

## Insidious Mother, Irresistible Murderess: The Righteous Temptress of the Bible

**Gila Fine**

**1** | [These] women really possess but one power and that is sexual. Time and again it is their sexuality which is considered emblematic of their piety. The day is won and the deed is done by use of feminine wiles, their beauty and body far more than their brain or brawn.

Harry Fox, Justin J. Lewis, *Many Pious Women: Edition and Translation*

**2** | וַיַּעַל לוֹט מִצּוֹעַר וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּהָר, וּשְׁתֵּי בָנָתָיו עִמּוֹ, כִּי יָרָא לְשִׁבְתָּ בְּצוֹעַר; וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּמַעְרָה, הוּא וּשְׁתֵּי בָנָתָיו: וַתֹּאמֶר הַבְּכִירָה אֶל־הַצְעִירָה אָבִינוּ זָקֵן; וְאִישׁ אֵין בָּאָרֶץ לְבוֹא עָלֵינוּ, כְּדָרֹךְ פְּלִהָאָרֶץ: לָכֵּה נִשְׁקָה אֶת־אָבִינוּ יָיִן וְנִשְׁכְּבָה עִמּוֹ; וְנַחֲמָה מֵאֲבִינוּ זָרַע: וַתִּשְׁקֶינָה אֶת־אָבִיהֶן יָיִן בְּלִילָה הוּא; וַתְּבֹא הַבְּכִירָה וַתִּשְׁכַּב אֶת־אָבִיהָ, וְלֹא־יָדַע בְּשִׁכְבָּהּ וּבְקוּמָהּ: וַיְהִי מִמָּחָרֶת, וַתֹּאמֶר הַבְּכִירָה אֶל־הַצְעִירָה, הֲוֹשִׁיכֵתִי אִמָּשׁ אֶת־אָבִי; נִשְׁקֶנּוּ יָיִן גַּם־הַלַּיְלָה, וּבֹאִי שִׁכְבִּי עִמּוֹ, וְנַחֲמָה מֵאֲבִינוּ זָרַע: וַתִּשְׁקֶינָה גַּם בְּלִילָה הַהוּא אֶת־אָבִיהֶן יָיִן; וַתִּקֶּם הַצְעִירָה וַתִּשְׁכַּב עִמּוֹ, וְלֹא־יָדַע בְּשִׁכְבָּהּ וּבְקוּמָהּ: וַתִּהְיֶינָה שְׁתֵּי בָנוֹת־לוֹט מֵאֲבִיהֶן:

בראשית יט:ל-לו

**ותאמר הבכירה אל הצעירה.** שהיו סבורות שנתכלה העולם כדור המבול.

בראשית רבה נא:ח

And [Lot] and his two daughters dwelt in a cave. Now the firstborn said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is no man on the earth to come in to us as is the custom of all the earth. Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve the lineage of our father." So they made their father drink wine that night. And the firstborn went in and lay with her father, and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. It happened on the next day that the firstborn said to the younger, "Indeed I lay with my father last night; let us make him drink wine tonight also, and you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve the lineage of our father." Then they made their father drink wine that night also. And the younger arose and lay with him, and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father.

Genesis 19:30-36

*Now the firstborn said to the younger.* Since they believed that the entire world had been destroyed, as in the generation of the flood.

