



Bar-Ilan University  
אוניברסיטת בר-אילן



*Faculty for Jewish Studies*

## ***The Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center for the Study of Women in Judaism Newsletter no. 13, June 2014, Sivan 5774***



***Prof. Judy  
Baumel-  
Schwartz\****

***Dear Friends,***

I am delighted to share with you a brief summary of our activities during this past academic year. During my third year as Director of the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center for the Study of Women in Judaism the Center has continued its involvement in cooperative research ventures, has supported national and international conferences, and has been instrumental in promoting academic research dealing with various aspects of women in Judaism including participating in publishing a book about Contemporary Jewish Women.

Consequently, the Center has been widely acclaimed as an academic research institute that not only stands at the forefront of cutting edge scholarship dealing with women in Judaism but has become an important force in furthering and supporting academic scholarship in various fields that promote a better understanding of women's lives as connected to different aspects of Jewish life and practice. As we have in the past, the Center has continued the exciting challenge of seeking worthy scholars at various levels who are studying various aspects of women in Judaism and have enabled them through our translation, research and publications grants to continue and expand their important research.

As always, we are indebted to Mrs. Fanya Gottesfeld Heller for her support and direction, and see her own experiences as a guiding light for young scholars wishing to explore and document various academic facets of the study of women in Judaism, both today and in the past.

We also wish to thank the Faculty of Jewish Studies at Bar Ilan University, and particularly the new Faculty Dean, Prof. Elie Assis, for his continued and enthusiastic support of the Heller Center and its various academic activities.

This year our activities focused on three areas: Academic Conferences and Symposia, Grants for Bar Ilan Staff and Graduate students, and the

publication of a volume dealing with the lives of Contemporary Jewish women. These activities, along with plans for the next academic year, are featured in this year's newsletter. Please follow our website for further information.

Wishing you a good summer, a year of good health, fulfillment and Jewish growth,

*Prof. Judy Baumel-Schwartz, Director*

\* picture by Reuven Castro

## ***Research Grant Recipients:***

### **Dr. Lilach Rosenberg-Friedman**



*Dr. Lilach Rosenberg-Friedman is a senior lecturer at the Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology department, Bar-Ilan University, Israel and a historian who specializes in the history of Israel in the modern period. Her studies focus on women and gender in Mandatory Palestine, and deal with range of issues: feminine identity, feminine leadership, the Hebrew family, marriage and motherhood and biographies of women in the era of national renaissance. Her book, "Revolutionaries despite themselves: Women and Gender in Religious Zionism during the Yishuv Period" (Hebrew) was published by Yad Ben-Zvi in 2005. With the support of the 'Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center for the Study of Women in Judaism' Grant, Dr. Rosenberg-Friedman intends to publish her new study on "Reproduction in the Yishuv, 1918-1948: Perceptions of Births, Prevention and Abortions".*

Reproduction stood at the epicenter of Jewish national discourse in Mandatory Palestine from 1918 through 1948. Ensuring a Jewish majority was a Zionist goal of the highest degree. It was imperative for the

establishment of a Jewish state. Reproduction was thus perceived as a national decree.

Although having children was both a national and a religious injunction in the pre-state Jewish community in Palestine -- the Yishuv -- the period in question was characterized by a steady decline in birthrate, mainly due to widespread abortion. This was the result of a variety of factors, among them economic hardship, sociological issues, the ordeal of immigration, modern ideology and traumatic historical events on a local and global scale, first and foremost the Holocaust. By looking at the dominant factors that shaped the abortion phenomenon prevalent in the Yishuv, we see how the Yishuv was both a meeting place of international cultures and a breed all its own.

The abortion phenomenon was fraught with conflicts generated by different approaches and value systems. The high importance attached to procreation was a direct outgrowth of the Zionist goal to establish a Jewish state, but Zionism also sought to build a new society with modern European features, and smaller family size was one of them. The Jewish immigrant population arrived with the notion that family planning was a private matter, and regarded small families as an ideal. At the same time, national anxiety sparked by the high Arab birthrate transformed reproduction into an issue of national concern. Women who sought abortions were perceived as behaving irresponsibly and disregarding the needs of the nation. On the other hand, the campaign to increase births and fight abortion was limited to certain social sectors.

