this day in Hesse, according to German tourist information). Berchta/Perchta shared her cave with unborn babies, and someone who wanted a child went to propitiate Berchta in order to get one.[55] Both Frau Holle and Perchta are said to be caretakers of children who die before being baptized.[56] Grimm's research associates Holle with the power to give life, to ensoul babies, and also to take away their souls if the infants should die. Holle mothers the souls of children, gives living babies to pregnant women, and if those babies should die, she takes them back and mothers them again in her watery realm. It is this aspect of her legend that gives us the clearest source for an alternate interpretation of the Hollekreisch ritual.

Lifting Up the Cradle: A New Meaning for Hollekreisch

Frau Holle was a part of medieval German baby-naming ritual. Elisheva Baumgarten, in her book *Mothers and Children: The Medieval Jewish Experience*, indicates sources, quoted by the folklorist V. Waschnitius, that describe a German naming ritual of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries invoking Frau Holle's name. Women would gather, bring the infant to the church, and lift it up three times, crying "Holle, Holle, Holle!" Then they would give the child a name.[57] Though most folklorists of Jewish naming customs do not know of this ritual, many of them posit that there must have been a German ceremony on which the Jewish one was based. The ritual Baumgarten describes, which contains lifting, threefold repetition, naming, and the crying of Holle's name, seems to be the missing link. Hollekreisch surely was borrowed from a ceremony like this one and perhaps combined with elements of the earlier ceremony recorded in *Mahzor Vitry* to create a Jewish ritual.

Baumgarten, like Perles and others, quotes negative legends about Frau Holle while ignoring positive references. She suggests the church ritual was meant to protect an unbaptized child from death at the hands of Frau Holle by naming it "as if" it was baptized. Yet, considering the legend quoted by Grimm that Holle was the keeper of the well from which babies came, and the customs mentioned by Gaster in which children had to be raised up off the earth to be regarded as viable human beings, the ritual Baumgarten describes may also be interpreted as a symbolic separation from Holle's well. Lifting the child may be meant to keep away Holle's "bad side," her frightening aspect, but it

may also be meant to honor her as the source and owner of new life. Holle's name is called as the child leaves Holle's realm. Naming the child at the end of the ceremony enters it into the human world, thus ending Frau Holle's—and the womb's—reign over the child. Holle plays the role of the earth, source of dearth and abundance, and also of the mother, who now must yield some of her power to that of the church and the community.

Landau, who did extensive research on Hollekreisch, bears out this interpretation by connecting Hollekreisch with Holle's well. He cites a German folk ditty (transcribed here in the original dialect, in modern German, and in English translation) in which new children live at the bottom of Frau Holle's well, emerging when the time has come for them to be born:

Hop, hop, Heserlman!	Hopp, hopp, Hasel-mann [*or:* Hesse-man]
Unsa Kaz had Schtiferln an,	Unsere Katze hat Stiefel an,
Rennt damid af Hollabrunn,	Rennt damit zum Holle-Brunnen,
Find't a Kind'l in da Sunn.	Findet ein Kindchen in der Sonne.
"Wia soll's hoass'n?"	"Wie soll es heissen?"
Kiz'l oda Goass'l.	Kitz oder Geisslein.
"Wear soll's heb'n?"	"Wer soll es aufheben?"
D'Sofferl mid da Reb'n.	Der Säufer mit der Rebe.
"Wear soll d'Wind'l wasch'n?"	"Wer soll die Windeln waschen?"
D'Wabel mid da Blandadasch'n.	Die Weibel mit der trüben Tasche [*or:* blanke-Tasche]

Hop, hop, hazel-tree man [or man from Hesse, or possibly rabbit man]!
Our cat has boots on,
Runs with them to Holla's well,
Finds a child in the sun.
"What shall it be called?"
Kid or little goat.
"Who shall lift it?"
The drinker with his wine.
"Who shall wash the diapers?"
The woman with the dim [or empty] pocket.

