



Volume 8

Fall 2008

In Memory of Esther Aumann z"l

Published by **Matan**, The Sadie Rennert Women's Institute for Torah Studies, Jerusalem

In association with

The Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center for the Study of Women in Judaism, Bar-Ilan University

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ISSN 1565-3625

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Published by **Matan**, The Sadie Rennert Women's Institute for Torah Studies,
30 Rashbag St., Jerusalem

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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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Prayer and Supplication in Glikl's Memoirs

Chava Turniansky

In Glikl's memoirs, written between 1691 and 1719, there are strikingly few references to her praying in or even attending the synagogue. Her book is, however, full of addresses to the Creator, expressed in terms of petition, supplication, praise, thanksgiving, lament, as well as pleas for forgiveness, argumentation and complaint. A study of this wide range of expressions shows that the author is not following the sequence of any particular liturgical text but is creating a sequence of her own, compiling and integrating phrases drawn from a wide variety of sources. The resultant combination of texts in the original Hebrew and in Yiddish translation creates a unique linguistic-stylistic mosaic that provides an insight into Glikl's command of Hebrew, the tradition of translating prayer-texts into Yiddish, and the nature of the supplication-texts originally written in Yiddish (*tkhines*). All these delineate the contours of the author's spiritual world, gauging her ability to express it in writing, while at the same time displaying her complex relationship of justification and defiance with her ever-present God.

*Women Studying Torah in Medieval and Early
Modern Italy – Halachic Discussions*

Ilan Fuchs

This article examines a number of halachic texts that deal with women's Torah study in Italy during the Middle Ages and into the early modern era. These texts are frequently referred to in later halachic discourse about women's Torah study and are portrayed as having granted women wider access to the study of Torah. This article examines the aforementioned responsa in their historical context, claiming that this stance is not contradictory to the position of accepted halachic texts of the time. For various reasons, this viewpoint was portrayed out of its original context and was therefore perceived in later halachic discourse to have been of a revolutionary nature.

One example, frequently mentioned in halachic discussions about women's Torah study, is the responsum (*t'shuva*) of Rabbi Shmuel Arkevolty of Padua, quoted from his 'Book of Responsa' - *Ma'ayan Ganim*. In fact the composition is not responsa literature at all, but rather a guide to letter writing, mentioned by the *Torah T'mima* (Rabbi Baruch Epstein, known by the name of his commentary on the Chumash) as a compendium of responsa, and was thus cited by all those studying the *Torah T'mima*.

Many responsa mention Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azoulai (known as the *Chida*) whose book of responsa *Tov Ayin* is often

considered as being supportive of women studying Torah. Closer study however, reveals that it is merely a theoretical discussion in an attempt to explain Rambam's differentiation between the Oral and Written Law, and explain away the fact that Bruria, Rabbi Meir's wife, was a Torah scholar. Indeed, other sources from the *Chida* prove that he was an advocate of the accepted halachic stance of the *Shulchan Aruch* on this matter.

Finally, it is interesting to examine this topic in a comparative manner. The fact that these responsa did not contribute to the empowerment of women - in contrast to the way they were portrayed in many texts - only seems to prove the notion that those 20th century responsa that diverged from accepted halachic commentary by enabling women to study Talmud, were in fact revolutionary, and created a new halachic model devoid of any prior foundation and opposed to accepted interpretation.

**"And God was favorable to the midwives" -
Jewish Midwives in Eretz Yisrael During
the Late Ottoman Period.**

Zipora Shehory-Rubin

Midwifery has long since become identified as the work of women – a female occupation and livelihood. Originally performed by older women, the position was passed down through the generations, usually from mother to daughter, from experienced midwife to apprentice. There was no theoretical study involved – the women acquired their experience and skill from the births they participated in. In *Eretz Yisrael*, as in Europe, women constituted the overwhelming majority of midwives. It should be noted that, due to cultural and religious norms, it was accepted practice in all cultures and eras that midwives were female.

The first midwives in *Eretz Yisrael* had no formal professional education and were therefore generally ignorant of hygienic necessities, a fact that led to high rates of both maternal and child mortality. This was only further compounded by the inferior level of general hygiene and sanitation at the time. It was for this reason that, although the midwives were largely appreciated and admired by the general population for the physical and emotional support they supplied before, during and after birth, they aroused much objection from local medical practitioners. Despite this opposition, midwives were successful over the years in establishing for themselves a firm status as providers of obstetric service to all,

regardless of religion or nationality. This standing began to be undermined towards the end of the 19th century with the influx of the first certified midwives from Europe. The new arrivals, graduates of obstetric academies in Europe, began to gradually displace the locals and take their positions.

This article summarizes the activity of the first midwives in *Eretz Yisrael*, the nature of their work and their contribution to the midwifery profession in Israel. We will uncover those first midwives from the early period, which was characterized by homebirths, assisted by midwives whom, due to the lack of hospital maternity wards and educational facilities, were usually uncertified. The article studies four categories of midwives which are divided into two pairs: (1) traditional midwives and certified midwives, (2) rural midwives and urban midwives. The article will attempt to highlight the defining properties of each group by comparing their different professional methods and characteristics, and thereby provide an outline of the development of the midwifery profession in *Eretz Yisrael* during the late Ottoman period, from the middle of the 19th century, until its demise at the end of the First World War.

