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The Ravishing of Dina: A Different Reading

Moshe A. Zipor

The biblical story of Dina's rape arouses many questions: Did the event befall Ya'akov's family completely unexpectedly? What messages does the account convey? The Midrash shows a connection between the opening verse of the story 'Then Dina, daughter of Leah, went out...' (Gen. 34:1) and an earlier story that begins, 'And Leah went out...' (Gen. 30:16) – suggesting that Dina's provocative behavior led to her downfall, and that the guilt was her mother's.

This essay offers an alternate reading in midrashic style. The episode involving Leah's 'going out' to her husband recounts an unhappy marital situation and the actions an 'unloved' wife feels compelled to take. The names Leah gives each of her sons likewise reflect her sense of being 'hated' and rejected. A number of elements in the story suggest that the account of Dina's rape is in a certain way a continuation of Ya'akov and Leah's story and contains hidden criticism of Ya'akov's relationship with Leah. His silence when told of the tragedy is compared with King David's response to a similar event, and interpreted as his realization that perhaps it has come as a punishment for his own behavior.

The Influence of Moslem Society on Jewish Women In Light of Documentation from the Cairo Genizah

Renée Levine Melammed

The discovery of the Cairo Genizah brought to light extensive documentation concerning the world of Jewish women in medieval Mediterranean society. Information was found in sources such as marriage documents, rabbinic responsa, wills and letters; some of them were written in Judeo-Arabic and even allow us to hear the voice of these women themselves. The fact that their lives were influenced by the surrounding Moslem society is clearly evident. Examples of such influence include the prevalence of polygamy and concubines; the wearing of the veil; adaptations of inheritance customs, along with temporary marriage arrangements similar to those that existed in Islam; and the option of going to the Islamic courts instead of to Jewish courts. To counter some of the negative influences of Islam, one finds, for example, special conditions that were included in marriage contracts such as the *monogamy clause* that was specifically created to protect the first wife.

**Rebbe Israel Ba'al Shem Tov and His Wife
And other Women in Hasidic Tales**

Rivka Dvir-Goldberg

Numerous differences exist between the book *In Praise of the Ba'al Shem Tov* (first published in 1815) and other collections of Hasidic tales published some decades later. One of them is its abundant reference, positive for the most part, to women. Especially notable is the mutual respect evident in the relationship between the Ba'al Shem Tov and his wife, and the sense of partnership they share – an unusual element within the overall framework of Hasidic tales. Later tales of the genre offer scant information about the marital situations of the *tzaddikim* and their wives. Most make no mention of it; at times, narratives hint at highly unpleasant relationships. The Ba'al Shem Tov's positive attitude toward women in general comes to the fore in his understanding and forgiving approach to women who were seduced by men and led to sin. This, too, stands in sharp contrast to the approach found in later collections of Hasidic stories. In them, women are very seldom portrayed as victims of sexual abuse, while in many stories women play the role of temptress, leading men to sin.

The Ba'al Shem Tov's distinctly positive approach may have, to an extent, influenced his circle of disciples and biographers, encouraging them to include so many stories about women in *In*

Praise of the Ba'al Shem Tov and to express such an encouraging and positive view. This essay examines these differences in regard to women in general and to the wives of the *zaddikim* in particular, focusing on the contrast between the book *In Praise of the Ba'al Shem Tov* and other collections of Hasidic tales.

**Miriam the Prophetess and the Rebbetzin:
the Eulogy of Rebbe Kalonymos of Piacezna
in Memory of Two Great Women**

Uziel Fuchs

The Hasidic rebbe, R. Kalonymos Kalmish Schapira of Piacezna composed his work entitled *Esh Kodesh* (The Holy Fire) in the Warsaw ghetto in 1940-1942. This essay discusses two *derashot* (sermons) on *parashat Hukat* that treat the biblical figure of Miriam the prophetess and her unique spiritual stature. In these sermons, we find ideas and expressions similar to those the Rebbe evoked in another context in memory of his wife. His recollection that ‘she would learn Torah every day’ and that she was a ‘compassionate mother’ to the *yeshiva* students and the *hasidim* of the community are echoed in the *derashot*. Knowing that the Rebbetzin passed away during the week of *parashat Hukat*, and that Miriam was one of her names, leads us to see that these *derashot* include a sort of hidden commemoration of her *yahrzeit*. Moreover, the Rebbe’s wife seems to have served as a spiritual model for his description of Miriam the prophetess in those sermons. An analysis of the *derashot* and his words in her memory are presented, as well as additional sources that shed light on the impressive spiritual status of the Rebbetzin, wife of the Rebbe of Piacezna.

