

 **MASSEKHET**  
say to wisdom, thou art my sister  
In Memory of Esther Aumann z"l

*Women of the Jewish World*

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# MASSEKHET

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**Ramat Gan**

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*Massekhet* is a periodical established in *Matan, Women's Institute for Torah Studies*, in memory of Esther Aumann, one of its first students. Esther, who devoted her life to her home and to raising her family, began attending *Matan* at the age of sixty-two and for the first time in her life delved into the depths of Bible, Talmud and Jewish-thought studies. Six years later she passed away of cancer. The story of her life epitomizes the revolution undergone by women's Torah studies in the last generation.



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*“The Ancestors’ Deeds are a Sign for their Children” and  
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### **Miriam Sklarz**

Nechama Leibowitz (1905-1997) played a crucial role in elevating biblical exegesis from a mere arrangement of statements into a sophisticated method of study. One of the most compelling interpretative frameworks she highlighted was the exegetical principle articulated by Ramban (Nahmanides), known as “*ma’aseh avot siman la’banim*,” or “the deeds of the ancestors are a sign for their children.” In this article, I will explore two perspectives that Nechama identified within this exegetical framework and examine how they align with Ramban’s overarching goals in his Torah commentary.

*The Riddle of the Palm Tree of Deborah*

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### **Ronit Shiran**

Much has been written about the characterization of Deborah in both the prose and poetic accounts of her leadership (Jud. 4-5). Nevertheless, to the best of my knowledge, a special identifying marker relating to her location – “The Palm Tree of Deborah” (ibid., 4:5) – has not been discussed in depth. This particular construct appears only once in the Bible, and it raises several questions. Why is the palm tree named after Deborah? How should the narrator’s statement that Deborah used to sit under it be explained (ibid.)? What is the exact nature of this palm tree? If “The Palm Tree of Deborah” is a tree, is its role similar to that of other trees in the Bible, such as the terebinth, which is associated with God’s revelation or with a cultic context, and was considered to be a sacred tree (e.g., Gen 35:4)?

Linguistic and textual information gleaned from the Bible, as well as the date palm's cultic significance in the ancient Near East, as attested by the wealth of iconographic information from the Middle Bronze Age through the Iron Age, suggest that "The Palm Tree of Deborah" is not an ordinary tree, but rather a sacred one. It can be compared to the Assyrian Tree of Life, which was perceived as an object that connects the heaven and the earth, and which served as one of the most prominent symbols for representing the deity in the ancient Near East. If this hypothesis is true, not only was Deborah seen as an oracle who spoke God's word to those who came up to see her, but she seems also to have been a priestess who engaged in cultic performance.

### *Rav Nahman's Daughters*

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#### **Anat Israeli Taran and Tal Ilan**

This article offers a new reading of the daughters-of-Rav-Nahman traditions dispersed throughout the Babylonian Talmud, and especially for the long narrative and complex tradition in *bGittin* 45a. Our reading is based on the employment of feminist exegetical tools in general and on the Feminist Commentary on the Babylonian Talmud (*FCBT*) in particular. Daughter of sages are seldom mentioned in rabbinic literature. In light of this fact, the appearance of the Rav Nahman's daughters (whose number is nowhere stated) three (or four) times in this composition is noteworthy.

The daughters' mention in *bGittin* 45a, which deals with their being taken captive, is a story that has been analyzed often by traditional scholars as well as by contemporary academic scholarship, but seems to have still never been fully decoded. In this article, we shall analyze the short traditions on this rabbi's daughters, followed by an analysis and a new reading of the long story. This will also explain the prominence of these daughters on the pages of the Talmud.



*Wedding Poems by Moshe ben Nahman, Descendant of Rabbi  
El'azar Berabbi Qillir*

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**Shulamit Elizur**

This article brings to publication two wedding poems which are signed with the name “Moshe ben Nahman, descendant of El'azar Berabbi Qillir, hazak.” Previously, only one *ma'ariv* (evening prayer) *piyyut* had been attributed to Moshe b. Nahman, which declares that he is a descendant (*nin* is a term for a descendant; in modern Hebrew, it means great-grandson) of the great *paytan* of the land of Israel, Rabbi El'azar Berabbi Qillir (not the known rabbinic scholar Nahmanides). The publication of these wedding poems expand this composer's poetic legacy, who flourished in the late eastern period of *paytanut* (the 9<sup>th</sup>–12th century).

The first poem focuses upon the bride, with each rhyme opening with the word *kallah* (bride). However, close analysis of the poem reveals that the poem truly speaks of an allegorical bride, namely, the people of Israel. The structure of the second poem is such that it presents congratulatory wishes to the bridegroom and bride in a symmetrical manner.

**In Memory of Prof. Itta Shedletzky:**

*“A Tibetan Rug:” Else Lasker-Schüler and Kafka, Nathan Zach and  
Gershom Scholem, Cultural Connections in Jewish-German Culture*

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**Karin Neuburger Twito**

This lecture, delivered at an evening in memory of the late Prof. Itta Shedletzky, held on June 15, 2023, at the Leo Baeck Institute in Jerusalem, traces her remarkable journey as a scholar of German-Jewish culture from Switzerland to Israel, and her academic evolution from studying the history of German Jews to engaging deeply with Jewish literature in the German language. The lecture

highlights her pioneering and multifaceted contributions to these fields of research.

