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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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**'In His Image He Created Her': Motifs of the Feminine in
the Works Of Reb Nahman of Bratslav**

Ora Wiskind Elper

In reading Reb Nahman's works, both the tales and the teachings recorded in *Likkutei Moharan*, one is struck by the author's remarkable sensitivity to feminine experiences and modes of being. To be sure, motifs of femininity may be found throughout the centuries of Jewish literary expression, from biblical images and rabbinic thought to mystical teaching. Reb Nahman's innovation, rather, is in the compelling forms and the major role such familiar motifs take in the personae, images, and events that inform his oeuvre.

This essay seeks to explore a number of motifs of the feminine that are central to Reb Nahman's thought. Among them: the figure of the Shechina, portrayed variously as daughter, sister, mother, beloved; metaphors of fertility, procreation, and nourishment; the symbolic valences of passivity, aggression, violence, and strength; transmutations of gender stereotypes. These are considered with attention to the pretexts in biblical, midrashic, and kabbalistic form that may well have influenced Reb Nahman's unique transformation of them in his own works.

Learned Women of the Haskalah
The Roots of Women's Modern Writing in Hebrew

Tova Cohen

The literature of the Haskalah, 19th century Jewish enlightenment, was perceived as a male domain in regard to its writers, readers and subject matter until ten years ago. The research I carried out together with Professor Shmuel Feiner in the last decade uncovered the writings of Maskilot – women that saw themselves as part of the Haskalah and wrote in Hebrew. The outcome of these efforts is the book (in press) *Kol Almah Ivriyah* (Voice of a Hebrew Woman), which is comprised of Hebrew writings (unpublished works, letters published in newspapers of the period, essays, fiction and poetry) of more than thirty Maskilot.

The inner struggle that tormented the writers due to their position in society and family arise out of these documents, they portray varying images of women – apprehensive or courageous; house wives or women involved in public activity; professed feminists in contrast with women that feared undermining their traditional place in society and family. The texts also represent different levels of linguistic and literary capabilities. However, one characteristic is shared by nearly every writer – they have knowledge and understanding of the texts that are central to the religious Hebrew culture. In most cases their writing reveals an extensive knowledge of the Tanakh and the ability to incorporate its language and

contents into their writing. Furthermore, many of the documents also reveal skills in studying additional canonical texts: Mishnah, Talmud, prayer, and Kabbalah.

This article brings forth examples of the textual expertise of Maskilot, which prove not only the scholarship of these Maskilot, but also their innovative feminine and even feminist reading of the canonical texts.

Yeshiva Learning and the 'Feminine Voice' of Torah Study

Rav Shagar

The vast changes in women's status of modern times have created a gap, even a tear, between women's self, social and personal awareness; her needs and demands to fully and equally participate in fulfilling the mitzvah of Torah study; and the ruled halachah and tradition that has nearly excluded women from the aforementioned field.

The article proposes that a halachic response to women's Torah learning can be found by looking at the difference between conservative unchanging piety and progressive religiousness. The *poskim's* (Rabbinic authorities) opposition to women's Torah study has focused on the contradiction that exists in women attempting to engage in *lamdanut* (Talmudic erudition in the Yeshiva) which is characterized by male skills, such as pilpul or fiery debate. Here one can ask why women need to imitate the Yeshiva style of learning, which itself is coming across many difficulties in the Religious-Zionist Yeshivas.

In the framework of this article *Beit HaLevi* represents the main stream of halachic ruling regarding women's Torah study. Modern approaches, still needing pragmatic traditional reasoning, are also brought forth – such as that of Rabbi Lichtenstein shlit"a, who extends the realm of women's study almost infinitely. Compared to

Rabbi Lichtenstein is the Admor of Chabad, Rebbe Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch zt"l, who was aware of modern ways and tried to address them within a Jewish framework. He represents a stance that internalizes and justifies modern 'feminist' values, seeing in them the hand of Divine Providence and advancement towards redemption.

Through one of Rabbi Soloveitchik's zt"l lessons the article analyzes *lamdanut* that is practiced in Yeshivas and presents it as a 'male exchange'. This perspective creates an opening for women and encourages them to develop a feminine *lamdanut* that is unlikely to encounter halachic opposition due to the fact that it does not compete with or challenge the learning tradition in practice. One can see in this *lamdanut* an advancement of the prophesy of spiritual redemption that, following the Kabbalists and Hassidim, the Rebbe of Lubavitch foresaw.

