

***Uchtavtam — “And You Shall Write”***

**An Integrative Study and Practice of *Safrut STa”M***

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## Summary of Contents

This rabbinic capstone consists of a kosher *megillah* (scroll) of Song of Songs. The accompanying text contains six chapters, three appendices, and a select bibliography.

The content includes a description of why and how I chose this project **(I)**; a thorough narrative of my training and writing process **(II and III)**; analysis of key texts that informed the project **(IV)**; how I related the selected biblical text to my writing process **(V)**; and a statement of goals for the project **(VI)**. The appendices include illustrations that accompany and elucidate narrative descriptions of the writing; selections of the primary sources examined in the text; and high-quality scans of the *megillah*.

The personal goal of the project was to train as a *soferet sta"m* (scribe of sacred Jewish texts) and complete a kosher *megillah* of Song of Songs. The educational and communal goal was to share my experience and learning with the hope of inspiring others to seek their own meaningful, integrative Jewish practice.

Materials used to complete the project include:

- ❖ cut and prepared calfskin parchment
- ❖ turkey feather quills
- ❖ iron gall ink and ink thinner
- ❖ cow sinew thread
- ❖ utility knife
- ❖ scalpel
- ❖ razor blades
- ❖ plexiglass cutting block
- ❖ *tikkun sofrim*
- ❖ artist's loupe
- ❖ artist's eraser
- ❖ drawing and measuring tools

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## I. Impetus and Inspiration

My involvement in the art of *safrut* began in February of 2017, when I attended a workshop at the Limmud-NY Jewish learning conference. That afternoon, I held a feather quill, dipped it in ink, and formed Hebrew letters on parchment for the first time. During the hour and fifteen minutes of this class I was laser-focused on the writing, and continued practicing *beit*, *kaf* and *lamed* long after the room had emptied. I was so energized by the experience, and the instructor, recognizing my enthusiasm, was generous enough to spend extra time with me and gift me with a feather, a jar of ink, and my own scrap of parchment to practice on.

Given my background in art history, it is no surprise that I was taken by this subject, but my love for the Hebrew letters is not a mere fascination with calligraphy. I appreciate beautiful writing as much as any other keenly visual person, but I had never been very interested in writing calligraphy myself. What drew me to the art of *safrut* *sta"m*<sup>1</sup> was not really how it looks, but what it represents.

Although that February was my first time forming for myself the letters we see in Torah scrolls, *mezuzot* and other sacred objects, it was far from my first time encountering sacred writing. I, along with my Hebrew school peers, was taught to respect and honor the Torah, and personally, I really did feel awe and reverence for the *Sefer Torah*. When I was in sixth grade, I was very excited to learn Torah cantillation in preparation for becoming *bat mitzvah*, because I was finally going to be able to read from

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<sup>1</sup> *Safrut* means scribal arts, while *sta"m* is an acronym for *Sefer Torah*, *Tefillin*, and *Mezuzah*. The Hebrew abbreviation format is used in this text.

the scroll. I felt no fear — only excitement — and understood clearly that I was about to inherit this tradition and take ownership of it. Of course, I would not have articulated such sentiments in this way as a twelve-year-old, but when I look back on that time, it feels authentic to who I was then and at the root of who I am now.

After that February, I did not spend much time thinking actively about *safrut*, but it clearly got under my skin. When it came time to choose a thesis topic several months later, I knew that this is what I would do, even though I have no memory of actively planning to. By August of 2017, I had decided to spend the following summer in Jerusalem and train with a *sofer* so that I would be prepared to write a kosher ritual object in accordance with Jewish law and tradition. I had a teacher in mind, but at the time — ten months ahead of the proposed study — there was no certainty that he would agree to teach me, or that I would find a way to be in Israel for the summer. Despite the uncertainty, I had a conviction that this is what I was supposed to do, and that it would, therefore, work out.

Fortunately, the pieces fell into place over the course of several months between securing Dr. Alyssa Gray as my advisor in August 2017 and submitting the final proposal to the faculty in March 2018. In December 2017 I was offered the position of summer intern at HUC–JIR in Jerusalem. In January 2018, I contacted *sofer* Rabbi Dov Laimon on the recommendation of several classmates who had studied with him at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem. Rabbi Laimon agreed to take me on as a student and prepare a course of study that would include a combination of writing instruction and study of *halakhah* (law) and *machshavah* (thought).

## II. Learning to Write

Upon my arrival in Jerusalem that June, I touched base with Rabbi Laimon and we began our lessons. Each lesson was two hours, and included practical training and study of key texts selected by Rabbi Laimon according to the interests I had specified — a few fundamental halakhic texts, and mystical traditions about letters and writing, drawn from a Kabbalistic and Chasidic sources. We met twice a week for four weeks, beginning on June 25 and concluding on July 17.

We began each session with the letters themselves — learning new ones and reviewing my “homework” from the previous session — and concluded with text study. In our first meeting we discussed strategic approaches to the writing materials: angles for holding the quill; body posture; managing ink supply; and the basic characteristics of working with *klaf*.<sup>2</sup> These are foreign concepts to the average modern person, accustomed to using ballpoints or gel pens on wood-pulp paper.

### Learning the letters

After I had begun to acclimate to the writing materials, Rabbi Laimon taught me **בִּי דִּי הִי תִי**, and explained how certain letters of the alphabet serve as the foundation for other letters. In this first set of letters, *dalet* forms the basis of *hei* and *tav* — a squared line on the top with an inset, slanting *regel* (leg) on the right-hand side. *Hei* and *tav* each begin as a *dalet*, and additional details bring them to their final form. **[figure 1]**

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<sup>2</sup> Animal parchment, usually calf skin.

We talked about what makes a letter *kasher* (fit) or *pasul* (unfit) and went over the acronym ש"עטנ"ז ג"ץ, which comprises the letters that are to be “crowned” with three *taggim*.<sup>3</sup> Finally, Rabbi Laimon oriented me to the most important texts for practical use: the section of the *Mishnah Berurah* known as *Mishnat Sofrim* and *Keset HaSofer*, an original formation of pertinent *halakhot* with the addition of the author’s own *piskei halakhah* (halakhic rulings) on writing. We concluded with study of mystical writings about the letter *beit* in *Mishnat Sofrim*.

In my second lesson, we continued with subsequent letter groups. וי וי are essentially the same shape with different lateral and vertical length [figure 2], and introduce curved lines to the writer’s repertoire. The next group, כ ל נ, continue with curved lines and introduce the combination of curved and squared corners [figure 3]. Until this point I had been writing with only horizontal space in mind, and with *lamed*, topped by a full-sized *vav* (three-units of height) on top, I began to think more strategically about vertical space. In my early writing practice, each letter was an isolated event — I would write one, then leave a bit of empty space and write another. When I learned *lamed*, I was able to envision how the letters I was learning would eventually join to become words and verses, and, some day, complete texts. For our text study in this second lesson, Rabbi Laimon brought an excerpt from Ya‘akov Yosef of Polonnoye’s *Toldot Ya‘akov Yosef*, a mystical treatise on the power of the Hebrew letters to connect between the earthly and heavenly.

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<sup>3</sup> Ornamental lines extending vertically from the top of specific letters.

Our third meeting introduced a new letter group, based on the letter *zayin*: ז' זי זיז. It is with this group that I learned to write the *keter*, crown, on the designated letters [figure 4]. As described in *B. Menachot* 29b (including Rashi and Tosafot), the *keter* comprises three *ziyyunim* — essentially three tiny versions of the letter *zayin* resting atop a full-sized *zayin*. As Rabbi Laimon explained it, one can imagine that each *zayin* has three *ziyyunim* that are themselves topped with three *ziyyunim* that continues infinitely, like a fractal pattern [figure 5]. This is not the only time that mathematics came up in our lessons. In fact, geometry forms the essential basis of the writing process: in learning to write, I was taught to imagine/project an invisible grid onto the parchment, with a consistent proportion based on the width of the *kulmus* (quill) in use at the time. [figure 6] Whether one is writing with a small quill or a large quill, the proportion of the letter never changes, only the overall size. [figure 7]

In this conception, each letter's matrix consists of nine units (3 x 3), although some letters do not fill this space and others exceed it. The easiest example of this is the letter *beit*, which is one reason why this letter is typically taught first. The top line of *beit* should be three units wide. Next, the scribe pulls a thin line two units down from the top line, for a total height of three units. Finally, the bottom line is pulled across from left to right — three units parallel to the top line with a tiny extension to the right. This leaves an empty space in the center that should be the same height and width as the parallel lines encasing it. Once the basic shape of the letter is formed, the scribe adds the various smaller flourishes that complete the letter. On a *beit* this includes a small *kotz* (thorn) on



the upper right-hand corners of both the top and bottom lines, and a small *tag* at the leftmost edge of the top line. **[figure 6]**

It was at this point in our third session that we discussed the process of making corrections to completed writing, and Rabbi Laimon introduced me to the essential halakhah known as *chok hatokhot*. This halakhah stipulates that no letter can be formed by erasure. For example, if one intended to write a *dalet* and accidentally added a left-hand *regel* to form a *tav*, the scribe would not be able to simply erase the accidental *regel* and be left with a kosher *dalet*. Instead, the scribe must erase the accidental addition and enough of the original *dalet* so that it could not be considered a kosher *dalet* on its own. After this, the scribe may repair the *dalet*, thus maintaining the principle of writing only by addition, not by subtraction.

*Chok ha tokhot* provided a fitting transition to our text study that day, which was focused on the teachings of Rabbi Isaac Luria, as recorded by his student Chayim Vital in the book *Eitz Chayim*.<sup>4</sup> Among the excerpts we examined are Luria's description of four presentations of the Divine Name, corresponding to the four worlds of Lurianic Kabbalah,<sup>5</sup> and the notion that the twenty-two letters of the alphabet represent twenty-two elemental spiritual realities.

As we progressed through the alphabet, the formation of the letters became increasingly complex. My fourth lesson focused on ך׳ ף׳ פ׳ ס׳ ע׳ — letters requiring more challenging techniques and featuring more composite elements. The previous letters I had learned can be accomplished with a couple simple strokes of the quill and follow the

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<sup>4</sup> For details on these two figures and *Eitz Chayim*, see Section IV.

<sup>5</sup> See Section IV, entry on *Eitz Chayim*.

basic structure of the 3 x 3 grid described above. Of this set, both *ayin* and *pei* are slightly taller than most letters and are written in no fewer than six steps as opposed to the one, two, or three of the previous letters. *Samekh* requires a fluid motion to achieve the bottom curved line, and a turn of the quill mid-stroke in order to achieve the transition from the thin left-hand side to the broad, curved base, and back up to the thin right-hand edge.

In learning to write *samekh*, I became most keenly aware of the role that physics/mechanics plays in this style of writing. Writing with a ballpoint pen offers the writer nearly complete control over the instrument. Writing with a feather quill does not offer complete control. On the contrary, one can only write with a limited set of motions — the ink must be pulled laterally in one direction<sup>6</sup> and the quill can only deliver ink when held at certain angles.

*Yud* is the smallest letter of the alphabet, yet, in some ways, it is the most complex. Because it is so small, it requires a high level of precision and delicacy in writing, but cannot itself be overly delicate, for fear that it could be mistaken for something less than a letter — a smudge of ink, perhaps. In conjunction with the practical learning about *yud* — the formation of which is debated heartily in commentary on the Talmud (see section IV on *B. Menachot*) — Rabbi Laimon and I discussed the mystical significance of *yud* and studied the opening *mishnayot* of *Sefer Yetzirah*.<sup>7</sup>

By our fifth session together, we were nearing completion of the alphabet. Progressing to letters of increasing complexity, we reached **שׁוּׁן**. At this point, I was

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<sup>6</sup> The Hebrew letters are formed from left to right, even though the language is written from right to left. I have consulted with a few left-handed scribes, who pull ink from right to left and bottom to top instead.

<sup>7</sup> See Section IV for more on *Sefer Yetzirah*.

able to grasp the writing more quickly, so we were able to spend more time on text study. We examined Rabbi Moshe Chayim Luzzatto's *Pitchei Chokhmah*,<sup>8</sup> a kabbalistic explanation of God's forms of communication to humankind, and Rabbi Zadok HaKohen of Lublin's *Machshavot Charutz*,<sup>9</sup> a Chasidic meditation on the letters as the root of all existence, flowing from the Divine to humanity.

In our sixth lesson, Rabbi Laimon concluded his instruction of the letters with ׀ and finally, ׀. I left his studio for the Shalom Hartman Institute, where I was taking a class on *Idra Rabba*<sup>10</sup> with my beloved teacher, Dr. Melila Hellner-Eshed<sup>11</sup> — a fitting way to complement my time learning the letters. I wanted to mark the spiritual progress of completing my *alef-beit* learning and Melila, a deeply connected spiritual teacher, seemed the perfect person to approach. When I asked if there was a special *kavvanah* or *berakhah* to recite, she didn't know of one specific to the occasion, but she gathered the

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<sup>8</sup> Rabbi Moses Chayim Luzzatto, known as the RaMCHaL, was a prominent Italian kabbalist, author, poet, and scholar. Born in Padua in 1707, he was a prolific thinker and writer. *Pitchei Chokhmah* is a “systematic exposition of the Lurianic Kabbalah.” (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd edition, vol. 13.)

<sup>9</sup> Zadok HaKohen of Lublin lived in Eastern Europe in the 19th-century. He came from a Lithuanian family, his teachers were students of the Vilna Gaon and Volozhiner Rebbe. R. Zadok embraced Chasidut and wrote extensively about halakhah, philosophy, and Kabbalah. *Machshavot Charutz* was published posthumously in 1912.

<sup>10</sup> “The Greater Assembly” — a section of the Zohar that narrates the gathering of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his circle, for the purpose of “healing” God. It includes extremely detailed and lengthy descriptions of different aspects of God's face, nose, eyes, beard, etc.

<sup>11</sup> Melila Hellner-Eshed, Ph.D., is a research fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute and professor of Jewish mysticism and Zohar at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her mentor is renowned scholar Yehuda Liebes. Melila is author of *A River Flows from Eden: The Language of Mystical Experience in the Zohar* (Stanford U. Press, 2011) and recently published a Hebrew translation and commentary on *Idra Rabba*; English ed. forthcoming.

members of our class, shared beautiful words of blessing, and witnessed my recitation of *Shehecheyanu*.

