

Mine and Yours is Hers: Stories of Women in the Talmud
A four-part adult education course for Temple Beth-El, Las Cruces NM

I am the first female clergy that my pulpit has ever had, and as far as I know I am also the first female clergy person in the greater El Paso area. I believe that I therefore have a unique perspective and leadership style to offer my community. I hope that through my leadership as shlichat tzibur and educator that I will serve as a role model for women and young girls in the community. I want to raise up the stories and voices of women from our sacred texts, in the hopes that that will also give voice to the experiences and voices of women, and other marginalised groups, in the community.

In this four-part adult education course, we will study the stories of four named women in the Talmud. Each class will focus on a different woman. Using a cultural orientation, we will seek to uncover who the heroes of these stories are. How are they represented in the text? What can these stories - presumably written from the perspective of male rabbis - teach us about women's lives during Talmudic times? What do these stories teach us about women's relationships with Judaism and with their husbands? What do these stories elucidate for us about the way the rabbis thought about women? We will also apply a Torah/instruction orientation as we consider what meaning these stories have for our own lives. As we 'reclaim' these stories from the boys' club that wrote them, we will breathe new life and new perspective into the stories of these women as we ask what lessons we can learn from them to apply in our lives and in our own times.

Since we will be studying four stories, I also hope to teach my congregants about aggadah as a genre of rabbinic literature. We will consider both the purpose and challenges of aggadah. I believe that storytelling serves as a powerful means of giving voice and bearing witness to our experiences. I hope that by bearing witness to the stories of these women, my congregants will be inspired to tell their own stories, and to add their own voices and experiences to the tradition.

Ultimately, I want to bring Akiba's message to my congregants - that each of us, regardless of our differences, can share in the knowledge and telling of Torah.

Enduring Understandings

- Stories of women in the Talmud were written by men and from the perspectives of men
- Women in the Talmud played a foundational role in supporting their husbands lives and learning
- Women in the Talmud were learned in their own right
- Reading and telling the stories of women in the Talmud can help us give voice to our own experiences and stories.
- In rabbinic literature, the presence, absence and play on women's names reveals rabbinic attitudes towards women

- Elevating the stories of women can help us find new meaning in rabbinic literature

Objectives:

- Students will be able to name four Talmudic heroines and their contributions to Talmudic Judaism
- Students will be able to describe the importance of studying the stories of women in the talmud
- Students will understand some of the rabbinic attitudes and complexities that underscore Talmudic stories about women
- Students will identify the central role of women in famous Talmudic stories
- Students will be able to connect these stories to their own experiences

NOTE: Source sheets for each lesson have been included at the end of this document, following all lesson plans.

Lesson 1: Rachel, Wife of Rabbi Akiva

Enduring understandings:

- The story of Rachel teaches us about the supportive role that women played in their husband's lives during Talmudic times
- In rabbinic literature, names play a significant role in the transmission of Torah
- Telling the stories of Talmudic women can help us give voice to our own stories

After feedback:

- In Judaism, we honour those who teach us Torah by acknowledging their names when we recall what they taught us
- Rabbinic literature mentions few women as teachers, and even then does not always name them

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Tell on a basic level the story of Rabbi Akiva and his wife Rachel
- Name Rabbi Akiva's wife and her contributions to Talmudic Judaism
- Situate their own experiences within the story of Rachel and Rabbi Akiva

Intro: Welcome, thanks and Zoom rules and protocols (mute/unmute, raise hand function) [2 minutes]

Set Induction:

THINK-then -SHARE Think of a memory of your first woman teacher/rabbi. What was her name? What did you learn from her? Then share it in the chat (3 -5 minutes)

[If I were teaching this lesson in person, I would use an activity called **Think-Pair-Share**, and have students share their answers with a partner].

Explain: In Jewish texts and tradition, names are very important. We have a strong tradition of attributing our learning to the one from whom we learned it, so the absence of a name is as significant as the presence of a name. Talmud is a compilation of Jewish law, redacted in 6th century. The rabbis who redacted the talmud are men, so we see very few women in the talmud. Those who are named are especially significant.

Aggadah vs halakha - the texts we'll be studying are aggadot - stories/narratives. [5 minutes]

A note from Tal Ilan, author of Mine and Yours are Hers: Retrieving Women's History from Rabbinic Literature

Avot d'rabbi natan is likely post-talmudic. Considered a commentary on Pirkei Avot, which doesn't have a gemara like the other tractates of the mishna.

"Careful comparison of parallel versions of rabbinic texts reveals that women have often been written out of the texts by tradents or copysists who were not comfortable with a woman saying or doing anything of significance. " cited in Judith Hauptmans's 1999 review of the book, p423. The Jewish Quarterly Review

BODY: Studying the texts.

Split participants into three even break-out rooms. Participants will have 15 minutes to read the text (which will be sent to them before the class) and discuss these questions. Participants should select a representative from each group who will report back to the whole class. [15 minutes]

Q:

What do we learn about R Akiba from this text?

What do we learn about Akiba's wife from this text? (demographic info, personality)

How do you understand Akiba's words to his students at the end of the story?

How do you think the rabbis understood the role of women according to this story?

Questions to consider when back together: [10-15 minutes]

What differences do we notice between the three texts?

Why might Rachel be named in only 1 of the three texts?

What are you taking away from this text?

Sikkum: Bibliodrama Role play/meditation. YOU Are Rachel. Telling Rachel's story/connecting her story to our lives. [10 minutes]

YOU are Rachel. You are the wife of the great Rabbi Akiva. Years ago, you saw his potential and encouraged him to seek out his wealth in words of Torah. You sacrificed a connection with your father and a life of financial security for the sake of Akiva's Torah.

