

Janet Mason

A Perfect Mind
(1272 BCE)

"It is not too late." Tamar reached up and took Judith's hand. "You can still conceive a daughter."

"How?" said Judith. "I am almost to the end of my bleeding time. I will do anything."

"First, you have to examine your mind. You must also look closely at your actions. You have to stop talking about your husband and sons. You have to take off the silver necklaces." Tamar saw the look of horror on Judith's face.

"But who am I without my husbands and sons? They are everything to me -- even though my husband barely looks at me, and my sons never listen to me."

Tamar nodded. Judith didn't have to tell her this. She already knew. She was at peace as she opened her mouth and uttered words she had never heard before. She could feel, deep within her, that these words were true: "You are yourself; you are the first and the last; you are the honored one and the scorned one; you are the whore and the holy one; you are the wife and the virgin; you are the mother and the daughter; you are the barren one; and many are your sons; you are the silence that is incomprehensible; you are the utterance of your name."

Tamar didn't know where she had heard these words before or where they had come from. They had echoed through her, a truth about Judith. She was all of these things and more. She liked the sound of these words. She would have to remember to write them down later.

Judith looked at Tamar and nodded. Tamar looked at the light in Judith's eyes -- and saw her beauty. There was not much light in the tent -- only from the one oil lamp and the desert sunset that filtered through the opening above the pole in the center of the tent. Judith's eyes caught the light and cast it back. Her long

dark hair shone. Her oval face held the luster of dark olives. Tamar knew that the things that were undefined were larger than Judith's existence as a wife and mother. And she knew that Judith was ready to know her own greatness.

All Judith had to do to fly was to let go of the past and to catch Tamar's words in mid-air. But she wasn't ready -- yet.

"The necklaces are all I have to show my accomplishments. "

"Just put them away for a while. You can always put them back on later," answered Tamar. "Every day, in the morning, sit and breath for a while -- at least until the sun shifts. Let go of the outside voices that say you are less than. These voices might come from your husband, from your sons. They might be the voices of the women in the marketplace. They might be everything that was told to you since you were a girl. But you have your own inner voice. And that voice will free you."

"Okay," said Judith. "How do I start?"

Tamar smiled serenely.

"Sit down with me," she said. Tamar sat cross legged on one of the folded camel hair blankets.

"Remember several growing seasons ago, when Leah brought the scroll that had been passed onto her and we sat and watched our breath and listened to the sound of "OM?"

Judith nodded. "We started every ritual after that with watching out breath and making the sound," said Judith.

"Yes," said Tamar. "And remember Leah and I said that it was good to start every day with a practice of quietness -- of watching our breath until the thoughts in our own minds go away and we are emptied. This way we are making a space for your own voice."

"I remember that Leah suggested that we do this at home in our own tents. But I have too much to do to practice. Besides, I don't have that much privacy and my husband and sons would wonder what I am doing."

"We can do it right now," said Tamar.

"Wait a minute. Tell me about the scroll. Where did it come from?"

Tamar looked at Judith.

"The teachings of the scroll are not outlawed," said Tamar. The voice in her head said *Yet*.

This was true, but Tamar was wise enough to be protective of the scroll. "But no one knows of its existence. And because it does not acknowledge the one God, it will surely be destroyed if anyone finds out about it. You really want to have a daughter, right?"

"More than anything."

"First, you must promise not to tell anyone about the scroll -- not your husband and not Jacob and Samuel at the village well. Not *anyone*."

"I promise," replied Judith.

"Leah has a friend that she has known for many years, almost as long as she has been in our goddess cult. This friend has a friend who had gone to the South of India and he brought back the scroll in a clay jar that her friend bought and gave to her. The man who had travelled to India was trading in scents and perfumes and creams. He sells his wares to the Nabataeans, the desert nomads in North Arabia."

"I've heard of the Nabataeans," said Judith. "But not good things. They worship many gods, not the one God. My husbands and sons say that they are bad and to stay away from them when they sell their scents at the market."

"And do you always do what your husband and sons say?"

"I say that I do," admitted Judith as she sat down on a folded blanket and faced Tamar. "But I bought some jars of Egyptian water lily scented cream from them. I use it on myself between the few times each week when I bathe. It really does soften my skin. The scent is delicate and fragrant. I keep the jar hidden. Bram doesn't notice the smell and neither do my sons."

"See. You know how to keep something to yourself when it suits you."

Judith nodded. "Yes, I can keep a secret."

"Then you must keep the secret of the scroll. And do not tell anyone that you want to conceive a daughter," said Tamar.

"I know that," said Judith. "I learned when I was a girl not to say I wanted a daughter. Mother taught me that women only pray for sons and those who pray for daughters never get what they want."

"That is what we are taught," said Tamar. "But all prayer doesn't have to be that way. This scroll talks about a religion that worships the feminine. And by sitting quietly and noticing our breath, by feeling our

oneness and saying the first sound of creation, 'OM,' we can remove all obstacles because they begin in the mind."

"But is feeling our oneness the same as worshipping the one God?" asked Judith.

"I think it is the same, but others may not agree," said Tamar. She knew that if Judith felt bad about betraying the one God, she would have a hard time removing the obstacles that blocked the conception of a daughter. But Tamar was also telling Judith what she knew in her heart to be true.

Judith nodded.

"Just remember," said Tamar. "To pray not only for yourself. Yes, you want a daughter more than anything, but you want to give birth to a daughter who can help others as well. You want a daughter who will make the land better when she walks upon it. You want a daughter because she will bring happiness, joy and peace to all who look upon her.

"I hadn't thought of that," said Judith. "But you are right. My daughter will bring happiness to others. And she will make our land a better place."

"That's right," whispered Judith.

The two women faced each other and breathed deeply.

"We'll start with 'OM,' the first sound that came out of the great void, that embraces all that exists and that has no beginning and no ending, the name of God," said Tamar.

"But is He our God?" asked Judith. "Our one God?"

Tamar shrugged. "Some would say so. Others would say not. And others would say that this God is not a He or a She. This God is a vibration, the sound of the brightest stars as they shoot across the desert night sky, the shifting of the grains of sand that make up the endless expanse of the desert and the song of the wind as it sculpts the sand."

"I see," replied Judith. "This is the same as the one God, but different. OM is the sound of creation. Yet the one God is said to have made everything. I remember my mother telling me the stories. The words lulled me to sleep then. Even now they move me. But my mother told me that Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden because Eve listened to the serpent and ate the forbidden fruit and then convinced her husband to have some."

Judith laughed abruptly and said, "as if serpents could talk!"

Tamar nodded. "Some of the stories are outlandish. And I hope they're not all true -- like the story about Lot after his wife was turned to a pillar of salt and he went to the desert of Zoar with his two daughters and since there were no other men they populated the nations of Moab and Ammon."

"Yes. The tale of God burning down the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah but then letting Lot lay with his daughters always troubled me," replied Judith.

"It is troubling," said Tamar.

"Perhaps that is why God gave me sons when I prayed for a daughter," said Judith. "And now that I have been praying for a daughter night and day, I have not conceived. Although I haven't laid with Bram in many growing seasons. He says there is no reason since we already have six sons. But to tell you the truth, I do not miss laying with him."

"Hmmm," replied Tamar. "It does not matter if you lay with Bram or not. In fact, it is better not to do the same old things. Conception starts in your mind -- and then your womb."

Judith nodded. I am beginning to understand.

"And you are right -- OM and the one God are different but the same," said Tamar.

"But I already prayed to the one God and only conceived sons," said Judith.

"Then it will be okay to pray differently," replied Tamar. She shifted on her blanket.

"That makes sense," said Judith. Her long dark lashes brushed her face as she closed her eyes.

"We will start with three OMs," said Tamar. "The first sound of creation."

"OM," said Judith.

"OM," echoed Tamar.

Together their incantation was larger than it would have been if each of them was chanting alone. As Tamar breathed in and out, she pictured a golden light around Judith. It pulsed like the haze around the sun.

Both of them breathed in and out. Sometimes they chanted and other times they were silent. After a time, Tamar felt her vision penetrate Judith's mind. She could see into her mind. It was ablaze with white light. There was a child there and the child was holy. Wise men would bow down to her. She was all they had ever wanted -- Tamar and Judith. Tamar and Judith were friends. More than that, Tamar was Judith's counselor and healer. She knew the old ways. Judith came to her goddess cult. Tamar wanted Judith to bear

this child. She was sure of it. Her intention was in Judith's mind. Then it was lower, in her womb. She saw an embryo forming in a blaze of light.

"Just remember that you are made from light," said Tamar softly. "The same light and water that the hyssop that grows in the desert is made from. And your daughter, too, will be created from light."