More specifically, the article will examine the midwife's skills and authority, her status and role in Jewish society. It will present the attitudes towards both the lay and the certified midwife, clarify the differences between the rural midwife and her urban counterpart, and portray some of the early midwives against the historical backdrop of the period.

The research draws on a number of original sources – letters, interviews and memoirs – and also information drawn from newspapers of the era, much of which has been verified by research in the field of medical history.

Queen Esther of the Tel Aviv Purim Carnival – a Personal Narrative in its Cultural Context.

Nili Arye-Sapir and Michal Held

The city of Tel-Aviv was founded in 1909, during the midst of the Second *Aliya* – a period that witnessed a rapid and intensive revival of Jewish national identity. Tel-Aviv developed into a center of multi-layered Jewish cultural life based upon the values and ideologies of the time. Indeed, the city owed much of its power during this period to the fact that its founders had aimed at creating it both as a national and as a cosmopolitan center. Such a center they believed, would not only shape the identity of the Jewish People in its own land, but would also enable it to engage in a dialogue with the surrounding world. Various groups of initiators worked during this period to outline new tools that would assist the collective process of creating a new Jewish society in *Eretz Yisrael*. One of the tools recognized as appropriate in reaching this goal and thereby shaping a new national ideology, were the Jewish holidays, re-defined to such an extent, that renewed national ideas were forged out of the traditional ones.

In the general context of *Eretz Yisrael*, the holiday of Purim, having a link with Jewish life in the Diaspora, was not regarded as having much potential in encouraging national revival. However, it was specifically in Tel-Aviv, that the holiday's potential to deliver a message that met with the city's nature and the ideological viewpoints of its founders, was realized. Purim was regarded as

both a national and a cosmopolitan holiday, during which the city was transformed into a carnival setting, hosting many visitors from around the country with parades that marched through its main streets. In addition, the city's individuals and institutions organized festive parties, all of which had a collective, ideological motif.

This paper analyzes the personal narrative of Tzipora Tzabari, a prominent figure who participated in the Tel-Aviv Purim carnival in the above-mentioned period. The suggested reading is based upon our understanding of the personal narrative as a realm in which co-existence of individual and collective standpoints is made possible. Born in 1908 to a poor Yemenite family of the *Neve-Tzedek* neighborhood, Tzipora Tzabari was elected to be Queen Esther of the 1928 Purim Festival – an event that came to signify a meaningful turning point in her life.

Our analysis, based upon a folkloristic approach, illuminates Tzipora's personal narrative from an epic point of view in order to expose her pragmatic truth. It proves that at the different stages of her life, she consistently directed her efforts at liberating herself from belonging to any type of collectively social or ideological standpoint. The traditional Yemenite society into which she was born, forced her to devote her life to menial domestic duties and marry, against her will, at a young age. Despite this, she attempted to extricate herself from this socially confining environment and transplant herself to the newly reviving society of Tel-Aviv. Unsurprisingly, these efforts to shape her own individuality, independent of the prevailing collective, constricting social structure, were met with disapproval. Thus, fighting for her own identity, Tzipora paid a heavy price as both the members of the Yemenite community and those of greater Tel-Aviv, excluded her from their social circles. She felt that she was an ousted queen who managed to fulfill her potential for a limited time only. However, Tzipora Tzabari's personal narrative conveys a message, according

to which there is no separation between past and present. The narrator refuses to accept the laws of reality and, in her old age, while relating her narrative, still held on to her self-conception as a queen. Indeed, she continued to form her identity around the title of Queen Esther that she was awarded in 1928, despite the fact that this conception negates the reality of her life that was by all respects, far from royal.

Literature and Midrash

Chana Bat-Shachar

Maayan Harel

Chana Bat-Shachar is the pseudonym of a *charedi* author who was born in 1944 and who lives and creates in Jerusalem. Bat-Shachar's voice is one of the most fascinating of women's Hebrew literature from the mid 1980's when her first collection of stories was published under the name of *The Owl Stories*. She subsequently published four additional volumes of short stories: *To Call the Bats*, 1990; *The Dancing Butterfly*, 1993; *Look, The Fishing Boats*, 1997; *Sweet Honey Birds*, 1999. In addition, she published three novels: *The Girl From Lake Michigan*, 2002; *White nymph, Wild Satyr*, 2005; *Shadows In The Mirror*, 2008. Her works, which move frequently between Jerusalem and American settings, are told largely from a woman's perspective. The main characters are portrayed as trapped in a patriarchal framework, subservient to family and religious rules, or forced to live in the shadow of others. It is however precisely from within this reality that her characters undergo intense, emotional experiences, forbidden loves, hidden wishes and passions, beauty and pleasure – usually with a strong attraction to the taboo. These features can be discerned in the visible and implicit twists in the plot, in Bat-Shachar's vividly expressive language, in the striking descriptions of nature present in her works, and in the abundance of imagery and metaphors – all with a surprising measure of restraint. Bat-Shachar's books have