"What shall it be called?"[58] is the same phrase that appears in Hollekreisch, and the sequence of events—finding a child, crying out its name, and lifting it up—resembles that of the Hollekreisch ritual and, to some extent, the German naming ceremony. Landau records another folk song that has the same three features: finding a child by a well, crying "What shall it be called?" and giving its name, and then lifting it up and washing its diapers. "Holla-Brunnen" (Holle's well) is a similar phrase to that used in other German legends about Holle's well of souls.

The well is not a place of terror or punishment; it is simply where the child is before it is born. In this mythic context, Holle is not an ugly witch, but rather the symbol of the earth—or of the mother's womb—giving forth life from her mysterious depths. She is frightening insofar as birth, bloody and dangerous, is frightening. The Hollekreisch ceremony, like the German "Holle" ceremony and other European cradling ceremonies that involved placing a child on the earth and lifting it up, honors the generous yet fickle powers of life.

In the German folk song, the cat cries "What shall it be called?" as the infant rises from Holle's well. In the Jewish ritual, it is the children who create a symbolic "well" by forming a circle around the cradle—perhaps since it is they who are closest to Holle's prenatal realm.[59] Holle, the children cry, what shall we name this baby? By inviting Holle to be present at the naming, as it were, the family of the child shows Holle that their child is now a full person and no longer subject to the dangerous newborn period. The child is born from Mother Earth and into the human community. Similarly, Italian, Silesian, and Swiss families laid their children on the earth and then lifted them up, to make them strong and full of life. Holle is the *Erd-Mutter* from whom all children must separate in order to become people, though they still need her strength in order to grow.[60] In this respect she bears some similarity to the human mother.

Clarissa Pinkola Estes calls liminal, chthonic figures like Holle the Life/Death/Life mother—the keeper of the gateway to the beyond. This fearsome mother figure appears in many cultures and in many places, from La Llorona of Mexico to Baba Yaga of Russia.[61] In Jewish mystical thought, the Shekhinah sometimes takes on this role, when she appears as a keeper of the souls of the unborn and the dead.[62] German women in Hesse honored Holle's role as Life/Death/Life mother by bathing in her spring when they wanted to marry or become pregnant.

Through Hollekreisch, Jews also invoked Holle at a threshold of life—birth with naming. Holle's presence within the birth ceremony would have been

difficult to transmit in Jewish language, since it lay outside a Jewish meaning structure. Certainly, few Jewish scholars before the modern period would speak about a Teutonic birth goddess in a text on Jewish customs. The scholarly men who wrote down the ritual may deliberately have forgotten Holle in order to judaize the ceremony and rid it of pagan influence. Or, Jewish communities may have found it more politic to downplay the custom's roots. They retained the ceremony as a folk custom but erased it as an explicit reference to a Teutonic goddess.

The German women's ceremony died out over time, but Hollekreisch continued for six centuries. Landau believes that it died out among Germans because it was replaced by the lifting-up of baptism, a welcome into the human community, whereas for Jews, who had no protective and welcoming naming ceremony for girls, the ritual remained necessary.[63] Another possible reason for the prolonged life of the Jewish ritual, suggested by Deborah Greniman,[64] is that German church authorities stamped out the Holle ritual as a form of witchcraft (if so, this would be yet another indication that the ceremony honored Frau Holle as well as warded against her). Jews, less conscious of its meaning, retained it, yet repressed the figure of Frau Holle herself. The giving of a *hai* or a name pendant to the child, as reported by Hilde Gerstley,[65] suggests that into the modern period, the ceremony remained a moment to wish life and strength for the new infant as it separated from its mother's body.

It is impossible to know what the original (probably female) Jewish innovators of Hollekreisch intended, or what the ritual meant to Jews beyond being a joyful celebration. Was it a way to relate to German neighbors, much as an American Jewish woman might engage in the American custom of a baby shower? Did Jewish women innovate it and pass it on to their daughters as a home ceremony they could share in without being seated behind a *mehitzah*? Did Jewish women of later times know about Holle as a deity, as German women did? These questions are unanswerable, yet it is inconceivable that Jews did not know, at least originally, the cultural context of the ritual they were adopting. To read Grimm's and Motz's sources on the extensive winter celebrations of Holle, one must imagine that everyone in the Germanic lands knew of Holle or Holda, and not only of her demonic aspect but of her benign one as well. The idea that a divine feminine force, embodied in nature, was the ground of life seems to have seeped into Judaism, not only through esoteric works like the *Zohar*, but through women's home rituals.