Script and Illustration: Hebrew Accents in Else Lasker-Schüler's Work

Itta Shedletzky

The Jewish-German poetess and painter Else Lasker-Schüler (1869-1945) had a unique attachment to the Hebrew language and her work contains at various levels a peculiar fusion of word and image, text and picture. Two striking conjunctions of these features are at the core of this article: a picture exposing a biblical text and a handwritten Hebrew text serving as illustration.

Although Lasker-Schüler did not 'know' Hebrew in a strict sense, she had an amazing intuition for the spirit of the language. In her poetry she coined the written language 'erhabene Harfenschrift' (sublime harp-script), mourning the loss of the idiom in the course of Exile, but all the more admiring the beauty of the Hebrew letters.

The Hebrew poet Uri Tsvi Grinberg dealt with central aspects of Lasker-Schüler's relation to the Hebrew language in his essay 'Debra Imprisoned' published in *Davar* in 1926. Passages of his essay are cited in the first part of this article. The second part deals with the picture-text relation revealed on the cover illustration of Lasker-Schüler's *Hebrew Ballads* (1913): a dialogue between a portrait of the poetess and the verses: *'If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither; let my tongue stick to my palate if I cease to think of you, if I do not keep Jerusalem in my memory even at my*

happiest hour'. (*Tehilim* 137 5-6). The last part traces the unique text-picture constellation in the story '*Der Malik*' (1919) derived from a Hebrew text in Lasker-Schüler's handwriting, which appears as an illustration in this book.

The Wife of Tinius Rufus and Rabbi Akivah

Tal Ilan

This article is a response and comment on Avigdor Shinan's article, published in the previous issue of *Masekhet*. It discusses a source mentioning the marriage of Rabbi Akivah to the wife of Tinius Rufus, the Roman governor of Judaea at the time. The article suggests that it is not really possible to deny or accept this detail as historical fact. However the inclusion of this story in the Babylonian Talmud caused other midrashic problems, because it seems to contradict well-established features in Rabbi Akivah's hagiography, namely his saintly marriage and devotion to another woman. These later traditions subtly undermine any assumption one may have that Rabbi Akivah was ever married to another woman.

The Treasured People and Their Treasured Book

**Infinity Revealed in the Soul: Joseph
Schechter's Educational Theory**

David Liberman

Joseph Schechter (1901-1994) developed a unique school of humanistic thought that combined Jewish sources with the experiential and spiritual worlds of Far Eastern and Western philosophy. The innovations in his work span the realms of psychology, community dynamics and Bible study. His combination of strong faith and insight into contemporary cultural issues enabled Schechter to produce an educational theory that is both compelling and concrete in nature. This essay brings to the fore Schechter's profound understanding of problems fundamental to the lives of individuals and communal groups and summarizes the teaching he proposed toward their resolution.

Ben-Gurion's Bible

Zvi Zameret

David Ben-Gurion tried to give all Zionist politics and policy historical philosophical character that is rooted in the Bible. He used the Bible as a tool to further his ideological concepts; in fact, we may say that he fought all his Zionist battles with the help of the Bible.

Already in his first published work, the Yiddish volume *Eretz-Yisrael* (the land of Israel) *Past and Present* (1918) that he co-authored with Izhak Ben-Zvi, he clearly stressed that the Zionist return to the land of Israel is actually a repeat of the biblical conquest and settlement of the country. Years later, when appearing before the Peel Commission in 1937, he emphasized: 'It is not the Mandate that is our Bible; rather it is the Bible that is our Mandate.' The War of Independence and the establishment of the State of Israel drew Ben-Gurion ever nearer to the biblical heroes – particularly in his own mind, but also in the view of others. The Book of Joshua came to be the biblical book to which he was most drawn. On more than one occasion he pointed to the clear and unbroken line of continuity 'from the days of Joshua bin Nun to the I.D.F.'

Ben-Gurion did his best to impart to the multitudes his belief in the centrality of the Bible. He was influential in making its study a major component of school curriculum, initiated the conducting of

Bible quizzes in Israel and the Diaspora, participated in conferences on biblical archaeology, initiated a regular Bible study circle in his residence, and more. Ben-Gurion may be credited with the fact that the Bible plays a renascent central role in Israeli culture. However, ‘the Founding Father’ is also to blame for a situation in which the entire period of the Jewish Diaspora, from biblical times to the beginning of the Zionist settlement in *Eretz Yisrael*, as well as the Jewish cultural treasures created in various Diaspora communities – which he tended to skip over and belittle – are today a ‘black hole’ for many Israelis.