### **Acquiring and using the materials**

At this point, Rabbi Laimon shifted almost entirely to practical instruction regarding the broader aspects of my project. I had begun my writing with a plastic quill tip affixed to a feather, and now it was time to learn how to write with an actual feather tip. This was a bigger adjustment than I had expected, and it did cause some frustration — I had been proud of and pleased with my three weeks’ progress and felt that this change of writing tools constituted a regression in my skills. Nevertheless, I pushed onward, and came to appreciate the greater control and precision afforded me by writing with the feather quill.

Learning to *write* with the feather required me to *create* a feather quill. This was no mean feat. Cutting a quill from a turkey feather involves very precise cuts into a shape that was not familiar to me, so I had to pay extremely close attention to Rabbi Laimon’s every move as he demonstrated his method. Taking detailed notes on his process did not help as much as I thought it would when I revisited the instructions months later. (For more on this, see p. 16.)

The process of cutting a quill cannot be achieved without the use of a number of implements that I refer to as “scary blades” — a heavy-duty utility knife, loose razor blades, and several extremely sharp scalpels in a variety sizes and shapes. Still healing from a traumatic cooking injury to my hand only a couple months earlier, I was very

nervous about using these tools. Fortunately, Rabbi Laimon is a kind and sensitive teacher, and he patiently coached me through my anxiety.

In addition to the skill of quill-cutting, Rabbi Laimon gave me a thorough rundown of all the materials I would need in order to complete my project. The most important of these materials is the *klaf* itself. I learned that parchment for sacred writing comes in a large variety of standardized sizes, and is typically sold with *sirtut* (scored lines and margins) already applied. The most common specification for a *megillah* is 21 lines per column, and that is what Rabbi Laimon recommended. We discussed line height, which can vary, and settled on one centimeter between lines, based on my preference of letter size and the desire to avoid a cramped appearance between each line of text.

Other necessary materials include: ink and ink thinner; a large number of feathers (to practice cutting them, and to have a range of size and style); the various blades described above; a heavy-duty artist's eraser; a piece of plexiglass to use as a cutting surface for the quills; *gid* (cow sinew) used to sew together pieces of parchment; and a very small loupe to examine closely any instance of ambiguous need for correction.

The final, and most essential, item I needed was a *tikkun sofrim*. This booklet serves as a guide to how to go about writing specific texts. I acquired a *tikkun sofrim l'chamesh megillot*, containing a guide for the books of Esther, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, and Ecclesiastes. The *tikkun* produces the full text of each book and demonstrates to the scribe exactly which words to write on which line and in which column. An individual scribe's style may vary somewhat, but every copy of a particular

text is standardized in this way. Each page represents a column of the *megillah* (or in the case of a 42-line scroll, half a column).

The text is not vocalized or marked with *te'amim*, since it is not used for reading, but does indicate the beginning and end of chapters. The most useful aspect of the *tikkun* is in its spacing instructions. The text is set digitally and does not account for the necessary squeezing and stretching of words and letters in order to write a fully justified column. To compensate for this, there are notations in the margin that indicate if a line contains extra units of measure or fewer. **[figure 8]** This is indicated by two letters in the right-hand margin of each line. “תש” stands for *shurah* (or *shitah*) *tamah*, a perfect line. If there are fewer units, it will show the letter ת, for *haser* (lacking), followed by another letter to indicate exactly how many units of measure the line is missing. This helps the *sofer/et* figure out how much stretching may be necessary. If there are extra units, it will show the letter ש, for *yeter* (excess), indicating how much the *sofer/et* may need to squeeze the writing on that line.

The process of acquiring these materials was more complicated than I had expected, given that I was in Jerusalem, a city full of specialty stores and many practitioners of the craft. The complications were twofold: first, the places I would go to find these items are in Ultra-Orthodox communities that are characterized by intense gender separation;<sup>12</sup> second, I was not confident in my ability to select high-quality *klaf*. Despite these challenges, I was very excited to acquire everything I needed to start the

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<sup>12</sup> In the Ultra-Orthodox Charedi world, sacred writing is the exclusive province of men. Although women are permitted by halakhah to scribe *megillot*, a woman engaging in *safrut sta"m* is frowned upon in this community.

project. Rabbi Laimon recommended a shop where he had previously sent female students and knew that I would not be harassed as a (clearly non-Charedi<sup>13</sup>) woman. With legs, arms, and torso fully covered in the July heat, I went to the shop.

As promised, the men at the shop were reasonably polite and somewhat helpful. They did not seem surprised to see me walk in, but did not offer guidance or advice to me, even though I had told them that I was embarking on my first writing project. In the end, I left without purchasing *klaf*, because, after touching dozens of sheets, I was not confident in my ability distinguish between the many quality pieces. I decided to take Rabbi Laimon up on his offer to purchase *klaf* for me at his favorite shop.<sup>14</sup> I checked a few items off my list, but was still in need of several others, so I made my way to the main shopping area of Ge'ulah. In all, I spent four hours visiting at least five stores and procured ink and thinner; scalpel and razor blades; a loupe; feathers; and a number of useful books.

I had a number of interesting encounters with the shopkeepers, whose responses to my presence and questions ranged from friendly and interested to confused to skeptical. No one was outwardly hostile, although one shopkeeper who didn't have what I need recommended another place, but told me not to expect those purveyors to be civil.

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<sup>13</sup> Although I was dressed appropriately with respect to the "modesty" standards of the neighborhood, I suspect it was quite obvious that I was not "one of them."

<sup>14</sup> The place Rabbi Laimon sent me to was not his regular shop. Although he is not secretive about the fact that he teaches women to scribe, he does not parade this information to the people he knows in the Charedi world. Rabbi Laimon does not judge individuals on the particulars of their Jewish observance, but the people who sell him supplies and buy his *tefillin* would surely not approve of women writing. Knowledge of his teaching could damage his reputation in the Charedi community, so he protects his livelihood by sending his female students elsewhere.

I was not able to test this warning, however, because the store had already closed. In the shop where I purchased feathers and a few other tools, the shopkeeper was very polite, but did seem confused, saying, “*banot lo kotvot* — girls don’t write.” I politely responded, “In my world, they do.”

In search of the *tikkun sofrim*, I went to one of the largest bookstores in Mea Shearim. It took several tries for the purveyor to understand what I was asking about. After he showed me to the *tikkun kor'im* section — books that instruct a person in chanting Torah — I tried again. I explained that I was well acquainted with *tikkunei kor'im* and that I am an avid Torah reader. I described the *tikkun sofrim* in detail and the English-speaking employee relented, saying, “You seem like you know what you’re talking about.” I responded politely, “I do.” And thus ended my adventure in Haredi Jerusalem. Rabbi Laimon graciously agreed to procure the supplies I couldn’t find and to select high quality *klaf* on my behalf.

Our final session together before my return to the U.S. emphasized broader aspects of the endeavor I was about to undertake. We worked on spacing between letters and words, sewing pieces of *klaf* together with *gid*, and I learned the appropriate *kavvanah* to recite before writing. With all my materials, and successful completion of the alphabet, Rabbi Laimon sent me off, expressing confidence in my ability to write a beautiful *megillah* of *Shir Ha-Shirim*.



### III. Beginning the Project

This final meeting took place on July 30, and I departed Israel on August 2. With very little time to settle in before the start of school, I did not begin the *megillah* right away. In fact, I did not start writing *Shir Ha-Shirim* on my *klaf* until November 2 — a full two months after getting Rabbi Laimon's "go-ahead" and all my materials. The major factor in the delay was not time (although I was quite busy in those two months), but confidence. My quill was not idle during that time, but I was very nervous about setting quill and ink to the *klaf* for fear of messing it up. I spent weeks practicing on scraps of parchment, working on my greatest challenge in *safrut*: spacing.

Spacing has proved to be the most difficult aspect of writing for me. I have excellent fine motor skills and well developed spatial awareness, but I have never had to combine the two in such an intense and intensive context as *safrut sta"m*. As with all things, this has improved with practice, but I am still overly cautious about saving enough space as I write so that I don't have to squeeze the last few words in. This sometimes results in lines with more stretched letters than is strictly ideal. Another difficult aspect of spacing is that it is completely discretionary.

The principle of spacing that Rabbi Laimon taught me is that there should be a maximum of three units between words and maximum of one unit between letters. Beyond that, each individual *sofer/et* must use their own judgment. As I mentioned in describing the *tikkun sofrim*, the *tikkun* specifies which words should appear on which

line and offers information as to how many units of space we must add or subtract, but it does not guide the user in applying this information.<sup>15</sup>

As I continue writing, it has become easier to space my lines appropriately, but this has not prevented me from occasionally being over-confident and having to squeeze a few words here or there. A useful tip that Rabbi Laimon offered was to draw a line in pencil down the middle of my column, and draw a line down the middle of the *tikkun* page, to aide me in spatial planning. Since there is no *halakhah* requiring *megillah* text to be written sequentially, he also suggested that, once I reach the middle of the line, that I write the last few words of the line before filling in the intermediate words. This has also been helpful in making sure that I space my lines appropriately.

Finally, Rabbi Laimon recommended that I start my *megillah* on my second page of *klaf*. *Shir Ha-Shirim* contains eight columns of text, and I procured two pieces of *klaf* with four columns each. The reason for doing this is simple: if I started with the second half of the *megillah*, my writing would be that much better by the time I got to the beginning! Rabbi Laimon urged me not to wait for perfection, but to use the project as practice. I received the same advice from Leana Jelen, another (more advanced) student of Rabbi Laimon's, who has also played a critical role in my project.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The *tikkun*, produced digitally, has justified text on each line, leaving greater distance between words on some lines than others. This is not proper when writing — the space between letters and words should be consistent. It is for this reason that letters are sometimes stretched.

<sup>16</sup> Not coincidentally, Leana was the person who taught the *safrut* workshop at Limmud NY that I attended in February 2017. I have a vague recollection that I inquired about who taught her, and she gave me Rabbi Laimon's name. If I remember this correctly, then I really had him in mind as a potential teacher even before I decided to do the project.

Once I got past the spacing challenge enough to feel ready to start, I made an appointment to immerse in a *mikveh*. The purpose of my immersion was to mark the moment of transition from preparing to write to actually engaging in the sacred endeavor.<sup>17</sup> With this final step of preparation, I was finally ready to begin writing my *megillah*. I picked up the quill I had already decided to use and realized that it was not the right size, so I set about cutting a new quill, following Rabbi Laimon's instructions. I cut quill after quill with increasing frustration, because I was not getting the results I hoped for and needed in order to begin the project. After three hours of labor, a floor covered in feather fragments, and no usable quills, I knew I needed help. Fortunately, Leana was in New York, and Rabbi Laimon encouraged me to contact her.

Soon after, Leana and I were in touch and she graciously offered some tips on how to improve my quill-making techniques. It was difficult to communicate exactly what my challenges were, so Leana invited me to come to her home and work on this together. Thanks to her generosity and patience, I left that evening with several usable quills and greater confidence in my quill-cutting and my writing. After that, there was no reason to wait. I began writing my *megillah* on November 2.

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<sup>17</sup> Soferet Julie Seltzer describes the purpose of mikveh immersion before writing as an act of "spiritual elevation." Video: "Interview with Scribe Julie Seltzer," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a5Brbqngnrc>.

## IV. Transformative Learnings from Relevant Texts

The excerpts discussed in this section can be found in Appendix 2.

### A. *Mishnah Berurah*, *siman* 36, “צורת אות בי”ת”

Written by Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (1838–1933, Poland), known as the *Chofetz Chayim*. The *Mishnah Berurah* is a vast and comprehensive halakhic work written in Rabbinic Hebrew, and — in contrast to the *Shulchan Arukh* — clear and accessible to readers seeking a practical guide to *halakhah*.<sup>18</sup>

In this text, the fundamental rule of determining whether an ambiguous letter can stand or not is presented with elegant clarity. When forming the letter *beit*, one must be “exceedingly careful in forming the square, lest it appear as a *kaf*. If it looks like a *kaf*, it is invalid. And if there is doubt, it should be shown to a child.”

This is a distillation of a discussion found in *B. Menachot* 29b that treats the question of a scribal ambiguity between the letters *vav* and *yud*. On this point, the Gemara concludes: “זיל אייתי ינוקא דלא חכים ולא טפש — go and show it to a young child who is neither wise nor simple.” If the child reads the word in question correctly, it is *kasher* (fit); if incorrectly, it is *pasul* (invalid). In practical terms, I don’t have such a young person around who is both available at a moment’s notice or who has the necessary skill, but this principle has nonetheless guided my writing. If, at the moment of

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<sup>18</sup> Dr. Alyssa Gray course: “Post-Talmudic Halakhic Literature” — class notes 12/5/2016.

forming a letter, I question its fitness, I do not move on before I am satisfied that the ambiguity has been mitigated.<sup>19</sup>

A more challenging principle — for me, at least — follows in a subsequent paragraph: “If the upper corner of the *beit* is rounded and the bottom is squared, צריך עיון — it must be investigated, ואין להקל — and one must not be lenient. ... צריך לכתחלה. it must meet the ideal standard.”

This refers to the halakhic concept that a mitzvah can be fulfilled *lekhatchila*—to the highest standard— or *bedi ‘avad*— not the ideal, but usually enough to be kosher.<sup>20</sup> In *safrut sta"m*, the accepted way of writing is *lekhatchila*, but at the beginning of my lessons, Rabbi Laimon would examine my practice and instead of evaluating the letters against the highest standard, he would simply identify them as kosher.

My father, Rabbi Arnie Gluck, taught me that the principle of *bedi ‘avad ulekhatchila* is an essential bridge between *halakhah* and reality that acknowledges human frailty while leaving space to grow. In his words, it prevents a situation in which either a person breaks the law, or the law breaks them. By establishing this spectrum, *bedi ‘avad ulekhatchila* transforms the fulfillment of mitzvot from a heavy burden into an aspirational endeavor.

The difficulty posed by the *Mishnah Berurah* here is that it explicitly states that one must *not* be lenient and that it must be *lekhatchila* or nothing. In other words, the highest standard becomes the *only* acceptable standard, while the minimum/aspirational

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<sup>19</sup> This approach may not always be economical in terms of time, but it puts my mind at ease, which has been invaluable in this project.

<sup>20</sup> See *B. Hullin* 27a and commentary for a discussion of the subject. The chapter raises the question of intention in performing a *mitzvah*.

is no longer an option. When I began writing, I held myself to what Rabbi Laimon considered to be unnecessarily high standards. I have since settled into a routine of aiming for the highest standard of beauty in my letters but not berating myself when I don't achieve it. For me, my father's interpretation rings true: when I do write a letter that reaches a high standard of beauty, I celebrate it, and it offers really wonderful motivation.