The Well of Life: What Holle Holds for Us

The ceremony of Hollekreisch, if we link it to the figure of Frau Holle in her full range of attributes, takes on a new life. We can re-understand it as a ritual that honored birth as women experienced it: dangerous and necessary, painful and exhilarating, wondrous and sometimes tragic. Hollekreisch, while making reference to the Torah and other Jewish symbols, challenged the Jewish norm—birth ceremonies that honored male parentage and male covenant and ignored women—with a ritual that celebrated the emergence of life out of the womb, made the mother a central ceremonial figure, and recognized both girls and boys as members of the human community. By separating the child from the womb of the earth, Hollekreisch may also have helped the mother to make the transition from being the sole keeper and "ground" of the child to being its social parent. Looking back at this ceremony, we can see the ways that Jewish women might have asserted themselves as important, ritually and theologically, by borrowing ceremonies and Judaizing them.

The figure of Holle, buried within Hollekreisch, is an affirmation that Jews throughout the centuries have borrowed images of the divine that were helpful to them, just as some Jewish women today are examining alternative divine images. As a theological image, Holle needs neither a male partner nor a female "shadow"; she is strong and beautiful, housewifely and wild, fierce and gentle—both Eve and Lilith. It is just possible that stories of Frau Holle may have affected how Jewish women and men regarded the birth of girls and the power of women to give birth. At the very least, we can let these stories change us. The existence of Hollekreisch and of other Jewish sources about Holle allows us to challenge existing interpretations of Jewish women as being peripheral to spiritual power.

Additionally, Hollekreisch and other sources on Frau Holle complement and challenge Jewish attitudes toward nature. They teach us that nature's forces yield both good and bad results but are holy nevertheless. The association of women with natural forces is problematic because it stereotypes women as "of the body," while men become keepers of culture and spirit. Nevertheless, since Jewish life has been so heavily weighted toward text, scholarship, and conversation with the divine rather than toward experience of the divine in nature (though of course there are many exceptions), examining the figure of Holle in all her aspects may remind us to regard the earth as an important spiritual

personality. Spinning wool and making snow, Frau Holle is keeper of nature *and* culture and perhaps represents their comingling—a union some Jews may have yearned to discover in their tradition. While Frau Holle, unreconstructed, is not a feminist figure—she is the patron of women's household work and to some extent maintains the strict gender roles of European society—her story might serve us as we revise our own myths. Jewish feminist theologians are struggling to define the relationship of women to God, nature, and culture. Frau Holle's image could provide one avenue of investigation.

Indeed, many modern Jewish women poets and writers use imagery similar to that which we glean from Hollekreisch. Marcia Falk's new liturgy for the Sabbath, altering the traditional text, calls the divine "source of life, ever-dying, ever-living" and "creator of good and evil."[66] This could easily be a description of Frau Holle. Lynn Gottlieb also seems to have met Frau Holle. She tells us that in her interpretation, "Jewish teachings rest on the perception that the forces of creation, destruction, and regeneration form a whole pattern of being" and later writes: "snow is the winter garment of Shekhinah."[67] Susannah Heschel writes:

> [The] image of the Goddess is very close to many Jewish insights about God who creates both light and darkness. . . . The Goddess gives and She takes away, not out of transcendent power but because that is the way things are.[68]

Alicia Ostriker describes the Shekhinah as "womb compassionate pitiless / eyes seeing to the ends of the universe / in which life struggles and delights in life."[69] All of these writers express theology that the legends of Frau Holle could enrich or inform.

