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In Memory of Esther Aumann z"l

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# MASSEKHET

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**'Massekhet'** is a periodical established in memoriam to Esther Aumann, one of the first students in the Matan *Beit Midrash*. Esther, who devoted her life to her home and to raising her family, began attending the *Beit Midrash* at the age of sixty-two and for the first time in her life delved into the depths revealed in the study of Gemara, Tanach and Jewish Philosophy. Six years later she passed away of cancer. The story of her life epitomizes the complete metamorphosis that women's Torah study has undergone in the last generation.



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*Fertility and Women – Formation of Israel in ancient Egypt*  
A literary-ideological study in Exodus Chap. 1-2

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**Lea Mazor**

A Peoples' ability to consolidate its identity is directly dependent on a conscious common past. A significant element within this common past is occupied by the "origin" period, during which the (People's) defining events occurred, thereby shaping the future significance and ideals of its very existence. The description of Israel's formative years, as portrayed in Chapters 1-2 of the Book of Exodus, contains many references to women and fertility. There are descriptions of fertility and attempts to restrict it, of marriage and birth, of women giving birth and midwives, of the birthing stool and the child's gender, of children and nursing babies, of seed and offspring. The female characters enjoy a prominent place in the story: The mothers, midwives, "the mother of Moses", his sister, "Pharaoh's daughter", her maidservants, the 7 daughters of Yitro. These women differ in their ethnic identity, their social status, their age and their occupation. There are Egyptians and Hebrews, both named and anonymous, child and adult, high-ranking and simple. The purpose of this article is to examine the ideological and theological messages of this phenomena, and its contribution in shaping the historical memory of the formation of Israel. God promised the forefathers both offspring and land. It was in Egypt, and through the involvement of women, that both these

promises began to materialize, thereby heralding the beginning of the transformation of Israel to a nation. The immense childbirth fulfilled the promise of offspring, and the birth of the leader, destined to lead the children of Israel to the Promised Land, began the process which would fulfill the prophecy of a country.

The wondrous process of events and literary analogies which link the narrative on childbirth and the birth of Moses to the traditions regarding the formation of Israel, demonstrate God's will of life for His people. The process culminates with Israel's appearance on the historical stage, an event of cosmic significance and the result of divine intention, whose roots lie in the very creation of the world and mankind.



***Motherhood: From Personal Experience to Public Expression***  
The Life and Achievements of Rachel Katzenelson-Shazar

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**Tamar Shechter**

Rachel Katzenelson Shazar (1885-1975) made Aliya in 1912 and was one of the pioneers of the Second Aliya. From the outset, she was involved with adult education, was a public and social activist in pioneer society, and was one of the leaders of social and cultural change in the new society being formed in the Land of Israel. From 1914 she was active in the establishment of the "Tnuat Hapoalot" (The Women Workers Movement) ultimately becoming one of its central figures. Her life's work, in which she left her mark more than anything else, was as editor of the "Tnuat Hapoalot" periodical – "Dvar HaPoelet". She was responsible for initiating the idea, the founding figure, and the editor from its first day in 1934 and until her retirement in 1961.

Her perceptions regarding gender were influenced by one of her strongest desires – to be a mother. Her personal experience became one of the most influential causes in the development of her social ideals and her public activity towards fulfilling them. She regarded motherhood as both an essential element in the formation of female identity and the ultimate expression of its purpose, frequently expressing herself publicly about motherly emotion. This article discusses Katzenelson-Shazar's primary philosophies regarding motherhood, and the changes they underwent over time – changes

brought about by the limitations as mothers that she and other women found themselves exposed to during the years. She fought the sexist, discriminatory notions that were the essence of gender differentiation in traditional society, but which also existed in pioneer circles, despite them having promoted the principle of gender equality as one of its basic values. Despite believing that "there is no malicious hand abusing the woman", she referred to the mother as "the prisoner of motherhood" and pointed an accusing finger towards society. She maintained her belief that every woman should become a mother, but claimed that there existed the need to create a new motherhood, one which would embody changes to the existing family model and social structures.