I argue that Else Lasker-Schüler's poem "*An Old Tibetan Rug*" exemplifies how Judaism has been, and continues to be, intricately interwoven into modern German culture. I further suggest that the poem reflects Shedletzky's nuanced understanding of the complex interplay and mutual influence between these two elements.

*"No Need to Worry:"  
Hannah Karminski's Family Letters, Berlin 1939-1942*

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### **Natalie Naimark-Goldberg**

Following the Nazi rise to power in 1933, and particularly after the *Kristallnacht* pogrom in November 1938, many German Jews sought ways to emigrate out of Germany. Hannah Karminski (1897-1943), an educator and social worker, and one of the leaders of the League of Jewish Women, chose to remain in Germany, not because she had any illusions regarding the future of Jews there, but in order to continue her communal work and help those who remained behind. In March 1939 Karminski parted from her parents, Adolf (Abraham) and Selma Karminski. Her parents managed to obtain immigration permits to Switzerland, where their younger daughter Erna Berlowitz and her family awaited them, but they were unable to convince their elder daughter to join them.

The parents' departure marked the beginning of an extensive correspondence. Approximately three hundred letters and postcards that Karminski sent to her parents and sister between 1939-1942 were preserved by the family, initially in Switzerland and now in Israel. The article focuses upon this unique collection, which is part of a limited corpus of letters sent by German Jews during World War II which are now available for research. The information which can be culled from these letters enhances our understanding of lesser-known aspects of Jewish life in Berlin during the war years in general, and regarding Hannah Karminski's activities in particular.

Furthermore, the article shows the significance of understanding the particular connection between the sender and the addressees, as

well as the goal which the sender sought to achieve through the correspondence. Letters written during the Holocaust period were not meant (merely) to serve as historical documents for the future, but had concrete purposes in the present. Examining the letters' and the postcards' deeper messages by reading between the lines shows that factors other than external censorship largely determined their content and form. Thus, the article also emphasizes an approach that may be applied to the analysis of correspondence in Shoah research more broadly.

*Remember Them: The Life, Death and Commemoration of a Mother, Daughter and Aunt in the Early Years of the State*

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**Sharon Geva**

This article addresses the story of a family, whose heroines were three women, resonating central themes in the history of the end of the *Yishuv* period, and the early years of the State of Israel, and also exemplifies the place of women in history. These women are Rachel Zeltzer Rays (1927-1948), a member of the Lehi underground group who fell in the War of Independence, a day after the declaration of the State of Israel; her mother, Ada Zeltzer Rays (1899-1948), a Holocaust survivor, a member of the Haganah who committed suicide three months after her daughter fell; and the mother's sister, the former's aunt, Prof. Tscharna Rayss (1890-1965), who was one of the first women at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem to attain the rank of professor, who paved her own way in academia despite discriminatory work conditions which prevailed against women at that time.

The article follows these three women, analyzing from a historical perspective what has been done to commemorate and memorialize them in Israel, actions which have been carried out exclusively by women, particularly poet-author Miriam Yalan-Shteklis, an Israel Prize laureate for Children's Literature (1956), and author-poet Anda Pinkerfeld-Amir, a subsequent Israel Prize laureate in the same category (1978). All of this research points to the fact that, both the story of these three forgotten women, and the realities of

how they have been commemorated, have been uniquely feminine – whether in terms of gender limitations, or because of the undermining of their status, which remained intact only temporarily.

*Another Look at the Status of Women: As a means of Isolation between Haredim and Mainstream Society*

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**Margalit Shilo**

The issue of the status of women is one of the major points of dispute between Haredi society and the liberal, Zionist society in the State of Israel. The purpose of this paper is to analyze how this was manifested vis-à-vis the status of women in Haredi society in the Yishuv, in the first half of the twentieth century. In its conclusion, I'll present this issue from an early twenty-first century perspective, as another layer in the construction of a fence that Haredi society has erected between itself and the surrounding mainstream society. This topic is to be analyzed while focusing upon the following three historical moments:

- A. The first public debate in the Yishuv, regarding allowing women the right to participate in communal leadership, which was held in Zichron Yaakov in 1903,
- B. The major public debates regarding the question of women's right to vote and participate in the newly established Assembly of Representatives of Jewish Yishuv in Mandatory Palestine, were held from the end of 1917 until the end of 1925. The Haredim negated women's right to vote and be elected and due to this left the organization when women were granted to vote and participate, and thus isolated themselves from the mainstream Yishuv society until the establishment of the State.
- C. The decision of the Agudath Israel-affiliated parties to participate in the January 1949 Knesset elections, in which women voted and were elected (with the exception of barring female representatives from the Religious United

Front. In the face of this decision, I will examine their statements on the issue of the status of women in debates concerning various laws in the first Knesset.

Finally, the article analyzes the question of how the rabbinic call, starting in 1952, for Haredi girls and women to leave their private sphere (home) and to go out to work in order to support their families, contradicts their former decisions while empowering the status of their women – to this day – and at the same time continues to perceive them as a means of isolation.