Scholars and ritualists have combed the Bible, the Talmud, and the *Zohar* for names and images of God-She. Most of them come from a world of male mysticism and scholarship. Holle, like the Shekhinah, is an immanent image, dwelling in the earth, the weather, the womb, and the wintry landscape. However we feel about Holle and other goddesses, we have the obligation to go beyond earlier researchers to re-understand figures like Holle and rituals like Hollekreisch. We may find that Judaism stretches much farther than we think.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the staff of the Leo Baeck Institute, of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, of the Rare Book Room at the Jewish Theological Seminary, and of the Newberry Library, Chicago, for locating valuable resources, as well as Nina Bruder, Gary Pretsfelder, and Hilde Gerstley for sharing their memories and their modern Hollekreisch ceremony. My thanks also to Rabbi Dr. Justin Lewis, Dr. Gertrud Jaron Lewis, and Dr. Elizabeth Denlinger for their invaluable scholarly help, to Erna Hammer for her translation and mythic memory, and to Shoshana Jedwab for her caring advice and support in preparing this article.

Notes

1. These figures are frequently, as a group, known as the Frauen (ladies), since all receive the title Frau. They resemble each other, varying in name according to location and only somewhat in terms of personal attributes and legends. They are mostly associated with birth, death, magic, winter, and nature, and occasionally with love; see Jakob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1883). While Holle, Perchta, Harke, Venus, etc., are somewhat independent entities, Holda and Holle may be regarded as identical. Grimm, for example, notes that Holle is Holda without the "d."
2. "Credesti ut aliqua," *Burchardi Wormaciensis Episcopi, Decretorum*, Liber 19, PL 140, p. 962, quoted in Elisheva Baumgarten, "Mothers and Children: The Medieval Jewish Experience" (Ph.D. Dissertation, the Hebrew University, 2000), p. 97.
3. See Lotte Motz, "The Winter Goddess: Percht, Holda and Related Figures," *Folklore*, 95/2 (1984), pp. 150–156.
4. Theodor H. Gaster, *The Holy and the Profane: Evolution of Jewish Folkways* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1955), p. 33.
5. *Mahzor Vitry* (ed. S. Hurwitz; Berlin, 1889–1893), p. 628; Hayim Schauss, *The Lifetime of a Jew throughout the Ages of Jewish History* (New York: UAHC, 1950), p. 79.
6. Judah Hehasid, *Sefer hasidim* (written in 1140; Jerusalem: Mossad haRav Kook, 1970).
7. Baumgarten, "Mothers and Children" (above, note 2); see also her book, *Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).
8. Herman Pollack, *Jewish Folkways in Germanic Lands (1648–1806): Studies in Aspects of Daily Life* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1971), p. 27, reporting eyewitness

accounts of the ceremony by Joseph Hahn of Kleinsteinach, Bavaria (seventeenth century), and Joseph Steinhart of Fürth (eighteenth century); M. Grunwald, "Altjüdisches Gemeindeleben," *Mittelungen des Gesellschaft für jüdische Volkskunde*, 43 (1912), p. 83, quoted in Pollack, *Jewish Folkways*, p. 365; Michele Klein, *A Time to Be Born: Customs and Folklore of Jewish Birth* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1998), p. 190; A. Landau, "Fragekasten: Holekreisch," *Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für jüdische Volkskunde*, 4 (1899), p. 146; idem, "Holekreisch," *Zeitscrift des Vereins für Volkskunde*, 9 (1899), pp. 72–77; L. Low, *Die Lebensalter in der jüdische Literatur* (Szegedin, 1875), p. 104; F. Raphael and R. Weyal, *Les Juifs en Alsace* (Toulouse, 1977); Leo Trepp, *The Complete Book of Jewish Observance* (New York: Behrman House, Inc./Summit Books, 1980), p. 226.

9. Moses ben Isaac Mintz, *She'elot uteshuvot rabbeinu Moshe Mintz* (Jerusalem: Mechon Yerushalayim, 1990), p. 37. Also see the citation in B.S. Hamburger, *Shorshei minhag Ashkenaz* (Jerusalem: Mekhon Moreshet Ashkenaz, 1995), p. 415.

10. Hamburger, *Shorshei minhag Ashkenaz* (above, note 9), pp. 415–417; Schauss, *The Lifetime of a Jew* (above, note 5), p. 79.