Genesis Rabbah 51:8



3

וַיִּנָּחֵם יְהוּדָה, וַיַּעַל עַל-גִּזְזֵי צֹאנוֹ הוּא, וַחֲבִירוֹ רַעְהוּ הַעֲדָלְמִי תִמְנָה: וַיֵּגֶד לְתֹמֶר לְאִמֹּר; הִנֵּה חֲמִידָה עָלָה תִמְנָה לְגֹז צֹאנוֹ: וַתִּסָּר בְּגִדֵי אֶלְמְנוּתָהּ מֵעֲלֶיהָ, וַתִּכְסּ בְּצִעִיף וַתַּתְּעֶלֶף, וַתֵּשֶׁב בְּפֶתַח עֵינַיִם, אֲשֶׁר עַל-דֶּרֶךְ תִּמְנָה; כִּי רָאֹתָהּ כִּי-גִדְלָה שָׁלָה, וְהוּא לֹא-נִתְּנָהּ לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה: וַיִּרְאֶה יְהוּדָה, וַיַּחְשְׁבֶהָ לְזוֹנָה; כִּי כִסְתָהּ פָּנֶיהָ: וַיֵּט אֶלֶיהָ אֶל-הַדֶּרֶךְ, וַיֹּאמֶר הִבְהִינָא אָבוֹא אֵלֶיךָ, כִּי לֹא יָדַע, כִּי כֶלְתּוֹ הוּא; וַתֹּאמֶר מִהֲתִתְּנִילִי, כִּי תָבוֹא אֵלַי: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנֹכִי אֲשַׁלַּח גְּדִיעִים מִרְחֻצָּאן; וַתֹּאמֶר אִם-תִּתֵּן עָרְבוֹן עַד שְׁלֹחַךְ: וַיֹּאמֶר, מָה הָעָרְבוֹן אֲשֶׁר אֶתְּרֹלְךָ, וַתֹּאמֶר, חֲתָמְךָ וּפְתִילְךָ, וּמִטָּף אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדְךָ; וַיִּתְּרֶלָה וַיָּבֹא אֵלֶיהָ וַתַּהַר לוֹ:

בראשית ל"ח, יב-יח

**בפתח עיניים.** מלמד, שפתחה לו את העין. אמרה לו: טהורה אני ופנויה אני.

בראשית רבה פה ז:

Judah... went up to his sheepshearers at Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. And it was told Tamar, saying, "Look, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep." So she took off her widow's garments, covered herself with a veil and wrapped herself, and sat in the entrance to Enaim, which was on the way to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given to him as a wife. When Judah saw her, he thought she was a harlot, because she had covered her face. Then he turned to her by the way, and said, "Please let me come in to you"; for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law... [He] went in to her, and she conceived by him.

Genesis 38:12-18

*In the entrance to Enaim.* From this we learn that she opened [פתחה] her eye [עין] to him, and said: I am pure and I am available.

Genesis Rabbah 85:7

4

וַחֲבֵר הַשִּׁינִי נָפַד מִשּׁוֹן, מִבְּנֵי חֶבֶל חֲתָן מִשָּׁה; וַיֵּט אֶתְּלוֹ, עַד-אֵלוֹן... וַיִּבְרַק, רִדְף אַחֲרֵי הָרֶכֶב וְאַחֲרֵי הַמִּחְנָה, עַד חֲרֹשֶׁת הַגּוֹיִם; וַיִּפֹּל כְּלִמְחִנָּה סִסְרָא לְפִי-חֶרֶב, לֹא נִשְׁאַר עַד-אֶחָד: וְסִסְרָא נָס בְּרִגְלָיו, אֶל-אֶהֱלָל יָעַל, אִשֶּׁת חֲבֵר הַשִּׁינִי... וַתֵּצֵא יָעַל לְקִרְאָת סִסְרָא, וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו, סוּרָה אֲדֹנִי סוּרָה אֵלַי אֶל-תִּירָא; וַיִּסָּר אֵלֶיהָ הָאֶהֱלָל, וַתִּכְסְּהוּ בְּשִׁמְכָה: וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ הַשִּׁינִינָא מַעֲט־מִים כִּי צִמְאֹתִי; וַתִּפְתַּח אֶת-נְאוֹד הַחֶלֶב וַתִּשְׁקֶהוּ וַתִּכְסְּהוּ... וַתִּשָּׂח יָעַל אֶשְׁת־חֲבֵר אֶת־יָתֵד הָאֶהֱלָל וַתִּשֹּׂם אֶת־הַמִּקְשָׁת בְּיָדָהּ, וַתָּבוֹא אֵלָיו בְּלֹאט, וַתִּתְּקַע אֶת־הַיָּתֵד בְּרִקְתּוֹ, וַתִּצָּנַח בְּאָרֶץ; וְהוּא-נֶרְדָּם וַיַּעַף וַיָּמָת: וְהִנֵּה בָרַק רִדְף אֶת־סִסְרָא, וַתֵּצֵא יָעַל לְקִרְאָתוֹ, וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ, לָךְ וְאַרְאֶךָ, אֶת־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר-אַתָּה מִבְּקֹשׁ; וַיָּבֹא אֵלֶיהָ, וְהִנֵּה סִסְרָא נָפַל מֵת, וְהַיָּתֵד בְּרִקְתּוֹ... [וַתִּשָּׂר דְּבוּרָה] תִּבְרָךְ מְנָשִׁים, יָעַל אִשֶּׁת חֲבֵר הַשִּׁינִי; מְנָשִׁים בָּאֶהֱלָל תִּבְרָךְ: מִים שָׂאֵל חֶלֶב נִתְּנָה; בְּסֹפֶל אֲדִירִים הִקְרִיבָה חֲמָאָה: יָדָה לַיָּתֵד וַתִּשְׁלַחנָה, וַיִּמְינָה לְהַלְמוֹת עַמְלִים; וְהִלָּמָה סִסְרָא מִחֻקָּה רָאוּשׁ, וּמִחֻקָּה וְחִלָּקָה רִקְתּוֹ: בֵּין רִגְלֶיהָ, כָּרַע נָפַל שָׁכָב; בֵּין רִגְלֶיהָ כָּרַע נָפַל, בְּאֲשֶׁר כָּרַע, שָׁם נָפַל שְׂדוּד.