enjoyed great critical acclaim, have been extensively researched and many have been translated to English and Spanish. In 1984 she was awarded the Neuman Prize for her first work *The Owl Stories*, and in 1994 won the Levi Eshkol Prime Minister Award for Literary Excellence. In her story *The Shunamit*, Bat-Shachar returns to some of the familiar themes from her earlier works, doing so however this time, against a biblical backdrop. She rewrites the story of the *Shunamit* from the Book of Kings: A female character different yet similar to her modern heroes, wandering the scenes of biblical *Eretz Yisrael*.

Readings and Reflections

Walking the Tightrope between the 'Eretz Yisrael Story' and the 'Babylonian Story'.

Yaffa Zilkah

This article examines two parallel stories, one from the Talmudic tradition of *Eretz Yisrael* and one from the Babylonian tradition. The two separate but parallel stories are similar, with a common core plot. Even though the two stories feature the same sages and portray the same events, the reader will discern that the stories are not identical and that each of the two traditions embodies a differing method of editing. It is precisely this difference between the two stories, that emphasizes the fact that these stories about the sages are not meant as historical documentation of an actual event, but rather as literary works, that, set against an external reality, are aimed at expressing the moral, spiritual and religious world of their authors. Comparing the parallel elements of the stories teaches us therefore, not so much about the events that happened, but rather, about the personal philosophy of those telling the story. Indeed, the genius of the editors of the stories is measured by the manner in which they processed familiar literary content and integrated it into varied contexts, and not necessarily by the creation of new material.

This is a broad and wide-ranging topic and, due to lack of space, will be examined here on the basis of two stories. The conclusions however are fundamental ones and, it can be cautiously asserted,

they largely represent the character of the stories in each of the two traditions.

The two stories examined in this article are centered round a sage who finds himself in a situation that necessitates an act which brings about a supernatural result. The first example is Rabbi Chanina who brings forth rain in the midst of a drought, and the second is Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa who miraculously prevails over the wild beast he encounters. Beyond the simple plot, these stories deal on a deeper level with cardinal questions, the different answers to which, weave the differing philosophies and world views of the Israel and Babylonian traditions. It is perhaps at the boundary between the parallel points of the two stories, and the specifically unique features of each, that the true dialogue between the doctrines of Babylon and that of *Eretz Yisrael* exists.

As editorial trends become clearer, we can better detect the hidden voices of their editors. These voices are no less fascinating than the stories themselves, and they create an unwritten narrative accompaniment that reflects a dynamic of ideological, historical and social processes from within the world of the stories' editors.

Book Review

***Coping with the issue of Intermarriage after
the Return to Zion***

Neta Shapira

In the wake of Yonina Dor's book "The Expulsion of the Gentile Women – Segregation After the Return to Zion", Magness Publications.

This paper examines the problem of intermarriage during the period after the return to Zion, as a response to Yonina Dor's book. It begins with a brief description of Jewish-Gentile relations throughout the books of Ezra and Nechemia. This overview portrays, on the one hand, a complex process of conflict, and, on the other, the opportunities for acceptance and cooperation. The constant differences of opinion between those returnees to Zion regarding their attitude toward the local residents, is also a prominent feature of this section.

Subsequently, the paper addresses Dor's book. Dor, who deals extensively with the expulsion of the gentile women as described in Chapters 9-10 of the book of Ezra, advances a number of primary claims and seeks to radically alter the accepted impression of this event.

Firstly, she proffers the notion that the gentile women mentioned throughout the story are not gentiles at all, but descendants of

Judaic Palestinians, who remained and were not exiled along with the rest of the inhabitants of Judea and Samaria.

Secondly, she contends that the women were never actually exiled, but rather, that the descriptions in Ezra and Nechemia are of ceremonies conducted periodically in order to segregate these women from the general population and thereby declare the community's fundamental objection to marriage with them.

The paper criticizes Dor's thesis. Dor's approach embodies a broad generalization regarding the women's identity which lacks sufficient proof in the biblical text or historical evidence. Her notion of the exile being merely a ceremonial event, and the motivation for it, as put forward in the book's introduction and conclusion, draws even harsher criticism.

Finally, the paper suggests a more complex understanding of the discussed events, according to which, the female population was comprised of various factions: women of Judaic descent, Samaritan women and gentiles. Ezra and Nechemia deal with the phenomena of intermarriage in different ways, but are unable to put an end to it. Additionally, it could also be argued that the strength of opposition to marrying out of the community of those returning to Zion in the period of Ezra and Nechemia, while at the same time denying any possibility of conversion, was a result of a unique set of characteristics of the era, whereby a large proportion of the local population shared in the religious and spiritual beliefs in the Jewish god and religion, but were opposed to the nationalistic aspirations of those returning to Zion.