



2004

In memory of Esther Aumann z"l
Published by MaTaN, The Sadie Rennert Women's Institute of Torah Studies, Jerusalem

MASSEKHET

Board of Directors: Malke Bina, Prof. Israel Aumann, Rochelle Furstenberg

Editorial Board: Prof. Shulamit Elizur, R. Daniel Epstein, Yossi David,
Dr. Aviad Hacoen, Dr. Bryna Levy, Prof. Uriel Simon, Yardena Cope-Yossef.

General editor: Dr. Rivka Dvir-Goldberg

Managing editor: Neta Shapira

Production editors: Keren Giat

Translation editors: Tal Perry, Dr. Ora Wiskind-Elper

Graphic design: Batshi Kochai

Names and addresses of contributors:

Prof. Michal Oron Dept. of Hebrew Literature, Tel Aviv University, Ramat Aviv

Judah Galinsky Touro College, Jerusalem

Dr. Michael Galchinsky Program in Jewish Studies, Georgia State University

Nava Cohen MaTaN, Jerusalem

Dr. Yael Levine P.O.B. 71140 Jerusalem

Dr. Rachel Manekin Dept. of Jewish History, Hebrew University, Jerusalem

Nili Samet Michlelet Herzog, Alon Shvut, Gush Etzion

Prof. Haviva Pedaya Dept. of Jewish History, Ben Gurion University, Beer Sheva

Prof. Avigdor Shinan Dept. of Hebrew Literature, Hebrew University, Jerusalem

Yael Shlossberg MaTaN, Jerusalem

© All rights reserved

Published by MaTaN Women's Institute of Torah Studies, 30 Rashbag St., Jerusalem
Mailing address: P.O.B. 8039, Jerusalem 91080 Tel: 02-679-8688 Fax: 02-679-8901
E-MAIL: netas@matan.org.il

Contents

The Three Wives of Rabbi Akivah

Avigdor Shinan

A [Jewish] Woman is Considered Circumcised

Yael Levine

A Victorian Midrash: Grace Aguilar and Her book *Women of Israel*

Michael Galchinsky

The Development of the Idea of Religious Education for Girls in Galicia in the Modern Era

Rachel Manekin

A Teacher's Notes

Zelda

Justice and Generosity:

"And it is for the Glory of the Great that their Name be Remembered" Commemorating the Dead and the Practice of Establishing a Hekdesh in Christian Spain

Judah D. Galinsky

Social Critique in Kabbalistic Literature

Michal Oron

Readings and Reflections:

"There is nothing worthwhile for a man but to eat and drink and afford himself enjoyment with his means" Material Pleasure in the Commentary Attributed to Rashbam on the Book of *Kohelet*.

Nava Cohen

The Motif of Eating Bread in Prophet Narrative

Nili Samet

Yosef and Osnat: The Story of Destiny

Yael Shlossberg

New Book:

Rachel Elijor: Temple and Chariot, Priests and Angels, Sanctuary and Heavenly Sanctuaries in Early Jewish Mysticism

Haviva Pedaya

English Abstracts

The Three Wives of Rabbi Akivah

Avigdor Shinan

There are various traditions in rabbinic literature concerning the women to whom R. Akivah was married. The article surveys the variegated sources in light of a modern Hebrew song (by Daliah Rabikovitch) in which the different stories are woven together. Rabikovitch seems to have joined into one literary creation two contradictory traditions – one found in a Babylonian source and another in a Midrash from the Land of Israel. The differences between the two rabbinic sources should be understood on the basis of the dissimilar conditions of life that prevailed in Babylon and the Land of Israel: leaving home for long period of time in order to study in the academy (Babylon) as opposed to studying while staying home, working and raising children at the same time (in Eretz Israel).

Each of the two main centers of ancient Judaism portrayed R. Akivah according to its unique way of life, while the modern poet blends the different traditions into one.

In addition to the “Babylonian” wife of R. Akivah (known mainly as Rachel), and an anonymous wife who appears in the Eretz-Israeli Midrash, there are traditions concerning a third wife – a roman matron, the ex-wife of Tineius Rufus, whom R. Akivah supposedly married after her conversion to Judaism. The article deals with the motive for this surprising tradition and its historical value and concludes by describing

all the stories about the wives of R. Akivah as motivated by actual-moral needs rather than reflecting any “true” historical circumstances related to the life of R. Akivah.

