**Chapter 6**

**The Language of Belief**

While in the previous chapter, I addressed the question of what belief is in the views of the interviewees, and I expanded upon the perspectives of emotion, experience, and worship; this chapter explores the question: “What is their belief that…?” (paraphrasing Buber, 1951). It focuses on the use that the interviewees make of language to address beliefs of theological truth that they hold. I do so while bearing in mind the two meanings of the word שפה *safah* [“language”] in Hebrew: the means used to communicate; and as threshold or limen into another realm. This “wordplay” in and of itself hints at the ambivalence and multiplicity of definitions that observably demand intricate mental acrobatics, that are found in the interviewees’ words/accounts. These acrobatics in turn demand, as we will see, high sensitivity to language, both on the interviewees’ parts and on the parts of those seeking to understand their words/wording.

In the previous chapter, we could detect in the interviewees’ thought processes/philosophies the dialectical relations between “Protestant” interviews, as presented by William James, as well as ideational elements whose origins lie in Judaism. This chapter will show how post-secular Jewish and feminist claims are conspicuous/abound in theological truth-claim discourse. Post-secular-Jewish theological truth-claims will be shown via the continuation of our discussion on Gordon and Buber, by addressing two feminist theologies: that of Mary Daly, who was mentioned in previous chapters; and that of Daphne Hampson, which will be presented in this chapter, both of whom are post-Christian, i.e., both announced that they left Christianity due to what Hampson (2002) referred to as “the scandal of the patriarchy”, although neither abandoned the element of belief in her worldview.

**“God” and “*wholeness*”**

Unlike the interviewees’ willingness to talk about their beliefs, their willingness to say exactly what they believe in was far lower. Thus, for example, Jungian psychologist Naomi, 69, remarked on Sharon, on whose book I expounded in Chapter 1:

I can’t come to terms with the need to define God. At a certain point I let it go/stopped trying, actually while I was influenced by Rabi Nachman of Breslov’s admonition to “abandon the head”, i.e., to stop thinking and connect up to believing. I felt like that fit me best, as if I try to define things logically, it’ll never end. So I choose deliberately not to deal with definitions, as they just confuse me. They don’t give me anything, they just annoy me, and I feel like it’s better to focus on the experience of belief.

The method of “abandoning your head” to which Naomi subscribes notwithstanding, the study of belief does not offer the real possibility of ignoring claims of truth that it entails. It wasn’t as if none of the interviewees tried to do so: When asked to explain explicitly what it is they believe in, a few refused to do so, while others found it quite difficult. Take for example, the following two accounts:

In the past I tried to put into words what this experience is [that we call ‘belief’]. But ultimately I decided that perhaps there’s something childish in trying to do so, or in defining anything at all. Why define something as amorphous as God? It’s like trying to define love; it’s not worth my time/the effort. [Sigal, PhD in social work, 39, Tel Aviv]

It’s difficult for me to define what God is; it also doesn’t occupy me that much/neither am I preoccupied by it. At the same time, an entity that looks out over everything or directs everything, or a system of forces, or energies, even if it’s something or someone on another planet – like some strange theories I’ve heard [espoused] – it really doesn’t matter to me who it is, exactly, how it looks, where it is, what it does, and what software it uses. I really don’t care that cheese has holes in it. It’s easier for me not to analyze it, as it’s so vague. I don’t feel like I'm adding anything if I know or decide what it is, as anyway I can’t. I don’t feel like it will add to my life to believe that there’s a higher power. [Nirit, alternative therapist/healer, 45, a kibbutz near Yokne’am]