Between Mother and Daughter:
A Multi-layered Dialogue

Nili Aryeh-Sapir

Up until recently, cultural works by and about everyday people have been largely ignored by researchers. This article serves to emphasize the inherent value of folklore as an integral piece helping shape the larger identity of society. The writing at hand is a collection of stories written by Haviva Gordon-Shalev about her childhood as a member of a poor family from Rishon Letzion at the beginning of the last century. These stories emphasize the lessons transmitted through traditional Yiddish proverbs used by Haviva's mother.

The first story reveals Haviva's mother guiding her to use an independent feminine voice and fight for marginal sections of society. Contrary to her own actions, Haviva's mother uses traditional sayings to teach her daughter to take a role that she herself could not take in her generation. The story recalls an encounter with a wealthy store owner, whose behavior was cruel and uncaring. When Haviva asks her mother how one could act in such a way, she responds with the Yiddish saying: 'He who is satiated cannot feel hunger'.

The second story differs from the first in that the mother's actions are in accordance with her words and her tradition. Haviva's mother shows her the burial shrouds that she had prepared for

herself. She teaches her how a Jewish woman should prepare for her own burial so as not to burden her family. Her mother says ‘Shrouds have no pockets’, explaining to Haviva that when one leaves this world he takes not his money, but his righteousness. The article analyzes these stories through emic and etic perspectives; this brings the central message out of the text, while at the same time identifying with Haviva. Only by using both of these methods together can we study the complex memories that Haviva transmits through her stories. The pervasive message that emerges is one that enlivens the hidden internal voice of the mother, and amplifies it with Haviva's active independent voice.

Approaching Marvels:
Facets of Rivka Miriam's Work

Sivan Harshefi

This article explores the poetic body of work that Rivka Miriam creates, focusing on the central theme in her work: *terem* (before) and the aspiration to return to it. The poetess uses *terem* to refer to the time before creation, the unified phase before division and multiplicity, the infinite expanse which preceded limited existence. In Rivka Miriam's body of work the *terem* is not a point of no return, on the contrary, this empty expanse (as an ultimate space, a proper entity) lingers in the foundation of all that is, into which the I that sings goes down deep to penetrate. This article considers several prevalent secondary themes and a few unique poetic styles in Rivka Miriam's work, showing that they all lead to her central theme and are tightly intertwined with it. The erotic image of the Jew, the relation to the body and its limitations and perspective of the subject, different models of partnerships, and the trend of inversion in content and in form all found in her poetry are examined for the first time through this prism. Different from most of the articles that deal with Rivka Miriam's work, which encompass isolated collections of poetry and lack a broad perspective, this article views her poetry as a whole.

Polemic and Dispute:
Why Rabbi Eliezer Was Excommunicated

Vered Noam

This article presents the similarities between the halachic positions of Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus and those found in the documents of Qumran. Besides the similarity of the details of a few halachic issues, they also share broad characteristics of halachic thought: a trend towards *chumrah* (stringency), adherence to the *peshat* (plain meaning) of the text, preference of tradition over logic and simplicity over sophistication. A new analyzation of the *Aggadah* in regard to R. Eliezer's excommunication reveals that the authors of the *Aggadah* associated R. Eliezer with fundamental views of the Oral Law that were not far from those of the Qumran sect. The Rabbinic literature preserved a few Massorot pertaining to his stubborn disagreement with the Rabbinic Establishment leading to his excommunication, and their rejection and intentional disregard of his halachah. The article proposes that this conflict is a remnant of the controversy between the Pharisees and their opposition in the end the Temple period. There was internal strife among the early Tannaim with regards to dissenting sectarian halachah. R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus was among the radical groups and figures opposing the Sanhedrin. These held similar opinions 'from within', even if not identical, to those that opposed them from the outside. The main stream Tannaim gradually forced these marginal opinions out.

Therefore, it is likely that the halachah of Qumran will shed a new light on the internal conflicts of the Sages and be an aid to the conflict occurring after the Pharisaic-rabbinic halachah's taking shape.