As other activists and leaders of the Women's Workers Movement, Rachel was also involved with assisting other women to cope with the social, economic, and emotional difficulties associated with motherhood. However it was towards the issue of women's education that she devoted most of her energy and this was her uniqueness. She claimed that the majority of the effort should be devoted to the development of women's awareness regarding the issue of sexual equality, and towards creating the necessary tools to enable them to instigate changes on both a personal and social level. She asserted that the forging of a new outlook, one which would be capable of bringing about change, would only be beneficial to education. The gender oriented change would provide a long-awaited response to the problems caused by ideological and practical incompatibility between the pioneer family and the vision of a new society in the Land of Israel.

***Male Nationalism from the Perspective of a Children's Story***

Sarah Foner – The first Hebrew Authoress and her book *The Children's Path*

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**Dana Keren-Yaar**

"The Children's Path" (1886), written by Sarah Foner, was the first Hebrew children's book written by a woman. It was published in the twilight of the Jewish Enlightenment period when such books were written almost exclusively by educated men. Foner's first novel (*The Love of the Righteous* 1881), received negative reviews, among other reasons, due to its unaccepted representation of women. "The Children's Path" appeared as a modest text aimed at children, not challenging the chaste female image, however a feminist reading shows that it was not meant for children alone, but rather as an allegory with a subversive public message. On the obvious didactic level, the story supports the ideas of "Chibbat Zion" and upholds the values of labor and living independently in the national homeland. On an additional level however, it examines the fulfillment of nationalism from a woman's viewpoint, and even offers an alternative national model that enables women's participation. This criticism of nationalism is evident from this story of maturing boys who move from the village to Jerusalem, becoming part of the governing public elite. This modern step is set against the background of the boys' split in loyalty between family and career, and is thus presented as a cause of disruption to a

natural fabric of national lifestyle. In addition to this criticism of male politics, the story seeks to undermine the supremacy of the public sphere and offers a hierarchical reversal through the preference of home and family. Against the backdrop of the boys' passage from village to city and weakening family ties, the village life is depicted as a scene portraying the ideal of national life. The rural social and family scene, naively reconstructed in the story, enables men and women to cooperate on their endeavor without being subjugated to public institutions. Therefore, from a marginally feminine outlook this story presents an alternative nationalism, and serves as an extension of the writings of Hebrew women.

*Prayer and Awe*

***The Exile of the Heart and the Loss of Voice***

An Expoundation of Prayer in our Generation

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**Haviva Pedaya**

This article offers a Theological expoundation of prayer in our generation and seeks to examine the relation between essence and language as a heart-voice relationship. Prayer is described as a seismograph, sensitive to the petrification of religious emotional life, in addition to acting as the first indication of its revival. The article emphasizes the relation between the primal voice and the internal and super-conscious powers that are conditional for spiritual renewal and authentic religious life.

The ideas are presented together with symbolic, metaphorical links and using Kabbalistic, Hassidic homiletic sources – this comprising the homiletic framework. This is combined with a systematic and formulated critical process. (In this article I have only presented short chapter headings of a wider process) The backbone of the systematic process is the attempt to point out the danger of a dichotomist reasoning that is generally altered towards uniformity. The dichotomist logus, whose results are the rift between the language of the heart and the external voice, acting in a self-feeding circulation manner, is expressed in other rifts such as: east-west, male-female, intellect-heart, but also in the forced separation between exile and redemption. This particular separation also incurs the cost of a rift between past and present, the consequence

of which is a further gulf between rich memories and an impoverished uniformity. This framework of uniformity, unlike unity, supposedly contains the loss of a voice, but which in its real and full meaning, I classify as the topos of the Seventy Voices. The concept of the Seventy Voices complements the idea of the seventy faces of Judaism and claims a living and present memory. Transportation, according to the utopist vision of formal prayer, does not truncate sequences of memory, but rather, lends seventy styles and colors to the voices of prayer and, in so doing, thereby provides the means for the transportation of voice from the depths of the heart to the language of prayer. The article also includes a short examination of the standing of the renewing synagogue and of liturgical compositions in comparison to modern poetry.

