

Chet to Fighters' House



Tradition and Revolution: The Story of the Founding of the Bais Yaakov Movement

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BAYT

A note about the picture

Bais Yaakov teacher training in 1929 at Rabka

Bibliography and Research Materials

The Bais Yaakov Project by Naomi Seidman and team [dedicated to the collection, preservation, and digitization of historical material related to the Bais Yaakov movement from its founding in 1917 through today]

<https://thebaisyaakovproject.com/>

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Rachel Manekin, *The Rebellion of the Daughters* (2020)

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Rabbi Reuven Brand, "Sarah Schenirer, the Chafetz Chaim and Talmud Torah For Women"

Yehuda Geberer, "Sister of Revolution," Five parts (Jewish History Soundbites)

Part 1 - Setting the Scene: Before Bais Yaakov

1) Pearl Benisch, *Carry Me In Your Heart*, xvii-xviii (2003) Rabbi Noach Weinberg - Forward

RABBI YEchezkel (CHASKEL) SARNA, the rosh yeshivah of Yeshivas Chevron and a very great man, was addressing a gathering at the *bris* of Reb Moshe Chevroni's grandson — who was also a grandson of the Gerrer Rebbe. A large segment of Eretz Yisroel's Torah giants were there, among them the grandchildren of the following leaders of the previous generation: the Chofetz Chaim, the Slonimer Rebbe, the Vizhnitzer Rebbe, the Gerrer Rebbe, the Levush Mordechai, the Alter of Navardok, the Alter of Mir, and the Alter of Slobodka. Their grandchildren were all there at this *bris*.

Rav Yechezkel Sarna got up and said, "Everybody in this room thinks that it was his grandfather that did the most for *Am Yisroel* in the last one hundred years. The Chofetz Chaim, the Alter of Navardok, the Alter of Slobodka — the *talmidim* they had, the *yeshivos* they created. I'm here to tell you that it's none of them."

Rav Sarna was very confrontational, and the people present said, "Reb Chaskel, let's not have fights. Please sit down."

Reb Chaskel said, "I'll tell you more. The one who did the most for *Klal Yisroel* in the last one hundred years, never learned a *blatt gemara*."

"Outrageous!" everyone said. "Reb Chaskel, you're going too far."

He answered, "I'll tell you more. When I mention the name, you will all agree with me that it wasn't your grandfather, it wasn't one of these great rabbis, but yes, it was in fact this person who did the most for *Am Yisroel* in the last one hundred years."

Everybody started laughing. Can you imagine that the chassidim and the misnagdim would all agree on who did the most for *Am Yisroel* in the last century? Was it possible?

Reb Chaskel mentioned the name...and they all agreed with him.

The name was Sarah Schenirer. If it wasn't for that woman who never had a formal Jewish education, if it wasn't for that woman who got this idea of educating our girls, then *chas ve-chalilah* the face of *Am Yisroel* would look very different today indeed.

What did this woman have? She didn't learn a *blatt gemara* like the men do. She didn't even go to a Bais Yaakov. What did she have that gave her the merit to be the force that did the most for *Klal Yisroel* in the last one hundred years? Nobody told her to do what she did. She had a lot of detractors, people who wanted to excommunicate her.

The story is told that they came to the Chofetz Chaim to complain about this woman who was doing something new under the sun. "For three thousand five hundred years we didn't have any school for girls. And who is she anyway?" They asked him to take action. The Chofetz Chaim was very agitated. He ran into his room. They thought he was getting his coat, to go out to do battle. Instead, he came out with some zlotys, coins, and said, "Such a tremendous mitzvah and I shouldn't have a part in it? Here, give her this money."

Baruch Hashem, the Chofetz Chaim backed her, the Gerrer Rebbe backed her, the Belzer Rebbe gave her his blessing. But what made her do it?

The 1903 Rabbinical Conference in Krakow



1903 Rabbinical Conference in Krakow

In the same year as the 6th Zionist Congress in 1903 in Basel where Theodor Herzl presented the Uganda plan which became hotly debated. In another part of Europe, there was another less famous rabbinical August of 1903, there was a Rabbinical Conference in Krakow (organized by Ashkenazi Rabbi of Cairo, Rabbi Aharon Mendel HaCohen) to gather the rabbinic leadership to face the challenges of their day -- modernity, assimilation, secularization, education, political changes, The failure of this conference led to the beginning of Orthodox politics, parties like Agudas Yisrael and the like.

R. Eliyahu Akiva Rabinowitz, the Paltaver rav, a strong and dynamic leader at the time, opposed this initiative and it became a debate. But we have to remember that this debate had been going on for decades before this, at least in Galicia where Cracow was.

