**The Path of Moses:**

**A Scholarly Essay on the Case of Women in Religious Faith**

By

The least among the sages

the lowly Mózes Salamon of Khust

Rabbi of the Congregation of Thurdossin

in the County of Árva [May God protect her]

In the year Ata SeTeR Li ] year 5660 *anno mundi*]

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My pamphlet,

Please go forth, for you are sent as a token of friendship, honor, and esteem to the beloved man, he whose stature is as tall as the cedars and who is as strong as the oaks

The learned rabbi, our teacher and rabbi Moses known as Dr. Bloch, may his light shine.

The teacher of teachers at the Rabbinical Seminary in the city of

Budapest the capital, may God protect her,

the seminary whose gates are as white as snow and whose stature is like that of a palm tree. Just as the palm tree is beautiful in all its appearance, and all its fruits are sweet and good, likewise etc. May it be God’s will to prolong his life, and to bless his path in the land together with his soul and the soul of his admirer, to the depth of his heart,

 The author

A word to the readers

Neither the love of novelties nor the desire to make myself a name in the land cause me to take pen in hand to compose this book that I set before you today. For I have grown old and gray, and my love, my hate, my jealousy have long since perished, and “Shem is the brother of Japheth, the elder".[[1]](#endnote-1) Rather, it is due to seeing the ruin of the daughter of my people. There she was, disheveled and unraveled before the eyes of her ostracizers, and the net was spread wide under her feet in every direction and every corner. They would curse her in her face and shame her like a harlot. In hiding they would prepare an ambush to trap her in their net, thinking all day long that “the daughters of Israel are free for the taking, they are wild beasts, in the council of their people they are not counted, even their God is disgusted with them, that is why He banished them and they may not enter into His congregation". But women are not light-headed, but they justly commune with their heart, and indeed it is truly empty and beyond cure.Who can fathom where they will wander to find peace and quiet for their spirit, which beats within them like the pounding of an anvil. That is why I thought in my heart to look in our literature for the source of woman’s disgrace, where it came from, and who has swept her away without justification, and why. Will I be able to restore things to their proper place, point by point, as they were in the beginning, or must she always be disgraced? And now, what I have found, I will humbly set before my brethren, may God protect them. I beg you, if only you take heed of my words and then decide to go right or left, for I am not the sort who comes to hack away with a hatchet and pike. I only ask and beg, as one who lacks spirit, all my words are just a warning call. Since I desire goodness, not disgrace, those who hear me should not hastily slander me without thought. And this shall be peace.

This essay was completed here in Thurdossin, may God protect her, in the county of Árva, on the day of mourning of my honored mother, modest in her deeds, Madame Yenta, rest her soul, 4 Kislev in the year 660 ([*anno mundi*] excluding the thousands).

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The man said: the woman You put at my side - she gave me of the tree, and I ate[[2]](#footnote-1) (Gen 3:12). “It was taught: R. Meir used to say[[3]](#footnote-2), A man is bound to say the following three blessings daily: [Blessed art thou] who hast made me Israelite, who hast not made me a woman,[[4]](#footnote-3) who hast not made me a brutish man” (*b.Menachot 43b*). –

The woman that God gave us here in the world[[5]](#footnote-4) was created as a "[conjoined] twin", according to one of our ancestors, rest their souls, the day the Lord God created Adam on the earth, therefore the same Torah and the same rule shall apply to her along with him. Even though ever since their separation they have been

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individuals, she has become his fitting helpmate[[6]](#footnote-5) to fill in the requisites that he lacks. While he has the greatness and the might, she has the majesty and the splendor, and against the wisdom and the knowledge that God put in him, she has the advantage of understanding[[7]](#footnote-6). From both of them the whole world spread out ... And if this a truly established fact, it is an extreme wonderment in the eyes of everyone who seeks truth in their heart, why our ancestors of blessed memory decided to push her away with both hands from the Sanctuary of Faith, to the point that today she has almost no part in the worship of God, blessed be He. And who was responsible for this great evil? It seems that Man keeps her subservient to him in a "permitted war" [*milhemet reshut*][[8]](#endnote-2) as a forced laborer[[9]](#footnote-7), after which he lords it over her and slanders her by saying that it is not becoming for a woman to go out to battle in the face of misfortunes and the vicissitudes of time[[10]](#footnote-8), because “all the glory of the daughter of a king is within”. But surely, in an obligatory war [*milhemet hovah*], who would dare steel his heart to exclude her from participating in the inheritance of the Lord, before Whom all people are equal[[11]](#footnote-10)?