## *Yearning for Eternity: The Prayers of Hillel Zeitlin*

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**Asael Abelman, Jonatan Meir**

For Hillel Zeitlin (1871-1942), writing was a way of life. From the outset of his literary career at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, until close to the time of his murder at the hands of the Nazis, Zeitlin published hundreds of books, pamphlets, newspaper articles and miscellaneous publications.

Zeitlin was noted for his wide cultural horizons, and an examination of his writings over the years reflects that there few subjects foreign to his pen. Politics, economics, social issues, foreign affairs, philosophy, history, mysticism, poetry, literature, theatre and art were all his interest.

A special category of his writing is his poetry. Among Zeitlin's many writings are songs and poems that express his religious moods, his philosophies regarding Man's place in the world, and his yearnings for the Messiah and the redemption of Israel and the entire world.

This article represents the first compilation of its kind of the songs and poetry of Hillel Zeitlin. The poems, accompanied by introductions and comments, were collected from the various sources where they originally appeared. They constitute an anthology that open a window on the various periods of Zeitlin's life, and the different issues that ignited his rich and sensitive internal world.

**'Prayer waits within me'**

The Song of Prayer of Bracha Serri

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**Lea Baratz**

The poet Bracha Serri was born in Tzan'a and spent most of her life in Jerusalem. In this article I will present the voice of feminine song that emanates from her poetry. It would appear on the surface that hers is an authentic female Jerusalem voice, however the echoes of her birthplace, Tzan'a in Yemen, are inextricably woven as delicate threads of expression. As she herself poetically wrote "I who come from the lands of color and spice" (Kiddushin, p.14). Indirect mentions of her place of origin progress from background sounds to being her main voice of expression: A previously silenced female voice, finding its expression in the composition of a powerful prayer, a female voice that possesses the "father tongue", and through it, establishes poetic prayer almost on the border of "*Kol b'isha – erva*". Her songs range from those wishing to destroy the old, to those seeking to create anew. Her voice is discernable not only for its ideological female-feminist echo, but also for the socio-political statements drawn from her definition of the female identity.



*'Because everything is yours – and it is all from you':  
Women's Pre-Performance Prayers*

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**Reina Rutlinger-Reiner**

Religious women's participation in stage arts such as theatre and ballet, whether as professionals or amateurs, has until now been regarded as an exception to the norm in religious society. The presentation of the female body as the centre of the audience's attention, is in direct contradiction to the centrality of the value of modesty emphasized in general religious education, and to girls in particular. A theatre of religious women represents a breakthrough in the existing cultural scene of religious Israeli society. There are however those who still perceive this phenomenon as being one of a subversive nature, even if this theatre deals with issues related to religion, faith and canonic texts. The religious women are transforming the theatre space to a realm where they explore their religious desires and aspirations, their faith, and the dynamic social processes taking place today in the society to which they belong.

The composition of "Women's Pre-Performance Prayers", just as women's participation in theatre and dance themselves, joins a list of orthodox women's initiatives in the sphere of religious life and in renewing texts and prayers unique to women. The article explores the context in which two prayers, very different in language and character, were formulated. Through them, it also examines the women's perceptions regarding stage arts and,

comparatively, the importance of prayer in their lives. The conclusion drawn is that it may be possible to relate the phenomenon of composing a prayer to be said before going on stage, to the women's desire to change the character of theatre from seemingly 'secular' and 'dangerous', to a religious act both holy and sanctifying – parallel to that of the prayer leader in the synagogue. It is also apparent from the reactions of male actors, that there is still an insecurity amongst orthodox female artists regarding the legitimacy of dealing with a cultural template that, until the last decade, was considered subversive – a place of idol worship and a waste of time meant for Torah study.