שופטים ד: יא-ה: כז

אמר רבי יוחנן שבע בעילות בעל אותו רשע באותה שעה שנאמר "בין רגליה כרע נפל שכב" וגו. הוריות י:



Now Heber the Kenite had separated from the Kenites, the descendants of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Zaanannim... And Barak pursued the chariots and the army to Harosheth-hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left. But Sisera had fled away on foot to the tent of Yael, the wife of Heber the Kenite... And Yael went out to meet Sisera, and said to him, "Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me; do not fear." And when he had turned aside with her into the tent, she covered him with a blanket. Then he said to her, "Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty." So she opened a jug of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him... Then Yael, Heber's wife, took a tent peg and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple until it went down into the ground while he was lying fast asleep from weariness. So he died. And behold, as Barak was pursuing Sisera, Yael went out to meet him and said to him, "Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking." So he went in to her tent, and there lay Sisera dead, with the tent peg in his temple... [Then sang Deborah] "Most blessed among women is Yael, the wife of Heber the Kenite; blessed is she among women in tents. He asked for water, she gave milk; she brought out cream in a lordly bowl. She stretched her hand to the tent peg, her right hand to the workmen's hammer; she pounded Sisera, she pierced his head, she split and struck through his temple. Between her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still; at her feet he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell dead."

Judges 4:11-5:27

R. Johanan said: That profligate had sevenfold intercourse at that hour; for it is said, "Between her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still" etc.