**B. *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef* — *Hakdamah*, דף ג ע"ב-ג**

Ya'akov Yosef of Polonnoye (d. ca. 1782) was a disciple of the Ba'al Shem Tov (BeSHT), founder of the Chasidic movement. His first book, *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*, contains the BeSHT's teachings, as well as Ya'akov Yosef's own sermonic writings, and is considered the first written work of Chasidic thought.<sup>21</sup>

In the introduction to *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*, the author cites a passage from the Zohar (*Bereshit* — Vol. I, 56a) stating that the world was created by way of the letters of the Torah. Ya'akov Yosef continues:

“Each person of Israel has *devekut* [communion with the Divine] through one letter of the Torah. As our sages said (*Zohar Chadash* 71a): the letters of YiSRaEL stand for ‘There are 600,000 letters of Torah’ and from this particular letter is the root of his soul.”

He writes that the letters themselves are vessels for the soul, as clothing is for the body, and that the soul within the letters is *koach ha-mechaber* — the connective power between God and Israel — that which is so pure it cannot be examined.

Ya'akov Yosef's point is that the greatness of existence is a matter not for

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<sup>21</sup> *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd edition, vol. 11, “Jacob Joseph ben Zevi Ha-Kohen Katz of Polonnoye.”

intellectual investigation, but one of <sup>22</sup>אִימָה, יִרְאָה, רִתּוּת, וְזִיעַ — awe, fear, trembling, and quaking. In other words, the Divine is not to *know*, but to *experience* and to *revere*. Ya‘akov Yosef goes on to explain that giving this *koah ha-mehaber* a name from among the Holy Names is impossible, because it is the generative source of all worlds — the light of *Ein Sof*, the Infinite One from whose hand are the united and connected the four letters of the Name הו"י.<sup>23</sup>

Awe, fear, trembling, and quaking is exactly what I felt when I first wrote the four-letter Name. Studying this text at the very beginning of my *safrut* studies has shaped my approach to and experience of writing the letters. The hidden nature of God is Ya‘akov Yosef’s ultimate focus, but the letters are an essential part of his mystical theology. His assertion that the letters of Torah are the ultimate building blocks of the existence and that the soul of each Jew — כל אחד — is rooted within a particular letter of Torah is part of the spiritual backbone to my study of writing. This belief imbues the writing of sacred text

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<sup>22</sup>*Berakhot* 22a quotes a *baraita* teaching that God’s Torah was received at Sinai באימה ביראה ברִתּוּת ובזיע and that all Torah study should be received in this way. *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* 6:1 instructs students not to sit on a couch, a chair, or a cushion while learning, but to sit before their teacher on the ground, ביראה באימה עליו יקבלהו — because every word that comes from his mouth should be received by them with awe, fear, trembling, and shaking. *Shulhan Arukh Orach Chayim* 61:1 states “יקרא” ק”ש בכוונה באימה וביראה ברִתּוּת וזיע — One should recite *Shema* with intention, awe, fear, trembling, and shaking.” Other references to this quartet can be found in *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 4:6, which describes heavenly beings standing before God’s Throne of Glory; *B. Yoma* 4b and *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* 1:1, which describe Moses transmitting God’s Torah at Sinai; and the Torah commentary of Nachmanides, where, in the first sentence of his introduction to Genesis, he states that he writes this new interpretation of the Torah in the name of the Great and Awe-Inspiring God, באימה ביראה ברִתּוּת ובזיע.

<sup>23</sup> Here, the four letters of the Tetragrammaton, *yud-hei-vav-hei*, spelling the true, unpronounceable name of God, are reordered as *hei-vav-yud-hei*, spelling *havayah* — existence. This formulation is favored by Renewal Judaism and similar communities.

with the highest of mystical-spiritual endeavors — connection with the Divine. I also find a profound egalitarian message here: every single Jew has a letter of Torah that is theirs and in which their soul is rooted. This is a wonderful teaching to share in educational settings like *b'not/b'nai mitzvah* preparation and community Torah-writing projects. Most importantly, Ya'akov Yosef's writing confirms my belief that Torah belongs to every Jew (see Part VI).

### ***C. Eitz Chayim, sha'ar 5 (Sha'ar TaNTA), Chapter 1***

Chayim ben Yosef Vital was one of the great kabbalists of the 16th–early 17th centuries. He was born in Eretz Yisrael, studied the Kabbalah of Moshe Cordovero, and later became a disciple of Isaac Luria. It was Vital who committed to writing the teachings of Lurianic Kabbalah and became the primary (but not only) transmitter of Luria's teachings, with his own additions. The magnum opus of this effort is *Eitz Chayim*. The section discussed here is called *Sha'ar TaNTA*,<sup>24</sup> and treats the subject of written language — letters, vowels, and tropes.<sup>25</sup>

In the opening of chapter one, Vital describes *komat ha-adam*, the stature, or fullness, of humanity<sup>26</sup> as incorporating each of the four aspects that are contained within *atzilut* (emanation) and, indeed, all four worlds of Lurianic Kabbalah.<sup>27</sup> He presents four

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<sup>24</sup> “TaNTA” — a Hebrew acronym, **טנתא**, for *t'amim*, *n'kudot*, *tagim*, *v'otiyot* — tropes, vowels, *tagim* (ornamental strokes and crowns), and letters.

<sup>25</sup> *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd edition, vol. 20, “Vital, Hayyim ben Joseph.”

<sup>26</sup> Rabbi Laimon explains this term as the “spiritual blueprint for the human form.”

<sup>27</sup> Gershom Scholem's explanation of the four worlds of Lurianic Kabbalah in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 272: “(1) *Atsiluth*, the world of emanation and of the divinity...; (2) *Beriah*, the world of creation, i.e. of the Throne, the *Merkabah* and the highest angels; (3) *Yetsirah*, the world of formation, the chief domain of the angels; and (4) *Asiyah*, the world of making (and not, as some translators would have it, action).”



ways of spelling out the four-letter Divine Name in long form<sup>28</sup> that correspond to the four worlds: 72 (ע"ב) corresponding to *atzilut*; 63 (ס"ג) corresponding to *beriah*; 45 (מ"ה) corresponding to *yetzirah*; 52 (נ"ב) corresponding to *'asiah*. In the chapter three of *Sha'ar TaNTA*, Vital adds that all of the worlds were created by way of the 22 letters, representing 22 elemental spiritual realities.

This text enhances the Zoharic notion that the letters are vehicles of connection to God, and emphasizes the sanctity of Hebrew writing. It was very exciting to read this and continue developing my understanding of this aspect of mystical wisdom as I learned to write. In addition to showing how creative one can be with the letters of the *alef-beit* and what they can represent, learning the variations of the Divine Name and their derivations explained a longstanding curiosity. As I mention in Section V (p. 32, p. 36), my love of Kabbalat Shabbat liturgy has played an important role in the development of this project. I have long been drawn to the Kabbalistic *piyyut* “Ana B’khoach” (recited before *Lekha Dodi*), and eventually gained an understanding of the meaning and purpose of the text.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Based in the variations of spelling out the letters. For example, *hei* is spelled in three ways in this text: ה"א; then ה"י; and finally ה"ה. Each of these has a different numerical value when each letter is added. The first spelling totals 6, the second, 15, the third, 10.

<sup>29</sup> A mystical, poetic meditation on a 42-letter name, in the form of an expanded acrostic. It is sometimes presented with the acrostic side-by-side with the text (see below). The rubric ends with פְּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד — the statement of faith after an utterance the Divine Name, originally on Yom Kippur in the Holy of Holies by the High Priest.

אב"ג ית"ץ	אָנָּא בְּכַח גְּדֻלַּת יְמִינְךָ. תַּתִּיר צְרוּרָה
קר"ע שט"ן	קִבֵּל רֶחֶם עֲמֶךָ. שְׁגִבְנוּ טְהוֹרָנוּ נוֹרָא:
נג"ד יכ"ש	נָא גְבוּר. דּוֹרְשֵׁי יְחוּדְךָ. כְּבִבְתָּ שְׁמֶרֶם:
בט"ר צת"ג	בְּרַכֶּם טְהוֹרֶם. רַחֲמֵי צְדָקָתְךָ. תַּמִּיד גְּמִלֶם:
חק"ב טנ"ע	חֲסִין קְדוּשׁ. בְּרוּב טוֹבְךָ. נִהַל עֲדָתְךָ:
יג"ל פז"ק	יְחִיד גָּאֵה. לְעַמְּךָ פִּנְה. זֹכְרֵי קְדוּשָׁתְךָ:
שק"ו צי"ת	שׁוֹעֲתָנוּ קִבֵּל. וְשִׁמְעַ עֲצָקָתָנוּ. יוֹדַע תַּעֲלָמוֹת:

Learning that it was an expansion of a 42-letter name of God helped expand my liturgical vocabulary, but I still didn't understand why it was 42 letters, and how it came to be. Reading Vital's text finally answered this question in a clearer and more satisfactory way than modern academic writing has. Vital's concise elucidation really speaks for itself, and going to the source is always better, in my mind, than relying on intermediary sources.

#### **D. *Sefer Yetzirah***

The provenance of this mystical work are unknown, but it is considered to be of ancient origin (although “ancient” certainly covers a vast amount of time). *B. Sanhedrin* mentions a work called *Sefer Yetzirah*,<sup>30</sup> but it is not known if the work we know today by this name is the same one discussed in the Talmud. It can be definitively dated to no later than the 10th century,<sup>31</sup> and a manuscript found in the Cairo *genizah* is tentatively dated to the 11th century.<sup>32</sup> The content of the book is a unique imagining of *ma'aseh bereshit* (Creation) with a late-antique Pythagorean influence.<sup>33</sup>

*Sefer Yetzirah* begins with a lengthy invocation of God, using ten distinct monikers: “יה יהוה צבאות אלהי ישראל אלהים חיים ומלך עולם אל שדי רחום וחנון רם ונשא שוכן עד” —Yah Adonai of Hosts, God of Israel, Living God, Ruler of the Universe, God on High, Merciful and Gracious, Exalted and Uplifted, Abiding Forever, Whose

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<sup>30</sup> *B. Sanhedrin* 65b: “רב חנינא ורב אושעיא הוו יתבי כל מעלי שבתא ועסקי בספר יצירה.” — Rav Chanina and Rav Oshaya would sit every Shabbat eve and engage in [study of] *Sefer Yetzirah*.”

<sup>31</sup> Saadia Gaon (d. 942 CE) wrote a translation and commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah*.

<sup>32</sup> *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd edition, vol. 21, “Yezirah, Sefer.”

<sup>33</sup> *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd edition, vol. 11, “KABBALAH — The Historical Development of the Kabbalah — Jewish Gnosis and the *Sefer Yezirah*: The *Sefer Yezirah*,” pp. 595–596.

Name is Holy.” It goes on to describe the “thirty-two marvelous paths of wisdom” that God used to create the world — the ten *sefirot* and the twenty-two letters by three means: בספר וספר וספור — *b’seifer u-s’far v’sippur*.

These three words each derive from the same root, ס-פ-ר, and are differentiated by their vocalization. *Sefer*, writing; *sfar*, counting; *sippur*, speaking. This is the same root of the word *sefirah*, counting. Later mystics, starting with the circle of Yitzchak Sagi Nahor<sup>34</sup> in the 13th century, have read the kabbalistic *sefirot* into this text, but this is an anachronism since *Sefer Yetzirah* makes no mention of what we now know as the *sefirot*.

The second *mishnah* delves deeper into these elements, describing the ten *sefirot* as elements of “nothingness” and designating subcategories of the 22 “foundation” letters: “Three mothers, seven doubles and twelve elementals.” The first category comprises *alef*, *mem*, and *shin*, representing *Avir* (air), *Mayim* (water), and *eiSH* (fire).<sup>35</sup> The “doubles” are the “*begeg kedet*” letters<sup>36</sup> that are doubled at the beginning of words and syllables, plus the letter *reish*, while the “elemental,” or simple, letters are the rest of the alphabet, totaling twenty-two.<sup>37</sup>

This text is most likely the inspiration for each of the texts already mentioned in this paper that see the letters of the Hebrew alphabet as the mystical building blocks of existence. Although *Sefer Yetzirah* greatly predates Chayim Vital and Ya‘akov Yosef, my study of this text after those two helped me understand the thematic integration of all

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<sup>34</sup> Also known as Isaac the Blind, thought of as the father of Kabbalah. (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd edition, vol. 10, “Isaac the Blind”).

<sup>35</sup> Saadia Gaon’s commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah*.

<sup>36</sup> *Beit*, *gimmel*, *dalet*, *kaf*, *pei*, *tav*.

<sup>37</sup> Class notes from Dr. Sharon Koren’s survey of Jewish mysticism, November 13, 2017.

three approaches. Vital's *Eitz Chayim* approaches the letters from a numerical stance, using the value of letters to create new interpretive possibilities. *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef* speaks of God's *koach ha-mechaber*, the force that joins —*mechaber*— elements together in order to create. This joining can refer to writing or speaking, since both endeavors require letters to combine and form words. *Sefer Yetzirah* upholds the three modes of communication — writing, counting, and speaking — as joined together to serve God's creative efforts.

More than anything, this underscores the notion that words create worlds, and that they may take many forms to do their work. By beginning with an invocation of God's many sacred names, *Sefer Yetzirah* ties this aphorism to the divine work of Creation, but it also opens the door to humankind as God's partner in this work. After all, do we human beings not write, speak, and count, too? I love this text for this reason, and because it doesn't explicate its ideas in too much detail. *Sefer Yetzirah* leaves room for mystery, which, as Ya'akov Yosef rightly demonstrates (pp. 19–21), is essential to an attitude of reverence to the unknowable — and unnameable — God.

#### **E. *Bavli Menachot* 29a–30b<sup>38</sup>**

Chapter 3 of *Menachot*, the second *masseket* in *Seder Kodashim*, deals with grain offerings brought to the Temple, and also discusses types of sacrifices that come in specific sets, such as the four species of the *lulav* on *Sukkot* and the seven sprinklings of red heifer's blood on the altar. The *mishnah* that opens the *sugya* examined here, and, following the number seven, rules that the seven-branch *menorah* is invalid if even a

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<sup>38</sup> See Appendix 2

single branch is missing. The *mishnah* continues by stating that the absence or invalidity of any one *parashah* of text in the *mezuzah* invalidates the entire *mezuzah*. The Gemara follows this statement with several pages of discussion of many and varied issues related to *safrut sta"m*.