A [Jewish] Woman is Considered Circumcised

Yael Levine

The present article examines conceptual interpretations appearing in the post-talmudic literature concerning the issue raised in Tractate *Avodah Zarah 27a* which discusses the acceptability of a woman to perform the rite of circumcision. In the course of the *sugya* the opinion is voiced that a woman is considered circumcised even though she has not been circumcised in practice. No reasoning is offered in the Talmud itself for this idea.

Several interpretations have been offered in later sources in an attempt to comprehend this idea that a woman is deemed circumcised. According to one explanation, the entire Jewish people is considered circumcised, men and women alike. Another school of thought is that a woman receives her essence as circumcised by virtue of her husband. Yet another view posits that women fall in the above-mentioned category because they lack foreskin.

Several practical implications accompany the notion that a woman is considered to be circumcised: Women like men are saved from the judgment of Gehenna. With the absence of men, women may be counted at the circumcision ceremony in the prayer quorum. A male infant who is ill and cannot be circumcised may be given a name when the father is called to the Torah, as is the practice concerning a female infant.

Several sources state that the ritual immersion of a woman is the female alternative to circumcision. If so, women can be seen to have an advantage over men, as circumcision is a one-time act, whereas the ritual immersion of a woman is carried out repeatedly.

A Victorian Midrash

Grace Aguilar and Her Book *Women of Israel*

Michael Galchinsky

Of the Jewish women writers who have been rediscovered in recent years, the earliest and most significant to have written in English is Grace Aguilar (1816-1847), a Sephardic woman writing in Victorian England. Aguilar was a prominent contributor to the Anglo-Jewish Haskalah, arguing for both Jews' emancipation in the Victorian world, and women's emancipation in the Jewish world. Her twelve books and other publications included novels, poems, theology, liturgy, history, and polemics, and were read by Jews in England, the United States, Germany, France, and Jamaica. Several of her books were translated into Hebrew and Yiddish.

A descendant of those who had fled the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions, she recorded the oral history of the crypto-Jews in her romances and histories. In her non-fiction masterpiece, *The Women of Israel* (1845), excerpted here, she provided a series of biographies of Jewish women from the Bible, the Talmud, and throughout history. These early versions of modern feminist "midrashim" appealed to both Jewish and Christian women readers. Since most Jewish women were not taught Hebrew, and vernacular translations of the Bible were only beginning to appear, Aguilar's *Women of Israel* functionally served as "Torah" for many Jewish women, Torah that was centered on women's obligations, needs, and aspirations.

At Aguilar's early death at the age of thirty-one, she was described as "the moral governess of the Hebrew family". Her death was called a "national calamity" in Jewish periodicals around the world.

The Development of the Idea of Religious Education for Girls in Galicia in the Modern Era

Rachel Manekin

This article focuses on the development of the idea of religious education for Jewish girls in Galicia beginning in 1772, when Galicia was annexed to the Austrian Empire. Although it is well-known that there was a wide gap in Galicia between the girls' general and Jewish education, the article examines the concrete historical context in which this gap developed. It points out those people and platforms that sought to stimulate public discussion about education for girls and to alter the status quo.

The practice of providing Jewish girls with a general education became institutionalized and wide-spread following the passage of laws concerning mandatory education in the Austrian Empire in 1869, which came into effect in the 1870's. Thus, while the general educational system for girls developed and became enhanced, Jewish religious lessons remained private, voluntary, and limited in scope. The demand for formal religious education and the establishment of religious schools for girls came from below: from the families and the Jewish press. Beginning in 1900, and for nearly two decades, the subject never left the public agenda. But Galician Jewry's social structure, with its Hasidic courts and various organizations, exerted conflicting pressures on the rabbinate, and as a result, no decision was made.

With the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the fabric of traditional-

religious Jewish life was damaged, and the old disputes and pressures were weakened. The time was ripe to realize the plans and programs that had been advanced in the press for some time. The person to make the idea of girls' religious education a reality was a woman, Sarah Schenirer, who established in 1917 in Cracow (Western Galicia) a formal framework for the religious education of Jewish girls.