Over the course of the book, many different voices are heard, both public and private. We hear gender-based views, the views of various social sectors and views colored by ethnic and community affiliation. We hear the voice of doctors, of the establishment, of individuals, of kibbutzim and the rural sector, of the religious sector, and more. A special emphasis is placed on the voice of women and their life stories, mothers and single women, female doctors and leaders, women from all sectors and settlements. These indicate on the multifaceted portrait of the Yishuv's woman.

Apart from adding a new chapter for the study of women in the Yishuv, the research sheds new light on the Yishuv society as a whole. As we explore abortion in the Yishuv and the attitudes toward it, we see the tensions, conflicts and gaps between the declarations and practice,

between the aspirations of the leaders and the needs of the citizens, between the ideology and the constraints of the real world. This tug of war, which was an inseparable part of life in the Yishuv and a leading component in shaping its distinct character, runs like a thread throughout the book and takes center stage as the historical narrative unfolds.

Analyzing the abortion phenomenon corrects the distorted picture of Jewish society at the time, showing that it was much more heterogeneous and conflict-ridden than commonly assumed, and there were limits to the nationalist indoctrination. Therefore, we can look at this book as an illustration of the purpose of the study of women and gender, since it offers a new look at the known historical narrative.



*Dr. Lilach Rosenberg –Friedman speaking during the Prize Ceremony*

## Dr. Eli Gurfinkel



*Dr. Eli Gurfinkel is a lecturer in Jewish studies at Bar-Ilan University and the Michlalah-Jerusalem College. His research deals with Jewish philosophy, the philosophy of Jewish law and the relationship between them and he has published on the topic. He has focused on the writings of Maimonides and the varying exegetical perspectives on his doctrine as well as the differing viewpoints surrounding the principles of faith. With the support of the 'Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center for the Study of Women in Judaism' Grant, Dr. Gurfinkel intends to prepare a critical annotated edition of the manuscript "Shevah Hanashim", including an introduction about its author, Rabbi David ben Judah Messer Leon.*

*Shevah Hanashim* was written by Rabbi David ben Judah Messer Leon (hereafter known as the Radmal), a 16th-century Italian rabbi and community leader, and author of several important rabbinical works of exegesis and philosophy.

The essay, written as a gift for a woman who acted as a financial patron for the author, describes the qualities and characteristics of a 'praiseworthy woman' (the 'ideal' woman, so to say), in the form of a commentary on the renowned Biblical text *Eshet Chayil* ('A woman of valor', Proverbs 31:10-31). To illustrate these spiritual characteristics, the Radmal uses the lives and deeds of women mentioned in the Bible and in Aggadic and Midrashic literature, as well as telling the tales of gentile women, whose adventures were written in classic Latin literature, familiar to the author.

The Radmal doesn't hesitate to use examples of character of women such as the Amazons, Cleopatra of Egypt, or Faustina Minor, wife of Marcus Aurelius, all the while acclaiming their praiseworthy aspects while refuting their less positive undertakings. In practice, the Radmal mentions almost all the women cited in *'De claris mulieribus'* (Concerning Famous Women) by Giovanni Boccaccio, with additional women from Biblical and Rabbinic sources.

In outlining the character of the praiseworthy woman, the Radmal notes her characteristics evident in the Biblical texts describing the classic duties of women in Ancient and Medieval society: caring for the everyday functions of the close family through domestic work; using her skills to provide for the family; and being involved in the social welfare of the poor and destitute. However, the author's novelty is in his focus on additional qualities and characteristics, emphasising the woman's individualistic nature and her assertiveness. The 'woman of valor' for the author is a woman "inherently wise in spirit... who can stand before kings and princes without fear and trepidation, and speak pleasant words to them."

To him, she who 'opens her mouth with wisdom, with loving instruction on her tongue' is not a woman sitting and reciting Psalms, but rather one who makes use of her rhetorical skills in a fitting way in order that her will be done. Presumably, this understanding of women's character prompted him to seek for role models outside the wise women mentioned in the Aggadah and Midrash. In any case, the author does not delineate a fixed image of a woman enclosed in her own world, but rather portrays a colorful vibrant character full of life and activity.