## *Readings and Reflections*

### *On masters and servants in the Bible*

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**Eliezra Herzog**

This essay focuses on three Biblical scenes, each of which portrays a master together with his servants during, or on the way to a mission. The three scenes are: Abraham parting from his servants on his way to the Akeda (Genesis 22, 5); Pharaoh's daughter bathing and saving Moses while her maidens walk along the Nile (Exodus 2, 5-6); Bil'am riding his she-ass with his two servants alongside, on his way to curse Israel (Numbers 22, 22). These three extremely different settings have several motifs in common: In all of them, the master is required to decide between God's decree or plan, and a human desire or command, and in each one, the story makes reference to the servants' geographical location vis-a-vis his master. Of these three personae, Abraham and Pharaoh's daughter acted according to God's will or plan. The first, consciously, at the Akeda, and the latter, unconsciously, at the Nile, and in both cases their servants were not present with them. In contrast, Bil'am acted against God's instruction, and when God's angel stood in his way, his servants were not at a distance, but rather 'with him'.

The underlying assumption of this paper is that the servants' presence may be a burden on the master while fulfilling his mission and/or making the decision. According to this assumption, I explained the distance of Abraham's and Pharaoh's daughter's servants from their master during the Akeda and the saving of

Moses, with regard to their capacity to act according to God's will or plan. This would therefore suggest that the proximity of Bil'am's servants to him when the Angel blocked his way, directly reflected and influenced his incapacity to act according to God's original instruction, and forsake the curse. On the textual level, I suggest that the attendants and their location in these three scenes are a Biblical convention, one which indicates a pattern through which we can examine situations of decision making as to whether to act in accordance with, or against, God's will.

## *On the Search in 'Shir Hashirim'*

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**Yael Shlosberg**

This article proposes a study of the motif that constitutes the central focus around which the entire *megilla* of "Shir Hashirim" revolves, namely the motif of the search.

There are 2 striking instances in which the woman seeks her beloved: The first in Chapter 3, verses 1-5, and the second in Chapter 5, verses 5-8.

In both cases, the search occurs at night, she encounters the guards on her way and both end with the adjuration of the daughters of Jerusalem. However the results in each instance are exactly opposite: while the first search is successful – "..when I found him whom my soul loves", (Chap.3, v.4), the second ends in failure – "but my beloved had turned away, and was gone... I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer." (Chap.5, v.6).

What is the source of this difference? What are the causes of the opposite outcomes?

An accurate examination of the verses reveals that the starting point for the search in both examples is completely different, and it is this that determines the diverse results: In Chapter 3 it is the woman who initiates the quest after her beloved, while in Chapter 5 it is he who is the active party. The fact that there are 2 opposing

starting points to the search is based in the 2 chapters previous to Chapters 3 and 5. According to this understanding, Chapter 2 comprises the preparation for the search of Chapter 3, and Chapter 4 the preparation for the search of Chapter 5.

The beloved, leaping and skipping, is in fact characterized by a measure of remoteness - standing "..behind our wall", "looking through the windows", even "peering through the cracks". Moving both closer and farther away. Present and yet absent. The element of hiding in this chapter can be observed in the descriptions of both time and of the beloved.

Conversely, in Chapter 4, which acts as a preparation for the search in Chapter 5, an opposite trend can be identified: The appearance of the lover, the description of the woman, and the lover's approach to the woman are all revealed and obvious, direct and detailed.

It is this difference that is the cause of the diverse results. This article examines the significance and ramifications of the remoteness and hiding inherent in the initial search, compared to the closeness and exposure in the second.

Both stages of the search are also connected to the 2 types of scents that pervade the *megilla*. This is the focus of the second half of the article: The scent of the incense sacrificed in the temple that is the smell that symbolizes the intimate connection between the lovers, to which the woman is unable to resist, compared to the smells of flowers and fruits that actually enable her to draw close to her lover. The trends of hiding and insinuation as opposed to the trends of the obvious and detailed are expressed through the different scents throughout the *megilla* and thereby create a significant connection between the motifs of scent and search