Zelda

Zelda was born in the Ukraine in 1914, the only daughter of R. Shalom-Shlomo and Rachel Sneursonh. She spent her childhood in her grandfather's house in Chernigov, Ukraine, under the shadow of the Russian Revolution and the Civil War.

When Zelda was around eleven, her family moved to Israel and settled in Jerusalem. A short time later her grandfather and then her father passed away.

Zelda studied at the 'Mizrachi' Teachers' Seminary and worked for many years as a school teacher, particularly in underprivileged neighborhoods of Haifa and Jerusalem. During this period, she wrote short pieces about school life and reflections about her students. These pieces, entitled 'A Teacher's Notes' were first published in the journal *Dvar Ha-poelet* from 1939-1943, during the Second World War. they were re-published together in 1973 in the United Kibbutz Movement journal, *Mi-bifnim*, which, at that time, was edited by Zelda's friend, the poet Zerubavel Gilead.

These pieces, a lesser-known part of her oeuvre, are presented here on the twentieth anniversary of her death.

At about the age of thirty-six, Zelda married Haim Mishkowsky. The wonderful relationship they shared – which continued until his death twenty-two years later – is the subject of numerous poems.

Zelda's first collection of poetry, *Pnai*, was published in 1967. Another five books of poetry were published in her lifetime.

A second and less recognized aspect of her creativity was drawing. In 1932 Zelda began studying with the Tel Aviv artist Chaim Glicksberg, and dreamed of studying at the Bezalel Academy of Art in Jerusalem. Though this dream was never realized, she did teach drawing in the schools where she worked and continued to draw all her life, in a variety of styles and with different materials.

Reproductions of some of her works from various periods of her life accompany "A Teacher's Notes" here.

**“And it is for the Glory of the Great that their Name
be Remembered” Commemorating the Dead and the
Practice of Establishing a *Hekdesh* in Christian Spain**

Judah D. Galinsky

During the thirteenth century in the various Jewish communities of Christian Spain, as in other Jewish and non-Jewish communities throughout Christian Europe, it was common to set aside charity prior to one's death. Unique to Spain, however was the donor's preference for establishing a private charitable trust or foundation – *a wakf* – known as “*hekdesb*”. The donor would appoint executors, trusted friends or relatives, outside of the communities administration (*the Gabbaim*), who were responsible for investing the capital as well as distributing the income to various causes, *le-olam va-ed*, for eternity.

In the survey of Jewish Responsa literature from Christian Spain and of Jewish Latinate wills preserved in Spanish archives, we have identified two major motivations for the giving of charity in anticipation of death. The primary motivation is religious, “for the sake of the soul”, *le-toelet nishamati*, or *kofet le-nafshi*, that is: To cleanse the soul of sin, to protect it from the fires of hell and ease its entry into the anticipated state of paradise. A secondary motivation, however, and one that is most relevant with regard to the charitable foundation, is the desire to be remembered in this world.

In this article I will first review the Talmudic sources that articulate this natural human impulse for commemoration and then present its expression as found in Hispano-Jewish society of the thirteenth century.

The purpose of the article is to explain how an Islamic institution such as the *wakf* became a central aspect of Jewish pre-death practice for Jews living in Christian Spain in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Social Critique in Kabbalistic Literature

Michal Oron

The Kabbalah literature is concerned, essentially, with the Upper Worlds, as well as with the past and future of the People of Israel. Nonetheless, we can detect in it certain echoes of the reality of the times in which the various works were composed. In works written in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, one finds harsh criticism of leaders, rabbis and teachers of the community, as well as of Jewish society as such. The Kabbalists cried out against the social wrongs of the class society of their day, against disregard for the commandments and imitating the ways of the Gentiles, as well as against being immersed in Diaspora [*golah*] existence and the loss of faith in Redemption.

This article cites some of these critiques and protests as found in two Kabbalists books – *Ha-peliiah* and *Ha-kana* – written in the fifteenth century in Greece by an unknown author. The pronouncements of that anonymous Kabbalist prove that mystics of his time did not limit themselves to the mysteries of Kabbalah but were well aware of contemporary social injustice.

“There is nothing worthwhile for a man but to eat and drink and afford himself enjoyment with his means” Material Pleasure in the Commentary Attributed to Rashbam on the Book of *Kohelet*.