Bertha Pappenheim and Early Jewish Feminism



Bertha Pappenheim
(1859 -1936) - Anna O



Joseph Breuer
(1842-1925)



The first Board of the Weibliche Fürsorge in Frankfurt, 1904
(Pappenheim: first row, second from the left).

2) Shaul Stampfler, *Families, rabbis, and Education* (2010)

† Prostitution was one of the less savoury aspects of eastern European Jewish life in the late nineteenth century but, perhaps surprisingly, it can also serve as evidence for the role of romance in couple formation. It is a well-known fact that east European Jews played a major role in prostitution and in the international ‘white slave trade’ in the latter part of the nineteenth century.³⁶ Recruitment of prostitutes was simple. Procurers who posed as suitors looking for a wife were the key. They preyed on single women who wanted to fulfil traditional roles as wives and mothers. The true intent of the ‘husband’ or ‘groom’ was revealed after ‘marriage’, or after the woman had gone off with the newly found friend who promised marriage. Recruitment to prostitution was made easier by the fact that the wave of migration to the

³⁶ In Dick, *Makhazeh mul makhazeh*, cited and translated in Roskies, ‘Yiddish Popular Literature and the Female Reader’, 853.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ See Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice* for a fine survey of the phenomenon, and Gartner, ‘Anglo Jewry and the Jewish International Traffic in Prostitution’ for a detailed analysis of a key element of the trade.

United States included more men than women, which led to a shortage of single males in eastern Europe. One consequence of this was widespread desperation among young women looking for husbands.³⁹ As one memoirist put it:

To be left an old maid . . . [was] the greatest misfortune that could threaten a girl, and to ward off that calamity the girl and her family, to the most distant relatives, would strain every nerve, whether by contributing to her dowry, or hiding her defects from the marriage broker or praying and fasting that God might send her a husband.⁴⁰

In many cases prostitutes came from disturbed family backgrounds, often without a father present,⁴¹ or they were servant girls living away from home.⁴² However, this was not always the case, as the following description points out:

[P]rocurers from Buenos Aires sometimes brought along the Jewish marriage contract, the *ketubah* that traditionally was part of the religious betrothal. On these contracts the procurer's name was already filled in, along with those of two witnesses. The schemer would then arrange to meet the daughter of a poor family and explain that there was no time to lose before getting back to his thriving business across the ocean. Or, he would claim to be acting on behalf of the eligible groom who was too busy to leave America. The *ketubah* was usually enough to convince any traditional family that the match was proper.⁴³

Prostitution was not simply a result of the disappearance of traditional values. In certain key respects, the opposite was the case—traditional values remained though traditional patterns of behaviour had been abandoned.⁴⁴ The procurers could entrap women only in a reality in which young women played a main role in choosing their life partner and where it was regarded normal for a young man to press his suit directly. In a society where parents made all the decisions and children were totally dependent, the task of a procurer would have been impossibly difficult. The victims of the procurers took for granted that they could make decisions, and that mutual attraction was justifiable and acceptable grounds for marriage. At the same time, the victims felt that sexual promiscuity was unacceptable. Contemporary sources do not

³⁹ There were, of course, many women who knew exactly what they were doing, and saw no great virtue in living a life of poverty, or in selling their body to one man through marriage rather than keeping control over their body for their own profit. See Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice*, 158.

⁴⁴ *Prostitution and Prejudice*, 95.

⁴² *Ibid.* 98.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 105.

A 'surprising' fact that Jewish girls could become prostitutes; the fact that young Jewish men who had studied in *heder* became pimps was assumed to be natural. Similarly, the fact that young Jewish men were often clients of prostitutes was also seen as so natural as not to need explanation.

discuss attempts to return home by young women who had been enticed into prostitution. Apparently the unfortunate victims of the procurers accepted society's view that as prostitutes they had no value and consequently they lost any sense of self-esteem.⁴⁵

Marital behaviour of Jewish immigrants to America at the turn of the century is well documented and it may serve as indirect evidence of courtship patterns and the role of love in determining marriage in east European Jewish society. Despite the evidence for the increased role of young people in choosing marital partners in eastern Europe, it appears that the immigrant parents continued to regard arranged marriages as desirable for respectable Jews. This view created innumerable conflicts between the generations and the children were not always the winners.⁴⁶ Since Jews were employed to a large extent in industry, young adults often earned wages that were no lower than that of their parents. This meant that they were relatively independent.⁴⁷ The relatively high income of young workers, together with the influence of romantic values current in America, was regarded as responsible for the tendency of young Jews to choose their own partners—whether out of love or out of other considerations. As a matchmaker in New York put it in 1898:

Once I lived off the fat of the land, and most marriageable men and women in the quarter depended on me to make them happy. Now they believe in love and all that rot. They are making their own marriages . . . They learned how to start their own love affairs from the Americans, and it is one of the worst things they have picked up. How can a Jewish couple expect to be happy in a marriage of their own making when it has been the custom of their fathers and mothers for ages not to see each other until after marriage?⁴⁸

⁴⁵ A woman with traditional values was more likely to develop a negative self-image after being seduced than was a woman who lived in a society that was tolerant of premarital sexual experience. See Rosen (ed.), *The Maimie Papers*, for the fascinating correspondence of a 'reformed' Jewish prostitute in the USA in the early 20th century and the editor's sensitive introduction, esp. p. xxiv.