You are Rachel, wife of the great Rabbi Akiva. For 24 years, you lived alone, like a widow, while your husband sought out his wealth in words of Torah.

You are Rachel. What are you thinking? [Pause for participation].

You are Rachel. You have not seen, embraced, touched, kissed your husband Akiva for 2 decades. You are Rachel, finally given the chance to greet your husband when he comes back to you after 24 years.

You are Rachel. Much of your story remains untold and unknown. You are Rachel. What are you thinking? [Pause for participation]

WRAP UP 5mins

Lesson 2: Ima Shalom, wife of Rabbi Eliezer, sister of Rabban Gamliel

Enduring understandings:

- In Judaism, names carry great significance and even give insight into their owner's personalities
- In the world of the Talmud, women were caught in the middle of rabbinic politics and ambitions.
- Stories in the talmud play an important role in revealing the themes and messages of the larger context of the sugya
- Understanding the larger context of a sugya can, therefore, help us make sense of the story

Objectives:

- Students will be able to name Eliezer's wife, Ima Shalom, and identify the meaning of her name and her position in the rabbinic world
- Students will be familiar with the story of the Oven of Akhnai and understand how it relates to the story of Ima Shalom
- Students will feel a sense of ownership over rabbinic stories by asking questions and participating openly in class activities

Intro:

Go over Zoom protocol. Last time we learned about Rachel, wife of Akiva. This week, we'll be learning about the wife of another great sage, who was also the teacher of R Akiva. As you can see in the source sheets I sent out, we'll be studying two different texts. When we study rabbinic texts, especially aggadah (stories/narrative), it's often important to consider the context in which the story takes place, as it is often used to highlight a theme or prove a point in the larger discussion. I want to start with the broader context of our first text from Bava Metzia.

Set induction:

Bim Bam video on the Oven of Akhnai:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a14FgjbUztI&ab_channel=BimBam

This famous sugya is known as 'The Oven of Akhnai' and is an important text about rabbinic interpretation and disagreement.

Do you have any clarifying questions from the video?

What do you think this famous story is about? [according to Jeffrey Rubenstein: " Legal controversy and its aftermath, interpersonal emotions, emotional and verbal harm"]

BODY: Studying the texts

Translation is by Adin Steinsaltz - text in bold is his translation of the original aramaic, and regular font is his interpretation and commentary. I have included this translation as the commentary is helpful in filling in some of the gaps in the very brief text. It is also an easily accessible translation. We'll study the first text from Bava Metzia together, and then we'll break into small groups to look at the 2nd text.

Cast of Characters:

Rabban Gamliel: The Nasi, head, of the Sanhedrin, the supreme religious court that functioned after the destruction of the Temple.

Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrkanos: A disciple of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakai, and teacher of R Akiva. Known for his brilliant mind and his conservative opinions, which often differed from the majority on the Sanhedrin.

Ima Shalom: "Mother of Peace." Sister of Rabban Gamliel, wife of Rabbi Eliezer.

Questions on Bava Metzia 59:

- What is the meaning of Ima Shalom's name? What might this tell us about how the rabbis perceive her and understand her role?
- Who is Ima Shalom related to? What might this tell us about her personality and her role in the rabbinic world ? (See bios for Gamliel and Eliezer)
- What are the implications of the Aramaic word for wife (beit = house)?
- What characteristics do we see Ima Shalom embody in this text?
- How does this part of the sugya fit in with the rest of the story of the Oven of Akhnai? Does it affirm/contradict/challenge etc?

"Ultimately, the story focuses on the tension between these two realms, between a legal process that involves interpretation, debate, and decision on the one hand, and human feelings, emotions and dignity on the other... the story warns that the human element must not be overlooked. Feelings of shame and humiliation matter, and must not be ignored in the name of legal considerations." Jeffrey Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories* (cited in Gila Fine, 'Talmudic Heroines')

[Ima Shalom] is depicted as acting out of concern for the welfare of her husband Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyracanus and her brother Rabban Gamliel... placing their needs before her own... [She] is depicted as acting out of emotion and a desire to protect her family, in contrast to the sages who acted out of a struggle for power and honor... reflect[ing] the sages' perception of women, according to which one of the roles ascribed to a woman is guarding the family, keeping it whole, and preserving life.

Liat Sobolev-Mandelbaum, *Imma Shalom: the Controversial Role Model*
cited in Gila Fine, 'Talmudic Heroines'

Questions on Shabbat 116:

- How is Ima Shalom portrayed in this text?
- How is this representation similar or different from the first text?
- How do her actions in these texts reflect the meaning of her name?

Resource on Imma Shalom:

<https://wjudaism.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/wjudaism/article/view/29733/22240>

SIKKUM:

Based on what we have learnt from these two stories, I want us to imagine that Ima Shalom is a guest at our dinner party. What questions would you want to ask her or what would you want to tell her? Write it on a sticky note on our jamboard:

<https://jamboard.google.com/d/1wIRE6cymSirCq99mww5d0183QUGET5Ak31ccqvah2Aw/viewer>.

Closing reflection/blessing:

We learn from the rabbis that “lo bashamayim hi” The Torah is not in heaven. So too may we learn that the stories of these women are not in heaven. Let us take back these stories, speak them in our words and carry them in our hearts.

Lesson 3: Cheruta/Rabbi Hiya bar Ashi's wife

Enduring understandings:

- Rabbinic literature splits the women in its stories into good wives and mothers on the one hand and threatening and alluring on the other
- The characterisation of women in rabbinic literature reflects the psychological phenomenon of the Madonna/Whore complex
- The setting and characters in a Talmudic story reveal information about the themes and message of that story or sugya

Objectives:

- Students will be able to explain the Madonna/Whore complex and how it manifests in biblical and rabbinic texts
- Students will be able to conduct a literary analysis of a sugya of Talmud

Set Induction: Comparing Lilith and Eve.