Nava Cohen

As we know, the book of *Kohelet* [Ecclesiastes] is distinctive both in form and ideology compared to the other books of the Bible. Traditional commentators of all ages have grappled with its message in the attempt to demonstrate that its contents do accord with the worldview expressed in the rest of the *Tanakh*. This essay discusses the approach set out in the commentary on *Kohelet* attributed to R. Shmuel ben Meir, the Rashbam, to a certain set of statements in which the narrator (*Kohelet*) counsils his listeners to focus on materiality and draw full benefit from it.

The essay seeks to outline the author’s unique treatment of this unusual advice. The commentary, while remaining loyal to a “literal” *pshat* reading, nonetheless manages to invest the statements *Kohelet* makes with a broad religious meaning, due to his comprehensive literary vision of the book as a whole. The essay attempts to show how the commentary attributed to Rashbam combines principles intrinsic to a *pshat* reading with literary sensitivity and deep faith – creating a commentary that is daring and fascinating to explore.

The Motif of Eating Bread in Prophet Narrative

Nili Samet

This essay focuses on the motif of eating bread in two narratives: the one concerns the “man of God” and the elderly prophet in 1 Kings 13; the other recounts the prophet Amos’s meeting with Amatziya, “Cohen Beit El” in Amos 7. In the first, the prohibition against eating bread and drinking water is a central motif, stressed by a fixed formula. In the second, Amatziya says to Amos: “And eat bread there”. Comparison of the two narratives uncovers numerous parallels; among them, the locale (Beit El), the name of the king (Yerav’am), the event (a conflict concerning Cohanim), and emphasis on the prophet’s alternate appellations. Analysis of the narrative in Amos reveals that it stages a fundamental dispute concerning the nature of prophecy, which Amatziya sees in external, egotistical terms, while Amos experiences it as an overpowering, true vision. The most distinctive difference between these two views of prophecy centers on the question of its reward, symbolized in the eating of bread. On the basis of the parallel between the two narratives, the eating of bread in both may be interpreted as symbolizing “prophecy of the court” – eating from the table of the king and serving his interests. This motif, common to both stories, reveals the subject they share: the abyss separating true and false prophecy. Finally, more examples from other narratives in which the motif of eating bread with a similar meaning are considered.

Yosef and Osnat: The Story of a Destiny

Yael Shlossberg

“Midrash tells us that Osnat, daughter of Dina, was born of Shechem ben Hamor” (Rabbeinu Bahai, Gen. 41:45). This surprising identification of Osnat, daughter of Potifar, the Priest of On, given to Yosef in marriage, is the subject of our discussion. We investigate five of the sources that suggest such an ancestry, comparing variations among them while noting each one’s agenda and particular emphases, and attempt to decode the statement in *Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer* that “Osnat was meant for Yosef.”

Yosef and Osnat are considered as part of an over-arching process that encompasses the entire book of Genesis, in which expulsion precedes the acceptance of mission. This perspective is presented and founded first in general terms and then concerning the specific relation of Yosef and Osnat within it. The expulsion endured by each of them, its reasons and place, as well as events of their childhood and later lives, their ending up in the house of Potifar, and the trials that test them – all these challenge Yosef and Osnat with a common mission. Our essay seeks to bring this mission to light.

New Book

**Rachel Elijor: *Temple and Chariot, Priests
and Angels, Sanctuary and Heavenly
Sanctuaries in Early Jewish Mysticism***

Haviva Pedaya

A major contribution of this recent study in early Jewish mysticism is its evocation of the complex chain of social, religious, and theological contexts in which the mystical priestly tradition evolved. Clarifying these contexts bears far-reaching implications for the *Heichalot* literature and the early Kabbalah as a whole, but raises questions as well. One concerns this more complex understanding of *Chazal's* attitude toward such priestly traditions – did they reject them or conceal and secretly perpetuate them? The same problematic applies to the early Kabbalah – were there two separate social-religious groups or, alternately, did some organic connection bind the actual ritual and mythic elements in the Temple and the spiritual-mystical constructs that emerged from it? This article arouses awareness of these factors and their importance to research in early Kabbalah. In addition, it broadens the traditional boundaries of scholarship by combining Jewish thought, creative innovation, literature and poetry to create a rich cultural texture of discussion.