Arguments a minore ad majus (*qal vaḥomer*)
– Sadducean Realism

Daniel R. Schwartz

This article follows up on earlier studies that suggested that ancient priestly sects, such as the Sadducees and the Qumran sect, were determined by descent, just as the Jewish priests are. These ancient priestly sects followed a realist view that Jewish law in general follows nature; that is, that the Torah informs us about laws already existing in nature. Contrary to this, Pharisees and rabbis, who chose their profession, tended to follow the nominalist view that the Torah creates obligations. Furthermore, distinction usually arises in polemical contexts, which call upon each side to be consistent and to avoid using the opponents' principle. Based on this, we note that rabbinic literature frequently ascribes arguments a minore ad majus (*qal vaḥomer*) to the Sadducees; such arguments depend not upon text but upon nature, and rabbinic literature enjoys showing that the Sadducees were misled to opinions that contradict the Torah. The Sadducees indeed tended to use *qal vaḥomer* arguments in accordance with their general priestly realistic view of the law as natural, whereas the Pharisees and rabbis, at least when confronting priestly opponents, eschewed the *qal vaḥomer* along with the notion that divine law is natural law. Only the eventual disappearance of the priestly sects put an end to such polemic conditions and allowed the *qal vaḥomer* to be widely used by the rabbis.

Structure in the Parshot of Our Forefather Abraham

Gila-Rachel Yuval

This article explains the chiasmic structure of the chapters about our forefather Abraham. In the beginning and end of the chiasmic structure we find an abduction of Sarah, first by the house of Pharaoh, and then by Abimelech. In the middle of the chiasmic structure, between *Brit bein Ha'Betarim* (the Covenant between the Severed Parts) and *Brit Mila* (Covenant of Circumcision), the birth of Ishmael is described. The centralization and emphasis of the birth of Ishmael surprises the reader who has been taught that Isaac is Abraham's successor. However, a close reading of these chapters reveals the central place of Ishmael in his father's life; Ishmael is the first son born to Abraham when he is eighty-six years old! His birth ends Abraham's period of childlessness, and accordingly is a central point in Abraham's life. The structure of the parshot on Abraham reflects the magnitude of the pain that Abraham experienced most of his life, due to his state of childlessness. This pain was verbally expressed with his only emotional outburst: 'My Lord Hashem what will You give me, I am childless?!' (Genesis 15:2). The Torah brings attention to Abraham's pain with a structure which divides the chapters on Abraham's life into two periods, where the birth of his first son, Ishmael, stands in the center. The chiasmic structure may be divided into two parts. The first component describes a long period of childlessness. The second half clarifies the question of who is the chosen son.

Additional developments occur in the second section: Abraham is separated from his potential heirs, Lot and Ishmael; Hashem and Abraham become closer; and the existence of *Hashgacha* (Divine Providence) is emphasized. All of these developments climax with the binding of Isaac. Chapter twenty-one, which deals with the birth of Isaac, is outside of the chiasmic structure because the promise of offspring was referring to him. The article explains the meaning of the placement of chapter twenty-one, which is excluded from the structure, in the chapters of our forefather Abraham.

Book Review

**Every Woman Has a Name - Elisheva Baumgarten,
Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe**

Aviad Hacoen

Dr. Elisheva Baumgarten's new book *Imahot vi'Yeladim: Haye Mishpahah b'Ashkenaz bi'Yame ha'Benayim* (Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe) opens a window into the enchanting and fascinating world of women and children, and accompanies them through several centuries in times of joy and sorrow, through war and peace. They pass before us as if in a procession – women *mohels* and godmothers; midwives, wet nurses and doctors; very fertile women and barren women. This is all written in a fluent and clear manner.

This book puts the spotlight on women and stands them on center stage. In light of the relative minority of sources that deal with women and children, the book helps do justice to the lion's share of mankind. Bringing up forgotten voices (or those that would be forgotten) from centuries of women's subconscious, Baumgarten's book uncovers before the reader a wonderful world whose light has been hidden until now. It contains a meaningful contribution to revealing a history true to reality. We walk with Baumgarten on the paths of Germany and Northern France, hear the shouts of women kneeling in birth, experience with them the personal procedures of gynecological examinations, listen attentively to the gossip in the courtyards at dusk, and view the angelic smile of a babe suckling at his mother's breast. Baumgarten walks us through the rooms of the

house, places us next to the cradle, and brings into our own room the tumult of children playing in the yard.

This article critically examines the research methods, sources, subject matter, framework, time period and locality that the book discusses. In addition to turning our attention to the many innovations in the book, the author suggests several points worthy of further study and discussion.