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And why did they do all this to the mistress of the house? Are not most of the acts of faith in her hands,[[12]](#footnote-11) and her heart is like malleable sealing-wax molding to the impressions of what is in the heavens above, in sacred awe…

Consider this, all those who honor God, and take it to heart, behold the whole land is before you, see for yourselves how a noble vine turned into a base, an alien vine, and learn it well. - Abraham had a daughter whose name was Ba-kol.[[13]](#footnote-12) One day she rose to her full stature and stood upright, and after many days her power grew strong. She, in her image, turned Man and God into three. She did this only with mindful intelligence. Women who seek the closeness of God always surround her like a wall; during the night watch they guard her sanctuary, and in the day they work on everything pertaining to the altar, because she has never ignored them. Therefore, her prayer houses are full, from end to end, at all time and season, and their limbs don’t clash/ and their nerves are not stressed/ and their worshippers are not oppressed. And who holds the lead? Women are the ones who lead.[[14]](#endnote-3) Her faithful will gather at all times, the princes of men that neither the rain nor the snow will stop. Proudly will they advance, although they are captives, in irons. Like a reed they will bow their head before the man of faith, even if he has seven abominations in his heart. Whereas we call on the name of the Lord our God, but we are not heard. Our Lord is One and we will worship Him in pure heart, even if we do not know what to do in order to restore the Covenant that He made with us at Horev. Why do we bury in the sand our heads and say, He does not see us.

1. “Shem is the brother of Japheth, the elder".

   It is not clear from Gen 12:2 who was older, Shem or Japheth. See *Gen R* Noah portion, 37. It seems that Salamon means that some things cannot be resolved, so further discussion is unproductive.

