

Voices from the Sukkah



THE EXPANDED USHPIZIN

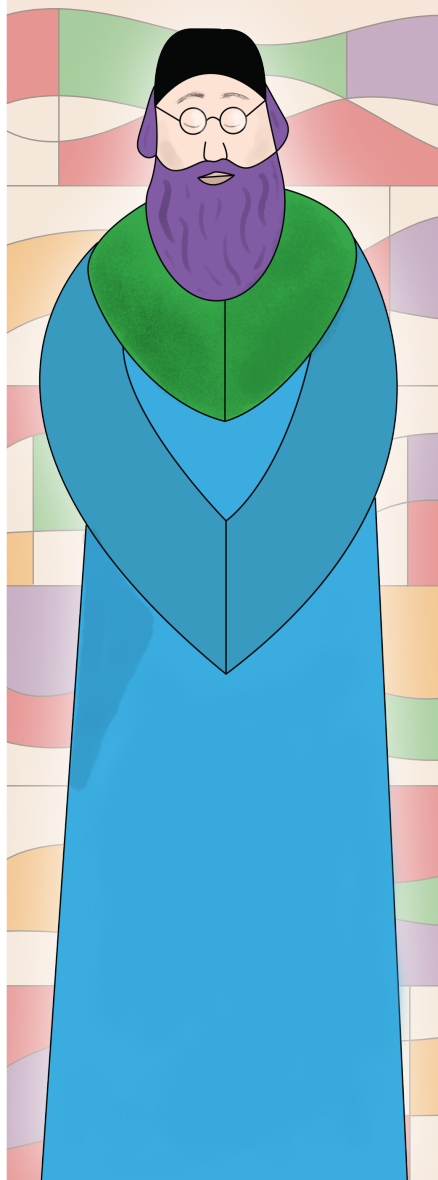
Sukkot is filled with calls to open up temporary dwellings, encouraging us to experience the world in a new way; including the symbolic ritual of the Ushpizin, where for each night of the holiday, we invite a different guest into our Sukkah. This year we invite in seven additional voices, as a chance to encounter the expansiveness of our tradition.



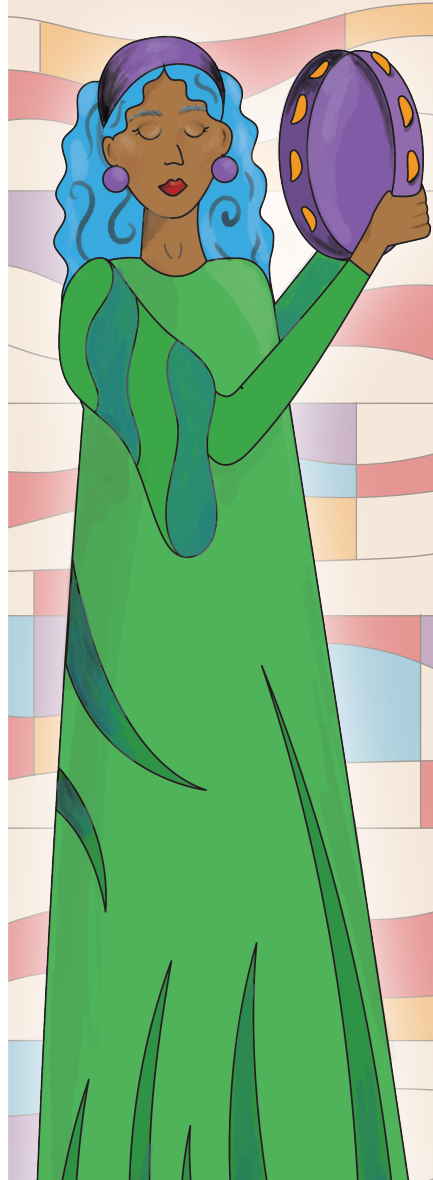
Scan here to read about
each of the Ushpizin.