⁴⁶ See notably Yeziarska, *Bread Givers*. In this apparently autobiographical novel three daughters give up their loves for a match chosen by their father. The source of his authority over his daughters lies in the fact that he is a Torah scholar and dependent on their support—hence he can appeal both to traditional values and to feelings of guilt to impose his will. Even if we assume the accuracy of the description, clearly this was an exceptional household in a society where most men were employed in industry or in commerce. Moreover, the clients of the matchmakers are potential grooms themselves, not their parents, and the young couples are involved with each other for a while before the match is final—both innovations from the traditional patterns. The grooms that the matchmaker presented were also failures of one sort or another, and were far from being typical young men.

⁴⁷ See Gillis, *Youth and History*, 44.

⁴⁸ 'Shadkens Find Business Bad', *New York Tribune*, 9 Jan. 1898; cited in Ewen, *Immigrant*

Early Precedent for Torah Study for Jewish Girls and Women



**R. Samson Raphael Hirsch
(1808-1888)**

חורב,

V e r s u c h e
über Ziffroëls Pflichten
in der Berstreuung,

zundächst

für Ziffroëls denkende Jünglinge und Jungfrauen,

von

Samson Raphael Hirsch,
Großherzoglich Oldenburgischem Land-Rabbiner.

Wenn auch Verstohene man dich nennet,
Denmal bleib's — Forcher fehlt ihm, nur.
ש"ס י"ב, 17.

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Altona,
bey Johann Friedrich Hammerich.
1837.

“Dedicated to the young thinking Jewish men and **women**”

The Realschule in Frankfurt

אִסְרִישְׁמְרוּ בְּנֵיךְ בְּרִיתִי וְעַדְתִּי זֶה אֶלְמָדָם גַּם־בְּנֵיהֶם עָדִי עַד וַיָּשְׁבוּ לְכַסֵּא־לֵךְ



75jähriges Jubiläum der Realschule mit Lyzeum
der Israelitischen Religionsgesellschaft Frankfurt a. M.

3) R. Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Horeb*, Mitzvoth, Ch. 75 no. 494 (p. 371)

No less should Israel's daughters learn the contents of the Written Law and the duties which they have to perform in their lifetime as daughter and young women, as mother and as housewife.

4) Ohr Yisrael, Letter 3

א) ידידי! הנה אנכי חשבתי למשפט, כי דברי הראשונים יספיקו למדי לעורר לבבכם אל חיזוק לימוד הלזה הוא לימוד המוסרי, אשר לא ככל הלימודים לימוד המוסרי הלזה, אין לך לימוד אשר יקיף חיובו על כל הנפשות, הנשים פטורות מתלמוד תורה, קשי יום וחסרי דעת במצוקות רעות ח"ו יש מקום הרבה לפוטרם; איש איש לפי ענינו ישולל מחיובם, לא ראי זה כראי זה, כל אשר ירחיב לאדם, כן יגדל החיוב וכן ירבה:

(ב) לא כן לימוד הלזה הוא חיוב מוקף לכל הנפשות אחת לא נעדר, כי המלחמה פרושה על כל החיים המדברים, היא מלחמת היצר ותחבולותיו, תאוות האדם ועלילותיו, אשר המה ילבדוהו במכמריהם, לבל יהי' לו תקומה ח"ו, אשר כמעט קט יפשע האדם למרבה באין מעצור לרוחו, להוציא כל מפעל רע ונתעב לעיני השמש, אוי! מה נעשה ליום פקידה, כי יפקוד ד' המשפט על כל החיים, טעימה האדם ותחבולותיו, במה נאזר עוז ותעצומות, לעמוד נגד המלחמה החזקה הלזו, אם לא בלימוד הלזה לימוד המוסרי, לזכך מעט הרעיון, להלהיב מה הלב, ולתת אחרייתנו על לבינו, למען להיות לגו לאור מאיר, אשר האברים החיצונים לאורם יהלכו, ובגבורתם יעשו מלחמתם למען האמת והצדק, כי זה כל פרי מגמתינו, רק על האברים החיצונים לשומרם מכל נגע רע ומחלה, הן במדות והן בדינים, אשר לא יאוסרו כי אם בחזקה ובהרגל רב: