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The Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center for the Study of Women in  
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# MASSEKHET

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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.



The Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center for the Study of Women in Judaism

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**'If I perish, I perish' (Esth. 4:16):  
The Story of Esther, Emissary and Savior**

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*Yael Shemesh and Matan Nauerman*

A fair number of women who demonstrated bravery and resourcefulness in perilous times peer out of the pages of Scripture. The present article focuses on the last of these – Esther, whose story is the most impressive of all the female salvation stories because of its scope – saving the entire Jewish people from genocide.

Esther is an emissary, even though it is not God who sends her, but her cousin Mordechai. This means that the story does not fit into the genre of call narratives, to serve a prophet or redeemer – all of which have male heroes. Nevertheless, it does have lines of similarity with them.

The first part of the article presents the various elements of the genre of call narratives, beginning with that of Moses (Exodus 3–4), and identifies some of them in Esther's story.

The second part of the article compares the story told in the book of Esther with the chronicle of the Exodus, and juxtaposes the Jewish queen with Moses. They have quite a bit in common: the background to their story – a murderous decree proclaimed by a foreign king against the newborn Israelite males/the entire Jewish people; and their biography – both Esther and Moses are raised by adoptive parents. No less significant, however, are the differences between them. Some of these are a result of the gender difference between salvation worked by a man and salvation achieved by a woman. The most important difference is that Moses is delegated by the Lord to save His people, whereas Esther is sent by Mordechai. This produces other major differences: to Moses the Lord vouchsafed His promise of assistance and many signs and portents, whereas Esther sets out on her mission with no promises and no guarantee of success. Whence her pessimistic words, 'if I

perish, I perish' (Esth. 4:16). This plaintive envoi exalts the character of Esther and her act to save her people, which involved a real risk to her life.

### **'The Sages Talk about You': Rav Hisda's Daughter and Rava – Interactions and Bonds between the Couple through the Corpus of the Babylonian Talmud**

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*Michal Shir-el*

From thousands of Sages mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud, only 40 are mentioned together with their wives – '*d'veitho*', of which only seven are mentioned more than once. In other words, about 33 couples are presented a single time as a couple, and for their wives, this is their only appearance in the Talmud.

This article presents a unique couple, Rava and Rav Hisda's daughter, an exceptional talmudic model of a couple regarding whom there is a wealth of textual material, incomparable to the other couples cited in the Babylonian Talmud. The multiple interactions and bonds described between these two marital partners enable us to construct of an elaborate depiction, based on numerous aspects of their relationship.

There appear to be thematic connections between the extensive attention this couple receives in the Babylonian Talmud and the fact that the woman is Rav Hisda's daughter, identified as such in almost all the texts concerning the couple, rather than by the usual term, '*d'veitho*', and these are explored. However, we can discern this only after discussing the different narratives, which



surprisingly have not been given due scholarly attention, as addressed in the article.

### **The Education of the Jewish Woman in the Missionary Schools of the Ottoman Empire**

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*Lea Bornstein-Makovetsky*

The article addresses both the accomplishments and the shortcomings of the Christian education that was provided by Protestant missionary groups to Jewish women and girls in Istanbul, Salonica and Izmir from the 1840s until the beginning of the twentieth century. The focus of the article is on the schools these missionaries established for Jewish girls, while also addressing the establishment of educational frameworks for married Jewish women. The establishment of schools for Jewish girls by the Protestant missionary groups was an important step in advancing the education of the Jewish girls in these cities. Concomitantly, many Jewish girls studied in the Catholic school that operated in each of the respective cities.

In the Protestant missionary schools, these students acquired elements of basic education, learning languages, Christian theology, along with the art of sewing. Interestingly, despite the Christological training and influence, few of these students converted to Christianity. These schools raised the standards for girls' education in all strata of the Jewish society within which they lived. The *Alliance Israélite Universelle* (AIU) organization also established modern schools for girls that attracted most of the Jewish girls, starting in the 1870s.

Returning to the issue of the majority of students remaining Jewish: we have concluded that the missionaries who established the schools for Jewish girls underestimated the latter's strong bond to

their religion, synagogues, rabbis and religious education. Furthermore, the missionaries did not invest sufficient efforts in the education of the married Jewish women, attempting to draw them in to their cause through meetings, mostly incidental ones, but to no avail. The Christian schools also did not press the women to follow professional training, with the women's work designed only for those who were in need of a livelihood.

We indicated that the marriage age of the Jewish girls who studied in the missionary schools and in the AIU rose in accordance with their respective level of education there.

The missionaries emphasized the loyalty of the Jewish women to religion. The Jewish leadership expressed its opposition to the Christian schools, undertaking great efforts to prevent the registration of the girls into these schools.

The impression one gets is that most of the students, both in the missionary schools and in the AIU schools, internalized the message they learned in school with regard to a woman's standing, as well as her important role as a housewife and an intelligent mother.

### **'A One-Woman Show': The Story of Ethel Bloom, Founder of Occupational Therapy in Pre-State Israel**

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*Tovi Margaliot and Lilach Rosenberg-Friedman*

The article familiarizes the reader with the fascinating, hitherto mysterious figure of Ethel Bloom, the woman who founded the field of occupational therapy in the *Yishuv* during the British Mandate period. Her story is intertwined with the development of this new health profession in the period under discussion. Drawing

upon a range of primary sources, the article investigates Bloom's motivations, her perceptions of gender, and the means that she utilized in order to implement her ideas. This implementation led to the establishment of the first clinic for occupational therapy at Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem in 1946. Bloom also developed an institutionalized training system that created a standardized infrastructure for professional occupational therapists, along with establishing a professional organization for which she successfully achieved recognition. All this is described against the backdrop and in context of the time period, central to which was the national fight for the establishment of the State.

Bloom was involved in every aspect of activity in the growth of occupational therapy in the *Yishuv*. The field developed out of a partnership between different organizations in the *Yishuv* and in the United States, aligned with the professional standards that were accepted in the US. She had prestigious partners in this project, chief among them being Hadassah founder Henrietta Szold, who joined her in the initiative, bringing Hadassah on board with tremendous support for the development. Also among her partners were certified therapists who came from the United States to train local women, and who also came to develop the departments at the respective medical centers. The female students themselves also played a crucial role, as they answered the national call to join the study of this new field.

Bloom's activism, driven by a strong sense of mission and purpose, both nationalistic and professional, was unique in a period in which women were restricted in countless fields. She acted out of a sense of national mission, understanding the local need of occupational therapy. She saw the development of the field as an element of shaping the *Yishuv* and the young and burgeoning State. Along with all this, she made a significant contribution to the advancement of the stature of women in the *Yishuv* and Israel, by providing them with a new educational option, a new field and a new way to make a living. Her meaningful professional contribution on the national level was for her, for her students as well as for all other occupational therapists, a springboard for self-realization and self-advancement.

Outlining the figure of Ethel Bloom is also a reflection of the status, place and function of professional women in the *Yishuv* and in the early years of Israel.

### **Leah Goldberg the Anglophile: Rethinking her Cultural Horizons and the Cross-Cultural Affinities of her Time**

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*Giddon Ticotsky*

The common perception regarding Israeli author-poet Leah Goldberg (1911–70), that her one foot was rooted in Russian culture while her other foot remained rooted in German culture, is re-examined in this article. A new reading of her writings is suggested in its place, emphasizing instead her affinities for the Anglo-American culture. The argument is that her dialogue with that culture results partly from Goldberg's biography, and even more so from the historical transformations which she witnessed.

The initial trigger that led her to delve into English literature is inextricably connected to its being a stark contrast to German writing, which was surely significant with the Nazis' rise to power. The British 'dryness' served Goldberg as an inoculation against the 'storminess' of the German writing. She was drawn to this culture further owing to the British Mandatory period here in Palestine-Eretz Israel, especially when understood against the background of World War II, when Walt Whitman and other British and American authors served as polestars of democracy and freedom of expression for her in the sea of fascism.

With the conclusion of the war, Goldberg identified the transition that had taken place in Western culture, namely, the strengthening of Anglo-American culture in place of Russian, French and other cultures. Accordingly, she was among the few of her generation

whose ear was attentive to the “new music” that beat in the works of the modern English and American authors and poets. This attentiveness can explain the transition to looser writing that is apparent in her later poetry, and how Goldberg became a mediator between the poets of the 'Statehood Generation' (including Nathan Zach, Yehuda Amichai and Dahlia Ravikovitch) and the Hebrew poets of her own generation. Even then, in the 1950s and sixties, her identification with the Anglo-American culture was accompanied by a political component – namely, opposition to the Soviet 'realistic socialism.'

### **Secondary Heroes: A Gender Perspective on the Underground Female Couriers in the Ghettos in Poland**

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*Sharon Geva*

Among the members of the Underground in the ghettos in Poland that undertook revolt were many women who functioned as couriers, playing crucial roles in communication and transmission. Carrying out their missions required great courage, composure and wisdom, as they were always life-threatening. Their activity was regarded with much esteem in the documentation on the uprising of the Jews in the ghettos in Poland during the Holocaust as well as subsequently in Israel, where they were an integral part of the heroic tales of the fighting Underground.

The article examines the place of the couriers in this heroic story as it is told in Israel, emphasizing the gender perspective on the story. The article shows that despite the great recognition shown toward these women, it was always limited and constrained based on the traditional division of tasks between men and women. As such, the women were considered as secondary heroes rather than being glorified as the primary heroes. The underlying explanation for this

returns to the limits of gender roles which these women tested by their very belonging to the fighting Underground, and the nature of their role within it based on the reality of life in the ghettos, which was, in light of its various components, essentially a feminine role.

Against this background, and with the aim of reflecting more precisely their place in the Underground in the Holocaust, I put forward a new term with regard to these women. Alongside the familiar moniker 'couriers', and indeed in its stead, I suggest referring to them as 'female spearheads' of the ghetto Undergrounds, for indeed, for all intents and purposes, that is what they were.

### **'Draw Near to My Soul and Redeem It' - The Ba'al Shem Tov and 'The Yemima Method'**

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*Tsippi Kauffman z"l*

'Consciousness awareness', the method developed by Yemima Avital, is an inwardly driven spiritual approach that has become widespread and known both to the Israeli public and its media. The consciousness thinking that Yemima taught is not influenced by intertextual citations. She is not a preacher, nor does she claim to rely upon earlier traditions. Her text is generally given in simple Hebrew, though the syntax is often intricate and not always clear, with a unique inwardly-oriented vocabulary. Those who read these texts will not identify any Hasidic or Kabbalistic traditions, other than an occasional 'shimmer'. Nonetheless, in many ways, one can think of these groups of women studying consciousness awareness as a type of contemporary Hasidism or neo-Hasidism. Indeed, one can identify significant commonalities, and perhaps even elements of influence, between the Hasidism of the Ba'al Shem Tov and the approach transmitted by Yemima Avital to her students.

In a manner comparable to the Hasidic *tzadik*, Yemima Avital also functioned both as a mystic and a magician. Yemima offered to her followers that which the Hasidic *tzadik* offered to his: spiritual and ethical support, behavioral guidance, along with real support in times of crisis, especially in medical crises. Yemima may be the first woman to have operated within the Jewish tradition as a mystic who left behind a practical-spiritual approach.

The consciousness awareness method itself also addressed at least one daily challenge, namely learning how to experience calm listening, or to acquire emotive listening in daily life. Followers who succeed in living more 'precise' lives, to more closely approximate their better essence and to unleash 'burdens', testify to greater openness in other avenues of reality and of spiritual life, as well as to finding the divine spark. By being 'in their place', to use Yemima's term, they encounter, in 'the Place', one of the classic rabbinic terms for God.

Various and varied attempts have been made, both by Hasidim and scholars of Hasidism, to define the novelty that was introduced by the Ba'al Shem Tov. In place of the asceticism that had characterized the previous sects of self-defined Hasidim, the Ba'al Shem Tov suggested an all-inclusive, undefined conception whose essence was love. Asceticism, according to the Ba'al Shem Tov, is not only a rejection of the material and social world, but also a rejection of some of the inner elements of man that seek to connect with the material and social channels. This practical alternative involved bringing together these previously rejected elements and incorporating them into the spiritual realm. This inclusive spiritual approach is reflected in Yemima's teachings as well.

Thus, comparing a number of concepts from Yemima's teachings with the parallel teachings in traditions cited from the Ba'al Shem Tov reveals a uniting element between Hasidic thinking and the mystical principle underlying Yemima's teachings.