The characteristics and qualities of the praiseworthy woman are based on real-life women known to the author, in his role as Rabbi and community leader in Italy; *Shevah Hanashim* therefore opens up the world of the Italian Jewish woman, describing her features in a fascinating work of Rabbinic exegesis. The work also highlights the rich spiritual and cultural character of the Radmal himself, dauntlessly combining tales from classical literature in a religious text. In the first part of the essay, the author dedicates a long prologue to the explication of this kind of literary combination, making clear that this style of writing was not deemed acceptable in the rabbinic culture in which he was raised, yet that he was determined to promote it.

*Shevah Hanashim* has thus far remained in manuscript form, and is unknown in the academic world. Famed scholars of Italian Jewish culture, and students of gender in this time period, have known of this text through only one extant replica. The fall of the Iron Curtain in recent decades has allowed examination of manuscripts hidden in Eastern Europe, and among them was found an additional manuscript of the text. Comparison of the two copies shows that the version previously known to scholars was truncated and heavily censored so as to remove any examples of women whom the censor did not consider relevant to a religious exegetical text.

These omissions did not allow a proper understanding of the intention of the text and its major innovations. The present edition attempts to restore the lost text to the Jewish library, and to present, for the first time, the complete text in a critical annotated edition, including an extensive introduction to the author and his work.



*Dr. Eli Gurfinkel receiving the prize envelope*

## ***Translation Grant Recipient:***

**Prof. Bracha Yaniv**



*Prof. Bracha Yaniv is the founder and former chair of the Department of Jewish Art at Bar Ilan University. She is also the founder of *Ars Judaica: The Bar-Ilan Journal of Jewish Art*, an international journal which appears annually since 2005. Her research during two decades focused on the history, design, iconography, and Halakhic aspects of the ceremonial objects which protect and adorn the Torah scroll as well as furnishings related to the Torah ark and the reader's desk. These are also the subjects of her articles and books, among them are *Ma'aseh Hoshev: the Torah Case, Its History and Design* and *Ma'aseh Rokem: Textile Ceremonial Objects in the Ashkenazi, Sephardi and Italian Synagogue*, which is in the process of being published in English and for which she received the translation grant.*

Ceremonial synagogue textiles, without doubt a matter with which women were involved, has been a neglected field of research for many years. Four years ago, after a long and intensive period of research, this lacuna was filled by the publication of my Hebrew book *Ma'aseh Rokem*, by the Ben-Zvi Institute of the Hebrew University and with the support of the The Israel Science Foundation. Following the publication of this book a need was felt to publish an English version, since no such publication exists in English. This initiative was taken up by the Littman Library of Jewish Civilization and the book was approved for publication in English.

The book deals with two groups of ceremonial objects. The first, referring to the manner in which the Torah scroll is wrapped in Europe and the Sephardi diaspora, comprises three items: the Torah wrapper, the Torah binder, and the Torah mantle. The second group refers to synagogue furnishings and includes the Torah ark curtain, the Torah ark valance, and the cover of the reader's desk.

Although the book is not a 'gender' study by definition, it reflects the role of women behind every matter and object discussed in the book, since textile was – from antiquity to our days – a 'womanly' matter. This took

the form of women's donations to the synagogue, whether purchased, hand crafted, or produced by them in the framework of their livelihood occupations. The discussion deals in depth with the people involved in the production of ceremonial objects, most of them women of Ashkenazi, Sephardi, and Italian communities in their roles as embroiderers, lace and accessories workers, seamstresses, and workshop owners. The women's products are identified by embroidered dedicatory inscriptions, such as those of the Venetian six-year-old girl, who embroidered a Torah binder, or through documentary testimony like that of an eighteenth-century industrial physician, who describes the contemporary 'sweatshops' of the Jewish women embroiders in Rome. The story of the textile ceremonial objects is actually the story of the artisans who produced them – in most cases women at home in the framework of home industry, or in professional workshops.

The major objective of this volume is to present a full presentation of the ceremonial textile objects in all communities that traditionally used them. The second objective is to discuss the role of the craftsman, in many cases a craftswoman, at home or as a professional worker. Such a project requires a wide infrastructure of research and an extensive collection of data covering all the communities under study, this within a chronological framework providing information that is as early, complete, and continuous as possible.

This study is based on the documentation of hundreds of objects in synagogues, museums, and various collections. The documentation of the surviving objects was complemented by secondary sources, primarily photographs and documents.

The publication of the revised and updated English edition of this book will provide a basis for further research focusing on specific objects and practices in specific communities.



*Prof. Bracha Yaniv speaking during the Prize Ceremony*

## ***Publication Grant Recipient:***

**Dr. Haggai Mazuz**



*Dr. Haggai Mazuz is a lecturer of Islamic and Jewish Studies at Bar-Ilan University. He has published several articles on the relationship between Judaism and Islam,*

*Qur'ān commentary and Islamic jurisprudence and with the assistance of the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Institute publication grant, is about to publish a book entitled: Menstruation and Its Legislation: The Evolution and Crystallization of the Law of Menses in the Islamic Juristic Tradition, with an introduction by Moshe Sharon (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, forthcoming).*

This study examines the way the Islamic laws of menstruation were shaped and cast in final form. Islamic sources indicate that Muslims often deliberately rejected Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian the practices in what Islamic legal sources term *mukhālafā*, the principle of non-imitation or non-adoption of non-Muslim customs. The main thesis in this monograph is that most Islamic laws relating to menstruation evolved from the application of *mukhālafā* to Talmudic law or, more precisely, the way Muslim jurists understood it. To demonstrate the validity of the thesis, a first-ever attempt to analyze systematically and to compare the Islamic and Jewish laws relating to menstruation is made.

Describing the thrust and parry of Islamic jurisprudence in detail, the monograph illuminates the Muslim jurists' efforts to create a legal system that differs from the Jewish one – efforts that came fruition in their juristic conclusions, which flowed from discussions in which the Jews and their customs were frequently mentioned.

Usually, scholars of the *sharī'a* seek conclusions about the paths of development of the *sharī'a* by investigating juristic principles as opposed to the minutiae of the laws. Mazuz's work, in contrast, demonstrates this complex discourse in Islamic jurisprudence and its development in the most complicated field of all in this jurisprudence – the laws of menstruation.

The *sharī'a* took shape in Iraq. Western scholarship has stressed the interaction that took place there between Muslim sages and Jewish ones and detected much Jewish influence on the shaping of the *sharī'a*. Recent research shows that early Islam often confronted Talmudic Judaism. This anti-Talmudic spirit may explain the essence of the Islamic laws of menstruation – and not them alone.



*Dr. Haggai Mazuz receiving the prize envelope*

## ***Outstanding Graduate Student Prize Recipient:***

**Shira Ben Shachar**



*Shira Ben Shachar is an M.A. student in the Department of Land of Israel Studies and Archeology at Bar Ilan University and coordinates administrative work at the Ingeborg Rennert Center for Jerusalem Studies at the university. She recently completed a study about the "Memorial for the 'Final Decendants', the men and women who were sole survivors of families destroyed in the Holocaust and who lost their lives during the Israeli War of Independence. Her study concentrated*

*particularly on the women of this group, charting their histories and discussing how they were commemorated.*

When discussing the War of Independence in 1948, people often quote the number 6000 fallen out of a population of 600,000 Jewish residents in the country. This is a round number with no distinction between men, women, children and old people and no distinction between combatants and residents.

But I want to distinguish a large group of people killed during the war who had experienced the horrors of the Holocaust in the ghettos, concentration camps, fleeing and hiding from the Nazis and fighting alongside the underground movement or partisans on Nazi-occupied territory. These people came to Israel, participated in the battles of the early years of the state and have fallen in Israel's wars.

Among the survivors who fought for the country and fell in battle, there is a relatively large group of people who were the sole survivors of their families after these were destroyed in the Holocaust. Members of this group are called "the final descendants".

The commemoration of the final descendants who had no one to perpetuate them, was initiated by Yehuda Sternfeld who led the movement to establish the Monument "From Crisis to Hope" in the *Maginim* forest near Latrun in 1998. Sternfeld was himself a Holocaust survivor who immigrated to Israel after the war, joined the Palmach Harel Brigade and fought in the War of Independence as a combat medic.

This monument commemorates 436 victims who were final descendants. With cooperation between the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Education, Yad Vashem and the Jewish Agency, in 2004 "the final descendant" monument was inaugurated on the connecting path between Yad Vashem and Mount Herzl as its eighth and final station, which commemorated 275 men and women who fell in battle, after managing to find relatives around the world of some of the martyrs memorialized at the "crisis to hope" monument.

The search for remaining relatives continues, and today the final descendant monument commemorates 147 such men and women.

I felt the need to focus specifically on nine women who were "final descendants" and lost their lives during the Israeli War of Independence.

1. Atara Abramson \*
  2. Chava (Eva) Goldman
  3. Gila Davidovich
  4. Rachel (Rania) Hiller \*
  5. Chaya Wasserteil\*
  6. Zipporah (Feige) Jakubowicz\*
  7. Rina Lemberger
  8. Rachel Mines\*
  9. Esther Kaufman\*
- \* Lost their lives in Gush Etzion

Elsewhere in the world, it is rare to find women fighting on war fronts. Commonly, the women were helpful in fighting only in the homefront and not on the battlefield.

The meaning of these sacrifices touched me more deeply when I visited the monument formed like the framework of a house with a wall missing that is laid alongside it and engraved with the names of the deceased and next to them the address:

The home that was there – and is gone.

The house they could have built here – and is never to rise.

They were the sole survivors of their home - and are not.

These special and brave women who lost their entire family during the Second World War came to Israel after experiencing the horrors of the Holocaust, dreaming to rebuild their lives here, but those dreams were impeded during the war. These women sacrificed their lives for the country before they had a chance to build a home, raise a family and preserve the memory of their family murdered in the holocaust.

These women put aside their personal needs and were willing to do all they could to defend the developing Israel, for us and for future generations.

Personally, I see my study as another way to commemorate the casualties of these final descendants, especially these admirable and amazing women. I learned a lot about their personal stories of courage, sacrifice, strong faith, Zionism and the great power of the women.



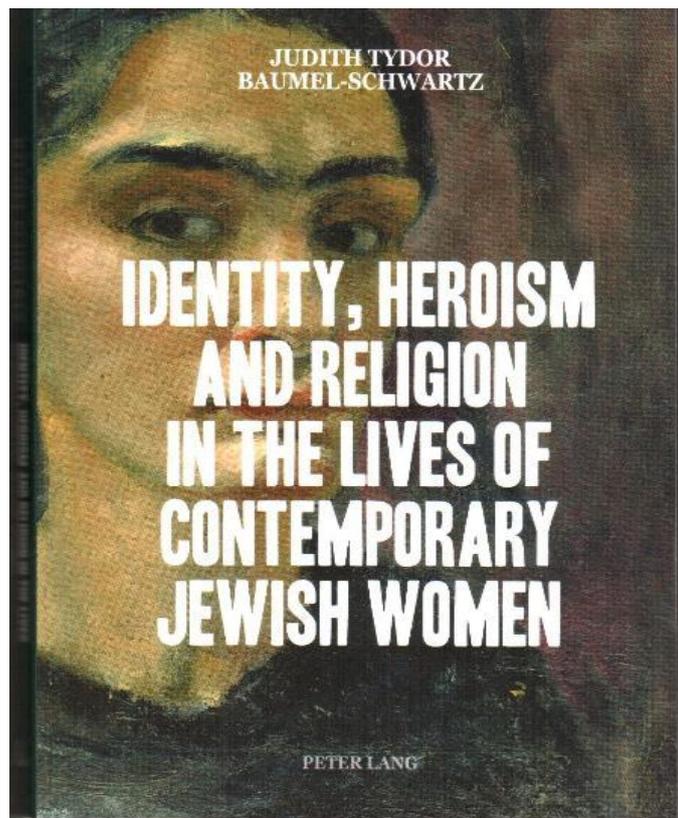
*Shira Ben Shachar receiving the prize envelope*



*Grant Recipients and Prize Winners with  
Center Director, Prof. Judy Baumel-Schwartz*

## ***Co-Production of Academic Publications:***

The Fanya Gottesfeld-Heller Center has traditionally supported the publication of books dealing with different aspects of Jewish women's lives, or those focusing on women and Judaism. Some of this support is given as research, translation or publishing grants to individual scholars. At other times it translates into co-producing academic publications with other research institutes or publishing houses. During the 2013-2014 academic year the Center entered into a co-operative venture, together with Peter Lang International Publishers (Switzerland) of publishing an academic study focusing on the national and religious identity of Contemporary Jewish women. The book, entitled *Identity, Heroism and Religion in the Lives of Contemporary Jewish Women*, published in December 2013, is an anthology of articles that were written by historian and Center director Judith Baumel-Schwartz.



## ***Academic Conferences and Symposia:***

On March 26, 2014 the *Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center* co-sponsored a symposium entitled "The New Religious Zionism" together with the Institute for the Study of Religious Zionism, The Rabbi Moshe Haim Lau Chair for Leadership in Crisis, and the Yehua Avner Chair for the Study of Religion and Politics. The *Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center* was instrumental in underwriting the third session of this well attended symposium which was devoted to "Women in Contemporary Religious Zionism" and speakers included Dr. Nava Wasserman, Dr. Rachel Levmore and Dr. Ilana Stockman.

On June 2, 2014 the *Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center* co-sponsored a symposium entitled "Choosing an Academic Career: The World of Religious Devout Women" together with the Midrasha, the Josef Burg Chair in Education for Human Values, Tolerance and Peace, UNESCO chair, the School of Education at Bar Ilan University, and Emunah, the National Religious Women's Organization. The conference was dedicated to launching the book edited by conference organizer Prof. Zehavit Gross, together with Lynn Davies and Al Khansaa Diab, *Gender, Religion and Education in a Chaotic-Post Modern World* (Springer Publishing). The conference explored the world of religious women who have chosen to follow an academic career without renouncing their significant religious identity which is central to their lives. Among the speakers were Prof. Lynn Davies, Prof. Elisheva Baumgarten, Prof. Tamar Ross, Prof. Tova Hartman, Dr. Al Khansaa Diab, Prof. Malka Schaps, Rebbetzin Malka Piotrikowsky, Rebbetzin Esther Farbstein, Dr. Tova Ganzel, Mrs. Adina Bar Shalom, Prof. Chaya Brodie, Rebbetzin Chana Hendler and Dr. Rebbetzin Penina Neuwirth.

## ***Cooperation with other Centers both inside and outside Bar-Ilan University:***

The *Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center* continued its tradition of cooperating activities with other centers and institutes both inside and outside the university. The Center is planning another joint conference next year together with the Institute for Religious Zionism at Bar Ilan University and an additional conference with the Department of Jewish History and Contemporary Jewry at Bar Ilan University. Several meetings have been

held between the Center's Director, Prof. Judy Baumel-Schwartz and Dr. Yishai Arnon, Academic Coordinator of the Institute for Religious Zionism about possible conference topics and the conference is scheduled to be held in early 2015.

The Center continues its cooperation with the Israel and Golda Koschitsky Jewish History and Contemporary Jewry Department at Bar Ilan University and with other university institutes and programs connected with the study of women in Judaism.

In addition to these two conferences we plan to continue the tradition of student prizes, research grants, publication and travel grants, and support for translation of scholarly articles dealing with women in Judaism.

### *Staff*

After over three years of successful work at the Center coordinator Yonatan Edrei left at the completion of his studies in February of this year and was replaced as Center coordinator by Yitzhak Pass, who is a graduate student in the Department of Jewish History and Contemporary Jewry at Bar Ilan University. Mr. Pass continued dealing with all the bureaucracy involved in creating a fruitful cooperation with various bodies both inside and outside the university. Mr. Pass was instrumental in setting up the prize giving ceremony, photographing the winners and ensuring that the ceremony would receive publicity both inside and outside the university.

**Updates on our conferences and programs will appear on our website:**

We hope that you will be able to join us for all the activities that we will host this year. For further information about conferences and fellowship opportunities:

<http://www.hellercenterforjewishwomen.org/>