Read together the stories from Genesis and the AlephBet of Ben Sira.

- What words would you use to describe/characterise Eve?
- What words would you use to describe/characterise Lilith?

Make a list together, using a [Google doc screen share](#).

Then, drawing on Ruth Calderon's writing, Sofia will talk about the Madonna/Whore complex and its relation to Lilith/Eve.

"The story of Rabbi Hiya bar Ashi is another step in the cultural process that bifurcates women into Eve, the good wife and mother, and Lilith, the threatening and alluring "other" woman. This process is age-old - as old as the Bible and as old as human history. This story makes no attempt to lessen the pain, and by the end of the story we, too, are scorched by the oven's flames."

Ruth Calderon, *A Bride for One Night: Talmud tales*

In the early 1920s, Freud termed this cultural process 'The Madonna/Whore complex' situating it within adult, male psychology.

According to our friend Freud, men with this complex desire a sexual partner who has been degraded (the whore,) while they are incapable of desiring the respected partner (the Madonna.) "Where such men love they have no desire and where they desire they cannot love," [he wrote in 1925](#). Clinical psychologist Uwe Hartmann, [writing in 2009](#), stated that the complex "is still highly prevalent in today's patients."

Huffington Post

BODY: Studying Kiddushin 81b: A literary analysis.

Split into small break-out rooms (3-4 people per group).

Read the story through once together. Make a note of anything that isn't clear or that you don't understand. Then read it through a second time and see if you understand it better. Then read it through again with the aim of answering the following questions:

- Divide the story into three scenes. Where do these three scenes take place? What might these three settings symbolise?
- What action happens in each of these scenes?
- What traits does Heruta/Rabbi Hiya bar Ashi's wife possess? Which of these traits correspond to Lilith traits and which correspond to Eve traits (see the Google doc)?
- Rabbi Hiya bar Ashi's wife does not have a name. What are the implications of her choosing the name Heruta when she disguises herself as a prostitute?
- What does this story reveal about how the rabbis understood (female) sexuality and the role of women in the rabbinic world?

SIKKUM:

Although Rabbi Hiya bar Ashi's wife plays an active role in this story, she does not have a name of her own. Ruth Calderon offers us an extended version of the story as she illustrates all these ideas and the difficulties with this story. As we read and tell these stories, I want to invite us, too, to imagine what really unfolded, from the perspective of Heruta.

Read the version of the story as told by Ruth Calderon in *A Bride for One Night*.

Lesson 4: Beruria, wife of Rabbi Meir, and wrap up of series

Enduring understandings:

- Women in the Talmud had as much knowledge of Torah as their husbands
- Women in the Talmud play an important role in the teaching and transmission of Torah
- The rabbis, in their own telling and interpretation of the Talmud, cast scholarly women in a negative light

Objectives:

- Students will be able to name Rabbi Meir's wife and her contributions
- Students will understand how the rabbinic view on women influenced the medieval interpretations of women in the tradition
- Students will recall the four women studied in this course
- Students will be able to share what they have gleaned from this course

Set Induction:

We started our course by thinking of our first woman teacher. Today I want us to think about a famous woman in history. How is she remembered/known by the world? Write your thoughts in the Zoom chat.

Body: Break-out room round-robin. 10 mins per text.

Brachot 10a

What do we learn about Bruria from this text?

How does Bruria's interpretation of the verse differ from Rabbi Meir's? What does this tell us about her character?

Eruvin 53b-54a:

What do we learn about Bruria from her interaction with Yossi the Galilean?

Note for Sofia:

"The story is laden with ironies. Rabbi Yose, fearing that a superfluous pleasantry will open him to lust, rudely asks directions without a greeting. Bruria obligingly demonstrates how he might have made the conversation briefer yet, thereby prolonging their contact. Not only must Rabbi Yose converse with a woman, he must be rebuked by her; not only rebuked, but taught Torah; and not just any Torah, but precisely the dictum he had been trying so zealously to observe... Bruria speaks ironically to the obtuse Rabbi Yose. In response to his zeal, she exposes the sexist dictum and teasingly reproaches its adherent for not observing it.
Rachel Adler, *The Virgin in the Brothel*.

Midrash Mishlei 31:10

What, according to this text, made Bruria a good wife (eshet chayil)?

What might these three texts teach us about the rabbinic attitude towards women?

MENTION the Bruriah incident. Provide texts for those who want to look at them after class. The Bruria incident, and Rashi's commentary in particular, ultimately leave Bruria remembered as the woman who came to a bad end after mocking the Torah.

"A woman who was like a scholar would indeed be anomalous, important, and worthy of attention as ordinary women were not, and yet unwomanly, shameful, and grotesque... an arrogant woman contemptuous of men and of rabbinic tradition. This negative pole of the rabbinic attitude toward Bruria, which culminates in the tale of her adultery and suicide, is filed with malignant power. It so pervades the legend retroactively that we cannot mention Bruria's intelligence or accomplishments without adding, if only mentally, "but she came to a bad end"... Rachel Adler, *The Virgin in the Brothel* (cited in Gila Fine, *Talmudic Heroines*)

Sikkum to lesson:

How would you remember Bruria?

Rashi's commentary on the Bruria incident teaches us that she died by suicide, ashamed that she transgressed. And so Bruria is ultimately remembered in rabbinic literature not for her wisdom and insight, but for her fatal act of adultery. After what we have learned about her today, how would you choose to remember Bruria?

Write it on a post-it note on our jamboard:

<https://jamboard.google.com/d/1aNGwv3J2Z-Obg8u9VRNv5O6HJC0UrPgPKcYp2FNBTdI/viewer?f=0>

Sikkum to course:

1. Match the name to the event/to the husband/to the saying or idea. I will have these scrambled and students will have to match them.