Horayot 10b

## 5

וּתְאֵמָר לָהּ נַעֲמִי חֲמוּתָהּ... הֲלֹא בָעָז מִדַּעַתְנִי, אֲשֶׁר הָיִית אֶת־נַעֲרוֹתַי; הִנֵּה־הוּא, זָרָה אֶת־גֶּרְוֹן הַשְּׁעָרִים הַלֵּילָה: וְרַחֲצָת וְסִכָּתָּ, וְשִׁמְתָּ שְׁמִלְתָּךְ (שְׁמִלְתִּיךָ) עָלֶיךָ וְיִרְדָּתִי (וְיִרְדָּתְךָ) הַגֶּרְוֹ; אֶל־תִּנְדְּעִי לְאִישׁ, עַד כִּלְתֹּךְ לְאָכֹל וְלִשְׁתּוֹת: וַיְהִי בְשֹׁכְבוֹ, וַיִּדְעָת אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכַּב־שָׁם, וּבָאת וּגְלִית מִרְגְּלֹתַי וְשִׁכַּבְתִּי (וְשִׁכַּבְתָּ); וְהוּא יָגִיד לָךְ, אֵת אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשִׂין... וְתִרְדַּד הַגֶּרְוֹ; וְתַעֲשֶׂה כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־צִוְּתָהּ חֲמוּתָהּ: וַיֵּאכֹל בָּעָז וַיִּשָּׂת וַיִּיטֵב לָבוֹ, וַיָּבֹא לְשֹׁכֵב בְּקֶצֶה הָעֵרְמָה; וְתֵבֵא בִלְטָהּ, וְתִגַּל מִרְגְּלֹתַי וְתִשְׁכַּב: וַיְהִי בַחֲצִי הַלַּיְלָה, וַיִּחַרְד הָאִישׁ וַיִּלְפֹּת; וְהִנֵּה אִשָּׁה, שִׁכַּבְת מִרְגְּלֹתַי: וַיֵּאמֶר מִי־אֵת; וּתְאֵמָר, אֲנֹכִי רוֹת אֶמְתָּךְ, וּכְרַשְׁתָּ כִנְפֶךָ עַל־אֶמְתָּךְ, כִּי גָּאֵל אֶתָּה.

רות ג:א-ט

"וַיִּלְפֹּת" - לפתתו כחזוית. התחיל ממשמש בשערה, אמר רוחות אין להם שער. אמר לה: מי את, רוח או אשה? אמרה: אשה. פנויה את או אשת איש? אמרה לו: פנויה. טמאה את או טהורה? אמרה לו: טהורה. והנה אשה טהורה מכל הנשים שוכבת מרגלותיו, שנאמר "וַיֵּאמֶר מִי אֵת וּתְאֵמָר אֲנֹכִי רוֹת אֶמְתָּךְ".

רות רבה ו:א



Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her... "Boaz, whose young women you were with, is he not our relative? In fact, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Therefore wash yourself and anoint yourself, put on your best garment and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. Then it shall be, when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies; and you shall go in, uncover his feet, and lie down; and he will tell you what you should do"... And after Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was cheerful, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and she came softly, uncovered his feet, and lay down. Now it happened at midnight that the man was startled, and turned himself; and there, a woman was lying at his feet. And he said, "Who are you?" So she answered, "I am Ruth, your maidservant. Take your maidservant under your wing,[a] for you are a close relative."

Ruth 3:1-9

*Turned himself* [וילפת]. She wrapped him up [לפתתו] like lichen. He began to feel her hair, and said: "Demons do not have hair." He said to her, "Are you a demon or a woman?" She said, "A woman." "Are you single or married?" She said, "Single." "Are you pure or impure?" She said to him, "Pure." And behold, the purest of women lies at his feet, as it says, "'Who are you?' he asked. And she replied, 'I am Ruth, your maidservant.'"

