

The Unsavoury Story behind Latkes

(Michie Yana-Berger, Limmud 2019)

1. “Levivot” in Tanakh

(II Samuel 13: 1-20)

א ויהי אחר־כֵּן וּלְאַבְשָׁלוֹם בֶּן־דָּוִד אָחוֹת יָפָה וַשָּׁמָּה תָמָר וַיֵּאֱהָבָהּ אֲמֹנֹן בֶּן־דָּוִד: ב וַיֹּצֵר לְאַמֹּנֹן לְהִתְחַלּוֹת בַּעֲבוּר תָּמָר אָחוֹתוֹ כִּי בְתוּלָה הִיא וַיִּפְלֵא בָעֵינָיו אֲמֹנֹן לַעֲשׂוֹת לָהּ מְאוּמָּה: ג וּלְאַמֹּנֹן רָע וַשָּׂמוּ יוֹנָדָב בֶּן־שֹׁמְעָה אָחִי דָּוִד וַיּוֹנְדֵּב אִישׁ חָכָם מְאֹד: ד וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מְדוּעַ אַתָּה כָּכָה זָל בֶּן־הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּבִקָּר בְּבִקָּר הֲלוֹא תִגִּיד לִי וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אֲמֹנֹן אֶת־תָּמָר אָחוֹת אֲבִישָׁלָם אָחִי אָנִי אֵהָב: ה וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ יְהוֹנָדָב שָׁכַב עַל־מִשְׁכָּבָהּ וְהִתְחַלּוּ וְכָא אָבִיד לְרֹאוּתָהּ וְאַמְרַתָּ אֵלָיו תְּבֹא נָא תָמָר אָחוֹתִי וּמִבְּרִנִּי לָחֵם וְעָשְׂתָהּ לְעֵינָי אֶת־הַבְּרִיָּה לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶה וְאֶכְלָתִי מִיָּדָה: ו וַיִּשְׁכַּב אֲמֹנֹן וַיִּתְחַלּוּ וַיָּבֵא הַמֶּלֶךְ לְרֹאשׁוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲמֹנֹן אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ תְּבֹא־נָא תָמָר אָחוֹתִי וְתִלָּבֵב לְעֵינָי שְׁתִּי לְבָבוֹת וְאַבְרָה מִיָּדָה:

(1) This happened sometime afterward: Absalom son of David had a beautiful sister named Tamar, and Amnon son of David became infatuated with her. (2) Amnon was so distraught because of his [half-]sister Tamar that he became sick; for she was a virgin, and it seemed impossible to Amnon to do anything to her. (3) Amnon had a friend named Jonadab, the son of David's brother Shimah; Jonadab was a very clever man. (4) He asked him, "Why are you so dejected, O prince, morning after morning? Tell me!" Amnon replied, "I am in love with Tamar, the sister of my brother Absalom!" (5) Jonadab said to him, "Lie down in your bed and pretend you are sick. When your father comes to see you, say to him, 'Let my sister Tamar come and give me something to eat. Let her prepare the food in front of me, so that I may look on, and let her serve it to me.'" (6) Amnon lay down and pretended to be sick. The king came to see him, and Amnon said to the king, "Let my sister Tamar come and prepare a couple of cakes in front of me, and let her bring them to me."

ז וַיִּשְׁלַח דָּוִד אֶל־תָּמָר הַבִּיתָּהּ לֵאמֹר לְכִי נָא בֵּית אֲמֹנֹן אָחִידָהּ וַעֲשִׂי־לוֹ הַבְּרִיָּה: ח וּתְלֶךְ תָּמָר בֵּית אֲמֹנֹן אָחִידָהּ וְהוּא שָׁכַב וַתִּקַּח אֶת־הַבֹּצֵק וּתְלוּשׁ [וּתְלֶשׁ] וּתִלָּבֵב לְעֵינָיו וּתִבְשֹׁל אֶת־הַלֵּבָבוֹת: ט וַתִּקַּח אֶת־הַמִּשְׁרָת וַתִּצֹק לִפְנָיו וַיִּמָּאֵן לֶאֱכֹל וַיֹּאמֶר אֲמֹנֹן הוֹצִיאוּ כָּל־אִישׁ מִעָלָי וַיֵּצְאוּ כָּל־אִישׁ מִעָלָיו: י וַיֹּאמֶר אֲמֹנֹן אֶל־תָּמָר הִבִּיאי הַבְּרִיָּה הַסֵּדֶר וְאַבְרָה מִיָּדָה וַתִּקַּח תָּמָר אֶת־הַלֵּבָבוֹת אֲשֶׁר עָשְׂתָהּ וּתְבֹא לְאַמֹּנֹן אָחִידָהּ הַסֵּדֶרָה:

(7) David sent a message to Tamar in the palace, "Please go to the house of your brother Amnon and prepare some food for him." (8) Tamar went to the house of her brother Amnon, who was in bed. She took dough and kneaded it into cakes in front of him, and cooked the cakes. (9) She took the pan and set out [the cakes], but Amnon refused to eat and ordered everyone to withdraw. After everyone had withdrawn, (10) Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food inside and feed me." Tamar took the cakes she had made and brought them to her brother inside.