Rachel: Rabbi Akiva/Mine and Yours is Hers

Ima Shalom: Oven of Akhnai/Mother of Peace

Heruta: Lilith & Eve/Madonna-Whore/Rabbi Chiya Bar Ashi

Beruria: Rabbi Meir/Eshet Chayil/The Incident

2. Personal reflection

One question I have after this course is...

One insight I have after this course is...

I am taking _____'s story with me because...

Yours and Mine is Hers: Stories of Women in the Talmud**#1: Rachel, Wife of Rabbi Akiva**

TEXT 1: BT KETUBOT 62b-63a (Translation and commentary: Adin Steinsaltz, from sefaria.org)

Rabbi Akiva was the shepherd of ben Kalba Savua, one of the wealthy residents of Jerusalem. The **daughter of Ben Kalba Savua saw that he was humble and refined. She said to him: If I betroth myself to you, will you go to the study hall to learn Torah? He said to her: Yes. She became betrothed to him privately and sent him off to study. Her father heard this and became angry. He removed her from his house and took a vow prohibiting her from benefiting from his property. Rabbi Akiva went and sat for twelve years in the study hall. When he came back to his house he brought twelve thousand students with him, and as he approached he heard an old man saying to his wife: For how long will you lead the life of a widow of a living man, living alone while your husband is in another place? She said to him: If he would listen to me, he would sit and study for another twelve years. When Rabbi Akiva heard this he said: I have permission to do this. He went back and sat for another twelve years in the study hall. When he came back he brought twenty-four thousand students with him. His wife heard and went out toward him to greet him. Her neighbors said: Borrow some clothes and wear them, as your current apparel is not appropriate to meet an important person. She said to them: “A righteous man understands the life of his beast” (Proverbs 12:10). When she came to him she fell on her face and kissed his feet. His attendants pushed her away as they did not know who she was, and he said to them: Leave her alone, as my Torah knowledge and yours is actually hers.**

TEXT 2: BT NEDARIM 50b (translation and commentary: Adin Steinsaltz, from sefaria.org)

Rabbi Akiva became betrothed to the daughter of bar Kalba Savua. When bar Kalba Savua heard about their betrothal, he took a vow prohibiting her from eating all of his property. Despite this, she went ahead and married Rabbi Akiva. In the winter they would sleep in a storehouse of straw, and Rabbi Akiva would gather strands of straw from her hair. He said to her: If I had the means I would place on your head a Jerusalem of Gold, a type of crown. Elijah the prophet came and appeared to them as a regular person and started calling and knocking on the door. He said to them: Give me a bit of straw, as my wife gave birth and I do not have anything on which to lay her. Rabbi Akiva said to his wife: See this man, who does not even have straw. We should be happy with our lot, as we at least have straw to sleep on. She said to him: Go and be a student of Torah. He went and studied Torah for twelve years before Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua. At the completion of the twelve years, he was coming home when he heard from behind his house that one wicked person was saying to his wife: Your father behaved well toward you. He was right to disinherit you. One reason is that your husband is not similar to you, i.e., he is not suitable for you. And furthermore, he has left you in widowhood in his lifetime all these years. She said to him: If he listens to me, he should be there for another twelve years. Rabbi Akiva said: Since she has given me permission through this statement, I will go back and study more. He turned back and went to the study hall, and he was there for another twelve years. Eventually he came back accompanied by 24,000 pairs

of students. Everyone went out to greet him, as he was by then a renowned teacher, **and she too arose to go out to greet him. That wicked person said to her: And to where are you going?** As she was excessively poor, she was not dressed in a grand manner, as fit for the wife of one so esteemed. **She said to him: “A righteous man regards the life of his beast”** (Proverbs 12:10); he knows that I am in this state as a result of my dedication to him. **She came to present herself before Rabbi Akiva**, but **the Sages** tried to **fend her off**, as they were unaware of her identity. **He said to them: Leave her.** Both **my Torah knowledge and yours are hers.** When **bar Kalba Savua** heard that the famous man was his son-in-law, **he came** before halakhic authorities **and requested the dissolution of his vow, and it was dissolved.**

TEXT 3: Avot d’Rabbi Natan Chapter 6 (translation: David Kasher, from sefaria.org)

What were the origins of Rabbi Akiva? They say that he was forty years old and had still not learned anything. Once, he was standing at the mouth of a well and he said: Who carved a hole in this stone? They said to him: It is from the water, which constantly [falls] on it, day after day. And they said: Akiva, don't you know this from the verse (Job 14:19), “Water erodes stones”? Rabbi Akiva immediately applied this, all the more so, to himself. He said: If something soft can carve something hard, then all the more so, the words of Torah, which are like steel, can engrave themselves on my heart, which is but flesh and blood. He immediately went to start studying Torah. He went with his son and they sat down by the schoolteachers. He said to one: Rabbi, teach me Torah! He then took hold of one end of the tablet, and his son took hold of the other end. The teacher wrote down *aleph* and *beit* for him, and he learned them (*aleph* to *tav*, and he learned them; the book of Leviticus, and he learned it). And he went on studying until he learned the whole Torah. Then he went and sat before Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Joshua. My masters, he said, open up the sense of the Mishnah to me. When they told him one law, he went off and sat down to work it out for himself. (This *aleph* – what was it written for? That *beit* – what was it written for?) Why was this thing said? He kept coming back, and kept asking them, until he reduced his teachers to silence. [...] All the poor will one day be judged against Rabbi Akiva, for if one says to them: Why did you never study? [And they say: Because] we were poor! then we will say to them: But wasn't Rabbi Akiva even poorer, completely impoverished? [And if they say: It is because of our babies, we will say: But didn't Rabbi Akiva] have sons and daughters as well? (But they will say: It is because) he merited to have his wife Rachel [to help him]. He was forty years old when he went to study Torah, and after thirteen years, he was teaching Torah to the masses. It was said that he did not leave the world until he had tables full of silver and gold, and he could go up to his bed on golden ladders. His wife would go out in a fancy gown and with golden jewelry with an engraving of Jerusalem on it.¹ His students said: Rabbi, you are embarrassing us with what you have done for her. He said to them: She suffered greatly with me for the sake of Torah.