Ruth Rabba 6:1

## 6

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאַסְתֵּר גַּם בַּיּוֹם הַשֵּׁנִי בְּמִשְׁתֵּה הַיַּיִן, מִהֲשֹׂאֲלֶתָּךְ אֶסְתֵּר הַמֶּלֶכָה וְתִנָּתֵן לָךְ; וּמִהֲבִקְשֶׁתָּךְ עַד־חֲצֵי הַמַּלְכוּת וְתַעַשׂ: וְתַעַן אֶסְתֵּר הַמֶּלֶכָה וְתֹאמַר, אִם־מִצְאֵתִי חֹן בְּעֵינֶיךָ הַמֶּלֶךְ, וְאִם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב; תִּנָּתְרֵלִי נִפְשִׁי בְּשֹׂאֲלֶתִי, וְעַמִּי בְּבִקְשֶׁתִּי: כִּי נִמְכַּרְנוּ אֲנִי וְעַמִּי, לְהַשְׁמִיד לְהָרוֹג וּלְאַבֵּד; וְאֵלּוּ לַעֲבָדִים וּלְשִׁפְחוֹת נִמְכַּרְנוּ הַחַרְשֹׁתִי, כִּי אֵין הָצָר שׁוֹה בְּגִזְק הַמֶּלֶךְ: וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֹׁרוּשׁ, וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַסְתֵּר הַמֶּלֶכָה; מִי הוּא זֶה וְאֵיזָה הוּא, אֲשֶׁר־מָלְאוּ לְבוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת כֵּן: וְתֹאמַר־אַסְתֵּר, אִישׁ צָר וְאוֹיֵב, הֵמָּן הָרַע הַזֶּה; וְהֵמָּן נִבְעֵת, מִלִּפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַמֶּלֶכָה: וְהַמֶּלֶךְ קָם בַּחֲמָתוֹ מִמִּשְׁתֵּה הַיַּיִן, אֶל־גִּנַּת הַבַּיִת; וְהֵמָּן עָמַד, לְבִקֵּשׁ עַל־נַפְשׁוֹ מֵאַסְתֵּר הַמֶּלֶכָה, כִּי רָאָה, כִּי־קָלְתָה אֵלָיו הָרָעָה מֵאֵת הַמֶּלֶךְ: וְהַמֶּלֶךְ שָׁב מִגִּנַּת הַבַּיִת אֶל־בֵּית מִשְׁתֵּה הַיַּיִן, וְהֵמָּן נָפַל, עַל־הַמֶּסָּה אֲשֶׁר אֶסְתֵּר עָלֶיהָ, וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ, הֲגַם לְכַבּוֹשׁ אֶת־הַמֶּלֶכָה עַמִּי בְּבֵית; הַדָּבָר, יָצָא מִפִּי הַמֶּלֶךְ, וּפְנֵי הֵמָּן חָפוּ: וַיֹּאמֶר חֲרֻבוּנָה אֶחָד מִן־הַסָּרִיסִים לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ, גַּם הִנֵּה־הֶעָץ אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה הֵמָּן לְמַרְדָּכִי אֲשֶׁר דָּבַר־טוֹב עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ, עָמַד בְּבֵית הֵמָּן, גְּבַה חֲמִשִּׁים אַמָּה; וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּלְחָו עָלָיו: וַיִּתְּלוּ אֶת־הֵמָּן, עַל־הָעָץ אֲשֶׁר־הָכִין לְמַרְדָּכִי; וַחֲמַת הַמֶּלֶךְ שָׁכְכָה:

אסתר ז:ב-ט

"ויבא המלך והמן אל המשתה אשר עשתה אסתר", כיון שנכנס המן לסעודה, קרבה אסתר את כסאה לכיסאו של המן. שאמרה אסתר, אם איני נותנת קנאה בין המלך והמן, שהמן חביב עלי, היאך אני שולטת בו? והיה הכוס נמוג למלך, ואחר כך למלכה, והיא נוטלת כוסה ונותנת אותו להמן, והמלך היה רואה ומתקנא לו.

מדרש אחרים פנים ה



So the king and Haman went to dine with Queen Esther. And on the second day, at the banquet of wine, the king again said to Esther, "What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!" Then Queen Esther answered and said, "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. Had we been sold as male and female slaves, I would have held my tongue, although the enemy could never compensate for the king's loss." So King Ahasuerus answered and said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who would dare presume in his heart to do such a thing?" And Esther said, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!" So Haman was terrified before the king and queen. Then the king arose in his wrath from the banquet of wine and went into the palace garden; but Haman stood before Queen Esther, pleading for his life, for he saw that evil was determined against him by the king. When the king returned from the palace garden to the place of the banquet of wine, Haman had fallen across the couch where Esther was. Then the king said, "Will he also assault the queen while I am in the house?" As the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. Now Harbonah, one of the eunuchs, said to the king, "Look! The gallows, fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai, who spoke good on the king's behalf, is standing at the house of Haman." Then the king said, "Hang him on it!"

Esther 7:2-9

*So the king and Haman went to the banquet that Esther had prepared.* Since Haman entered the banquet, Esther drew her chair close to his. She said, If I do not arouse jealousy between the king and Haman, as if Haman is a favorite with me, how shall I be able to control him? The cup was poured for the king, and then for the queen, and she took her cup and gave it to Haman, and the king saw and was jealous.