The *sugya* opens with a declaration: “Two passages in the *mezuzah* — [if] one [is missing, it] prevents [fulfillment of the *mitzvah* with] the other, and even one [missing] letter prevent it.” The Gemara declares this *pshita!* (simple!), and Rashi’s comment shows agreement. He adds “וכתבתם — כתיבה תמה” referring to the commandment in Deuteronomy 6:9, “Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” Rashi reinterprets the word *uchtavtam* (“and you shall write them”) as two words: *uchtav tam* (“and perfect writing”), meaning that the writing must be complete. This problem seems easily resolved, but the Bavli is only at the beginning of its inquiry.

The major concern here is the correct form of the letters, beginning with *kotzah shel yud*, the small stroke of the letter *yud*. According to Rav Yehudah, *kotzah shel yud* is the only element of text the absence of which invalidates a passage. The Gemara moves on from *yud*, but the commentaries recognize (as did I), that this does not provide sufficient clarity for a scribe. Rashi states that the *kotz*<sup>39</sup> is the righthand “leg” of the *yud*. Tosafot acknowledge this conclusion, but disagree on the grounds that obviously the missing “leg” *ein zeh ot* — is not a letter! They then quote Rabbeinu Tam,<sup>40</sup> who explains

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<sup>39</sup> Alternately called *oketz* instead of *kotz* in some sources, but the meaning is the same.

<sup>40</sup> Rabbi Jacob ben Meir (1100–1171), called Rabbeinu Tam — a prominent French Tosafist and grandson of Rashi. (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd edition, vol. 19: “Tam, Jacob ben Meir (Rabbenu).”

that the *kotz* is the bent head of the letter. His ruling has been so influential that the *kotz* is colloquially known as *kotz shel Rabbeinu Tam*.<sup>41</sup>

Having already learned the letters by the time I encountered this text, I was aware that I had to form *yud* with a small “thorn” of ink running straight down from the bottom left corner of the body of the letter. **[figure 9]** Rabbi Laimon taught me that this is a fundamental element of the letter, even though the requirement stems from the relatively late 12th century. The fundamental reason for this, as expressed in various halakhic texts<sup>42</sup> is to prevent a *yud* from being mistaken for any other letter. The section on *yud* in *Keset HaSofer*<sup>43</sup> warns: the *kotz* must not be too long, lest it be mistaken for a small *chet*; the *regel* should not be too long lest it be mistaken for a *reish* or *vav*.<sup>44</sup> The *Mishnah Berurah*’s summary of *yud* includes a similar warning to keep the *tag* on the top left corner small, lest the letter be mistaken for a small *lamed*.<sup>45</sup>

This section is meant to deal with the contents of the Talmud section at hand, but, as my personal narrative makes clear, the Gemara leaves a lot of questions unanswered for those searching for concrete instructions on how to write. Searching subsequent halakhic guides is an absolute necessity in some cases.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> [www.stamforum.com/2012/02/kotz-rabenu-tam.html](http://www.stamforum.com/2012/02/kotz-rabenu-tam.html); <https://www.thesofercenter.com/what-you-should-know.html>, and others.

<sup>42</sup> *Mishnah Berurah*, *Sha‘arei Sofrim*, *Keset HaSofer*, etc.

<sup>43</sup> A 19th-century summary by Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried (*Kitzur Shulchan Arukh*) of extant halakhah on all topics related to writing and creation of sacred texts. The work incorporates the author’s original halakhic formulations on the same questions.

<sup>44</sup> *Keset Ha Sofer*, *siman* 5, paragraph on the letter *yud*.

<sup>45</sup> *Mishnah Berurah: Mishnat Sofrim*, *Tzurat Ot Yud*.

<sup>46</sup> As an aside, *kotz shel yud* is, in Modern Hebrew, a common idiom for trivial nitpicking. An apt expression indeed! From Hebrew Wikipedia: “הביטוי קוצו של יו”ד משמש: “לתיאור עיסוק בפרטי פרטים או הקפדה על פרטים קלי ערך לכאורה.” See also: <http://www.learnhebrew.org.il/print/2012/oct3.htm>. For a substantive cultural application

The *sugya* next addresses the need to have each letter surrounded by white space on all sides in order to be valid, then moves on to the question of *tocho shel hei*. Again, there is a question of what is meant by *tocho*. Is it the space between the roof of the letter and the short, separated “foot” on the bottom left? **[figure 10] (1)** Or is it the inner space between this “foot” and the right-hand “leg”? **(2)**

Since the forms of the letters have been expounded upon extensively since the time of the Talmud and many guides for scribes exist, the question need not be answered here. The real takeaway from this section of Gemara (and others like it) is the dialectic — what do the rabbis of the Talmud consider simple, what do they argue, what is concluded, and what is left unresolved? Which rulings have remained to this day, and which have become obsolete in light of later halakhic works? These are the questions that arise from reading Talmudic sources on *safrut*, and that, whether answerable or not, have made for lively and interesting *limmud*.

This *sugya* also contains rich *aggadah*, including the famous story of Moses visiting the *beit midrash* of Rabbi Akiva. Following the halakhic questions about the form of the letter *hei* is a passage that offers beautiful spiritual teaching. It begins with a question from Rabbi Yehudah Nesiah: “What does it mean, ‘*bitchu bAdonai adei ad ki b’Yah Adonai tzur olamim*’ (Isaiah 26:4)?”<sup>47</sup> The real question is why the verse says *b’Yah* and not, simply, *Yah*. The Gemara answers:

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of the idiom, see: Judah Leib Gordon’s famous poem “Kotzo shel yud,” which uses the phrase to criticize limitation of women’s rights. This is described on p. 14 of Carole Balin’s *To Reveal Our Hearts: Jewish Women Writers in Tsarist Russia* (Hebrew Union College Press, 2003).

<sup>47</sup> “Trust in Adonai for ever and ever, for in Yah Adonai is everlasting strength.”

“There were two worlds [this world and the world to come] created by the Holy Blessed One: *אחד בה"י ואחד ביו"ד* — one with the letter *hei* and one with the letter *yud*. And I do not know which world was created by which letter.”

Referring to the verse, “These are the accounts of the heavens and the earth in their creation,” (Genesis 2:4a), the text continues, “Don’t read *b’hibar-am* [their creation]; instead, read ***b’hei** b’ra-am* [with the letter *hei*, God created them].”

The Gemara then asks why this world was created with *hei*, and the answer goes back to the shape of the letter. The reason is because *hei* appears like an *exhedra* — a Greco-Roman architectural element featuring a semicircular recess — open at one side so that “all who wish to leave may leave.” And why, the Gemara asks, is there a space between the leg and the roof (on the left side)? So that a person who has done *teshuvah* can return through the opening and not the same one from which they left.

Like the lesson of the height of the *keter* (p. 41), this discussion turns the letters into spiritual vehicles. In this case, *hei* becomes a symbol of the power of *teshuvah* — the open side teaches that a person can always return from wrongdoing; the new entry point teaches that a *ba’al/at teshuvah* has undergone transformation, no longer treading the same path.

There follows a lengthy discussion on the particulars of correcting a Sefer Torah, culminating in an important teaching on the commandment to write. The *mitzvah* that every Jew must write their own Torah scroll is derived from the instruction in Deuteronomy 31:19, “*kitvu lakhem et ha-shirah hazot* — write for yourselves this song/poem.” In *B. Sanhedrin* 21b, Rava cites the verse as a proof



text for this statement: *af al pi she-heinichu lo avoteinu l'adam sefer torah, mitzvah **likhtov mishelo*** — even if a person's ancestors have bequeathed a Torah scroll, it is commanded *that he write one himself*.

Regarding a person who has written their own Torah scroll, *Menachot* 30a continues: “it is as if they have received it on Mount Sinai,” i.e. directly from God. As a *soferet*-in-training, this is a profound statement on the work of a scribe. The sacred nature of this writing is something I have already tasted (p. 40), but this is a different level of experience entirely — that writing a Sefer Torah is essentially the same as receiving the Torah directly from God, as Moses did on Sinai. Talk about the power of writing! But the rabbis seem aware that this is a daunting task and not everyone will have the ability or resources to complete such a project. And so, the Gemara continues with an even more powerful statement: “If a person corrects even a single letter . . . it is as if they have written the Sefer Torah.” The first statement speaks to me as a nascent *soferet*, but the second is essential to me as a teacher. I want every Jew to connect with Torah, regardless of their ability or means. By including this amendment, the rabbis make it possible for every Jew to fulfill the *mitzvah*. I hope to use my *safrut* learning to help others access this possibility and have their own “Sinai” experience.

## V. Writing and Relating to *Shir Ha-Shirim*

When I submitted my proposal for this project in February 2018, I had determined to produce some sort of discrete written text, but had not yet settled on what it would be. Suggestions included either a *klaf* for *mezuzah* or a poetic excerpt from Tanakh, such as *Shirat Ha-Yam*.<sup>48</sup> I busied myself with planning the logistical aspects of the project, with a sense that the right text would present itself to me at the right time. This turned out to be true to such an extent that I don't even recall deciding to write *Shir Ha-Shirim* — I simply knew that I would. The choice of *Shir Ha-Shirim* felt so obvious — so clear and spiritually aligned — that I believe the text chose me more than I chose the text.

The poetry of *Shir Ha-Shirim* has spoken to me for a long time, even when I didn't have a true grasp of it as a complete work. I had been familiar with certain prominent verses that were part of liturgy or had made their way into popular Jewish songs with which I grew up. As my Hebrew continued to improve and my religious practice developed further,<sup>49</sup> I became more aware of and more attuned to the poetic possibilities of Hebrew and really grew to love it.

During my fourth year at HUC–JIR, I took a yearlong course in Jewish mysticism with Dr. Sharon Koren. I already had a penchant for the mystical, but this course opened

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<sup>48</sup> Exodus 15:1–18. A poetic interlude following the parting of the Sea of Reeds.

<sup>49</sup> As an undergraduate, I became well acquainted with the ritual and text of Kabbalat Shabbat, and was deeply drawn to the poetry of the Psalms. In my junior year of college I studied abroad in Jerusalem and regularly attended Kabbalat Shabbat services at Kehillat Shira Chadasha. This is when I really began to internalize the Psalms of Shabbat and when my latent Hebrew (I was born in Israel and was bilingual in my earliest years) was reactivated and reinvigorated.

wide for me the many worlds of Jewish mysticism in a much deeper way. Taking this course during the year of planning my thesis capstone contributed immensely to my thinking about the project. The reason that *Shir Ha-Shirim* felt like such a natural choice is clear: the book holds a high place in the mystical imagination, from tannaitic times when Rabbi Akiva called *Shir Ha-Shirim* the “Holy of Holies” of all sacred writing (*M. Yadayim* 3:5), to the 13th-century Zohar, which opens with the quote, “כְּשׁוֹשְׁנָה בֵּין הַחֹרְחִים” —like a lily among the thorns” (*Shir Ha-Shirim* 2:2).

Dr. Koren’s course exposed me to many varieties of Jewish mysticism, and I was pleasantly surprised to discover that language, writing, and letters have a very large role in the Jewish mystical imagination. In our very first class we discussed the outsize importance of words and language as hearkening back to the very beginning — *Bereshit* itself. Creation was brought about with words. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים — God spoke — and water, land, light, and life came into being.

In studying *I Enoch*, we read about Enoch as a “scribe of righteousness” and discussed how a scribe functions as transmitter of knowledge and tradition, becoming a figure of trust. When we studied the Qumran community, we learned about the importance of scribes and writing for their spiritual worldview.<sup>50</sup> We explored the world of magic in the rabbinic imagination and the appearance of formulaic adjurations on magical amulets in Palestine and magic bowls in Babylonia.<sup>51</sup> In *Heikhalot* and *Merkavah*

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<sup>50</sup> My class notes from September 11, 2017.

<sup>51</sup> Class notes, October 9, 2017.

Mysticism, too, the use of speech — adjurations, formulae, names of heavenly beings — is essential to that literature's quest for direct access to the Divine.<sup>52</sup>

We learned of Philo of Alexandria's neo-platonic notion that God's goodness flows to the world through *logos* — the divine word — and how this idea greatly informed both late-antique rabbinic traditions about Metatron<sup>53</sup> as well as early Christian writings, such as the Gospel of John, which begins: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," (John 1:1). We went on to *Sefer Yetzirah*, the first text we looked at that specifically discussed letters, in this case as the "miraculous ways of wisdom with which God uses language to create the world."<sup>54</sup>

Our study of Chasidei Ashkenaz<sup>55</sup> introduced me to *Sefer Ha-Shem* and *Sefer Gematriah*,<sup>56</sup> and we discussed the early kabbalistic connection of the ten *sefirot* as ten attributes of God in parallel to the Ten Utterances at Sinai, i.e. the Ten Commandments.<sup>57</sup> The question of the ineffable — God's true name — picks up energy in this time (early 13th century) and reaches a peak with Abraham Abulafia, whose mystical meditations

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<sup>52</sup> Class notes, October 23, 2017.

<sup>53</sup> An angelic figure who appears in Enoch, the Babylonian Talmud (*Hagiga* 15a, *Sanhedrin* 38b, *Avodah Zarah* 3b), and figures heavily in Heikhalot literature/Merkavah mysticism. In the mystical imagination, Metatron occupies an intermediary position between the high angels and God. (*Encyclopaedia Judaica* 2nd ed., vol. 14, "Metatron.")

<sup>54</sup> Class notes, November 6, 2017.

<sup>55</sup> A pietistic movement with mystical persuasions that emerged in the Rhineland in the 12th century. (*Encyclopaedia Judaica* 2nd ed., vol. 8, "Hasidei Ashkenaz.")

<sup>56</sup> These texts are examples of the Chasidei Ashkenaz community's focus on the esoteric nature of God's "unity and incorporeality" and on sanctification of God's name as the highest form of reverence to the Divine (*ibid.*).

<sup>57</sup> Class notes, January 22, 2018.

were very inspiring to me as I began this project.<sup>58</sup> Abulafia was born in 1240 in Spain, and traveled widely around the Mediterranean, as a student and then teacher of Maimonides's esoteric *Guide for the Perplexed* and of Kabbalah (especially *Sefer Yetzirah*, to which he wrote three commentaries).<sup>59</sup> Abulafia's unique legacy is his ecstatic language mysticism, "Kabbalah of the Divine Names," in which he attempted to commune with God through creative use of language and letters in three categories — *gematria*, *notarikon*, and *temurah*<sup>60</sup> — to reveal new wisdom in the letters and words of sacred text. In Dr. Sharon Koren's words, he sought to use the letters as numbers to create completely new worlds.<sup>61</sup> At an early stage of my thesis planning, I even contemplated adopting Abulafia's personal meditation practice of *tzeiruf* — combining infinite permutations of the Hebrew letters in order to induce a different state of consciousness leading to knowledge of the Divine<sup>62</sup> — but felt that it would be too

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<sup>58</sup> Another connection to *Shir Ha-Shirim*: Abulafia's 1289 commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah* titled *Gan Na'ul* ("Locked Garden"), after *Shir Ha-Shirim* 4:12 "גן נעול אחתי כלה גל נעול" — A locked garden is my mate, my bride; a locked fountain, a sealed spring."