Yours and Mine is Hers: Stories of Women in the Talmud**#2: Ima Shalom**Cast of Characters:

Rabban Gamliel: The Nasi, head, of the Sanhedrin, the supreme religious court that functioned after the destruction of the Temple.

Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrkanos: A disciple of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakai, and teacher of R Akiva. Known for his brilliant mind and his conservatism.

Ima Shalom: "Mother of Peace." Sister of Rabban Gamliel, wife of Rabbi Eliezer.

Bava Metzia 59b:10 (Transl: Steinsaltz)

Imma Shalom, the wife of Rabbi Eliezer, was the sister of Rabban Gamliel. From that incident forward, she would not allow Rabbi Eliezer to lower his head and recite the *taḥanun* prayer, which includes supplication and entreaties. She feared that were her husband to bemoan his fate and pray at that moment, her brother would be punished. **A certain day was** around the day of **the New Moon, and she** inadvertently **substituted a full** thirty-day month **for a deficient** twenty-nine-day month, i.e., she thought that it was the New Moon, when one does not lower his head in supplication, but it was not. **Some say that a pauper came and stood at the door, and she took bread out to him.** The result was that she left her husband momentarily unsupervised. When she returned, **she found him** and saw **that he had lowered his head** in prayer. **She said to him: Arise, you already killed my brother.** Meanwhile, the sound of a *shofar* emerged from the house of Rabban Gamliel to announce **that the Nasi had died.** Rabbi Eliezer **said to her: From where did you know** that your brother would die? **She said to him: This is** the tradition that **I received from the house of the father of my father: All the gates** of Heaven are apt to be **locked, except for the gates** of prayer for victims of verbal **mistreatment.**

בבא מציעא נ"ט ב:י'

אימא שלום דביתהו דר"א אחתיה דר"ג
הואי מההוא מעשה ואילך לא הוה
שבקה ליה לר"א למיפל על אפיה ההוא
יומא ריש ירחא הוה ואיחלף לה בין
מלא לחסר איכא דאמרי אתא עניא וקאי
אבבא אפיקא ליה ריפתא אשכחתיה
דנפל על אנפיה אמרה ליה קום קטלית
לאחי אדהכי נפק שיפורא מבית רבן
גמליאל דשכיב אמר לה מנא ידעת
אמרה ליה כך מקובלני מבית אבי אבא
כל השערים ננעלים חוץ משערי אונאה

[Ima Shalom] is depicted as acting out of concern for the welfare of her husband Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyracanus and her brother Rabban Gamliel... placing their needs before her own... [She] is depicted as acting out of emotion and a desire to protect her family, in contrast to the sages who acted out of a struggle for power and honor... reflect[ing] the sages' perception of women, according to which one of the roles ascribed to a woman is guarding the family, keeping it whole, and preserving life.

Liat Sobolev-Mandelbaum, *Imma Shalom: the Controversial Role Model*
cited in Gila Fine, 'Talmudic Heroines'

Shabbat 116a:11 (Transl: Steinsaltz)

The Gemara relates: **Imma Shalom**, the wife of **Rabbi Eliezer**, was **Rabban Gamliel's** sister. **There was a Christian philosopher [pilosofa] in their neighborhood who disseminated about himself the reputation that he does not accept bribes. They wanted to mock him and reveal his true nature. She privately gave him a golden lamp, and she and her brother came before him, approaching him as if they were seeking judgment. She said to the philosopher: I want to share in the inheritance of my father's estate. He said to them: Divide it. Rabban Gamliel said to him: It is written in our Torah: In a situation where there is a son, the daughter does not inherit. The philosopher said to him: Since the day you were exiled from your land, the Torah of Moses was taken away and the avon gilyon was given in its place. It is written in the avon gilyon: A son and a daughter shall inherit alike. The next day Rabban Gamliel brought the philosopher a Libyan donkey. Afterward, Rabban Gamliel and his sister came before the philosopher for a judgment. He said to them: I proceeded to the end of the avon gilayon, and it is written: I, avon gilayon, did not come to subtract from the Torah of Moses, and I did not come to add to the Torah of Moses. And it is written there: In a situation where there is a son, the daughter does not inherit. She said to him: May your light shine like a lamp, alluding to the lamp she had given him. Rabban Gamliel said to him: The donkey came and kicked the lamp, thereby revealing the entire episode.**

שבת קט"ז א"א

אִמָּא שְׁלוֹם, דְּבֵיתָהּ דְּרַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר,
אֲחֵתִיהָ דְּרַבָּן גַּמְלִיאֵל הָוָא. הָוָה הָהוּא
פִּילֹסוֹפָא בְּשַׁבּוּתִיהָ דְּהָוָה שְׁקִיל שְׂמָא
דְּלָא מְקַבֵּל שׁוּחָדָא. בְּעוּ לְאַחֲכִי בִּיה.
עֵילָא לִיה שְׂרָגָא דְּדִהָבָא, וְאַזְזִיל לְקַמֵּיהָ.
אָמְרָה לִיה: בְּעִינָא דְּנִיפְלְגוּ לִי בְּנִכְסֵי דְּבִי
נָשִׁי. אָמַר לָהּ: פְּלוּגוּ. אָמַר לִיה, כְּתִיב
לֵן: בְּמָקוֹם בָּרָא, בְּרַתָּא לָא תִירוּת. אָמַר
לִיה: מִן יוֹמָא דְּגָלִיתוֹן מֵאַרְעֵכוֹן,
אֵיתְנַטִּילַת אוֹרֵייתָא דְּמֹשֶׁה וְאֵיתִיהִיבַת
עוֹון גָּלִיוֹן, וְכְתִיב בִּיה: בָּרָא וּבְרַתָּא
כְּחֻדָּא יִרְתוּן. לְמַחַר הָדָר עֵילָל לִיה אִיהוּ
חֻמְרָא לִוְבָא. אָמַר לָהּ: שְׁפִילִית לְסִיפִיהָ
דְּעוֹון גָּלִיוֹן, וְכְתִיב בִּיה: אָנָּא לָא לְמִיפְחַת
מִן אוֹרֵייתָא דְּמֹשֶׁה אֲתִיתִי [וְלָא] לְאוֹסְפִי
עַל אוֹרֵייתָא דְּמֹשֶׁה אֲתִיתִי, וְכְתִיב בִּיה:
בְּמָקוֹם בָּרָא — בְּרַתָּא לָא תִירוּת.
אָמְרָה לִיה: נְהוֹר נְהוֹרִיךְ כְּשְׂרָגָא. אָמַר
לִיה רַבָּן גַּמְלִיאֵל: אֲתָא חֻמְרָא וּבִטָּשׁ
לְשְׂרָגָא.

Yours and Mine is Hers: Stories of Women in the Talmud

#3: Heruta, wife of Rabbi Hiya bar Ashi

The Creation of Eve

Genesis 2:18-23 (NJPS translation)

The Eternal God said, “**It is not good for man to be alone**; I will make a fitting helper for him.” And the Eternal God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name. And the man gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts; but for Adam no fitting helper was found. So the Eternal God cast a deep sleep upon the man; and, while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. And the Eternal God fashioned the rib that God had taken from the man into a woman; and God brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This one at last Is bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called Woman, For from man was she taken.”

3:20 The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all the living.

בראשית ב':י"ח-כ"ג

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לֹא-טוֹב הֵיכָּל הָאָדָם
לְבֶדּוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה-לּוֹ עֶזְרָ כְּנֶגְדּוֹ: וַיִּצַּר יְהוָה
אֱלֹהִים מִן-הָאָדָמָה כָּל-חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה
וְאֵת כָּל-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיָּבֵא אֶל-הָאָדָם
לְרְאוֹת מֶה-יִקְרָא-לּוֹ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא-לּוֹ
הָאָדָם נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה הוּא שְׁמוֹ: וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם
שֵׁם לְכָל-הַבְּהֵמָה וּלְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם
וּלְכָל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה וְלָאָדָם לֹא-מָצָא עֶזְרָ
כְּנֶגְדּוֹ: וַיִּפֹּל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים וַתִּרְדָּמָה
עַל-הָאָדָם וַיִּישָׁן וַיִּקַּח אֶחָת מִצְלָעָיו
וַיִּסְגֹּר בָּשָׂר תַּחְתָּנָה: וַיִּבֶן יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים
אֶת-הַצֶּלַע אֲשֶׁר-לָקַח מִן-הָאָדָם לְאִשָּׁה
וַיָּבֵאָה אֶל-הָאָדָם: וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם זֹאת
הִפָּעַם עִצָּם מֵעֲצָמִי וּבָשָׂר מִבָּשָׂרִי
לְזָאת יִקְרָא אִשָּׁה כִּי מֵאִישׁ לִקְחָהּ-זֹאת:
[...]

וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ חַוָּה כִּי הוּא
הִיְתָה אִם כָּל-חַי:

The Creation of Lilith

Otzar Midrashim, The Aleph Bet of ben Sira, The
Alphabet of ben Sira, (alternative version) 34

While God created Adam, who was alone, God said, '**It is not good for man to be alone**' (Genesis 2:18). God also created a woman, from the earth, as God had created Adam himself, and called her Lilith. Adam and Lilith immediately began to fight. She said, 'I will not lie below,' and he said, 'I will not lie beneath you, but only on top. For you are fit only to be in the bottom position, while I am to be the superior one.' Lilith responded, 'We are equal to each other inasmuch as we were both created from the earth.' But they would not listen to one another. When Lilith saw

אוצר מדרשים, אלפא ביתא דבן סירא,

אלפא ביתא אחרת לבן סירא ל"ד

כשברא הקב"ה אדם הראשון יחיד, אמר
לא טוב היות האדם לבדו, ברא לו אשה מן
האדמה כמוהו וקראה לילית, מיד התחילו
מתגרין זה בזה, אמרה היא איני שוכבת
למטה, והוא אומר איני שוכב למטה אלא
למעלה שאת ראויה למטה ואני למעלה,
אמרה לו שנינו שוין לפי ששנינו מאדמה,
ולא היו שומעין זה לזה, כיון שראתה לילית

<p>this, she pronounced the Ineffable Name and flew away into the air. Adam stood in prayer before his Creator: 'Sovereign of the universe!' he said, 'the woman you gave me has run away.' At once, the Holy One, blessed be He, sent these three angels to bring her back." [...] "Leave me!" she said. 'I was created only to cause sickness to infants. If the infant is male, I have dominion over him for eight days after his birth, and if female, for twenty days.'</p>	<p>אמרה שם המפורש ופרחה באויר העולם, עמד אדם בתפלה לפני קונו ואמר, רבש"ע אשה שנתת לי ברחה ממני, מיד שגר הקב"ה שלשה מלאכים הללו אחריה להחזירה, [...] אמרה להם הניחוני שלא נבראתי אלא להחליש התינוקות כשהן משמונה ימים מיום שיוולד אשלוט בו אם הוא זכר, ואם נקבה מיום ילדותה עד עשרים יום.</p>
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The Eve/Lilith dichotomy in Rabbinic Literature

<p>Kiddushin 81b:2-4 (translation: Adin Steinsaltz)</p> <p>The Gemara relates: Rabbi Ḥiyya bar Ashi was accustomed to say, whenever he would fall on his face in prayer: May the Merciful One save us from the evil inclination. One day his wife heard him saying this prayer. She said: After all, it has been several years since he has withdrawn from engaging in intercourse with me due to his advanced years. What is the reason that he says this prayer, as there is no concern that he will engage in sinful sexual behavior? One day, while he was studying in his garden, she adorned herself and repeatedly walked past him. He said: Who are you? She said: I am Ḥaruta, [from the Hebrew 'cheirut', meaning 'freedom'] a well-known prostitute, returning from my day at work. He propositioned her. She said to him: Give me that pomegranate from the top of the tree as payment. He leapt up, went, and brought it to her, and they engaged in intercourse. When he came home, his wife was lighting a fire in the oven. He went and sat inside it. She said to him: What is this? He said to her: Such and such an incident occurred; he told her that he engaged in intercourse with a prostitute. She said to him: It was I. He paid no attention to her, thinking she was merely trying to comfort him, until she gave him signs that it was indeed she. He said to her: I, in any event, intended to transgress. The Gemara relates: All the days of that righteous man he would fast for the transgression he intended to commit, until he died by that death in his misery.</p>	<p>קידושין פ"א ב:ב'-ד'</p> <p>רבי חייא בר אשי הוה רגיל כל עידן דהוה נפל לאפיה הוה אמר הרחמן יצילנו מיצר הרע יומא חד שמעתינהו דביתהו אמרה מכדי הא כמה שני דפריש ליה מינאי מאי טעמא קאמר הכי יומא חדא הוה קא גריס בגינתיה קשטה נפשה חלפה ותנייה קמיה אמר לה מאן את אמרה אנא חרותא דהדרי מיומא תבעה אמרה ליה אייתי ניהליה להך רומנא דריש צוציתא שוור אזל אתייה ניהלה כי אתא לבייתה הוה קא שגרא דביתהו תנורא סליק וקא יתיב בגויה אמרה ליה מאי האי אמר לה הכי והכי הוה מעשה אמרה ליה אנא הואי לא אשגח בה עד דיהבה ליה סימני אמר לה אנא מיהא לאיסורא איכווני כל ימי של אותו צדיק היה מתענה עד שמת באותה מיתה</p>
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Yours and Mine is Hers: Stories of Women in the Talmud

#4: Bruria, wife of Rabbi Meir

Bruria the Scholar

Berakhot 10a:3 (translation by Adin

Steinsaltz)

There were these hooligans in Rabbi Meir's neighborhood who caused him a great deal of anguish. Rabbi Meir prayed for God to have mercy on them, that they should die. Rabbi Meir's wife, Berurya, said to him: What is your thinking? On what basis do you pray for the death of these hooligans? Do you base yourself on the verse, as it is written: "Let sins cease from the land" (Psalms 104:35), which you interpret to mean that the world would be better if the wicked were destroyed? **But is it written, let sinners cease?"** Let sins cease, is written. One should pray for an end to their transgressions, not for the demise of the transgressors themselves. **Moreover, go to the end of the verse**, where it says: "And the wicked will be no more." If, as you suggest, **transgressions shall cease** refers to the demise of the evildoers, how is it possible that **the wicked will be no more**, i.e., that they will no longer be evil? **Rather, pray for God to have mercy on them, that they should repent**, as if they repent, then the wicked will be no more, as they will have repented.

ברכות י"א:ג'

הָנֵהוּ בְּרִיּוֹנֵי דְהוּוּ בְּשִׁבְבוּתֵיהֶם
דְּרַבִּי מֵאִיר וְהוּוּ קָא מְצַעְרוּ לֵיה
טוּבָא. הָהּ קָא בְּעֵי רַבִּי מֵאִיר
רַחֲמֵי עַלְוֵיהּ כִּי הִכִּי דְלִימּוּתָא.
אָמְרָה לֵיה בְּרוּרְיָא דְבִיתָהּ: מַאי
דַּעְתָּךְ — מְשׁוּם דְּכָתִיב "יִתְמוּ
חַטָּאִים", מִי כָתִיב "חוֹטְאִים"?
"חַטָּאִים" כָּתִיב. וְעוֹד, נְשִׁפִּיל
לְיִסְפִּיָּה דְקָרָא "וּרְשָׁעִים עוֹד
אֵינָם", כִּיּוֹן דְּ"יִתְמוּ חַטָּאִים"
"וּרְשָׁעִים עוֹד אֵינָם"? אֵלָא בְּעֵי
רַחֲמֵי עַלְוֵיהּ דְּלֵהֲדַרוּ בְּתַשׁוּבָּה,
"וּרְשָׁעִים עוֹד אֵינָם".

Eruvin 53b:24

Having discussed wise speech and the wisdom of Jewish women, the Gemara cites the following story: **Rabbi Yosei HaGelili was walking along the way, and met Berurya. He said to her: On which path shall we walk in order to get to Lod? She said to him: Foolish Galilean, didn't the Sages say: Do not talk much with women? You should have said your question more succinctly: Which way to Lod?**

עירובין נ"ג ב:כ"ד

רַבִּי יוֹסִי הַגָּלִילִי הָהּ קָא אֲזִיל
בְּאוֹרְחָא, אֲשַׁכַּח לְבְרוּרְיָה אָמַר
לָהּ: בְּאִיזוֹ דֶּרֶךְ נֵלֵךְ לְלוֹד? אָמְרָה
לָהּ: גָּלִילִי שׁוֹטֵה, לֹא כָךְ אָמְרוּ
חֻכְמַיִם: אֵל תִּרְבֶּה שִׁיחָה עִם

הָאִשָּׁה?! הֲיָה לָךְ לֹמֶר: "בְּאִיזָה
לְלֹד".