Midrash Panim Acherim 5

7

ויהי ביום הרביעי, ויעש הולופרנש משתה לאנשי ביתו, ואת פקידי הצבא לא קרא. ויאמר אל בגוא סריסו לאמור. לך נא אל האישה העבריה אשר אתך, ופתה אותה לבא אל המשתה אשר עשיתי. כי חרפה היא לנו לשבת עם אישה יפה מבלי דעת איש אותה, הלא נהיה לשחוק בעיניה. ויצא בגוא מאת פני הולופרנש, ויבוא אליה ויאמר. היפה בנשים, אל נא תמנעי מבוא אל אדוני לאכול ולשתות עמו ולהיטיב את לבבך. כי לכבדך הוא מבקש כאחת השרות אשר בבית נבוכדנצר. ותען יהודית ותאמר: מי אנכי להמרות את פי אדוני. את הטוב עיניו אעשה, והיה לי לכבוד ולתפארת עד יום מותי. ותקם ותלבש את בגדיה החמודות, ותשם כל עדיה עליה ותלך. ואמתה הלכה לפניה לפרוש את הכרים אשר נתן לה בגוא לשבת עליהם. ויהי בשבתה, ותבער בו אש התאוה, ונפשו שוקקה, כי חשק בה מיום בואה אל המחנה. ויאמר אליה: שתי נא בתי והיטיבי לבך. ותאמר יהודית: אשתה כדברך, כי מיום היוולדי לא ניכבדתי כזאת. ותאכל ותשת את אשר הכינה לה אמתה. וישמח הולופרנש לקראתה, והוא שותה שכור כאשר לא שתה כל ימיו. ויהי באישון לילה, ויפנו עבדיו איש איש לאוהלו ולחדר משכבו. כי עייפים היו מרוב המשתה, ובגוא סגר את הדלת מאחוריו ויצא. ותישאר יהודית לבדה באוהל עם הולופרנש, והוא שכור מיין, וייפול על מיטתו ויירדם. ותאמר אל אמתה, שבי לך פה מחוץ לאוהל עד בואי אליך לצאת ולהתפלל כאשר הסכנתי לעשות. וגם לבגוא אמרה, כי תצא גם הלילה. ויהי כי יצאו כולם, ולא נשאר איש באוהל למקטון ועד גדול, ותיגש אל המיטה אשר הוא שכב עליה,



ותתפלל בלבה ותאמר: אל אלוהים, אשר בידך הכוח והגבורה, הבט נא וראה את מעשה ידי שפחתך להרים קרן ירושלים. הנה קרבה עת פדות עם נחלתך, כי תושיעני ימינך לתת נקמה בגוים אשר קמו עלינו. ותיגש אל העמוד אשר בראש המיטה, ותיקח את חרב הלופרנש מעליו ותשלח את ידה ותיקחהו בציצית ראשו, ותאמר: יי אלוהים, חזקני נא ואמצני אך הפעם. ותך בחוזקה פעמים על צווארו, ותכרות את ראשו, ותגל נבלתו מעל המיטה. ותיקח היריעה מעל העמוד ותצא. ותיתן את ראש הלופרנש לאמתה, ותצווה לתתו אל השק. ותצאן שתיהן מן המחנה כדרך לצאת להתפלל. ותעבורנה את הערבה, ותעלינה ההרה, ותבאנה לפני שערי בתול. (ותקרא יהודית מרחוק אל שומרי השער לאמור: פתחו לי את השער כי יי אלוהינו אתנו להראות לישראל את ידו, ולצריו את זרועו, כאשר החל לעשת ביום הזה.

יהודית יב: י-יג: לא

On the fourth day Holofernes gave a banquet, inviting only his own staff and none of the other officers. He said to Bagoas, the officer in charge of his personal affairs, "Go and persuade that Hebrew woman you are looking after to come and join us and eat and drink in our company. We shall be disgraced if we let a woman like this go without seducing her. If we do not seduce her, everyone will laugh at us!" Bagoas then left Holofernes and went to see Judith. "Would this young and lovely woman condescend to come to my lord?" he asked. "She will occupy the seat of honour opposite him, drink the joyful wine with us and be treated today like one of the Assyrian ladies who stand in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar." "Who am I", Judith replied, "to resist my lord? I shall not hesitate to do whatever he wishes, and doing this will be my joy to my dying day." So she got up and put on her dress and all her feminine adornments. Her maid preceded her, and on the floor in front of Holofernes spread the fleece which Bagoas had given Judith for her daily use to lie on as she ate. Judith came in and took her place. The heart of Holofernes was ravished at the sight; his very soul was stirred. He was seized with a violent desire to sleep with her; and indeed since the first day he saw her, he had been waiting for an opportunity to seduce her. "Drink then!" Holofernes said. "Enjoy yourself with us!" "I am delighted to do so, my lord, for since my birth I have never felt my life more worthwhile than today." She took what her maid had prepared, and ate and drank facing him. Holofernes was so enchanted with her that he drank far more wine than he had drunk on any other day in his life... It grew late and his staff hurried away. Bagoas closed the tent from the outside, having shown out those who still lingered in his lord's presence. They went to their beds wearied with too much drinking, and Judith was left alone in the tent with Holofernes who had collapsed wine-sodden on his bed... she went up to the bedpost by Holofernes' head and took down his scimitar; coming closer to the bed she caught him by the hair and said, "Make me strong today, Lord God of Israel!" Twice she struck at his neck with all her might, and cut off his head. She then rolled his body off the bed and pulled down the canopy from the bedposts. After which, she went out and gave the head of Holofernes to her maid who put it in her food bag. The two then left the camp together, as they always did when they went to pray. Once they were out of the camp, they skirted the ravine, climbed the slope to Bethulia and made for the gates. From a distance, Judith shouted to the guards on the gates, "Open the gate! Open! For the Lord our God is with us still, displaying his strength in Israel and his might against our enemies, as he has done today!"

Judith 12:10-13:11



8



OSHA: I can give you what you want.

RAMSAY: And you're sure you know what that is?

OSHA: Same thing men always want.

David Benioff, D.B. Weiss, *Game of Thrones*

9

Our Rabbis have taught: A maiden who gives herself up to prayer, a gadabout widow, and a minor whose months are not completed — behold these bring destruction upon the world.

Sotah 22a

Woman is her husband's prey, his possession.... Virgins unsubdued by man, old women who have escaped his power, are more easily than others regarded as sorceresses; for the lot of woman being bondage to another, if she escapes the yoke of man she is ready to accept that of the devil.

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

10

In order to live, to breathe, and to generate novelty, human beings have had to create—by structural means—spaces and times in the calendar... These liminal areas of time and space—rituals, carnivals, dramas, and latterly films—are open to the play of thought, feelings and will; in them are generated new models, often fantastic, some of which may have sufficient power and plausibility to replace eventually the force-backed political and jurial models that control the centers of a society's ongoing life.

Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*

11

From the very first biblical narrative set in the Garden of Eden, women have offered men dangerous food. Within male-created narratives, it stands to reason that women's weapons would be chosen from the female arsenal. Since feeding is one of women's primary cultural roles, it becomes a key to their seizing of power. Thus, when God forbid the eating of the fruit of a particular tree, the man trusts that the woman will feed him only the safe food. Instead the woman feeds him the forbidden fruit, thus linking, from the beginning of the biblical narratives, a connection between food and death. A dual connection between food and sex is made simultaneously. As a result of eating the magical fruit, the couple discovers desire and gratification in each other's bodies... [T]he presentation and serving of food or drink leads to erotic conquest.

Alice Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal in Biblical Narrative*

12

Rabbah b. Bar Hana, quoting R. Johanan, said: "For the ways of the Lord are right, and the just do walk in them, but transgressors do stumble therein" (Hos. 14:10)... It is illustrated by Lot when his two daughters were with him. To these [the daughters], whose intention it was to do right, [applies], "the just do walk in them," whereas to him [Lot] whose intention it was to commit the transgression [applies], "but transgressors do stumble therein"... Ulla said: Both Tamar and Zimri committed adultery. Tamar committed adultery and gave birth to kings and prophets. Zimri committed adultery and on his account many tens of thousands of Israel perished. R. Nahman b. Isaac said: A transgression performed with good intention is better than a precept performed with evil intention... as it is written, "Most blessed among women is Yael, the wife of Heber the Kenite; blessed is she among women in tents" (Judg. 5:24) and by "women in tents", Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah are meant.

Nazir 23a-b





13

At the risk of over-generalizing, the subject in biblical law, with very few exceptions, is defined and evaluated mostly by what he does, and these actions determine if the agent is guilty or innocent, pure or impure. Suddenly, in rabbinic literature, we begin to hear echoes of a different type of legal subject. This is seen most clearly in certain legal terms and categories that emerge here for the first time, like “Commandments must be performed with intention”... [These are] rabbinic innovations that grant a new legal status to the internal world of the legal subject... The same act can be categorized in opposing manners according to the intention of the character; the intention of the agent determines the religious significance and value of the action.

Joshua Levinson, “From Narrative Practice to Cultural Poetics”

14

Since the beginning... we find two opposite feminine stereotypes: the positive, loyal, moral woman, who is beloved, wise, and charged with the preservation of the family unit and cultural continuity; and, by contrast, the sensual, attractive woman... who is independent, lascivious, enticing, self-indulgent, and loyal primarily to herself.

Nitza Abarbanell, *Eve and Lilith*

15

Once R. Hiyya the great and R. Simeon ben Halafta were walking in the valley of Arbel at daybreak. And they saw the hind of dawn as the daylight broke forth. Said R. Hiyya the great to R. Simeon ben Halafta b. Rabbi, “So is the redemption of Israel. It begins little by little and, as it proceeds, it grows greater and greater.” What is his basis [for this comparison]? “When I sit in darkness the Lord will be a light to me” (Micah 7:8).

PT Berakhot 1:1

“It is a time of agony unto Jacob, but out of it he shall be saved” (Jer. 30:7); i.e., from out of the very midst of the agony itself he will attain eternal salvation... Out of the negation grows the affirmation, out of the antithesis the thesis blossoms forth, and out of the abrogation of reality there emerges a new reality.... Eight years ago, in the midst of a night of terror filled with the horrors of Maidanek, Treblinka, and Buchenwald, in a night of gas chambers and crematoria, in a night of absolute divine self-concealment, in a night ruled by the satan of doubt and apostasy which sought to sweep the maiden from her house into the Christian church, in a night of continuous searching, of questing for the Beloved – in that very night the Beloved appeared. “God who conceals Himself in His dazzling hiddenness” suddenly manifested Himself and began to knock at the tent of His despondent and disconsolate love, twisting convulsively o her bad, suffering the pains of hell... It is the voice of my Beloved that knocketh!

Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Kol Dodi Dofek*



**GILA FINE** is editor in chief of Maggid Books (Koren Publishers Jerusalem). She is also a teacher of Aggada at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies, exploring the tales of the Talmud through philosophy, literary criticism, psychoanalysis, and pop-culture. Gila is a faculty member of the London School of Jewish studies and the Nachshon Project, and has taught thousands of students at conferences, community centers, and synagogues across the Jewish world. Haaretz has called her “a young woman on her way to becoming one of the more outstanding Jewish thinkers of the next generation.”

**THE PARDES INSTITUTE OF JEWISH STUDIES** is an open, inclusive, diverse and intellectually challenging Jewish learning community based in Jerusalem with programs worldwide. Pardes cultivates a life-long love of Jewish learning, the Jewish people and Israel. Pardes inspires engagement in Jewish life — as communal and spiritual leaders, educators and active participants. For more information see [www.pardes.org.il](http://www.pardes.org.il).