Battles Destined to be Lost

R. Mordechai Breuer

Four revolutions fiercely shook up the Jewish people in the last two hundred years. The common factor among all of them was that the Rabbis fought against them because they saw a threat to the very existence of Judaism. The revolution always overcame its conservative opponents. In the end, it became evident that the victory did not undermine the foundation of Judaism; rather it added strength and vitality to it.

The first revolution took place in the wakes of the Enlightenment. The Rabbis tried to prevent youths from studying secular subjects. However, today the majority of the religious community studied or studies at university. When the religious public sets aside time for Torah, it shows that Torah can reach beyond the *yeshiva* walls.

The second revolution occurred due to Zionism. Most of the Rabbis fought against Zionism, however the state of Israel rose to existence and it has more *yeshivas* and students of Torah than Europe did before the Holocaust.

The third revolution is increasingly occurring as discoveries about the Bible unfold. Already today, one can see that Biblical criticism will overcome its opponents and that Judaism itself will emerge improved from these new discoveries.

The last revolution is motivated by the desire for equal privileges and obligations among men and women. This revolution has focused on the issue of Torah study. However, women will always be exempt from certain *mitzvot* because they do not need them. Women do not have the *yetzer hara* that men have, thus there is no necessity for them to overcome their evil inclination through Torah study. The qualities a man can attain by means of Torah study alone are already part of her nature, effortlessly and without struggle. Although women's intellectual abilities are equivalent to those of men, this does not prove that they should have an equal obligation to learn Torah.

**Israeli Women Write about Biblical Women
Reading Genesis: Israeli Women Write About
Femininity in the Book of Genesis**

Yael Shemesh

Review

Reading Genesis: Israeli Women Write About Femininity in the Book of Genesis offers a colorful and enriching mosaic of research, reflections, stories, poetry, and dramatic excerpts involving female biblical figures from Genesis and Exodus, from Eve to Miriam. The authors of this anthology are Israeli women, scholars and artists coming from a wide range of backgrounds. Despite the divergent genres that compose the book, common elements engender a sense of unity among the pieces. Such elements include the widespread use (explicit or implicit) of Midrash; consideration of the silenced female voice and desire to make that voice audible through writing; and attention to figures of marginalized women – women of ‘inferior’ status due to social issues (e.g., the maidservants) or family dynamics (such as an unloved wife). These similarities, of course, are balanced by differences. The book offers readers a compelling, at times disharmonious, polyphony of voices. Thus, for example, some works speak of sisterhood, while others treat the painful issue of women exploited by other women. Although the word ‘feminism’ does not appear in the title, I believe this book has much to offer anyone interested in feminist ideology in general, and in feminist readings of the Bible in particular. The

focus on ‘her story’ as opposed to ‘his story’ has much in common with a central goal of feminist Bible study. Moreover, the notion, central to feminist studies, of the reader’s responsibility in regard to the interpretation chosen for a text, finds clear and well-exemplified expression in this book.

New Book

From Talmudic Literature to Jewish Society in Late Antiquity
Adiel Schremer, 'Male and Female He Created Them' – Jewish
Marriage in the Late Second Temple, Mishnah and Talmud
Periods, Jerusalem, Zalman Shazar Center 2003

David Levine

Adiel Schremer's book presents us with a social history of Jewish marriage during the first centuries of the Common Era, with particular attention to issues concerning the initial stages of marriage: making the match, the ages of bride and groom, and financial aspects of the relationship. As a social history, the author does not provide descriptions of specific individuals or stories of actual families; his interest lies not in unusual phenomena but in representative, prevalent practices in the society in question. Concepts and values related to marriage and family life – both of rabbis and broader Jewish society – are integrated in the discussion. In addition to internal perceptions and developments, the author considers the broader cultural context, pagan as well as Christian. The basic conclusion of the book is that a new dimension of marriage was introduced in late antiquity. Rather than replacing existing approaches, this dimension facilitated new characteristics and responded to emerging perceptions of the engagement and wedding process. The married couple and their evolving family attained new status; more than a social framework for procreation, it came to be seen above all as a relationship devoted to the

emotional and personal fulfillment of the married couple as individuals and as partners. Many characteristics of Jewish marriage during this period can be fully appreciated from this perspective including marital age, parental involvement, status of women as wives and mothers, perceptions of the nuclear family, and monogamous trends. These developments characterize Palestinian Jewish society and distinguish it from the Babylonian diaspora.

The variety of methods used to present, describe, and interpret the ancient sources lend weight and credibility to the book's presentation. The author combines philological skill deeply aware of the nature of talmudic sources and their literary history; together with historical analysis attending to the complex relations between talmudic norms and those of Jewish society in general. This combination results in a tour de force of talmudic-historical scholarship.