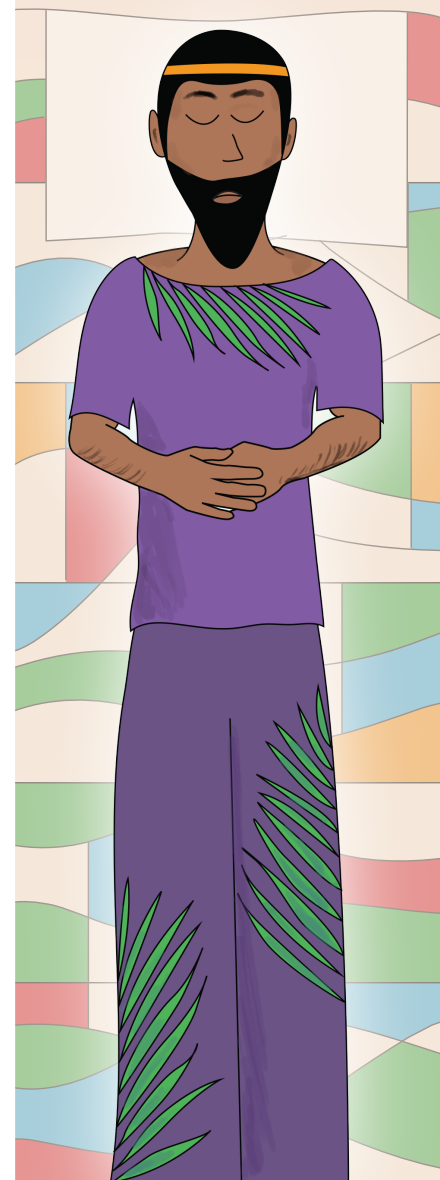
Piaseczner
Rebbe



Miriam



Tavi





**Sara
Schenirer**



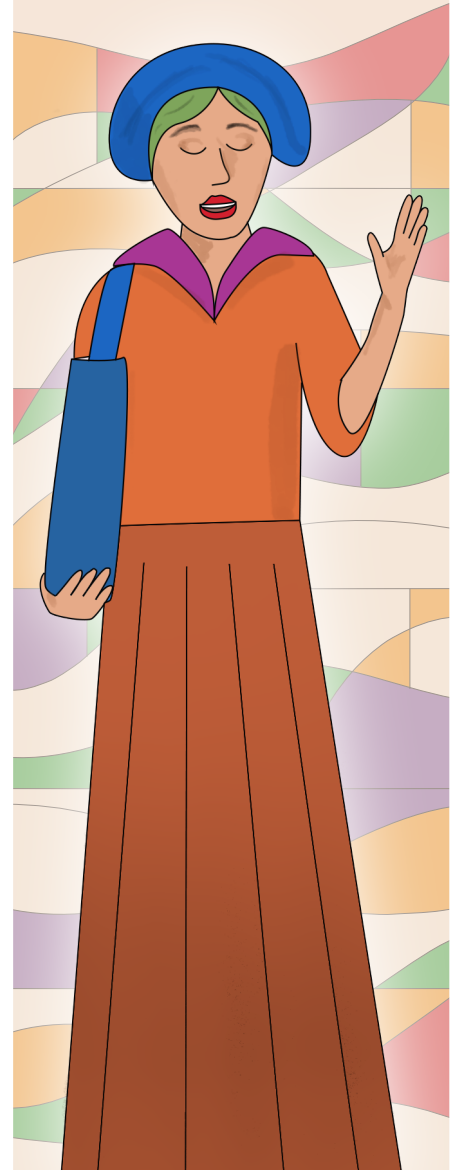
**Belzer
Rebbetzin**



**Rabbi
Hiyya**



**Nehama
Leibowitz**





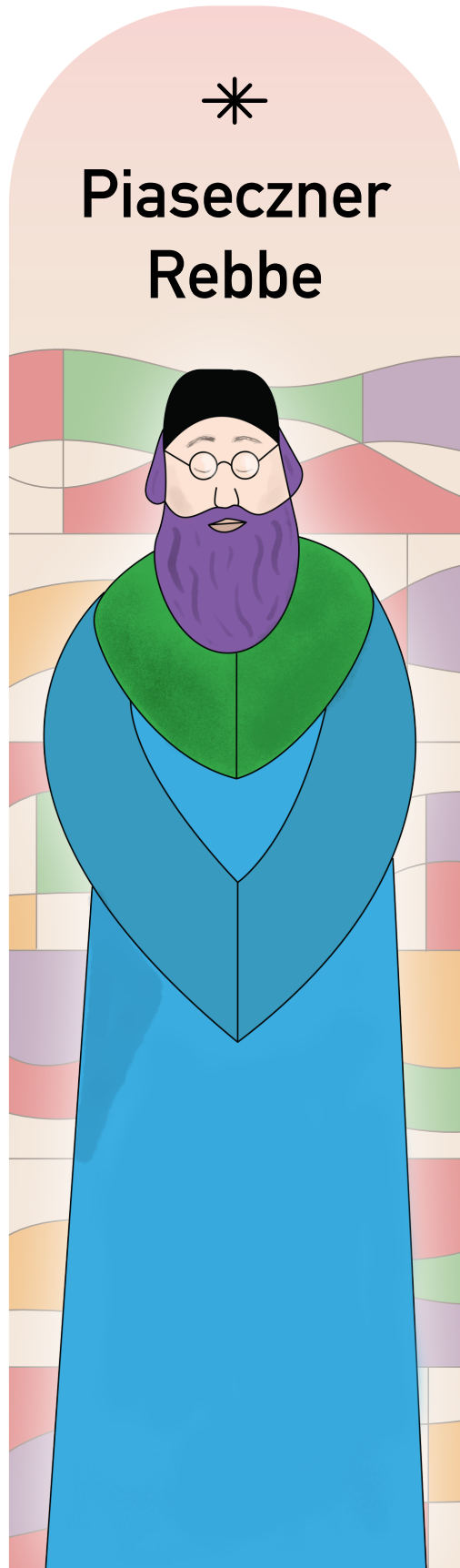
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Pardes | פּרְדֵּס
North America



MY REBBE: THE PIASECZNER

The teachings of R' Kalonymous Kalmish Shapira, known as the Piaseczner Rebbe, have brought much needed soul nourishment to Jews around the world for decades, and are currently becoming increasingly popular. As we encounter heightened uncertainty and insecurity, his voice resonates ever more deeply with us. It is for this reason that we are honored with his presence as our guest this Sukkot.

Rav Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira, 1889–1943, Warsaw, was an heir to a rich heritage of Hasidic thought, many of the greatest minds of the movement stem from his family tree. This includes R' Elimelech of Lizhensk (d.1787), the Maggid of Kozhnitz (d. 1814), the Chozeh of Lublin (d. 1815) and his maternal great grandfather for whom he is named, R' Kalonymus Kalman Epstein, the *Ma'or VaShemesh* (d.1823). His father R' Elimelech was the founder of the Grodzisk Hasidic dynasty and wrote the *Imrei Elimelech* (d.1892).

The Piaseczner Rebbe, is also referred to as the *Aish Kodesh* (Sacred Fire), after the title of his seminal work of Torah lessons he gave over while interned in the Warsaw Ghetto between the years 1939–1942. In this final of his seven books, the Piaseczner addresses the situation of his fellow Jews with humility, authenticity and faith. Unafraid to encounter human suffering in all of its rawness, the Rebbe offers profound teachings and meditations on spiritually moving through times of profound despair and uncertainty. His radical

teachings hold enduring relevance for us today, especially as a source for cultivating spiritual resilience, renewal and inner redemption.

After the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in the spring of 1943, the Piaseczner was deported to the Trawniki concentration camp, where he was murdered in November by a Nazi firing squad and buried in a mass grave.

The original *Aish Kodesh* manuscript, along with three others written prior to the War, was buried beneath the ghetto in metal milk canisters, and in 1950 all four were discovered and brought to light.

The Piaseczner viewed Jewish living and tradition as a spiritual practice. He himself was a mystic, pioneering educator and a highly evolved spiritual guide and innovator. His progressive ideas discuss the spiritual nature of our body, mind and heart, how we awaken to the Divine presence within us, and how we can integrate these components and expressions of the Jewish experience into one whole healthy being. This awareness of one's inner being cultivates an expanded and higher consciousness, affording the practitioner an immanent, unique and direct encounter with the Divine. His teachings are devoted to a profoundly holistic approach to the spiritual life and service of the Divine.

Dr. Henry Abramson writes in *Torah From the Years of Wrath, The Historical Context of The Aish Kodesh*, that "Rabbi Shapira meditated on the essence of Hasidut in several of his works. For him, the spiritual enlightenment engendered by Hasidut was intrinsically related to the phenomenon of prophecy. Although prophetic insight into future events – *nevuah le'atid* – had ended in the biblical period, argued the Rebbe, the communication between the Divine and creation persisted in the form of prophetic instruction – *nevuah le'hadrakhah*... prophecy, argued the Rebbe, did not end in the biblical period – it was merely altered... The Rebbe contended that God continued to maintain an open broadcast channel and that with the appropriate spiritual training, one could receive Divine inspiration. The development of this spiritual sensitivity was the primary goal of the Piaseczna Hassidut.

The Rebbe's unique innovations include:

1. Teachings on how to move from feeling distant and far from the Divine to sensing closeness and experiencing spiritual intimacy.
2. Cultivating "higher consciousness" where one senses the presence of the *Shechina* in all areas of life throughout the day and not only in the *Beit HaKnesset* and *Beit Midrash*.
3. Meditation, contemplative practice and ongoing "in conversation" with the Divine – *hitbonenut* and *hitbodedut*.

4. Employing visualizations to awaken feelings in the heart that enhance our relationship with the Divine.
5. Cultivating emotional openness as one moves from dullness and closed heartedness to open heartedness.
6. Progressive spiritual pedagogy.