11. Hamburger, *Shorshei minhag Ashkenaz* (above, note 9), *loc. cit.*; Gaster, *The Holy and the Profane* (above, note 4), p. 37; Schauss, *The Lifetime of a Jew* (above, note 5), p. 45

12. Paul Wexler, *The Ashkenazic Jews: A Slavo-Turkic People in Search of a Jewish Identity* (Columbus, OH: Slavica Publishers, 1993), p. 119.

13. *Ibid.*; M. Weinreich, "Holekreisch: A Jewish Rite of Passage—A Preliminary Statement," in D.K. Wilgus (ed.), *Folklore International: Essays in Traditional Belief and Custom in Honor of Wayland Debbs Hand* (Hatboro, PA: Folklore Associates, 1967), p. 246ff, quoted in Wexler, *loc. cit.*

14. http://www.sdv.fr/judaisme/traditio/hollek.htm; Rabbi Warschawski also says that the ceremony should conclude with the priestly blessing.

15. Hamburger, *Shorshei minhag Ashkenaz* (above, note 9), p. 424.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 418–419; Grunwald, "Altjüdisches Gemeindeleben" (above, note 8), p. 84; Yuspa Hahn, *Yosef ometz* (Frankfurt a/M: Y. Kelmar, 1723), pp. 361–362; Klein, *A Time to Be Born* (above, note 8), p. 190.

17. Hahn, *Yosef ometz* (above, note 16), *loc. cit.*

18. Jacob Moellin, *Sefer Maharil minhagim* (Jerusalem: Mifal Torat Hakhmei Ashkenaz, 1989); Rabbi Israel ben Shalom Shachna of Lublin, cited in Baumgarten, "Mothers and Children" (above, note 2), p. 96.

19. Schauss, *The Lifetime of a Jew* (above, note 5), p. 45.

20. Samuel ben David Moshe, *Nahalat shiv'ah* (Fyurda: Yosef ben Zalman Schneur, 1691), II, no. 17, fol. 11a.

21. I interviewed Hilde Gerstley by telephone on July 8 and 10, 2004.

22. Pollack, *Jewish Folkways in Germanic Lands* (above, note 8), p. 27.

23. Gaster, *The Holy and the Profane* (above, note 4), p. 37; Low, *Die Lebensalter in der jüdische Literatur* (above, note 8), p. 105; Trepp, *The Complete Book of Jewish Observance* (above, note 8), p. 226.
24. Landau, "Holekreisch" (above, note 8), pp. 72–77; J. Perles, "Die berner Handschrift des kleinen Aruch," in *Jubelschrift zum siebzigsten Geburtstag des Prof. Dr. H. Graetz* (Breslau: Schottlander, 1887), p. 24; Wexler, *Ashkenazic Jews* (above, note 12), p. 119.
25. But see Erika Timm, *Frau Holle, Frau Percht und verwandte Gestalten* (Stuttgart: Hirzel, 2003). Timm mentions Hol(l)ekriesch briefly in note 29 on p. 20, but she is non-committal about its origin.
26. Perles, "Die berner Handschrift" (above, note 24), p. 24.
27. Ibid.
28. Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* (above, note 1), p. 267.
29. M. Grunbaum, "Beitrage zur vergleichenden Mythologie aus der Hagada," in *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenlandischen Gesellschaft*, 31 (1877), pp. 224–225, 231, quoted in Perles, "Berner Handschrift" (above, note 24).
30. BT *Eruvin* 100b.
31. Gaster, *The Holy and the Profane* (above, note 4), pp. 36–37; A. Dieterich, *Mutter Erde: Ein Versuch über Volksreligion* (Leipzig 1905; reprinted Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967), pp. 7 ff.
32. Dieterich, *Mutter Erde* (above, note 31), *loc. cit.*
33. *Ibid.*
34. Kveldulf Gundarsson, *Teutonic Magic: The Magical and Spiritual Practices of the Germanic People* (St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1993), p. 128.
35. Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* (New York: Atheneum, 1974), pp. 40–43.
36. Wexler, *The Ashkenazic Jews* (above, note 12), p. 119.
37. Schauss, *The Lifetime of a Jew* (above, note 5), p. 46.
38. Debra Nussbaum Cohen, *Celebrating Your New Jewish Daughter* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2001), pp. 14–15; Anita Diamant, *The New Jewish Baby Book* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1993); Klein, *A Time to Be Born* (above, note 8), p. 190.
39. Diamant, *The New Jewish Baby Book* (above, note 38), p. 212.
40. Dov Sadan, "Marat Holle (gilgulo shel motiv)," *Yeda 'am*, 9 (1952), pp. 15–17.
41. Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt* (Sussex: Sussex University Press, 1975), pp. 212–213.
42. Carlo Ginzburg, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (English transl. by John and Anne Tedeschi; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 40.
43. Motz, "The Winter Goddess" (above, note 3), p. 155; V. Waschnitius, "Perht,