<sup>59</sup> Aryeh Kaplan, *Meditation and Kabbalah* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), p. 63.

<sup>60</sup> *Gematria* is the use of the numerical values of letters, often for interpretive purposes. These values can be manipulated in various ways, using various and sometimes multiple applications of arithmetic in order to form connections and draw midrashic conclusions. *Notarikon* is the interpretation of acronyms for the same purpose. A prime example is the interpretation of יהוה באלים מי כמוכה מכבי as a code for acronym, drawing thematic connections between the redemption from Egypt and the Hasmonean Revolt against the Seleucid kingdom in the 2nd century BCE. *Temurah* is the practice of creating ciphers with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet and using those ciphers to reinterpret written text. A notable example is called ATBaSH and involves switching *alef* with *tav*, *beit* with *shin* and so on and so forth until the middle two letters of the alphabet are switched. (Class notes, January 29, 2018.

<sup>61</sup> Class notes, January 29, 2018.

<sup>62</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (Schocken, 1995), p. 133.

difficult, at this stage, to translate the experience of the esoteric into comprehensible academic analysis.

Study of these mystical works and movements contributed immensely to my excitement about the topic at hand. I recognized early on that I could not incorporate all of it into this capstone project (not even close!) but each element of this learning provided its own inspiration and together created a supportive fabric for my particular interest in the mystical components of scribal work. I have been able to do in-depth study of only a few texts, but this material provides a great deal of intellectual and spiritual motivation for my work.

### **Integrating the text into my writing practice**

I have used various approaches to integrating the text of *Shir Ha-Shirim* into my practice of writing the *megillah*. As I wrote, I kept beside me a copy of Rabbi Shefa Gold's *In the Fever of Love: An Illumination of the Song of Songs*, and frequently referred not only to the beautiful translation, but also to Rabbi Gold's interpretive expansions. This book was recommended to me by Dr. Melila Hellner-Eshed, because she (correctly) believed it would enhance my integrative spiritual experience of writing. As an expansion of my regular pre-Shabbat practice of listening to an extensive playlist of Kabbalat Shabbat liturgical music, I incorporated contemporary musical settings<sup>63</sup> of

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<sup>63</sup> Nava Tehila's music has been particularly influential. Their songs, *Hinei Zeh Ba* (4:15, 2:8, *Mi Zot Olah* (3:6, 2:8, 8:3), *Libi Er* (5:2, 5:8), *K'Shoshana* (2:2–3), and *Mayim Rabim* (8:7), have all helped me get closer to the text, and have been useful in creating a certain spiritual ambience when I sit down to work on the *megillah*.

*Shir Ha-Shirim* into my writing practice, which was very helpful in putting me into the “world” of the text as I transmitted it to the parchment.

The most significant mode of integration in this endeavor has been learning to chant *Shir Ha-Shirim*. In the 2018 fall semester, I undertook an independent study with Cantor Benjie Ellen Schiller and learned the Ashkenazi cantillation used for the three festivals — *Shir Ha-Shirim* at Pesach, *Ruth* on Shavuot, and *Kohelet* during Sukkot. As an avid Torah and Haftarah chanter, I was happy to add another system to my repertoire, but the true purpose of this was to get the text of *Shir Ha-Shirim* under my skin, and this proved very effective.

Learning to chant the words helped me understand the text in a deeper way. In one instance, it even informed an artistic choice in my writing. *Shir Ha-Shirim* contains a notable instance of two consecutive words with the *zakef gadol* trope (which sound quite distinctive and dramatic in *Shir Ha-Shirim* trope). The sparse use of *zakef gadol* in this text, combined with the fairly unusual instance of two in a row, serves as an emphasis of significant and emotion-laden text. In this case, it was chapter 8, verse 6: “רשפיה רשפי אש — שלהבתיה — [love’s] sparks are a raging fire of Divine flame.”<sup>64</sup> This affecting use of music to accentuate already very strong language inspired me to add a visual element to make these words stand out in my *megillah*. Each of these four words contains the letter *shin*, which is crowned by three lines ending in a dot of ink on the top. Instead of doing rounded dots of ink on the crowns of these four letters, I used a fine quill I had cut for smaller writing, and shaped the tops of the crowns to resemble flames [figure 11].

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<sup>64</sup> My own translation, based on Shefa Gold (op. cit.) and Ariel and Chana Bloch (*The Song of Songs: A New Translation*).

The trope also gave me a sense of the character of the text. The musical mode of this trope is one of longing, of melodic push and pull, of cadences resolved and unresolved. The mood created by this trope does not just complement the words, it translates them. By chanting even the melody of the trope without the text, I internalized the emotional content of *Shir Ha-Shirim*. I believe that by *hearing* this melody, a person who does not understand the Hebrew could still grasp the mood of the book.

With this last thought in mind, I am resolved to continue the life of this *megillah* beyond its submission for this capstone project. I want to use the scroll that I have written, along with the chanting skills I have acquired, and share both with my community. Plans for this are in the works at Temple Beth-El in Hillsborough, NJ, the synagogue in which I grew up, and I hope to share with the HUC–JIR New York community as well.



## VI. Goals of the Project

### A “whole-person” project

This project is more than a capstone to me — it is much more than a means to fulfilling a requirement. Studying *safrut*, scribing the *megillah*, and writing this paper have been profoundly integrative endeavors. I have engaged my senses, my intellect, and my spiritual being. I have found diverse ways to share this work, and have many ideas about how else I can carry forward and further develop this learning.

The sensory aspects of this project abound. Learning to be a scribe is really a series of tactile experiences. Becoming familiar with the grain of *klaf* is essential to successful writing; getting to know the feel of a feather and its different parts makes it possible to cut them into useful instruments; sensing the viscosity of the ink determines how easily it will write. Writing is obviously a visual medium, but one with surprisingly varied form. I am not only attuned to the form of the letters, but also the shape of the quill, the gloss and thickness of the ink when it dries, and the empty space between letters, words, lines, and chapters — the white fire *and* the black fire.<sup>65</sup>

The *klaf* and the ink have distinctive smells. When I handle the parchment for an extended period, I can smell it on my hands. When I wash the ink from its jars, a waft of

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<sup>65</sup> From *Midrash Tanchuma, Bereshit, siman 1:1*, עַל גְּפִי אֵשׁ לְבָנָה, וְהַתּוֹרָה בְּמָה הָיְתָה כְּתוּבָה? — How was the Torah written? With black fire on white fire, as it is written: “His locks are curled and black as a raven,” (*Shir Ha-Shirim* 5:11).

iron reaches my nose. This process does not involve tasting anything (thank goodness!), but the text of *Shir Ha-Shirim* vividly evokes this sense:

נֹפֶת תִּטְפֹּנָה שְׁפֹתֶיךָ כֶּלֶה דְּבַשׁ וְחֵלֶב תַּחַת לְשׁוֹנְךָ Your lips, my bride, drip honey;  
honey and milk are under your tongue (4:11)

יָבֹא דּוֹדִי לְגִנּוֹ וַיֹּאכַל פְּרִי מִגִּדְּיוֹ Let my lover come into his garden and taste its  
luscious fruit (4:16)

אָכַלְתִּי יַעֲרִי עִם־דְּבַשׁ שְׁתִּיתִי יַיִן עִם־חֲלָבִי אָכַלוּ רֵעִים שְׁתוּ וְשָׁכְרוּ דּוֹדִים I have eaten  
from my honeycomb, I have drunk my wine and my milk. Feast, dear  
friends — drink until you are drunk with love! (5:1)

My auditory senses are engaged by the scratching of the quill and the humming and scraping of my tools,<sup>66</sup> and I have chanted my way through the verses as I work on the *megillah*. My writing brings to mind melodies, and melodies bring to mind writing.

The sensory aspect of the project is knitted closely to my spiritual experience. Using natural materials and substances to do this sacred writing feels organic and holistic — connected on a deep, cellular level. Thinking deeply about the materials — turkey feather quills, iron gall ink, and calfskin parchment — I marvel at how much life goes into one scroll, and how the gifts of nature combine with human ingenuity to create something physically durable and spiritually enduring.

The writing itself creates a sense of awe and wonder, too. Having spent the previous year studying the mystical traditions of writing and language with Dr. Sharon Koren, I was excitedly anticipating the spiritual experience of writing — but nothing could have prepared me for the actual feeling. The first time I scribed God's *shem ha-meforash*,<sup>67</sup> I had a visceral, intensely physical reaction: my heart was beating heavily,

<sup>66</sup> Various scalpels and an electric eraser.

<sup>67</sup> An epithet for the four-letter Name, *yud-hei-vav-hei*, meaning “the explicated Name.”

my chest tightened, my body temperature rose. Doing something so sacred as committing the Divine name to writing with ink on *klaf* was the closest I have come to a true experience of *yir'ah* — that inexplicable combination of fear, wonder, excitement, anxiety, and thrill.

### **Sharing my learning and creating spiritual connections**

I have sought to share this sense of awe, wonder, and connectedness by bringing my writing and learning to others. The first moment that it presented itself was in planning a service for HUC–JIR NY’s annual beginning-of-the-year kallah. My *tefillah* group had decided to use Nava Tehila’s melody for Psalm 16:8, “שׁוֹיִתִּי ה' לִנְגְדִי תָמִיד — I set Adonai before me at all times.” It happened that I and another member of the group had been on an HUC–JIR trip to Georgia and Azerbaijan in June, right before I traveled to Israel. Visiting the synagogues and Jewish community spaces in these two countries, I noticed this text everywhere. It serves as the running head of every page of the *siddurim* and each space had a Kabbalistic *shivviti* page<sup>68</sup> on the sanctuary wall. At the time, I was intrigued and made note of it.

When our group reconvened in early August, we had already decided to use the melody, and I presented my idea to the group: I would create a *daf tefillah* (prayer sheet) for the service that used the design of the Kabbalistic *shivviti* page as inspiration, but containing the texts we would use in our service. The group loved the idea, and I set

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<sup>68</sup>Votive plaques in synagogues featuring the *shivviti* text, which became prominent in the 18th and 19th centuries. “Most of them were profusely decorated in shapes and colors. The most common motifs of decoration were the seven-branched *menorah* of the Temple....” (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd edition, vol. 18, “Shivviti.”)

about creating it. Using my newfound mastery of the letters, I created with pencil and ink a customized *daf tefillah* [figure 12], as well as a large poster with the *shivviti* text as part of an interactive prayer activity.

The second opportunity came soon after. On Rosh HaShanah I delivered a sermon about allowing compassion to prevail over judgment and it felt quite natural to include a teaching that I learned during my lessons with Rabbi Laimon. Below is an excerpt from the sermon:

According to our tradition, *din* and *rachamim*, judgment and compassion, exist in balance with each other. There must be equal measures of the two qualities, or the world cannot be sustained. But there are voices in our tradition, the Kabbalists especially, who looked at the world and saw that achieving a balance was insufficient. They felt that an equal measure of *din* and *rachamim* was damaging the world — that there was a need for an extra measure of compassion and love.

So, they sought to tip the balance. Some of the ways in which they did this might seem overly subtle, but even seemingly small acts can serve as a reminder to us to do the work.

My favorite example of this is one I learned this summer in Jerusalem, where I was studying with a *sofer*, a master scribe of Torah scrolls and other sacred texts. Certain letters of the *alef-beit* have crowns on them, which looks like three vertical lines emanating from the top of the letter. My teacher told me: “If you want to be kabbalistic, you can make the right side, which stands for *chesed*, love, slightly taller than the left side, which represents *din*, judgment.”

And so I learned to make the crowns of the letters higher on the right side than on the left.<sup>69</sup> Writing this way may not actually heal the world, but every time I form a *keter* on a letter, I think about allowing love and compassion to prevail over judgment, and I try to emulate the ink.

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<sup>69</sup> [figure 4]

It was a joy to share an aspect of my *safrut* learning that moved me deeply and has had a lasting influence. I have internalized the lesson that Rabbi Laimon taught me about the crowns, and it turns up in many contexts that I would not have predicted. It reinforces my belief that our intentions do matter, because they shape how we operate in the world. The Kabbalistic notion that the upper and lower realms are connected, and that what we do on earth affects the Divine, has never felt more real to me since I absorbed this learning.

The sermon was well received, and it was this section that congregants and readers most appreciated, especially the phrase, “emulate the ink.” I was energized by the positive reactions because it demonstrated that people are receptive to these ideas — that the wisdom gained from studying the letters was not arcane or obscure, but intriguing and inspiring. I sensed a great opportunity to make accessible aspects of our tradition that have been distant to Reform Jews — something that has become a very high priority for my rabbinate — and have gone forward from that moment seeking to use my *safrut* learning to do just that.

By choosing *Shir Ha-Shirim* as my writing project, I have created such an opportunity at Temple Beth-El in Hillsborough. My home synagogue has been very supportive of my efforts as a student rabbi, and very open to my ideas, including a Pesach ritual that will incorporate my *megillah* of *Shir Ha-Shirim*. It has not been the community’s practice to do a public reading of *Shir Ha-Shirim*, so by selecting this text and incorporating chanting into my project, we will be able to create new connections to an ancient ritual. I see the benefit to this as threefold: one, the community will start to get to know a less familiar text; two, it will engage in an aspect of Jewish practice that has

been previously untapped; three, it may inspire further exploration into other unplumbed depths of tradition.

Indeed, these three outcomes have been in my mind since the start of this project. There's no question that I took on this learning for personal reasons, but I also want to make a contribution — if this project can help open the door even slightly to those seeking their own place in Judaism, I will be proud. I am not the first Reform Jew to become a scribe, nor am I the first woman. I stand on the shoulders of many brave, bold, and resourceful individuals whose stories are still not widely shared.

This project has been an important Jewish journey for me. Learning to write and creating my *megillah* has allowed me to integrate so much of myself into one endeavor. I have found a corner of the Jewish world that makes use of and *celebrates* who I am and what I can do, and expands both. My rabbinic vision is to accompany others on their own path to discovering this for themselves.