These are but specks of the radical, redemptive and refreshing Torah teachings from the Piaseczner:

From *Bnei Machshava Tova*: And therefore, we pray: "Our Father, Compassionate Father, have compassion on us. Awaken within our hearts a spark of desire and awareness, so that we will know that it is not enough to be like a mere servant, the son of a maidservant. It is true that he too serves and obeys the King, but his work is to 'grind away at the millstones,' far from the King. He does not hear the King's words nor does he enjoy or take pleasure by sensing the illuminating beauty of the King's radiance. Rather his is a service with a closed mind and a dulled heart.

Instead, we passionately desire and long to be among those described in the Torah: "You are children of Hashem your God." (Deuteronomy 14:1) Whenever we do God's work, whether in learning Torah, prayer or observing any of the *mitzvot*, we sense our closeness to HaShem. And not only when we pray and do mitzvot we can

feel ourselves growing closer to God – enjoying the radiance of His glory, sensing His presence."

From *Chovat HaTalmidim*: Parents and teachers must know that they need to view their children and students as great neshamot that are still budding – and they need to view themselves as responsible for helping them to flourish and grow.

As we sit in the Sukkah let us invite the Piaseczner Rebbe as our guest, and in turn, accept his invitation to acknowledge the Divine presence within us.

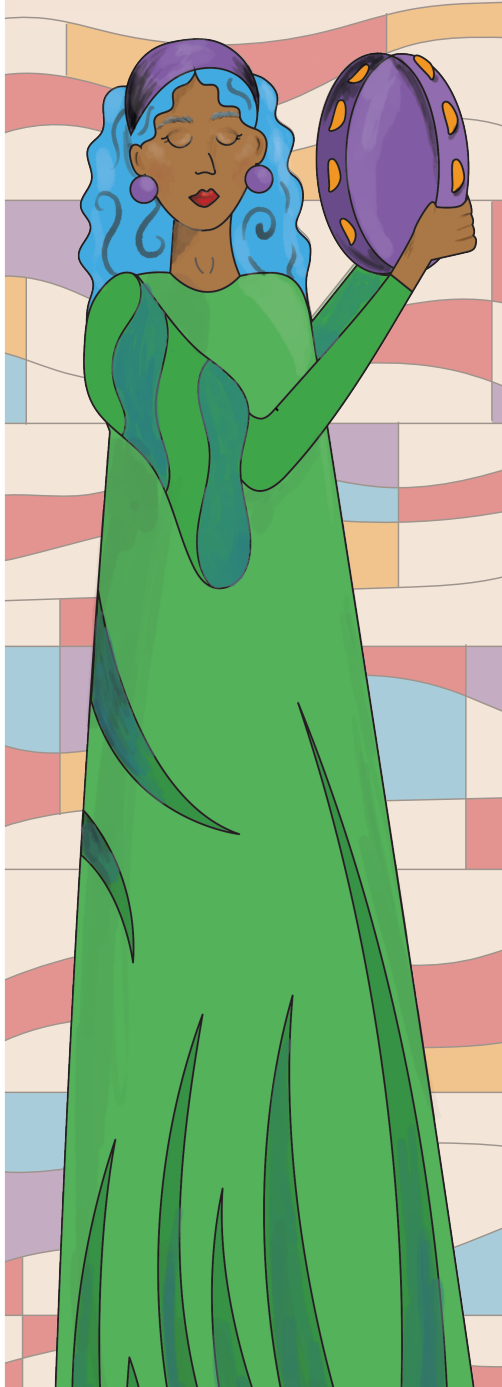
WRITTEN BY YISCAH SMITH



Yiscah Smith is a spiritual activist, educator, mentor, and meditation guide, who addresses the spiritual practice of encountering the Divine spark within and beyond. Yiscah teaches Jewish contemplative practice and spiritual texts at the Pardes and at Applied Jewish Spirituality. She also founded and directs Conscious Community Nachlaot, an organization in Jerusalem that hosts Shabbat in-person spiritual gatherings, virtual guided meditation sits and spiritual text classes.



Miriam



MIRIAM THE PROPHETESS

If anyone deserves an invitation to our Sukkah, surely it is Miriam the Prophetess.

Two central and interrelated themes of Sukkot are the nurturing parental love of God and water. Is there a more powerful reflection of intimate divine love than the seven Clouds of Glory that accompanied the Israelites through the desert, hovering over them like a doting parent, protecting them, straightening their path, and even providing dry cleaning? These, suggest the rabbis, were the real “sukkot” in which we dwelt in our wanderings (Sifra Emor 12). As we give thanks for Hashem’s loving care, we also pray for continued care in the form of water – as seen in the many rituals of Sukkot which call for rain, including the lulav, willow, water libations and prayer for rain.

As the maternal leader of the Israelites and the cause of the well that accompanied them in the desert, Miriam is the earthly embodiment of both of these themes.

While the Clouds of Glory provided all-encompassing protection, they did not provide rain. Desert water ironically came from a well, provided as a gift to the Israelites in reward for Miriam’s righteousness and leadership:

Rabbi Yose bar Yehuda says: The people of Israel had three excellent leaders – Moshe, Aharon and Miriam. Three good gifts were extended to the

people of Israel on their behalf – the well, the clouds, and the manna. The well was provided due to the merit of Miriam, the clouds of glory because of Aharon, and the manna on account of Moshe. When Miriam died, the well disappeared, as it says: "The people of Israel, all of the congregation, came to the wilderness of Zin, and the people dwelt in Kadesh. Miriam died there and there she was buried." Immediately afterwards, the text states: "The congregation had no water, and they gathered against Moshe and Aharon..." (Talmud Ta'anit 9a).

For this reason, throughout Jewish tradition the well is referred to as "Miriam's well" (Talmud Shabbat 35b, Jerusalem Talmud Ketubot 67a, see also Shivhei HaAri p. 6 for the magical powers of that well). Miriam's connection to the well is natural, given the connection she had with water even prior to the Israelites' experiences in the desert. Her most heroic appearances are as she waits to see Moses rescued at the Nile River and then arranges for their own mother, Yocheved, to be his wet-nurse (Exodus 2:1 – 10). Water features again, as she leads the Israelite women in song at the Red Sea (Exodus 15:20 – 21). Even her name seems to allude to water, containing both the roots of water and sea.¹

¹ Miriam could be parsed as bitter water (Mar -Yam) or lofty water (Mei-Ram) or waters with a resh (Mayim +R)

The most colorful description of the well is found in Tosefta Sukkah 3:11 –

The well that accompanied Israel in desert was like this:

It resembled a rock that was full [of holes] like a sieve, bubbling forth and rising as if from the mouth of a water bottle. With them, it ascended the mountains, and with them, it descended into the valleys.

Wherever Israel dwelled, it dwelled across from them... And the water would bubble up like a pillar towards the heights. Everyone would take their staff and draw water with it, each man towards his tribe and his family, as it says "well was dug by chieftains" (Num. 21:17)...

It surrounded the entire camp of Israel, and it watered the entire wasteland...