Holda und verwandte Gestalten: Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Religionsgeschichte," in *Sitzungsberichte der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaft in Wien, Philosophische-historische Klasse*, vol. 174, dissertation 2 (Vienna, 1914), p. 321.
44. Motz, "The Winter Goddess" (above, note 3), p. 152.
45. Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* (above, note 1), III, p. 277; there is even one frightening figure called Hildaberta, apparently a combination of Holda and Perchta.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 1056–1057; Regino of Prum (Abbot of Treves), *Canon Episcopi* (tenth-century church records), cited in Motz, "The Winter Goddess," p. 162 (above, note 3).
47. Martin Luther, *Auslegung der Episteln* (Basel, 1622), p. 69. Cited in Motz, "The Winter Goddess" (above, note 3), p. 163.
48. Motz, "The Winter Goddess" (above, note 3), p. 161.
49. Hilda Ellis Davidson, *The Lost Beliefs of Northern Europe* (London–New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 115–116.
50. Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* (above, note 1), p. 266.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 267.
52. My own mother remembers legends from her German childhood about Frau Holle making snow. For my mother and her family, Frau Holle was a benign, roly-poly figure shaking out heavenly featherbeds.
53. Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* (above, note 1), p. 268; here Grimm sees a connection with Nerthus, goddess of the earth.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 285; Diana Paxson, "Holda," in *Idunna: A Journal of the Northern Tradition*, 30 (1998), pp. 19–21.
55. Motz, "The Winter Goddess" (above, note 3), p. 154.
56. Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* (above, note 1), p. 275.
57. Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children* (above, note 7), p. 159; Waschnitius, "Perht, Holda und verwandte Gestalten" (above, note 43), p. 321.
58. Landau, "Fragekasten" (above, note 8), p. 146; idem, "Holekreisch" (above, note 8), pp. 72–77. The rhyme appears here as translated by Rabbi Justin Lewis and Dr. Gartrud Jaron Lewis (with some help from Erna Hammer and Birgit Preisinger). The meaning of *blandadasch'n* is particularly obscure. Hollabrunn, "Holla's Well," is also the name of a town in Austria. "The woman with the empty pocket" could refer to Holle or to another mythic figure, though the imagery is unclear.
59. The circle may allude to Holle's association with spinning wheels, or to her wheel of life and death. The name of Holle's holiday, Yule, means "wheel."
60. This practice is not unique to Europe; the Zuni of the Southwest laid children and their mothers on mounds of earth and had them rise up again, as a sign that the children were becoming human.
61. Clarissa Pinkola Estes, *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992).

62. Cf. *Zohar*, I, 48a; II, 89b.
63. Landau, "Fragekasten" (above, note 8), pp. 146–147. Also see Weinreich, "Holekreisch" (above, note 13), pp. 243–253.
64. Personal comment.
65. See above, note 21.
66. Marcia Falk, *Book of Blessings: New Jewish Prayers for Daily Life, the Sabbath, and the New Moon Festival* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), p. 471.
67. Lynn Gottlieb, *She Who Dwells Within: A Feminist Vision of a Renewed Judaism* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), pp. 25, 61.
68. Susannah Heschel, *On Being a Jewish Feminist* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), p. 243.
69. Alicia Ostriker, *The Volcano Sequence* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002), p. 64.