I am not suggesting that everyone should do what I am doing, or that *safrut* will be inspiring to every person. I *am* suggesting that there are many aspects of our tradition that have not been available to Reform Jews, but can still have great meaning for us. In the past decades, Reform Jews have shown greater interest in ritual and tradition than they did in the first half of the 20th century. More and more Reform Jews wear *tallitot*, while *tefillin* are gradually becoming more visible in our movement.

The opportunities for this type of engagement are many: the tools to chant Torah and Haftarah are widely available and an opportunity for individuals interested in music to connect it with their Judaism. Artists and synagogues run workshops to help

*b'nei/b'not mitzvah* students and adults create their own *tallitot* and some even tie their own *tzitziyot*. A small, but growing number of progressive Jews are training as *mohalim* and *mohalot* and others are learning to *shecht* kosher meat. Women are taking the reins of ritual practices forbidden them in the Orthodox world and thereby empowering others to pursue interests that have been elusive at best, and exclusionary at worst.

By engaging in these pursuits and taking ownership of these kinds of traditional practices, Reform Jews disprove claims against the authenticity of our movement.

Affixing a *mezuzah* to the door of one's house is one of the practices that Reform Judaism explicitly values — it is often the case that even Jews who do very little by way of Jewish practice have at least one *mezuzah* in their home. Yet how often do we think about where the scroll comes from, who made it, and who *can*? Making our own sacred objects means that we do not have to turn to the Orthodox when we want to express our need or desire for Jewish ritual.

Not everyone can, or will want to train as a *sofer/et*, a *shochet/et*, or a *mohel/et*, or the like — and not everyone needs to. But the more we bring these stories to light and share them with each other, the more accessible these avenues become. By demystifying practices that have been obscured or placed out of reach, we can foster a vibrant Judaism, rooted in tradition and branching upward and outward so every Jew may find a place that comforts, challenges, and offers meaning.

## Appendix 1: Illustrations

Figure 1

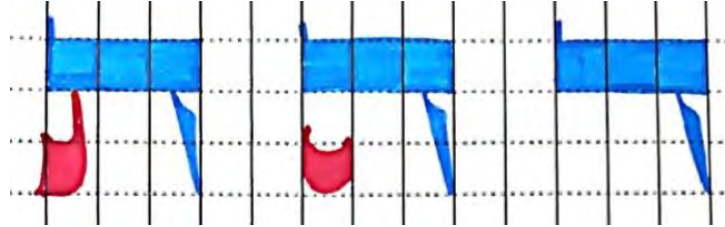


Figure 2

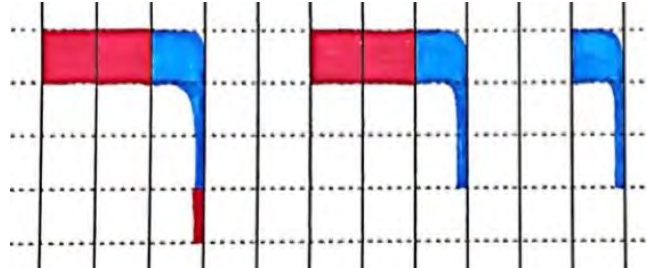


Figure 3

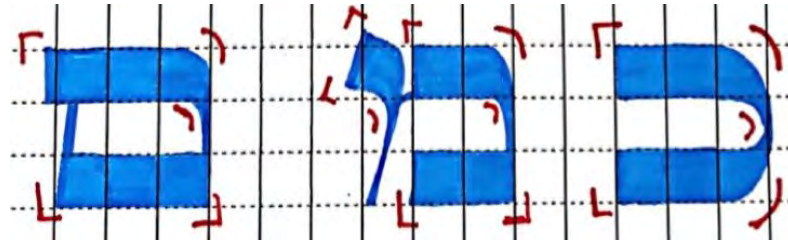




Figure 4

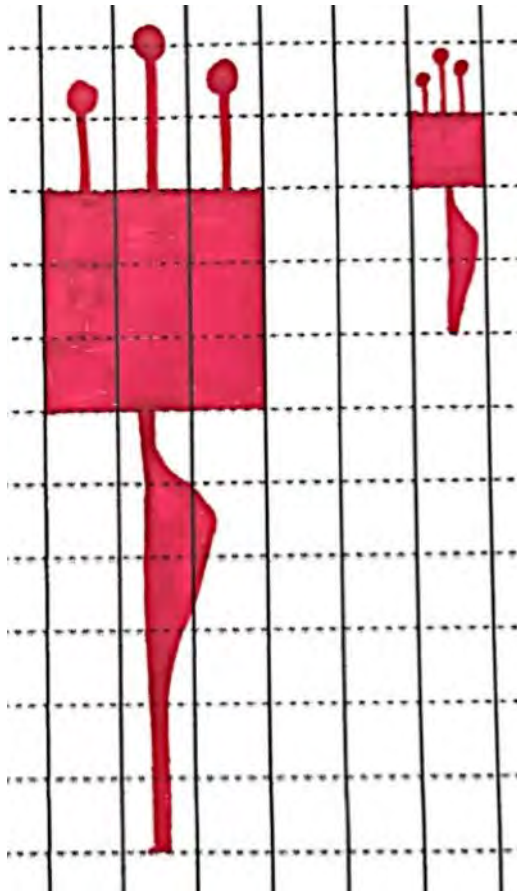


Figure 5

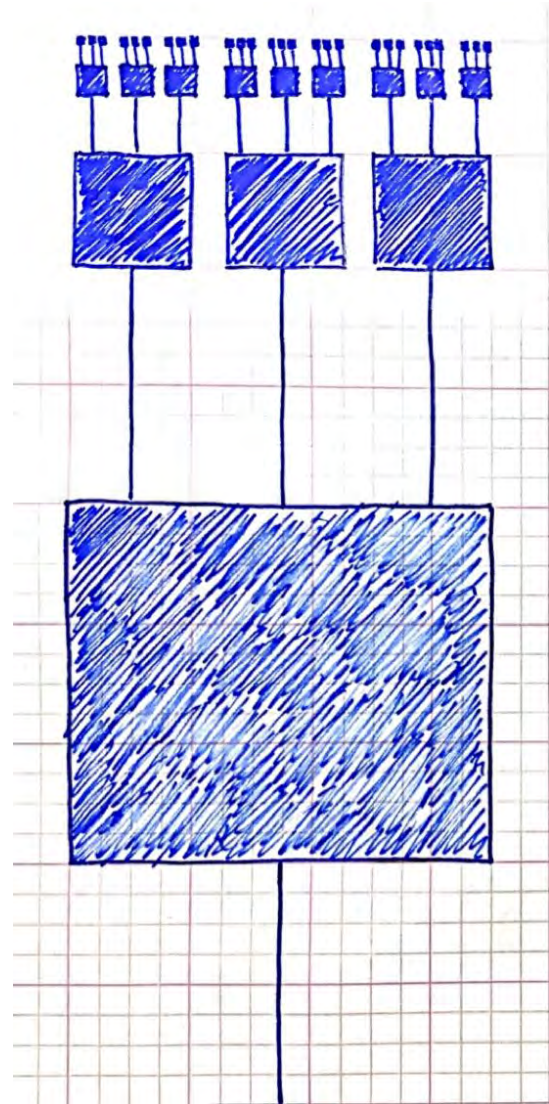


Figure 6

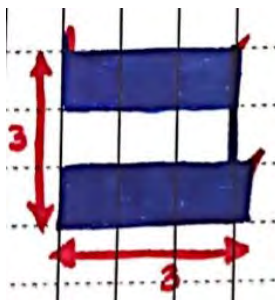


Figure 7

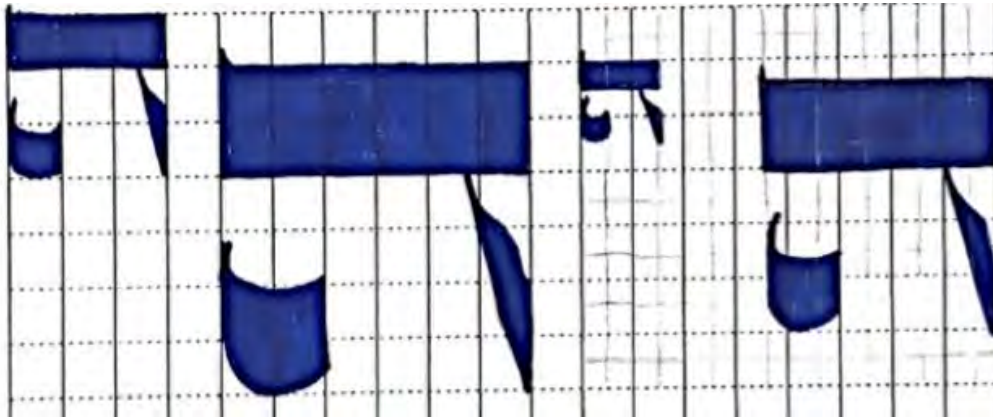


Figure 8

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 א  
 22 חז הַחֲזוֹזִים כֵּן רָעִיתִי בֵּין הַבָּנוֹת כְּתֻפוֹז בַּעֲצֵי  
 23 חא הִיעָר כֵּן דּוּדֵי בֵּין הַבָּנוֹת בַּעֲלוֹ חֲמַדְתִּי וַיִּשְׁבַּתִּי  
 24 חד וּפְרִי מִתּוֹק לֶחֶזְכִּי הִבִּיאֲנִי אֶל בֵּית הַיֵּין וְדָגְלוֹ  
 25 שת עָלַי אֶהְבֶּה סִמְכוֹנִי בְּאִשִּׁישׁוֹת רַפְדּוֹנִי בְּתֻפוֹזִים  
 26 חח כִּי חֹולֶת אֶהְבֶּה אֲנִי שְׂמֹאלוֹ תִּחַזֵּת לְרֹאשִׁי  
 27 חג וַיִּמְנֶנּוּ תִּחְבֶּקֶנִי הַשְּׁבַעֲתִי אֶתְכֶם בָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם  
 28 חו בַּצִּבְאוֹת אוֹ בְּאִילוֹת הַשָּׂדֶה אִם תַּעֲרִוּ וְאִם  
 29 חו תַּעֲרִיר אֶת הָאֶהְבֶּה עַד שְׁתִּחַפֵּץ קוֹל דּוּדֵי  
 30 שת הִנֵּה זֶה בָּא מִדֹּלֶגַּעַל הַהָרִים מִקֶּפֶץ עַל הַגְּבֻעוֹת  
 31 חו דּוֹמֶה דּוּדֵי לַעֲבִי אוֹ לַעֲפָר הָאִילִים הִנֵּה זֶה

Figure 9

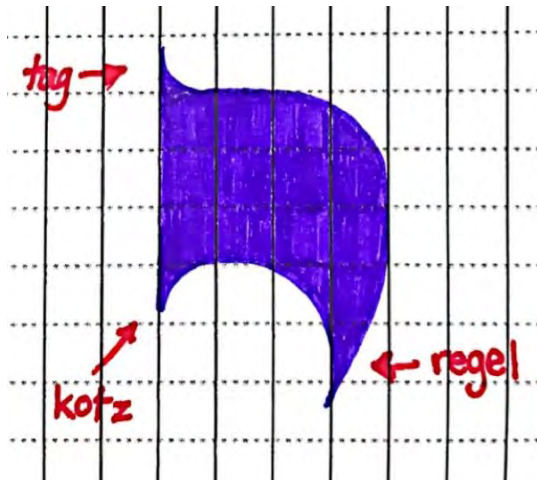


Figure 10

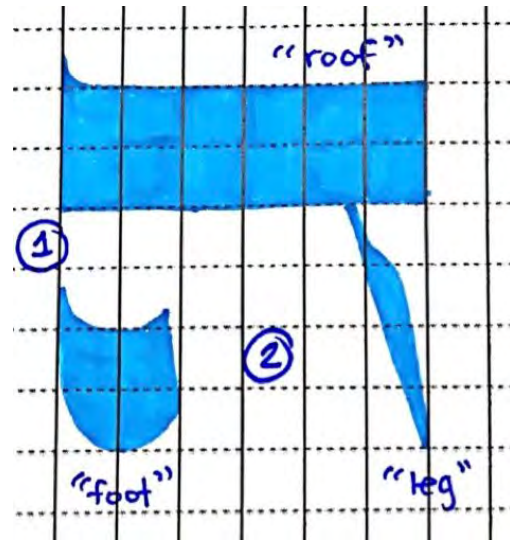


Figure 11

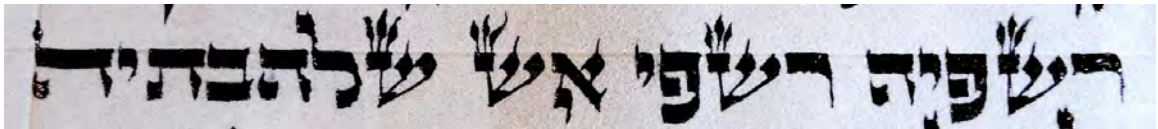


Figure 11, detail



Figure 12



Rabbi Lisa Grant, PhD · Shira Gluck · Alexandra Kurland · Zachary Plesent  
 TUESDAY, AUGUST 21, 2018 NEW YORK CAMPUS KALLAH י"א באבול תשע"ח

## Appendix 2: Texts

This section contains the relevant excerpts discussed in Section IV.

### A. *Mishnah Berurah: siman 36*, צורת אות ב"ת (Mishnat Sofrim)

#### אות ב"ת

- ❖ צריך מאד ליזהר בריבועה שלא תהא נראית ככ"ף אם נראית ככ"ף פסולה ואם ספק אזי מראין לתינוק.
- ❖ וצריכה להיות מרובעת בימין בין למעלה בין למטה
- ❖ ואם למעלה עגולה ולמטה מרובעת צ"ע בזה ואין להקל
- ❖ וצריך לכתחלה שיהא לה בראשה מצד שמאל על פניה תג קטן תמונתו כמו מקל ועוקץ קטן למעלה בצד ימין נוטה לצד האל"ף [כדאמרין בירושלמי דחגיגה מפני מה יש לב' שני עוקצים אחד למעלה ואחד לאחוריו אומרים לבי"ת מי בראך מראה להם בעוקצו שלמעלה ומה שמו מראה להם בעוקצו שמאחוריה לצד האל"ף ר"ל אחד שמו]
- ❖ גם יהיה לה עקב עב למטה כי תמונתה כמו דלי"ת תוך גרון של וא"ו
- ❖ ע"כ צריך להיות לה זוית למעלה שיהיה כדלי"ת ועקב טוב למטה שיהיה במקום ראשה של וא"ו
- ❖ וטוב שאורך ורוחב הבי"ת יהיה כג' קולמוסים
- ❖ ורוחב חללה כעובי קולמוס
- ❖ ואם קיצר הבי"ת עד שנראה כנו"ן כפופה לתינוק דלא חכים ולא טיפש נראה דיש להחמיר בזה עיין לקמן בדין אות נו"ן כפופה ובב"י בא"ב שני אות וא"ו אח"כ מצאתי כן בהדיא בפמ"ג בפתיחה ע"ש שכ' דבתו"מ לא מהני בזה תיקון להמשיכו כמו בי"ת משום שלא כסדרן.

### B. *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef: Hakdamah*, דף ג ע"ב-ג

....העולה מדברו כי קדושת שבת הוא קיום כל העולמות כמו נשמה בגוף. ולהבינך ענין זה איך הוא חיות וקיום העולמות ע"י קדושת שבת. נ"ל דכת' בזוהר בראשית דף נ"ו אר"י בכל דרא ודרא הוי עלמא גפיף באתוון ולא מתיישבין בדוכתי' עד דאתייהב אורייתא לישראל אז אתתקן כולא וכו'. ויש להבין הא גם בריאת העולם הי' ע"י אותיות התורה כמ"ש בש"ס דברכו' יודע הי' בצלאל לצרף אותיות שנברא בהם שמים וארץ וכו' וא"כ למה לא נתיישבו עד מתן תורה לישראל. ואומר באימה וביראה כי נודע מעלת

אומה ישראלית ששורש נשמתן דבוק למעלה בסוד יעקב חבל נחלתו כי כל א' מישראל יש לו דביקי באות א' מהתורה כמ"ש חז"ל ר"ת ישראל"ל י"ש ש"שים ר"בוא א"ותיו"ל"תורה ומשם שורש נשמתו והנה האותיות עצמן הם כלים כמו לבוש וגוף אל הנשמה שבתוכו והנשמה שבתוך האותיו"ל הוא כח המחבר והוא אור צח ומצוחצח אשר לא הורשנו להתבונן בו כלל ועיקר רק דעת אותו אמונת אומן ברוב מציאותו באימה וביראה ברתת ובזיע אשר לרוב העלמו לא יצדיק בו שם משמות הקדושים כי הוא עילת כל העולמות והוא אור א"ס אשר על ידו נעשה יחוד וחיבור ד' אותיות שם הוי' וכל האותיות שנצטרפו ונתחברו לתיבות הוא ע"י אור א"ס המייחדן ומחברן....

### **C. Eitz Chayim, sha'ar 5 (Sha'ar TaNTA), Chapter 1**

ונבאר עתה עניינם דע כי אין מציאות ציור קומת אדם בעולם שלא היה בו כללות ד' בחי' אשר כוללים כל האצילות וכל העולמות כולם ואלו הם ע"ב כזה יו"ד ה"י וי"ו ה"י. ס"ג יו"ד ה"י וא"ו ה"י. מ"ה יו"ד ה"א וא"ו ה"א. ב"ן יו"ד ה"ה ו"ו ה"ה. והנה אלו הד' הוי"ו"ת הנחלקים לד' מלואין האלו הם ד' בחי' אלו הטעמים שם ע"ב. הנקודות שם ס"ג. התגין שם מ"ה. האותיות שם ב"ן. וכל אחד מאלו הד' הוי"ו"ת כלול מכולם ויש בכל הוי"ה מהם בחי' טנת"א....

### **D. Sefer Yetzirah, Chapter 1**

**1** בשלשים ושתים נתיבות פליאות חכמה חקק יה יהוה צבאות אלהי ישראל אלהים חיים ומלך עולם אל שדי רחום וחנון רם ונשא שוכן עד וקדוש שמו מרום וקדוש הוא וברא את עולמו בשלשה ספרים בספר וספר וספור:  
**2** עשר ספירות בלי מה ועשרים ושתים אותיות יסוד שלש אמות ושבע כפולות ושתים עשרה פשוטות:

### **E. Bavli Menachot 29a–30b**

שתי פרשיות שבמזוזה מעכבות זו את זו ואפילו כתב אחד מעכבן: פשיטא אמר רב יהודה אמר רב לא נצרכה אלא לקוצה של יוד והא נמי פשיטא אלא לכאידיך דרב יהודה אמר רב דאמר רב יהודה אמר רב כל אות שאין גויל מוקף לה מארבע רוחותיה פסולה אמר אשיאן בר נדבך משמיה דרב יהודה ניקב תוכו של ה"י כשר יריכו פסול א"ר זירא לדידי מפרשה לי מיניה דרב הונא ורבי יעקב אמר לדידי מפרשה לי מיניה דרב יהודה ניקב תוכו של ה"י כשר יריכו אם נשתייר בו כשיעור אות קטנה כשר ואם לאו פסול אגרא חמוה דר' אבא



### דף כט ע"ב

איפסיקא ליה כרעא דה"י דהעם בניקבא אתא לקמיה דר' אבא א"ל אם משתייר בו כשיעור אות קטנה כשר ואם לאו פסול: ראמי בר תמרי דהוא חמוה דרמי בר דיקולי איפסיקא ליה כרעא דוי"ו דויהרג בניקבא אתא לקמיה דרבי זירא א"ל זיל אייתי ינוקא דלא חכים ולא טפש אי קרי ליה ויהרג כשר אי לא יהרג הוא ופסול אמר רב יהודה אמר רב בשעה שעלה משה למרום מצאו להקב"ה שיושב וקושר כתרים לאותיות אמר לפניו רבש"ע מי מעכב על ידך אמר לו אדם אחד יש שעתידי להיות בסוף כמה דורות ועקיבא בן יוסף שמו שעתידי לדרוש על כל קוץ וקוץ תילין תילין של הלכות אמר לפניו רבש"ע הראהו לי אמר לו חזור לאחורך הלך וישב בסוף שמונה שורות ולא היה יודע מה הן אומרים תשש כחו כיון שהגיע לדבר אחד אמרו לו תלמידיו רבי מנין לך אמר להן הלכה למשה מסיני נתיישבה דעתו חזר ובא לפני הקב"ה אמר לפניו רבוננו של עולם יש לך אדם כזה ואתה נותן תורה ע"י אמר לו שתוק כך עלה במחשבה לפני אמר לפניו רבוננו של עולם הראיתני תורתו הראני שכרו אמר לו חזור [לאחורך] חזר לאחוריו ראה ששוקלין בשרו במקולין אמר לפניו רבש"ע זו תורה וזו שכרה א"ל שתוק כך עלה במחשבה לפני אמר רבא שבעה אותיות צריכות שלשה זיונין ואלו הן שעטנ"ז ג"ץ אמר רב אשי חזינא להו לספרי דווקני דבי רב דחטרי להו לגגיה דחי"ת ותלו ליה לכרעיה דה"י חטרי להו לגגיה דחי"ת כלומר חי הוא ברומו של עולם ותלו ליה לכרעיה דה"י כדבעא מיניה רבי יהודה נשיאה מר' אמי מאי דכתיב (ישעיהו כו, ד) בטחו ביי' עדי עד כי ביה יי' צור עולמים אמר ליה כל התולה בטחנו בהקב"ה הרי לו מחסה בעולם הזה ולעולם הבא אמר ליה אנא הכי קא קשיא לי מאי שנא דכתיב ביה ולא כתיב יה כדדרש ר' יהודה בר ר' אילעאי אלו שני עולמות שברא הקב"ה אחד בה"י ואחד ביו"ד ואיני יודע אם העולם הבא ביו"ד והעולם הזה בה"י אם העולם הזה ביו"ד והעולם הבא בה"י כשהוא אומר (בראשית ב, ד) אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם אל תקרי בהבראם אלא בה"י בראם [הוי אומר העולם הזה בה"י והעולם הבא ביו"ד] ומפני מה נברא העולם הזה בה"י מפני שדומה לאכסדרה שכל הרוצה לצאת יצא ומ"ט תליא כרעיה דאי הדר בתשובה מעיילי ליה וליעייל בהך לא מסתייעא מילתא כדריש לקיש דאמר ריש לקיש מאי דכתיב (משלי ג, לד) אם ללצים הוא יליץ ולענוים יתן חן בא לטהר מסייעין אותו בא לטמא פותחין לו ומ"ט אית ליה תאגא אמר הקב"ה אם חוזר [בו] אני קושר לו קשר מפני מה נברא העולם הבא ביו"ד מפני שצדיקים שבו מועטים ומפני מה כפוף ראשו מפני שצדיקים שבו כפוף ראשיהם מפני מעשיהן שאינן דומין זה לזה....

### דף ל' ע"א

.... וא"ר יהושע בר אבא אמר רב גידל אמר רב הלוקח ס"ת מן השוק כחוטף מצוה מן השוק כתבו מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו קיבלו מהר סיני אמר רב ששת אם הגיה אפי' אות אחת מעלה עליו כאילו כתבו.

### Appendix 3: The Megillah

מִלִּיר הַעֲיִירִים אֲשֶׁר לְשִׁלְמָה יִשְׁקָנִי מִגְשִׁיקוֹת  
 פִּיהוּ כִּי טוֹבִים דְּדִיר מִיֵּן לְרִיזוּ עֲמֻמָּךְ טוֹבִים  
 עֲמֻמָּ תוֹרֶק עֲמֻמָּ עַל כֵּן עֲלָמוֹת אֶהְיֶה מִשְׁכָּנִי  
 אֲחֲרִיק גְּרוּעָה הַנִּימָנִי הַמֶּלֶךְ הַדְּרוּי גְּלִילָה וְעֲשִׁמּוּזָה  
 בֶּךְ גְּזִכִּירָה דְּדִיר מִיֵּן מִיִּשְׁרָיִם אֶהְיֶה שְׁחֹזָרָה  
 אֲנִי וְנֶאֱוָה בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם כִּאֲהֲלִי קֶדֶר כִּירִיעוֹת  
 עֲלָמָה אֶל תִּרְאֲנִי עֲלָמִי עֲחֹרֶזֶת עֲשִׁיפְתָּנִי  
 הַעֲמֻמָּ בְּנִי אֲמִי גְּזֹרָה בִּי עֲמֻמָּי גְּטָרָה אֶת הַכְּרָמִים  
 כְּרָמִי עֲלִי לֹא גְּטָרָתִי הַגִּידָה לִּי שְׁאֶהְבָּה גְּפֻשִׁי  
 אִיכָּה תִרְעָה אִיכָּה תִרְבִּיעַ בְּעֶהְרִים עֲלָמָה  
 אֶהְיֶה כְּעֶשִׂיָּה עַל עֲדָרִי חֲבָרִיק אִם לֹא תִדְעִי  
 לֶךְ הִיפָּה בְּעֶשִׂים עֲלִי לֶךְ בְּעֶקְבֵּי הַנֶּאֱזָר וְרִעִי  
 אֶת גְּדִיחִיק עַל מִשְׁכָּנוֹת הָרָעִים לִסְסָדָנִי בִּרְכָבִי  
 פִּרְעָה דְּמִיחִיק רִעִיתִי גְּאֻוּ לְחִיִּיק בְּתוֹרִים עֲוָאֶרֶךְ  
 בּוֹזְרוֹתִים תוֹרִי וְהֵב גְּעֶשִׂה לֶךְ עִם גְּקָדוֹת הַכֶּסֶף  
 עֲדָה עֲהֶמֶלֶךְ בְּמִסְכּוֹ גְּרָדִי גְּדָתָן רִיזוּ עֲרָוֹר  
 הַמֶּר דוּדִי לִי בִּין עֲדִי יִלְוֶן אֲשֶׁכֶּל הַכֶּפֶר דוּדִי  
 לִי בְּכִרְמִי עֲיֵן גְּדִי הַגֶּר יִפָּה רִעִיתִי הַגֶּר יִפָּדֶה  
 עֲיֵצִיק יוֹצִים הַגֶּר יִפָּה דוּדִי אֶף גְּעִים אֶף עֲרָשָׁנוּ  
 רִעֲזָנָה קָרוֹת בְּתִינּוֹ אֲרָזִים רִחִיטָנוּ בְּרוּדִים אֲנִי  
 חֲבִלָּה הַעֲרוֹן עֲשִׁינָּה הַעֲמָקִים כְּשִׁינָּה בִּין



החוזזים כן רעיתי בין הבנות כדנפוזז בעצמי  
היער כן דודי בין הבנים בעלו חמדתי ויעבדתי  
ופריו מתוק לחכי הביאני אל בית היין ודגלו  
עלי אהבה סמיכתי באשיות רפדוני בתפוזים  
כי חולת אהבה אני שמאלו תחזת לראשי  
וימיני תחבקני תשבעתי אדנכם בצות ירושלם  
בשבאות או באילות העדה אם תעירו ואם  
תעוררו את האהבה עד שתחפץ קול דודי  
הנה זה בא מדלג על ההרים מקפץ על הגבעות  
דומה דודי לעבני או לעפר האילים הנה זה  
עומד אחר כתליו מעשיח מן החלפות מעיש מן  
החרכים ענה דודי ואמר לי קומי לך רעיתי  
יפתי ולכי לך כי הנה הסתו עבר הגשם חלף  
הלך לו הצעצעים צאו בארץ עת השמיר הגיע  
וקול התור נשמע בארצנו התאנה חטטה פגיה  
והגפנים סמדר גתנו ריחו קומי לבי רעיתי יפתי  
ולכי לך יוצתי בוצאי הסלע בסתר המדבר  
הראיתי את מראיך העמייעני את קולך כי קולך  
ערב ומראיך נאוו אחזו לנו עשרים עשרים  
קטנים מוזבלים כרמים וכרמינו סמדר דודי  
לי ואני לו הרעה בשושנים עד שיפוזז היום



וַתָּסוּ הַצִּלְלִים סב דמה כך דודי לַצִּבִּי אִו לַעֲפֹר  
 הַאֵילִים עַל הָרִי בָתֵּר  
 מֵעֹכָבִי בְּלִילֹת בִּקְשָׁתִי אֵת עֲאֶהְבֹּהָ לַפֶּעַי  
 בִּקְשָׁתִיו וְלֹא מִצָּאֵתִי אֶקְוִמָה לָּא וְאֶסֹבְבָה בְּעִיר  
 בַּעֲוֹקִים וּבְרֹחֲבוֹת אֶבְקֶשָׁה אֵת עֲאֶהְבֹּהָ לַפֶּעַי  
 בִּקְשָׁתִיו וְלֹא מִצָּאֵתִי מִצָּאֹנָי הַעֲמִירִים הַסַּבִּים  
 בְּעִיר אֵת עֲאֶהְבָה לַפֶּעַי רֵאִיתָם כִּמְעֵט עֲשֶׂבְרָתִי  
 מֵהֶם עַד עֲמִצָּאֵתִי אֵת עֲאֶהְבָה לַפֶּעַי אֲחַזֶּדְתִּי  
 וְלֹא אֶרְפָּצוּ עַד עֲהֶבִיאֵתִי אֵל בֵּית אֲמִי וְאֵל חֹדֶר  
 הַיֹּרֶתִי הַשֹּׁבַעֲתִי אֶתְכֶם בְּצֹת יִרְשָׁלַם בַּעֲבָאוֹת אִו  
 בְּאִילֹת הַעֲדָה אִם תַּעֲרִי וְאִם תַּעֲוֹרְרוּ אֵת הָאֶהְבָה  
 עַד עֶשֶׂת חֶפֶץ מִי לָאֵת עֲלָה מִן הַמַּדְבָּר כִּתְיִמְרוֹת  
 עֲשֹׁן מִקְטָרֶת מִר וּלְבוֹנָה מִכָּל אֶבֶקֶת רֹכֵל הַלָּזָה  
 מִשָּׁתוּ עֲלֵשְׁלִמָה עֲשִׁים גִּבְרִים סָבִיב לָהּ מִגִּבְרִי  
 יִשְׂרָאֵל כָּלִם אֲחַזֶּי חֹרֵב מִלְּמֹדִי מִלְּחֻמֹּדֹה אֵינִי  
 חֹרְבוּ עַל יִרְכּוֹ מִפְּחָד בְּלִילֹת אֶפְרַיִם עֲשֶׂה לֹו  
 הַמֶּלֶךְ עֲלִמָה מִעֲצֵי הַלְּבָנוֹן עֲמֹדִיו עֲשֶׂה כֶסֶף  
 רַפִּידָתוֹ זָהָב מִרְכָּבוֹ אֶרְגָּמָן תּוֹכוֹ רִצּוֹף אֶהְבָה  
 מִבְּצֹת יִרְשָׁלַם צֵאִלָה וְרֵאִלָה בְּצֹת צִיִּן בְּמִכְלָךְ  
 עֲלִמָה בַּעֲטָרָה עֲשֶׂטָרָה לֹו אֲמוֹ בַּיּוֹם חֲזַתְנָתוֹ  
 וּבַיּוֹם עֲמִזְזָת לָבוֹ הַגֶּר יִפְהֵר רַעֲיָתִי הַגֶּר יִפְהֵר עֲלִיָּקִיר



יוֹצִים מִבַּעַד לַצִּמְתָּךְ עֲשֶׂהְךָ כַּעֲדָר הָעֲזִים עֲלֵהְךָ  
 מִהָרָה גִּלְעָד עֲלֵיךָ כַּעֲדָר הַקְּצֻבוֹת עֲשֶׂהְךָ מִן  
 הָרֹחַ צֶה עֲכָלֶם מִתְאַיְמוֹת וְשִׁכְלֹת אֵיךְ בָּהֶם כִּזְזוֹת  
 הָעֲשִׂי עֲפֹתוֹתֶיךָ וּמִדְּבָרְךָ גֵּאוֹהַ כִּפְלִיחַ דָּוָר מוֹן  
 רִקְתָּךְ מִבַּעַד לַצִּמְתָּךְ כִּמְגֹדֶל דְּוִיחַ צוֹאֲרֶךְ בָּצִי  
 לַתְּלִפּוֹת אֶלֶף הַמִּגָּן תִּלְוִי עֲלֵיו כָּל עֲלֵשִׁי הַגְּבוּרִים  
 עֲשִׂי עֲלִידֶךָ כַּעֲשִׂי עֲפָרִים תְּאֻמִּי עֲבִידָה דָּוָר עֲשִׂים  
 בַּעֲשֵׂי עֲשִׂים עֲדָה עֲשִׂפּוֹחַ הַיּוֹם וְצִסּוֹ הַעֲלִילִים אֶכְלֶךָ  
 לִי אֶל הָרָה הַמּוֹר וְאֶל גִּבְעַת הַתְּלֻבֹּתָה כִּלְךָ יִפְדָּה  
 רַעֲיָתִי וּבִיּוֹם אֵיךְ בָּרַךְ אֶתִּי מִלְּבָצוֹן כִּלְךָ אֶתִּי מִלְּבָצוֹן  
 תְּבוֹאֵי תַעֲשִׂוִּרִי מִרְאֵשׁ אֲמִצָּה מִרְאֵשׁ עֲשִׂיר וְדָוָר מוֹן  
 מִבְּעֲצוֹת אֲרִיזָה מִהָרָרִי גְּמָרִים לִבְבֹתֶיךָ אֶחָדִי כִלְךָ  
 לִבְבֹתֶיךָ בִּאֶחָד מִעֲלֵיךָ בִּאֶחָד עֲנֶכָה מִלְּוֹרֶיךָ מוֹדָה  
 יִפּוֹ דִידֶךָ אֶחָדִי כִלְךָ מוֹדָה טָבוֹ דִידֶךָ מִיִּיךְ וְרִיזָה  
 עֲשִׂמֶיךָ מִכָּל בְּשָׁמִים גִּפְתָּ תִטְפֹּלָה עֲפֹתוֹתֶיךָ כִלְךָ  
 דְּבַעֲךָ וְחִלְבִּי תוֹחַת לְשׁוֹנְךָ וְרִיזָה עֲלִמְדֶיךָ כִּרְיִיזָה  
 לִבְצוֹן גִּלְךָ גִּלְךָ אֶחָדִי כִלְךָ אֶל גִּלְךָ מִעֵיךְ דִּזְתוֹם  
 עֲלִיזִיךָ פִּרְדָּס רְמוֹצִים עִם פִּרִי בִגְדִים כִּפְרִים  
 עִם צִרְדִים צִרְדִים וְכִרְכָּם קִצָּה וְקִצָּמוֹן עִם כִּלְךָ עֲשִׂי  
 לְבוֹשָׁה מִרְאֵה לְבוֹשָׁה עִם כִּלְךָ רִאֲשִׁי בְּשָׁמִים מִעֵיךְ  
 גִּלְךָ בִּאֶר מִיָּם דִּזִּים וְצִלִּים מִן לִבְצוֹן עֲשִׂוִּרִי צִפּוֹן



ובוני תימוץ הפיוזי ג'י יזכר בשמי יבא דודי לג'ו  
 ויאכל פרי מגדיו באתי לג'י אחתי כלה ארייתי  
 מזרי עם בשמי אכלתי יערי עם דבשי עתייתי ייזי  
 עם זכרבי אכלו רעים שתי ושכרו דדים אני יעשה  
 וכלבי ער קול דודי דופק פתחי לי אחתי רעיתי  
 מוזתי תמותי ער אשי צמלא של קוצי רסיסי לילה  
 פשטתי את כתנתי איככה אכל בשנה רחצתי את  
 רגלי איככה אטנפם דודי עלוז ידו מן החזר ומעי  
 המו עליו קמותי אני לפתח לדודי ידו זטפו מור  
 ואצבעתי מור — עבר על כפות המזעול פתחתי  
 אני לדודי ודודי חבוק עבר צפשי יצאה בדברו  
 בקשתי וכלא מצאתיהו קראתי וכלא ענני מצאני  
 השמרים הסבבים בעיר הכוזי פשעוני געאן אדם  
 רדידי מעלי שמרי הזמות העבשתי אתכם בצות  
 ירושלם אם תמצאו את דודי מה תגידו לו עזוזת  
 אהבה אני מה דורך מדוד היפה בשמים מה דורך  
 מדוד שככה העבשתי דודי צח ואדום דגון  
 מרבבה ראשו כתם פז קוציו תלתלים עזוזות  
 כעורב עיניו כיוזים על אפיקי מים רחצות בזכר  
 ישבות על מלאת לחיו כערוגת הבשם מגדלות  
 מרקוזים עפתותיו עושנים זטפות מור — עבר

ידיו גלילי זהב ממולאים בתרשימים מעיו עשית  
 עץ מעלפת ספירים עזוקין עמודי עשמי מיסדים  
 ער אדני פץ מראהו כלבצוף בחזר כארזים חזו  
 מכותקים וכלו מוזמדים זה דודי וזה רעי בצות  
 ירושלם אלה הלך דודך היפה

בזעים אלה פנה דודך וצבק שצו עמוך דודי ירד  
 לגזו לערבות הבשם לרעות בגלים וללקט שושנים  
 אמי לדודי ודודי לי הרועה בשושנים יפה את  
 רעיתי כתרצה צאזה כירושלם אימה כגדלות  
 הסבי עיניך מנגדי שהם הרהיבני ערךך כעדר  
 העצים שגלשו מן הגלעד שצירך כעדר הרחלים  
 שעלו מן הרחצה שכלם מתאימודת ושכלה איך  
 בהם כפלח הרמוץ רקתך מובעד לצמותך עשמי  
 המה מלכות ושומרים פירגשים ועלמות איך מספר  
 אחת היא יוצתי תמותי אחת היא לאמה ברה היא  
 ליוכדתה ראזה בצות ויאשרוה מלכות ופירגשים  
 ויהללוה מי זאת העקפה כמו שחזר יפה כלבצה  
 ברה כחמה אימה כגדלות אלגבת אגוז ירדתי  
 לראות באבי הנזיר לראות הפרחה הגפן הנצור  
 הרמוגים לא ידעתי צפשי שמתני מרכבות  
 עמי צדיב עובי העונמידי עובי עובי



וְזָחָהּ בַּךְ מִזֶּה תִּזְחֹן בְּשׁוֹלֵמִית כְּמוֹזָלֶת הַמִּזְחִים  
 מִזֶּה יִפּוּ פְעָמֶיךָ בְּזַעֲלִים בַּת זָדִים זְמוּקֵי יֶרֶךְ כִּיךָ  
 כְּמוֹ זִלְאִים מִעֲשֵׂה יָדֵי אִמִּי עֲרָרְךָ אֶגֶן הַסֵּהר אֶל  
 יִזְסֵר הַמִּזְגָּ בַּטָּנָךְ עֲרֻמַּת זִטִּים סוּגָה בְּשׁוֹשֵׁלִים  
 עֲשֵׂי עֲדִיךָ כְּשֵׁנִי עֲפָרִים תֵּאֲמִי צִבִּידָה צִוְּאָרְךָ  
 כְּמִגְדֵּל הַשָּׁן עֵינֶיךָ בִּרְכוּת בִּזְעִיבֹן עַל שְׁעָר  
 בַּת רַבִּים אֶפֶר כְּמִגְדֵּל הַלְבָבוֹן צִוְּפָה פָּנֵי דְמִשְׁקָה  
 רֶאֱשֶׁךְ עֲלֶיךָ כְּכַרְמֵל וּדְלֶלֶת אֶשְׁךָ אֶרְגָּמֹן  
 מִלֶּךְ אֲסוּר בִּרְהֻטִּים מִזֶּה יִפִּית וּמִזֶּה זְעֻמַּת אֲהַבָּה  
 בַּת עֲצוּגִים וְאֵת קוֹבוֹתֶיךָ דְּמוֹתָה לְתִמּוֹר וְשִׁדְיֶיךָ  
 לֹא־שְׁכָלוֹת אִמְרַתִּי אֶעֱלֶה בַּתִּמּוֹר אֲזַחֲזָה בַּסֶּסְסִי  
 וְיִהְיֶה זֶה עֲדִיךָ כֹּא־שְׁכָלוֹת הַגֶּפֶן וְרִיחַ אֶפֶר  
 כְּתִפּוּזִים וְזִכָּר הַטֹּב הוֹלֵךְ לְדוּדֵי לְמִי־עֲרִים  
 דּוֹבֵב עֲפָתִי יִשְׁעִים אֲנִי לְדוּדֵי וְעַלִּי תִשְׁקָדְנוּ  
 לִכְהֵ דוּדֵי זֶעֶא הַשְׂדֵּה זִלְזָה בַּכְּפָרִים זְעֻכִּימָה  
 לְכַרְמִים זָרָאָה אִם פְּרִזָּה הַגֶּפֶן פֶּתִיחוּ הַסְמָדָר  
 הַזֵּצִו הַרְמוּזִים שֵׁם אֶתָּן אֶת דוּדֵי לֶךְ הַדוּדֵאִים  
 זֶתֶצֶו רִיחַ וְעַל פֶּתִיחֵינוּ כָּל מִגְדִּים זִדְעִים גָּם  
 יִשְׁעִים דוּדֵי צִפְנָתִי לֶךְ מִי יִתָּנָךְ כֹּאֲחִי לִי יוֹצֵק  
 עֲדִי אִמִּי אִמִּי־אֶרְבֵּךְ בִּזְיוֹן אֶשְׁקֶךָ גָּם לֹא יִבְזֹו לִי  
 אֲנִי־הֶגֶךְ אֲבִי־אֶךְ אֶל בֵּית אִמִּי תִכְמִידֵי אֶשְׁקֶךָ מִיִּיךְ

הרקדו מעסים רמזי שמאלו תחת ראשי וימינו  
תחבקני השבעתי אתכם בזות ו—עולם מה  
תעירו ומה תעירו את האהבה עד שתחפץ  
מי זאת עלה מן המדבר מתרפקת על דודה  
תחת התפוח עוררתך שמה: חבלתך אמר  
עמה חבלה ילדתך עימני כחותם על לבך  
כחותם על זרועך כי עזה כמות אהבה קשה  
כשאול קנאה רעפיה רעפי אש על להבותיה  
מים רבים לא יוכלו לכבות את האהבה וזהרות  
לא יעטפותה אם יתן איש את כל דונו בידו  
באהבה בון יבון לו אחות לנו קטנה ועדים איך  
לה מה געשה לאחותנו ביום שידבר בה אם  
חומה היא גבנה עליה טירת כסף ואם דלת היא  
גצור עליה לוח ארץ אני חומה ועדי כמגדלות אף  
הייתי בעיני כמנצאת עלום כרם היה לעלמה  
בבעל הכנון נתן את הכרם לגננים איש יבא  
בפריו אכלו כסף כרמי עלי לפני האכלו כרם  
עלמה ובאדנים לגננים את פרי היועלות  
בגנים חברים מקעיבים לקולך השמייעני ברחו  
דודי ודמה לך לצבי או לעפר האמרים על  
הרי בשמים

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