And they would sit in light boats and travel to one another as it says, "and it flowed as a stream in a parched land" (Psalms 105:41). And whoever traveled to the right, the water would flow to the right [for their convenience], and whoever traveled to the left, the water flowed to the left, and the water became a large river, and it would flow all the way to the Great Sea and bring all of the pleasures of the world from there, as it says "these forty years God went with you and you did not lack a thing." (Deut. 2:7) (Tosefta Sukkah 3:11-13)

Like the hyper-protective clouds of glory, Miriam's well is portrayed in this midrash as much more than a mere water source. It was an expression of Divine abundance in the form of deluxe services. Attention was personal—each individual tribe and family had water delivered to their door. The people of Israel were literally inundated with water, demonstrating the love and personal care provided by an adoring motherly partnership – Miriam and God.

Part of the beauty of these midrashic depictions is that they assume and even strengthen Miriam's place as a significant figure in Jewish history. The Torah recognizes her stature: she is twice mentioned as a partner with Moses and Aaron (Numbers 12:10, Micah 6:4); the people of Israel wait for her when she is ill (Numbers 12:15); her death is noted in the Torah (Numbers 20:1); she is instrumental in saving Moses from the Nile (Exodus 2), and leads the women in song at the Red Sea (Exodus 15). However, in the entire Bible her name appears only sixteen times, while Moses is mentioned 770 times and Aaron 347 times. By associating them together so explicitly, the midrash makes Miriam a full-fledged member of a triumvirate of powerful leaders.

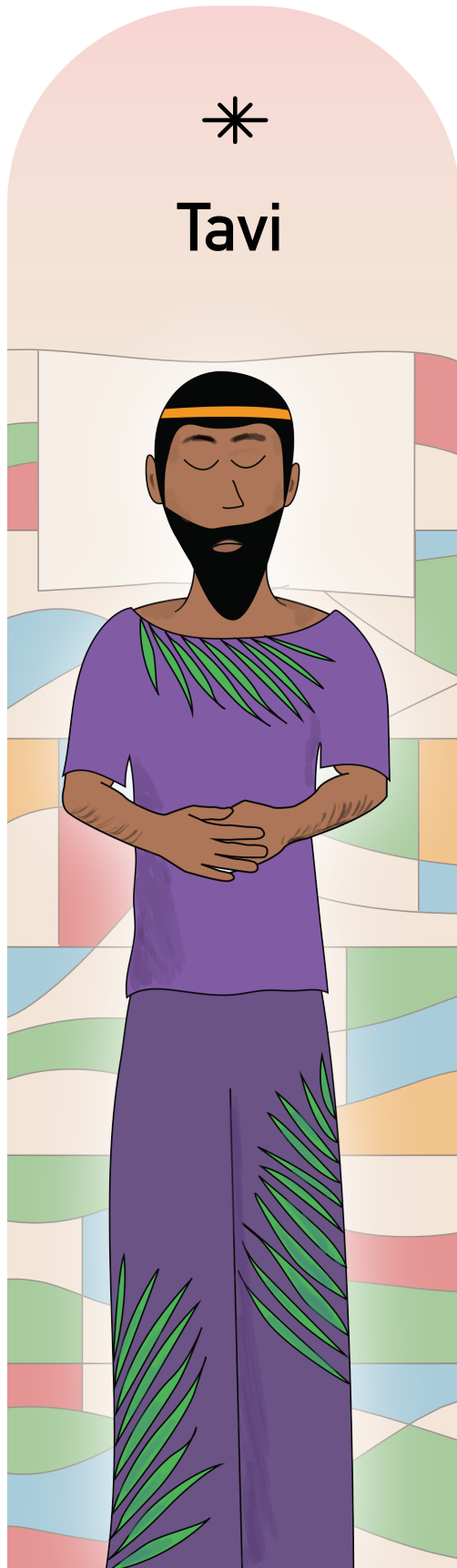
How appropriate then, to recognize her on Sukkot, her natural holiday, and to recognize her as a divine emissary of maternal love and care.

Read more about her and her remarkable connection to Sukkot [here](#).

WRITTEN BY MEEESH HAMMER-KOSSOY



Meesh Hammer-Kossoy is the Director of the Pardes Year Program, where she has made her professional home since 1999. She has also taught at NYU, Drisha and Midreshet Lindenbaum. She teaches Talmud and Rabbinics, Social Justice and Ethics. Originally from Washington, D.C., Meesh has a B.A. in Near Eastern and Judaic Studies from Brandeis University, and a M.A. and Ph.D. from New York University. In 2015, Meesh completed her studies at Beit Midrash Har'el and received Orthodox ordination from Rabbi Herzl Hefter and Rabbi Daniel Sperber.



THE MITZVAH OF SUKKAH: A RABBINIC CRITIQUE OF SLAVERY?

The Torah in Leviticus 23:42 – 42 teaches that the commandment of *sukkah* was given so that “[future] generations may know that I [God] made the children of Israel dwell in *sukkot*, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt” and the *midrash halakha* (*Sifra Emor Parsha 12*) adds that “even the *sukkah* is a reminder of the exodus from Egypt”. In what way does the *sukkah* remind us of our experience in Egypt? Let us answer this question by learning about Tavi the slave of Rabban Gamiliel and one of our honored Ushpizin for this year.

Coming out of Egypt the Jewish people went from being slaves to the Egyptians to a free people able to choose to be in a covenantal relationship with the Divine. One might have thought that after experiencing slavery for themselves the Jewish people would be particularly careful that they, themselves, would never enslave others. However, during Mishnaic times, like those around them, Jews did own slaves. Interestingly the second chapter of Mishnah *Sukkah* seems to want to discuss this issue of slavery. The chapter opens and closes with a Mishnah that prominently features a slave, (as well as Mishnah 8 stating that Canaanite slaves are exempt from the *sukkah*). What is the connection between these texts? Why would the Mishnah frame the discussion of how one fulfills the commandment of *sukkah* with mentions of slavery?

The chapter opens by teaching an essential rule about the *sukkah*. One who sleeps under the bed while in the *sukkah* has not fulfilled their obligation, for instead of being under the *skhakh*, experiencing the temporary nature of the *sukkah*, they have the bottom of the bed above their heads blocking them from correctly performing the mitzvah. The text states:

Mishnah Tractate Sukkah 2:1

One who sleeps under the bed in the *sukkah*, has not fulfilled his obligation R. Yehuda said, "We were in the habit of sleeping under the bed in the presence of the elders, and they never said anything to us [against it]." R. Simeon said, "It happened that Tavi, the slave of R. Gamaliel, used to sleep under the bed." And R. Gamaliel said to the elders, **"You have seen Tavi my slave; he is a disciple of the sages [Talmid Chakhum] and knows that [Canaanite] slaves are exempt from the *sukkah*; therefore, he sleeps under the bed [in the *sukkah*]."** Incidentally [from this observation of Tavi] we have learned that one who sleeps under the bed [in the *sukkah*] has not fulfilled his obligation.

משנה מסכת סוכה ב:א

הישן תחת המטה בסוכה לא יצא ידי חובתו. אמר רבי יהודה נוהגין היינו שהיינו ישנים תחת המטה בפני הזקנים ולא אמרו לנו דבר. אמר רבי שמעון מעשה בטבי עבדו של רבן גמליאל שהיה ישן תחת המטה ואמר להן רבן גמליאל לזקנים ראיתם טבי

עבדי שהוא תלמיד חכם ויודע שעבדים פטורין מן הסוכה לפיכך ישן הוא תחת המטה ולפי דרכינו למדנו שהישן תחת המטה לא יצא ידי חובתו:

If the purpose of the Mishnah was solely to teach the technical law, then the Mishnah could have sufficed with just the first line and did not need to relate the whole story of events regarding Tavi, Rabban Gamliel's slave. In doing so we learn that originally the older generation of Rabbis did not think there was anything legally problematic about sleeping under the bed, it is only from Tavi that we learn the correct *halakha*.

The last Mishnah also brings a story of a slave, however, this time it is a parable. The text states:

Mishnah Tractate Sukkah 2:9

For the duration of the seven days [of the festival], a person makes his *sukkah* established, and his house temporary. Rain fell, from when is it permitted to leave [the *sukkah*]? From when the dish [of porridge] spoils, they [the sages] illustrate this by a parable, "to what can the matter be compared? **To a slave who came to fill a cup for his master, and he [the master] poured the jug in his [the slave's] face."**

משנה מסכת סוכה ב:ט

כל שבעת הימים אדם עושה סוכתו קבע וביתו עראי. ירדו גשמים מאימתי מותר לפנות? משתסרח המקפה. משלו משל למה הדבר דומה? לעבד שבא למזוג כוס לרבו ושפך לו קיתון על פניו.

This Mishnah clearly states the main message of the *sukkah* that the experience of the holiday is to highlight our dependence on the Divine and to remind us that all we have built and grown, our homes and harvests, are not permanent but rather depend on God's mercy and providence. In this Mishnah we, the Jewish people, are God's slave, and unlike Tavi, there are times when our actions displease our master so much that the Divine does not want our service and exempts us from the *sukkah*.

The juxtaposition between these two *mishnayot* is jarring. Both feature slaves who are exempt from the *sukkah* yet while Tavi, who seems to understand the mitzvah of *sukkah* better than anyone, is lauded by his master the Nasi, Rabban Gamliel, the chapter ends with a description of the Divine's anger with the Jewish people's *sukkah* performance. These *mishnayot* knock down the hierarchy and differences between slave and free Jew. Tavi is a *Talmid Chachum*, disciple of the sages, taking an active part in the creation of Torah, as is the normative role of the free Jew, while we are mere slaves, struggling to serve our Master and at times failing. Tavi is like us, and we are like him.

The first Mishnah ends by stating the simple facts of what we "learned" from the Tavi regarding sleeping under the

bed, however, when examining the imagery painted by the example an even deeper idea is revealed. The Jerusalem Talmud's explanation for why the slave is exempt from reciting the *Shema* sharply portrays the slave's reality.

Jerusalem Talmud Tractate *Berakhot* 6b

Slaves from where [do we know they are exempt from *Shema*]? Because it says, "Hear Israel the Lord your God the Lord is One", you who does not have another master other than the Holy One Blessed be He [reads the *Shema*], a slave comes out [of that group] **since he has another master.**

תלמוד ירושלמי ברכות דף ו טור ב

עבדים מניין? שנאמר שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד,
את שאין לו אדון אלא הקב"ה, יצא העבד שיש לו
אדון אחר.

The slave cannot be required to recite the *Shema*, for it is impossible to fully state complete allegiance to the Divine when ruled by another – his human master.

The Jews needed to be freed from under Pharaoh's authority before they could enter into a relationship with God at Sinai. To enslave another human being is the ultimate human hubris. To control the life of another is to act in place of God.

The example Tavi teaches us in the *sukkah* visually demonstrates that important reality.

Just as the one under the bed is not truly under the *skhakh*, for the structure of the bed replaces the roof of the *sukkah*, so to the slave can not live fully and freely in the domain of the Divine when the human master stands in God's place.

The message of the holiday of *Sukkot* specifically at harvest time, with the risk of rain before all the crops are collected, while sitting in a temporary structure without a solid roof, is to combat human hubris, by reminding human beings that they are not the source of life in this world and that all the hard work of their hands is ultimately a blessing from the Divine. The Mishnah uses this image of the *sukkah* to connect us to the experience of slavery in Egypt by showing us the similarity between human beings, despite humanly created social hierarchies, and reminding us that ultimately, we should all reside in the Divine's domain without human interference and dominance.

Let us welcome Tavi into our *sukkah* to sit at the table and dine with us. May his presence remind us of the threat of the ultimate human hubris, that of one human being's desire to rule over another. May he strengthen us to always act towards others as equals, and to share, not block, the gift of life bestowed upon us by the Divine.

WRITTEN BY RAHEL BERKOVITS



Rahel Berkovits is a senior faculty member at the Pardes, where she has been teaching Mishnah, Talmud and halakha for over twenty years. Rahel lectures widely in both Israel and abroad, especially on topics concerning women and Jewish law and a Jewish sexual ethic. She is the Halakhic Editor and a writer for *Hilkhot Nashim* the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance's Halakhic Source-guide Series, recently published by Koren Publishing. Rahel is a founding member of Congregation Shirah Hadasha, a halakhic partnership Synagogue, and serves on their halakha committee. In June 2015, Rahel received Rabbinic Ordination from Rabbis Herzl Hefter and Daniel Sperber.

An illustration of Sara Schenirer, a woman with her eyes closed, wearing a purple head covering and a long purple dress with floral patterns. She is holding an open orange book. The background is a colorful, abstract pattern of geometric shapes in shades of purple, green, red, and yellow. Above her, the name 'Sara Schenirer' is written in a bold, black font, preceded by a six-pointed star symbol.

*
**Sara
Schenirer**

SARA SCHENIRER

The word Ushpizin is an Aramaic word meaning guest or visitor. In the context of the Sukkot festival, it refers to heavenly guests, namely, Avraham, Yitzhak, Yaakov, Yosef, Moshe, David, and Shlomo. According to the Zohar, the Sukkah is “the shelter of faith” where not only do we enter it but G-d Himself enters as well. Rav Hamnuna saw the unique spiritual opportunity provided by the “shelter of faith” and invited the souls of the great, righteous, leaders of the Jewish people to join him in his Sukkah. “When he entered the Sukkah he used to stand at the door and say, ‘Let us invite the (heavenly) guests and prepare a table.’” (Zohar Vol. 3 pg 103b) Translating this practice in modern terms, sitting in the Sukkah provides us with an opportunity to encounter our heroes from the Jewish past, and invite them to “sit with us” and inspire us with their wisdom and life journeys.

The person I have chosen to visit me this year in my Sukkah is the founder of the Beit Yaakov school system, Sara Schenirer. Born in Krakow in 1883 to a Chassidic family, Sarah was a serious and curious student of Torah even at a young age. She had a passion for learning Tanakh and other classical texts, and was envious of her brothers who got to attend classical Yeshivot and devote themselves to serious study. As a young woman she witnessed how modernity and change were challenging the traditional life and values of the Jewish community. As public education became compulsory, many young Jewish women from

traditional homes were exposed to secular literature, art and culture, while their knowledge of Judaism remained only what they learned from home. This dissonance created a real crisis for traditional Jewish families all over Eastern Europe. Young women were reading Polish poetry instead of Tsena U'Rena. They were turning down marriage offers as they saw Yeshiva boys as ignorant and uncultured. Witnessing many of her peers abandoning traditional Jewish life, Schenirer believed a unique challenge had emerged which required a unique solution. Reflecting on that time later in life she wrote the following:

"And as we pass through the days before the High Holy Days ... fathers and sons travel, and thus, they are drawn to [Ger](#), to Belz, to [Alexander](#), to [Bobov](#), to all those places that had been made citadels of conceited religious life, dominated by the figure of the rebbe's personality. And we stay at home, the wives, daughters, and the little ones. We have an empty festival. It is bare of Jewish intellectual content. The women have never learned anything about the spiritual meaning that is concentrated within a Jewish festival. The mother goes to the synagogue, but the services echo faintly into the fenced and boarded-off women's galleries. There is much crying by elderly women. The young girls look at them as though they belong to a different century. Youth and

the desire to live a full life shoot up violently in the strong-willed young personalities. Outside the synagogues, the young girls stay chattering; they walk away from the synagogue, where their mothers pour out their vague and heavy feelings. They leave behind them the wailing of the older generation, and follow the urge for freedom and self-expression. Further and further from the synagogue they go, further away, to the dancing, tempting light of a fleeting joy."

After spending some time in Vienna when leaving Krakow during World War 1, Schenirer hears the lectures of a Dr. Moshe Flesch, leading educator for the German Neo-Orthodox approach which placed great emphasis on the education of women. She returned to Krakow resolved to make a change. Getting support from leading Rabbis like the Belzer Rebbe and later the Chofetz Chayim, she begins a school for young Jewish women out of her seamstress shop. Although initially failing with young students, she turns her attention to teens and succeeds in launching a network of Jewish schools that would serve tens of thousands of young Jewish women.

I would relish the opportunity to host her in my Sukkah and ask her to share her wisdom. I would ask her how a young woman from a Hassidic family managed to find her voice and push for change. I would

like to know how she maintained such a powerful passion and attachment to tradition while at the same time was inspired to generate such a progressive shift in women's education. I want to hear how she combined the insights of feminism and traditional Judaism. Finally, I would ask her what approaches are needed today to make traditional Jewish learning and practice attractive to those who have never been immersed in its culture and wisdom. The Jewish people need more Sarah Schenirers today.

WRITTEN BY ZVI HIRSCHFIELD



Zvi teaches Talmud, Halakha, and Jewish Thought at Pardes; he has been training and mentoring Jewish Educators for over ten years in Tefilah in educational settings, critical issues in modern Jewish thought, and Israel education. Zvi holds a B.A. in History from Columbia University and did graduate work at Harvard University in Medieval and Modern Jewish Thought. He studied at Yeshivat Har Etzion in Israel and has rabbinic ordination from the Chief Rabbinate of Israel. He also serves as a curriculum writer and is involved in staff training for the Nesiya Institute.

✳

Belzer Rebbetzin



THE BELZER REBETZEN SURAH ROKACH

The current Belzer Rebetzen Surah Rokach (b. 1946) is a fascinating contemporary hasidic leader, and it would be an honor to have her pay a visit to our Sukkah.

According to Jewish mystical tradition, our forefathers come as holy guests to each Sukkah. The first Belzer Rebbe, Rabbi Shalom Rokach (1751–1855), stated that “it is known that if the fathers come, the mothers also [come] too.” He explained that there is an allusion to these guests in the biblical verse: “You shall live in booths seven days; every *ezrah* in Israel shall live in booths” (Lev. 23:42). The word *ezrah* (אזרח) refers to a person who is affiliated with a sovereign state in some way. In modern Hebrew the term is used for civilian or citizen as a legal category. The Belzer Rebbe explained that the numerical value of the letters of the Hebrew word *ezrah*, when those letters are fully spelled out, is equivalent to the numerical value of the Hebrew letters of the four mothers: *Sarah*, *Rivka*, *Rahel*, and *Leah* (*Midbar Kadesh*, p. 91).

The following table presents the *gematria* calculation that Rabbi Shalom of Belz had in mind. The right column has the names of the Four Mothers. The double apostrophe in each name indicates that the name has a further meaning – in this case its numerical value which appears in the next column. The third column has the names of the letters of the Hebrew word *ezrah*, which can be

seen by reading the first emboldened letter from top to bottom. The left column has the numerical value of the names of each letter. The sum totals appear at the bottom:

111	א ל"ף	505	ש"ר"ה
67	ז "ן	307	ר"ב"ק"ה
500	ר "ש	238	ר"ח"ל
408	ח "ת	36	ל"א"ה
—		—	
1086	=	1086	

Surah Rokach (b. 1946) is a scioness of Vizhnitz hasidic masters. In 1965, she married Yisakhar Dov (b. 1948) – the leader-in-waiting of the Belz Hasidim. Besides her familial ties to holy men, Surah is recognised by many as a hasidic leader in her own right. Some have even called her the *Admorit* of Belz.

The term *admor* is an acronym for *adoneinu, moreinu ve-rabbeinu* – our master, our teacher, and our rabbi. The acronym was in use before the advent of Hasidism. Over time it has come to be an honorific accorded to hasidic masters, and on occasion it has been rendered into English as Grand Rabbi. The Hebrew acronym *admor* is treated like a word and can be turned into a plural form, such that the plural form *admorim* refers to a number of hasidic masters. Using the term in the feminine Hebrew form, *admorit*, is an innovation.

Surah refers to herself – when she signs letters or on the letterhead of her personal stationery – as the *Belzer Rebetzen* or in *Hebrew HaRabbanit MiBelz*. Like other hasidic masters she receives *kvitlach* – petitions written on slips of paper – and she is sought out for her blessing and counsel.

In the annals of Hasidism, the contribution of women is often unnoticed and inaudible. Nevertheless, women are undeniably part of the story of Hasidism. On occasion, women played key roles in the evolution of the movement. Thus, for example, women publishers were significant in the production of hasidic texts. There were cases where the establishment or survival of a hasidic court was the work of a woman. Some women from the hasidic community were social activists who seeded movements. There were also occasional instances of women serving as hasidic leaders. Such female rebbes were on the cultural fringes of the movement; they were exceptions to the rule of male leadership. While these women provide thought-provoking chapters in the history of Hasidism, they do not occupy a central place – not in Jewish collective memory, nor in hasidic circles.

With the passage of time, historical threads have been woven into the fabric of legends. Contemporary scholars continue to unravel the material, earnestly trying to recover the fascinating journeys of these women.

In this way we seek to recount the challenges these women faced in their spiritual quests, their achievements, and the disappointments they experienced.