יא וַתִּגַּשׁ אֵלָיו לֶאֱכֹל וַיִּחְזַק-בָּהּ וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ בּוֹאִי שְׁכְבִי עִמִּי אַחֹתִי: יב וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ אֶל-אָחִי אֶל-תַּעֲנֵנִי כִּי לֹא-יַעֲשֶׂה כֵן בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-תַּעֲשֶׂה אֶת-הַנִּבְכָּה הַזֹּאת: יג וְאָנִי אָנֹכִי אֶל-תְּחַרְפֵּתִי וְאַתָּה תִּהְיֶה כְּאֶחָד הַנִּבְכָּלִים בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַתָּה דַּבֵּר-נָא אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּי לֹא יִמְנַעֲנִי מִמֶּךָ: יד וְלֹא אָבָה לִשְׁמֹעַ בְּקוֹלָהּ וַיִּחְזַק מִמֶּנָּה וַיַּעֲנֶה וַיִּשְׁכַּב אִתָּהּ:

(11) But when she served them to him, he caught hold of her and said to her, “Come lie with me, sister.” (12) But she said to him, “Don’t, brother. Don’t force me. Such things are not done in Israel! Don’t do such a vile thing! (13) Where will I carry my shame? And you, you will be like any of the scoundrels in Israel! Please, speak to the king; he will not refuse me to you.” (14) But he would not listen to her; he overpowered her and lay with her by force.

טו וַיִּשְׁנֶאֱהָ אֲמִנוֹן שְׁנֵאָה גְדוֹלָה מְאֹד כִּי גְדוֹלָה הָשְׁנֵאָה אֲשֶׁר שְׁנֵאָה מֵאֵהָבָה אֲשֶׁר אֵהָבָה וַיֹּאמֶר-לָהּ אֲמִנוֹן קוּמִי לְכִי: טז וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ אֶל-אוֹדֹת הָרָעָה הַגְּדוֹלָה הַזֹּאת מֵאַחֲרֵת אֲשֶׁר-עָשִׂיתָ עִמִּי לְשַׁלְּחֵנִי וְלֹא אָבָה לִשְׁמֹעַ לָהּ: יז וַיִּקְרָא אֶת-נַעֲרוֹ מִשְׁרָתוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלַחוּ-נָא אֶת-זֹאת מֵעָלַי הַחוּצָה וְנַעַל הַדֶּלֶת אַחֲרֶיהָ: יח וְעָלֶיהָ כָּתַת פָּסִים כִּי כֵן תִּלְבָּשֶׁן בְּנוֹת-הַמֶּלֶךְ הַבְּתוּלֹת מְעִילִים וַיֵּצֵא אוֹתָהּ מִשְׁרָתוֹ הַחוּץ וְנַעַל הַדֶּלֶת אַחֲרֶיהָ: יט וַתִּקַּח תָּמָר אֶפֶר עַל-רֹאשָׁהּ וּכְתַנַּת הַפָּסִים אֲשֶׁר עָלֶיהָ קָרָעָה וַתִּשֶׂם יָדָהּ עַל-רֹאשָׁהּ וַתִּלָּךְ הָלוֹךְ וְזֹעָקָה: כ וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ אַבְשָׁלוֹם אַחִיָּה הָאֲמִינוֹן אַחִיךָ הִנֵּה עִמָּךְ וְעַתָּה אַחֹתִי הַחֲרִישִׁי אַחִיךָ הוּא אֶל-תִּשִׁיתִי אֶת-לִבִּי לְדַבֵּר הִנֵּה וַתֵּשֶׁב תָּמָר וַתִּמְמָה בֵּית אַבְשָׁלוֹם אַחִיהָ:

(15) Then Amnon felt a very great loathing for her; indeed, his loathing for her was greater than the passion he had felt for her. And Amnon said to her, “Get out!” (16) She pleaded with him, “Please don’t commit this wrong; to send me away would be even worse than the first wrong you committed against me.” But he would not listen to her. (17) He summoned his young attendant and said, “Get that woman out of my presence, and bar the door behind her.”— (18) She was wearing an ornamented tunic, for maiden princesses were customarily dressed in such garments.—His attendant took her outside and barred the door after her. (19) Tamar put dust on her head and rent the ornamented tunic she was wearing; she put her hands on her head, and walked away, screaming loudly as she went. (20) Her brother Absalom said to her, “Was it your brother Amnon who did this to you? For the present, sister, keep quiet about it; he is your brother. Don’t brood over the matter.” And Tamar remained in her brother Absalom’s house, forlorn.

