

## On Becoming a Woman

by Qalonymos ben Qalonymos, born in Arles, 1286.

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translated by Peter Cole (*The Dream of the Poem: Hebrew Poetry from Muslim and Christian Spain 950-1492*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007. 285-6)

Lord in heaven,  
who brought forth wonders  
by fire and water for our Fathers,  
cooling Abraham's Chaldean kiln,  
so in its flames he'd not be burned;  
who altered Dina's fate in the womb,  
and made a serpent of Moses' wand;  
who whited with illness Miriam's hands  
and turned the Sea of Reeds into land—  
transforming the muddy bed of the Jordan  
into passable sand,  
and making from stone and shale  
a pool whose springs would not fail  
if only you would make me female!

If that alone might be done,  
how wondrous then would be my fortune!  
Spared the arduous labor of men,  
I'd settle down and raise my children.  
But why complain and bitterly whine?  
If my Father in heaven is so inclined  
as to fashion me with a lasting deformity,  
how could I ask that He take it from me?  
Worry about what just can't be  
is incurable pain and endless misery;  
empty condolence is hardly an answer.  
"I'll just have to bear it," I said, "though I'll suffer

until I wither away and die.”

And since long ago I learned from tradition  
that both good and bad deserve benediction,  
in the faintest of whispers I'll mutter each morning;  
Blessed art Thou, O Lord—who has not made me a woman.