It may seem that such female leaders are vestiges of the past. To be sure, there are certainly women today who study and teach hasidic thought, culture and history. Moreover, there are women who provide spiritual guidance and leadership – both in the hasidic world and beyond. Yet in the present climate, it is difficult to imagine a publicly acknowledged female leader in contemporary hasidic society.

Viewed from this perspective, Surah is truly a remarkable woman.

Though it would be inaccurate to suggest that the *admorit* plays the same traditional leadership role as the *admor*, Surah's sphere of leadership goes beyond the social conventions. Surah has been a regular traveler to communities outside Israel. She works hard to raise funds for the needy, and when she has visited primary-school-age children, she has spoken briefly and bestowed blessings on those in attendance. Any time she visits Belz institutions around the world, she is received as royalty.

Surah presents an iconic image. She covers her entire head with a distinctive type of head covering. The hat fits tightly

on her forehead and temples and blooms above her head, towering above her like a crown, or perhaps... like a *spodik*!

Certainly, Surah Rokach is a regal figure in hasidic society. Given her reputation and stature in the community, the Belzer Rebbetzin is the most prominent woman in contemporary Hasidism and our honored Ushpizin this Sukkot.

WRITTEN BY LEVI COOPER



Levi Cooper currently teaches Hasidut, Maimonides, Midrash, and Halakhic History at Pardes. He has also taught Bible, Talmud, and Philosophy of Halakha. He previously served as the director of the Fellows program and the director of the Kollel, as well as heading the Pardes Educational Seminar to Turkey. Originally from Australia, Levi holds an LL.B., LL.M. and Ph.D. from the Law of Faculty, Bar-Ilan University, and is a member of the Israel Bar Association. In addition to his work as Pardes, Levi is a Teaching Fellow at the The Buchmann Faculty of Law, Tel Aviv University, where he teaches courses in Jewish law and legal history.



Rabbi Hiyya



RABBI HIYYA

Rabbi Hiyya, often referred to in Talmudic texts as *Rabbi Hiyya Rabba*, or *Rabbi Hiyya Hagadol*, belongs to a very select group of Talmudic figures who have the descriptive "the great" added to their name. This "greatness" of Rabbi Hiyya, however, appears to have been of a particular nature, one that is both meaningful and merits his seat among this expanded "*Ushpizin*."

Rabbi Hiyya appears in many narratives and anecdotes within Talmudic literature, offering details of his story and glimpses into his character and personality. He originates from the Babylonian Jewish community, but relocated to Eretz Yisrael to study with Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi, where he soon became a close member of Rebbe's inner circle, often seen as a close associate and assistant to Rebbe in his leadership role as the Nassi. The relationship between these two scholars is an intriguing one, characterized by mutual respect and admiration, yet also, on several occasions, strong criticism, reservations and vast differences of opinion.

One such dramatic conflict is narrated in the Talmud Bavli, Moed Katan 16a. Rebbe Yehuda HaNassi prohibited the teaching of Torah outside in the public square, reserving it for the elite in the Beit Midrash. Yet Rabbi Hiyya defiantly opposes this decree by taking his two nephews and disciples, Rav and Rabba bar Hanna, to teach them intentionally outside where others could hear.

Despite being a member of the Rabbinic innermost circle of his time, we learn Rabbi Hiyya's role as the defender of the "outsiders" and those on the fringes. He insists on the appropriateness, even perhaps the necessity, for Torah to be taught and studied *outside* the inner circles of the Beit Midrash. His Babylonian origins perhaps play a role in this orientation and identity, sensitizing him to the risks and dangers of centers of authority that seal themselves off from the social and geographic peripheral influences.

This theme of the outsider interplays with the traditional role conventionally assigned to Rabbi Hiyya in the literary and textual history of the Oral Tradition. Rabbi Hiyya is associated as the collector and transmitter of the "*baraitot*," texts left *out* of the Mishna when it was redacted by Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi at the beginning of the 3rd century. Rabbi Hiyya collects these excluded sources and preserves them for posterity in the Talmudic Beit Midrash. He is specifically associated with the text of the Tosefta – an edited collection of Tannaitic sources which serves as a companion text and commentary to the Rebbe's Mishna. His contribution, therefore, is to make certain that, as texts become canonized and gain centrality and authority, other marginalized teachings continue to remain part of the world of Torah and tradition.

This perspective creates a context for understanding another, initially perplexing, statement made regarding Rabbi Hiyya found in the Talmud Bavli, Sukka 20a

... as Reish Lakish said: I am the atonement for Rabbi Hiyya and his sons, as initially, when the Torah was forgotten from the Jewish people, Ezra ascended from Babylonia and reestablished it. The Torah was again forgotten, and Hillel the Babylonian ascended and reestablished it. When the Torah was again forgotten, Rabbi Hiyya and his sons ascended and reestablished it.

This strikingly "Babylonian" perspective on the history of Torah and the Jewish people, emphasizes how, time and again, the Torah is forgotten in Eretz Yisrael, and individual Rabbinic figures arrive from Bavel to restore Torah to the people. The first two instances of this – Ezra during the time of the first Return to Zion after the first exile, and Hillel at the dawn of the great flourishing of Rabbinic Judaism as the classic Tannaitic period begins towards the end of the second Temple period – make historical sense. Within the narrative of Rabbinic tradition, it seems appropriate to describe these two historical periods as confronting a reality of nearly forgotten Torah, subsequently invigorated and infused by the arrival of these two strong and influential figures – Ezra and Hillel. However, the third instance cited in this text

is indeed puzzling. How could the generation of Rabbi Hiyya and his sons be described as a time in which the Torah was forgotten? Surely in the generation of Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi, the world of Torah and its study is flourishing and thriving!

Perhaps the solution to this lies in the context drawn above. The Torah is not at risk of being forgotten because of a lack of Torah leadership, but precisely the opposite! Because of the strength and charisma of the authoritative center of learning, those marginalized voices coming from the periphery are at risk of being lost. It is the contribution of Rabbi Hiyya, and his role as "outsider" and the preserver of these "outside" traditions that keeps the Torah whole and complete.

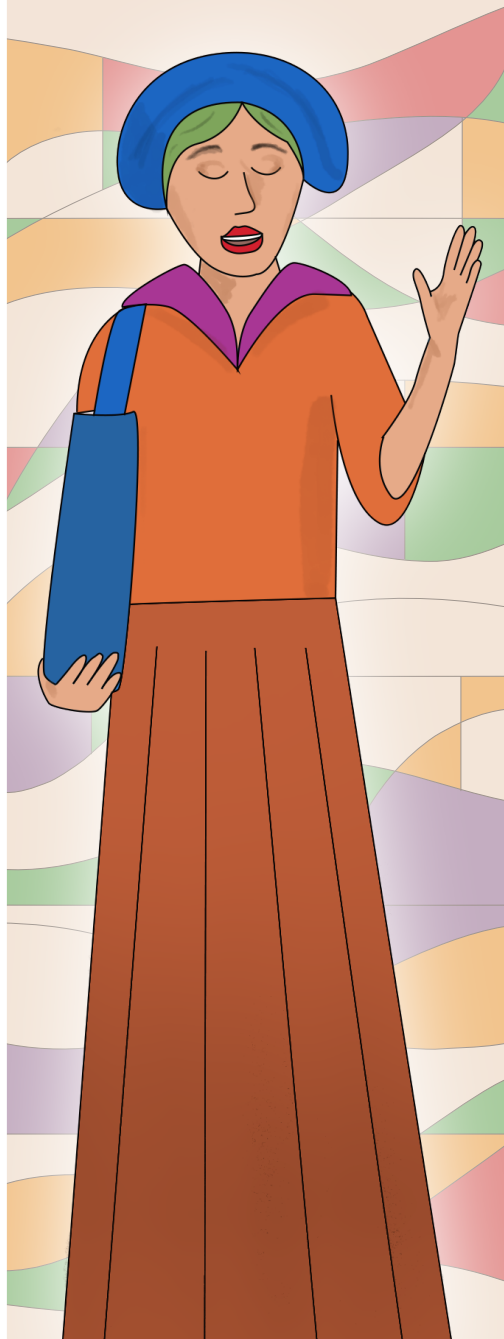
It is only a combination of a strong center of learning and authority together with a strong representation of *all* voices in the conversation that makes for a truly vibrant and meaningful world of Torah. For this reason, it is time we follow Rabbi Hiyya's lead and bring these peripheral figures and their Torah into our Sukkot with seats of honor.

WRITTEN BY LEAH ROSENTHAL



Leah holds a B.A. in Talmud and Jewish Philosophy and an M.A. in Jewish Education, both from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She has been teaching Talmud at Pardes for over twenty years and still enjoys doing so. She combines her teaching at Pardes with teaching at the nearby Pelech High School for Girls and raising, with her husband, their five children.

✳
**Nehama
Leibowitz**



NEHAMA LEIBOWITZ

In the spirit of the seven righteous leaders of the Jewish people we usher into our Sukkah as our guests, it is fitting that we invite Professor Nehama Leibowitz, the unsurpassed expositor of the Bible in the twentieth century. Nehama – as she encouraged her students to address her – revolutionized Bible study, demonstrating a carefully crafted pedagogy that made Torah study accessible, interactive, relevant, challenging, and above all, meaningful in a modern age.

Nehama Leibowitz was born in Latvia in 1905, received her doctorate in education in Berlin c. 1920, and immigrated to Israel c. 1930. From her arrival in Israel until her death in 1997, she made it her mission to teach Bible to students of all levels, backgrounds and socio-economic conditions: she traveled throughout the country, Bible in hand, engaging with factory workers, kibbutz members, soldiers, new immigrants – all in addition to the university students she educated at Tel Aviv and Hebrew Universities. Nehama's reach grew even more dramatically when she began producing weekly worksheets – her no-frills mimeographed "*gilyonot*" – on the Torah portion. For more than thirty years, she mailed these pages to anyone in the world who requested them; the recipient would fill in answers to her text-based questions and mail the pages back to her. Remarkably, Nehama would pore over each and every missive, inserting pointed comments and corrections, all in her own hand.

At its core, Nehama's methodology was based on the search for "*kushiyot*," the difficulties small and large that permeate the biblical text, and which are discoverable only upon close and exacting reading. With her emphasis on revealing, and then focusing on, the problems in the text – rather than glossing over them or seeking facile solutions – Nehama empowered her students to become part of the interpretive process. In carefully perusing the text in the search for its inherent difficulties, students would frequently anticipate the questions most commonly posed by the classical commentators and would often anticipate their resolutions as well.

For Nehama, although discovering meaning in the biblical text was of utmost importance, it was critical that meaning be achieved through rigorous analysis and utter faithfulness to the text's language and form. Meaning was never to be imposed upon the text, but was to flow outward from it.

To illustrate Nehama's approach, here is Genesis 18:1, a passage that, appropriately, centers on the topic of guests:

The Lord appeared to him [Abraham] in the terebinths of Mamre... looking up he saw three men standing near him...he ran from the entrance to the tent to greet

them...and said... "let a little water be brought.. let me fetch a morsel of bread..."

As always, Nehama began by challenging her students to locate the difficulties in the text. In this case, we note that God's visit seems to be devoid of content: it is accompanied by neither speech nor action, thus posing the problem of an anthropomorphic presentation of God. In addition to this theological difficulty is a syntactical one: although the chapter opens with an entirely new scene and situation, Abraham is referred to not by name, but by pronoun (the Lord appeared to *him*).

In her analysis, Nehama focused on Rashi's interpretation, which posits that God's visit – with no stated purpose – was intended for no other reason than to "visit the sick." In support of Rashi's reading, we note that the previous passage concludes with Abraham's circumcision; it is thus reasonable to conclude that God now arrives just to "be" with his beloved servant following his surgery. Further support for this reading may be found in the use of the pronoun instead of Abraham's proper name: although the passage begins a new story, it is also an extension of the previous narrative, with God now paying respects to the ailing patriarch.

Nehama found great poignancy in the notion of a divine visit – or, as she

extrapolated, any visit between people – that is purely relational and not at all transactional: an opportunity to just “be” with another, with no agenda in mind. But along with this, Nehama stressed the fact that the social/moral message emerged from careful methodology. Only by exploring the text’s anomalous language and content does the value of “just visiting” emerge.

To segue from this guest-centered passage back to the notion of inviting Nehama as our honored Sukkot guest: Nehama is worthy of our invitation primarily due to her groundbreaking contribution to Torah study in the modern age. But beyond this, her character and personality would make her an ideal guest in any setting. Nehama was genuinely, keenly, interested in, and solicitous of, the people around her. Her erudition, her wisdom and her expansive life experience made her a great conversationalist; her wonderful sense of humor and her lack of religious posturing made visiting with her unthreatening and thoroughly enjoyable.

In her humility, Nehama instructed that her tombstone contain no more than the dates of her life and the words “Nehama Leibowitz, teacher.” At the memorial service following her death, a relative called upon all those who had learned from her, and who now felt bereft, to

recite the mourner’s kaddish in unison. Although Nehama did not have biological children, the room erupted with the sounds of kaddish by her many heirs, who will carry on her legacy into the next generation and far beyond.

By inviting Nechama into our Sukkah we join those in continuing her legacy today

WRITTEN BY JUDY KLITSNER



Judy Klitsner is a senior lecturer in Bible at Pardes, where she has empowered a generation of students to seek meaning and relevance in the text through a skills-based method of learning. Judy has taught Bible to Christian and Muslim religious leaders and she has served as a regular visiting lecturer at the London School of Jewish Studies. Judy is the author of the acclaimed book *Subversive Sequels in the Bible: How Biblical Stories Mine and Undermine Each Other*, which received a National Jewish book award. Judy is the founding board chair of Sacred Spaces, an organization that seeks to address abuses of power in Jewish institutions.