Bruria the Mother

Midrash Mishlei 31:2 (translation adapted from
Sefaria.org)

"A valiant woman, who can find" (Proverbs 31:10): They said, "There was a story about Rabbi Meir who was sitting and expounding in the study hall on Shabbat afternoon, when two of his sons died. What did his mother do? She placed both of them on the bed and spread a sheet over them. At the end of Shabbat, Rabbi Meir came home from the study hall. He said to her, 'Where are my two sons?' She said [back], 'They went to the study hall.' He said to her, 'I scanned the study hall and I did not see them.' They gave him the cup of Havdalah and he separated [the days of the week with the closure of Shabbat]. He repeated and said, 'Where are my two sons?' She said, 'They went elsewhere and they are coming now.' She placed food in front of him and he ate and blessed. After he blessed, she said to him, 'I have a question to ask you.' He said to her, 'Say your question.' She said to him, 'Rabbi, some time ago, a man came and deposited something with me, and now he is coming to take it. Should we return it to him or not?' He said, 'My daughter, one who has a deposit with him must return it to its owner.' She said to him, 'I would not have given it to him without your knowledge.' What did she do? She grabbed his hand, brought him up to that room, had him approach the bed and took off the sheet from upon them. When he saw both of them dead and laying upon the bed, he began to cry and say, 'My sons, my sons, my teachers, my teachers - my sons in the way of the world, my teachers in that they would enlighten my eyes with their Torah.' At that time, she said to Rabbi Meir, 'Rabbi, is this not what you told me - do I not need to return the deposit to its Owner?' He said, '"The Eternal has given and the Eternal has taken; may the name of the Eternal be blessed"' (Job 1:21)." Rabbi Chanina said, "With this thing, she consoled him and his mind became composed -

מדרש משלי ל"א:ב'

(משלי לא י): "אשת חיל מי ימצא" - אמרו: מעשה היה ברבי מאיר, שהיה יושב ודורש בבית המדרש בשבת במנחה, ומתו שני בניו. מה עשתה אמו? הניחה שניהם על המטה ופרשה סדין עליהם. במוצאי שבת בא ר' מאיר מבית המדרש לביתו. אמר לה 'היכן שני בני?' אמרה 'לבית המדרש הלכו', אמר לה 'צפיתי לבית המדרש ולא ראיתי אותם', נתנו לו כוס של הבדלה והבדיל, חזר ואמר 'היכן שני בני?', אמרה לו 'הלכו למקום אחר ועכשיו הם באים', הקריבה לפניו המאכל ואכל ובירך, לאחר שבירך אמרה לו 'רבי, שאלה אחת יש לי לשאול לך', אמר לה 'אמרי שאלתך', אמרה לו 'רבי, קודם היום בא אדם אחד ונתן לי פקדון, ועכשיו בא ליטול אותו, נחזיר לו או לא?', אמר לה 'בתי, מי שיש פקדון אצלו, הוא צריך להחזירו לרבו', אמרה לו 'רבי, חוץ מדעתך לא הייתי נותנת אצלו, מה עשתה? תפשתו בידה, והעלה אותו לאותו חדר, והקריבה אותו למטה, ונטלה סדין מעליהם, וראה שניהם מתים ומונחים על המטה, התחיל בוכה ואומר 'בני! בני! רבי! רבי! בני בדרך ארץ, ורבי שהיו מאירין פני בתורתך!', באותה שעה אמרה לו לרבי מאיר 'רבי, לא כך אמרת לי - אני צריך להחזיר הפקדון לרבו?', אמר (איוב א

that is why it states, 'A valiant woman, who can find.'"

כא): "ה' נתן וה' לקח, יהי שם ה' מבורך". אמר רבי חנינא: בדבר הזה נחמתו ונתיישרה דעתו, לכך נאמר "אשת חיל מי ימצא".

The Bruria Incident

Avodah Zarah 18b:4 (transl: Adin Steinsaltz)

Rabbi Meir **arose, fled, and arrived in Babylonia**. The Gemara notes: **There are** those **who say** that he fled because **of this inci-dent, and there are** those **who say** that he fled due to embarrassment **from the incident involving** his wife **Berurya**.

עבודה זרה י"ח ב:ד'

קם ערק אתא לבבל איכא דאמרי מהאי מעשה ואיכא דאמרי ממעשה דברוריא:

Rashi on Avodah Zarah 18b:4:2

And some say, because of the story of Beruriah: As one time, she mocked that which the Sages said (Kiddushin 80b), "The conviction of women is weak about them." And he said [to himself], "By your life, In the end you will concede to their words." And [so] he commanded one of his students to test her with a matter of sin. And [that student] pleaded with her many days until she agreed. And when she found out, she strangled herself. And [so] Rabbi Meir ran away due to embarrassment.

רש"י על עבודה זרה י"ח ב:ד'ב'

ואיכא דאמרי משום מעשה דברוריא - שפעם אחת ליגלגה על שאמרו חכמים (קדושין דף פ:) נשים דעתן קלות הן עלייהו ואמר לה חייך סופך להודות לדבריהם וצוה לאחד מתלמידיו לנסותה לדבר עבירה והפציר בה ימים רבים עד שנתרצית וכשנודע לה חנקה עצמה וערק רבי מאיר מחמת כסופא:

Sofia Zway
RAB 632

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