2. Megillat Yehudit (medieval Jewish texts, excerpts)

וַיְהִי | בַּשְּׁלִישִׁי הַיָּמִים וְאַשָּׁה | אֶתֶת | מִנְּשֵׁי בְנֵי־הַנְּבִיאִים וְשִׁמָּה יְהוּדִית צָעָקָה אֶל־יְהוָה
וַתִּתְפַּלֵּל | וַתִּצְוֶם וַתִּתְחַנֵּן־לּוֹ אֲנִי יְהוָה עֲשֵׂה חֶסֶד לְאֲלָפִים זְכָרָה לְחֶסֶדִי דָוִד הַנְּאֻמָּנִים:
וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַתְּפִלָּה וַתִּצְלַח רוּחַ־יְהוָה וַתִּשָּׂם לָהּ בְּלִבָּהּ:

On the third day a woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets, whose name was Judith, cried out to the LORD, and prayed, and fasted, and beseeched him: "Please, LORD, who performs kindness to thousands! Remember David's loyal service in faithfulness!" After she had prayed, the spirit of the LORD suddenly seized her and she took it to her heart.

וַיְהִי | כַּצֵּאת הַגְּבִירָה הִיא וּשְׁתֵּי שִׁפְחוֹתֶיהָ הִחֲלִיכּוֹת לְרַגְלֶיהָ וַתִּלְבָּשׁ בְּגָדֵי מַלְכוּת וַתִּשָּׂם
כֶּתֶר־מַלְכוּת בְּרֹאשָׁהּ וַתַּטֵּב אֶת־רֹאשָׁהּ וַתַּרְבּ תַּפְאֲרָתָהּ וַתִּגְדֵּל יְפֻעָתָהּ וַתְּהִי יְהוּדִית
נִשְׂאֶת חֹן בְּעֵינֶי כָּל־רְאִיָּהּ:

When the lady went out, herself and her two maids in attendance, she put on royal apparel and set a royal diadem on her head and dressed her hair. Her glory increased and her beauty grew, and Judith won the admiration of all who saw her.

וַיְהִי | כְּשִׁמּוֹעַ אֲלִיפּוֹרְנִי אֶת דְּבָרֵי הַנַּעֲרָה וַיִּשְׂמַח וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־תְּרַאֲי כִּי אֶעֱשֶׂה כִּנְפִישִׁךְ
[כְּנִפְשֶׁךָ] וְאֶצִּיל אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹתֵיהֶם מִמָּוֶת: וְאַתָּה תִּהְיֶה [תְּהִי] עַל בֵּיתִי וּמַלְכָּתָּ כָּל־אַשֶּׁר
תֵּאֱנִי וְאַבְיָד אֲשִׁימְנוּ שׁוֹמֵר לְרֹאשִׁי כָּל־הַיָּמִים: בְּאֵי־נָא שִׁכְבִּי עִמִּי אַחֲוָתִי כִּי גְדוּלָּה
אַהֲבָה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְבֶּתִּיךְ אֶהְבֵּת תַּעֲנוּגִים:

When Aliforni heard the words of the girl, he rejoiced greatly, and said: "Do not fear for I will do what you desire and I will deliver your lives from death. You will be in charge of my household and reign over all your soul desires and your father – I shall make him my bodyguard forever". "Come now, lie with me my sister, for it is a great love I have for you, a love with all its rapture."

וַתֹּאמֶר יְהוּדִית צִמְאֹתִי וְגַם בָּצוּם נַפְשִׁי עָנִיתִי: וַתֹּאמֶר לְשִׁפְחָתָהּ בִּשְׁלִי לִי שְׁתֵּי לֶבִיכּוֹת
וְאַבְרָא [וְאַבְרָהָה] מִידָּךְ וַתַּעַשׂ לָהּ הַלִּבִּיכּוֹת וַיִּמְלִחֵם עַד־מָאֹד וּבְחֲרִיצֵי הַחֶלֶב שָׁפַךְ עַל־
הַסִּיר: וַיִּקְחֵם וַיְבִיאוּם הַחֲדָרָה אֲשֶׁר אֲלִיפּוֹרְנִי שָׁמָּה:

Then Judith said: "I am thirsty and have been humbling my soul with fasting." So she said to her maid: "Cook me two pancakes so I can eat at your hands." She made her the pancakes and salted them heavily and poured them into the pot with pieces of cheese. She took them and brought them to the room where Aliforni was.

3. Who was Yehudit?

Book of Judith (8:1-2)

Judith was informed at the time of what had happened. She was the daughter of Merari son of Ochs, son of Joseph, son of Oziel, son of Eliah, son of Ananias, son of Gideon, son of Raphaim, son of Ahitub, son of Eliljah, son of Hilkiah, son of Eliab, son of Nathanael, son of Salamiel, son of Sarasadai, son of Israel. Her husband Manasseh, of her own tribe and family had died at the time of the barley harvest.

Book of Judith (9:1-2)

Judith threw herself face to the ground, scattered ashes on her head, undressed as far as the sackcloth she was wearing and cried loudly to the Lord. At the same time in Jerusalem, the evening incense was being offered in the Temple of God. Judith said: Lord, God of my ancestor Simeon, you armed him with a sword to take vengeance on the foreigners who had undone a virgin's belt to her shame, laid bare her thigh to her confusion, violated her womb to her dishonour, since through you said @this must not be' they did it.