   <ST: I do not think that this explanation fits the context.  
   An alternative suggestion: He says he does not want “a name”, *shem*; so maybe he is saying that such pursuit of *shem* is a variation of “Japhet”—maskilic, Hellenistic-like, academic enterprises, and that this is not what he is currently engaged in.> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. According to the literal meaning of this verse it seems that Adam wanted to save himself at the expense of the soul of his wife Eve. He rolled the stone off himself and placed it on the shoulder of his helpmate. And according to this, it is difficult that the sages do not deduce from here that *we do not plead on behalf of an inciter* [mesit]. She should have said: "When the words of the teacher and those of the pupil [are contradictory], whose words should be hearkened to…" (see *b.Sanhedrin* 29b). [Salamon wonders, why the sages blamed Eve for inciting Adam to commit a sin. Adam was responsible and should have been punished for his sin because of the halakhic rule *we do not plead* *on behalf of an inciter*: a person cannot blame someone else for inciting him to commit a crime. Eve, on her part, did not defend herself. When Adam blamed her for inciting him, she could have said: why did Adam not listen to his teacher (God), but instead listened to his pupil (woman)? Salamon points out that this line of reasoning in the Talmud is applied to the snake, but not to Adam and Eve] (One may say that it is not in the nature of Woman to save herself by sacrificing her husband or her children). The sages certainly were consistent in their approach when they said (*Gen. Rab.* portion 19): "Said [R. Abba] bar Kahana: It is not written: 'and I ate' [*ve’akhalti*] but it is written 'I ate continuously [*va’okhel*]'—I ate and I am eating". They meant that Adam said: "I am not surprised by what I have done, but that I continue to eat." And if it is so, he did not seek to defend himself. And this fits with what the sages said (*b.Sanhedrin* 38b): "Adam was a Sadducee"; see there. [*Sadducee* is understood by Rashi and earlier commentators as inclining towards idolatry. In other words, the sages came to the conclusion that Adam was not incited by Eve to sin but was an evildoer in his own right.] [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. R. Meir was a disciple of R. Akiba and he lived after Woman had already been stripped of her dignity. There was also a bad incident concerning his wife (see *b.Avodah Zarah* 18b). [When speaking of R. Meir’s wife, Salamon probably had in mind the “*Ma’aseh de-Beruriah*” which is told by Rashi in his commentary on *b.Avodah Zarah* 18b. The story of R. Meir's strange bet and its tragic outcome has attracted scholarly interest. For recent research and current bibliography on the subject, see M. Simon-Shoshan, "The Death of Beruriah and Its Afterlife: A Reevaluation of the Provenance and Significance of Ma’aseh de-Beruriah". *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 2020 (110.3): 383-411.] See also *Seder Hadorot*, note 40, which brings the terrible story that happened to R. Meir with his hostess, and a word to the wise is sufficient. [It seems that Salamon has in mind the story of R. Meir’s seduction by his friend's wife. See Y. Halperin, *Seder Hadorot*, Warsaw 1878, part II, 264. The earlier version of the story appears in *Midrash Aseret Hadibrot*, Jerusalem 1955, 40-41. For a feminist interpretation of this story see R. Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*, The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia Jerusalem 1998, 13-16.] And all this was true in those olden days and at that time, when all people lived in darkness and gloom, when [even] the king and the queen did not know how to say the Grace after Meals (*b.Berachot* 48a) [*b.Berachot 48a* tells that King Yannai and Queen Salome could not say the Grace after Meals by themselves. The queen suggested calling for her brother Rabbi Simon ben Shetah for this purpose, but she set the condition that the king, known for his ruthless dealing with the sages, would not harm him] and among the qualifications of a scholar was knowing how to write. Rashi, of blessed memory, explains that they had to know to sign their name in order to sit as a judge or to testify (*BHullin* 9a). If such was the situation with men and scholars in those days, what could be said of Woman. But nowadays when the majority of women know how to pray and to recite blessings, to read, to write, and to sign their name, it is possible that even R. Meir, who ruled that 'rare cases should be taken into consideration' (*b.Hullin* 6a), would admit that this is a redundant blessing, and a word to the wise is sufficient. ]R. Meir’s legal principle *rare cases should be taken into consideration*, means that although rulings are usually based on the majority of cases, rare cases should be taken into consideration in the legal process. Salamon seems to say that it is important not to make unequivocal statements based only on the obvious. Such statements do not take into consideration future possibilities.] [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. See *Tosefta Berachot* ch. 6. The version there reads: “R. Judah says, three blessings etc. A Cuti [Samaritan/a gentile] is because it says ‘All nations are like nothing to Him,’ a woman is because women are not obligated in commandments, a boor [ignoramus] because a boor is not afraid of sin.” Check Neusner's translation] [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. See *b.Berachot 61a*: “R. Jeremiah b. Eleazar said: God created two countenances [*du-parzufin*] in the first man as it says (Ps 139:5) `Behind and before hast Thou formed me’”; see there. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. In *the Book of* *Zohar on Genesis* in the verse “The Lord God formed man” two words were added to what is written in the Torah: “but for Adam no helpmate was found (but all of them ]*ella kulhu*] were) against him"; see there. This is a fine addition, for all the creatures are indeed Man's opponents and enemies because of his and their nature. By making an effort to overpower and to defeat them his strength will grow and he will become a true human being. The Holy One, Blessed be He, later made for him a helpmate opposite to him. Thus Woman is certainly his helper, even as she is his opponent/complement, because he will find in her whatever he is lacking, and a word is enough for the wise. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. *b.Nidda*h 45b: "What is Rabbi's reason? Because it is written in Scripture (*Gen* 2), 'And the Lord God built the rib' which teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, endowed the woman with more understanding than the man"; see there. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. In contrast to the *War by Commandment* (*milhemet mitzvah*), *Permitted War* (*milhemet reshut)* is an expansive war, serving the political and economical interests of its initiator. See Deut 21:10-14; Y. Karo, *Sefer Hachinuch* 527. It seems that Salamon hints to the unholy reasons behind the exclusion of women from most rituals. Since the passage in *Deuteronomy* deals with the case of the captive woman, Salamon may be hinting to the powerlessness of Jewish women against the rulings of the sages. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
9. *m*.*Ketubot* 5:4: “The following are the kinds of work which a woman must perform for the husband: grinding corn, baking bread, washing clothes, cooking, suckling her child, making ready his bed and working in wool”; see there. Nowadays where is the maidservant that would be willing to do all these? She would be given a generous wage and enthroned in gold filigree. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
10. *b.Yebamot* 65b: “R. Ilea replied in the name of R. Eleazar son of R. Simeon: Scripture stated, 'And replenish the earth, and subdue it' -  it is the nature of a man to subdue but it is not the nature of a woman to subdue.” And this is only a pretext, because *and subdue* (*vekivshuha*) is plural and it refers to Woman just as for Man. And when the sages of blessed memory said that it was not the nature of a woman to subdue in practice, that is, as it were, to go to war to confront the foe, they spoke only of what they actually witnessed. Nowadays Woman is the angel of peace, but before she got confined to the home to concoct, to cook, and to bake, she too would habitually subdue. So many women have confronted misfortunes and vicissitudes of time to support their husbands who dedicated their life to the Torah and to tradition. See in *t.Ketubot* ch. 4: “Joshua, the son of R. 'Aqiba married a woman and made an agreement with her that she maintain and support him and teach him Torah." *The Tosefta*, Ketubot, transl. from the Hebrew by J. Neusner, Peabody Mass., ????????? 4.7 . See also *b.Yebamot* 65b, and see *b.Eruvin* 22a: "As was the case with R. Adda b. Mattenah. He was about to go away to a schoolhouse when his wife said to him, ‘What shall I do with your children?’ — ‘Are there’, he retorted: ‘no more herbs in the marsh?’ Rashi explained: "[kurmi] - vegetables, [another version]: [you can] pull out from the marsh wet reed who is still tender, grind it and make bread." - This is heroes’ food, and she ate and wiped her mouth; and a word to the wise is sufficient.] *Heroes’ food* [Ps 78:25] has a positive meaning, and is usually understood as “angel’s food”. It is not clear what Salamon has in mind here. ST: Maybe: Earlier in this note, Salamon said that nowadays women are angels of peace. Here he shows that traditionally they have been involved in “subduing”, like angel-warriors] [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
11. *Eliahu Rabba* part 1 ch. 9 "…I call heaven and earth to witness that whether it be a heathen, or a Jew, whether it be a man or a woman, a manservant or a maidservant, the holy spirit will suffuse each of them inkeeping with the deeds he or she performs.", [*Tanna debe Eliyahu*, translated from the Hebrew by W.G. Braude and I.J. Kapstein, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia 1981, part 1, pp. 152-153.]How sublime are these words to those who know the hidden wisdom. For if a man says: "Am I to be the loser because I am a male?" (*b.Ketubot* 108b), a woman also may say: “Is it because I am not a male I have lost? Surely, my acts are pleasing, and it is said (at the end of the Book of Proverbs): ‘[Extol her for the fruit of her hand, and let her works praise her in the gates.’" [Pr 31:31]. For how can she make her path good and submit to the yoke of the Torah and the commandments if we will not even accept her goodness? How many men have angered and defied God, and how many women did what was good in His eyes? But men are the mighty ones who set the rule and the law as it pleases them. God Blessed be He, goes along with their words, even though they are not to his liking, and He agrees to them; and a word to the wise is sufficient. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
12. R. Nissim of Gerona, [*Sefer Hidushei Haran on Tractate Hullin*, Jerusalem 1973, p. 12]: "We say in the first chapter of the *Tractate Pesachim* concerning the removal of the leaven, that because it is a rabbinic commandment the rabbis trusted her, but if it were a commandment of the Torah they would not trust her. We stated the reason for that in the *Yerushalmi*: because women are lazy, they barely check. In other words, since usually the leaven is not found there, they tend to say that there is no leaven there and they are lenient in this instance. If it were a commandment of the Torah, they would not be trusted. But in all other matters they are trusted, even if it is a commandment of the Torah. We rely upon them every day, as a matter of course, in salting and deveining meat etc.". See there. [It seems that Salamon either shortened the citation or had a shorter version of the passage before him.] [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. *b.Baba Batra* 16b: "… there is a difference between Tannaim. [It is written,] The Lord had blessed Abraham in all things [*ba-kol*] (Gen 2). What is meant by 'in all things'? R. Meir said: In the fact that he had no daughter." (R. Meir spoke in accordance with his view; and a word to the wise is sufficient.) “R. Judah said: In the fact that he had a daughter. Others say that Abraham had a daughter whose name was *ba-kol*." -- Only *others* say that her name was Ba-kol, and a word to the wise is sufficient. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
14. about [↑](#endnote-ref-3)