



Nourishing your mind, body, and spirit

About Feeding Women of the Talmud, Feeding Ourselves

[*Feeding Women of the Talmud, Feeding Ourselves*](#) is community cookbook co-created with 129 Jewish women from around the world. 60 Rabbis, Rabbinical students, Jewish teachers, and emerging thought leaders contributed to the Talmudic narratives, and 60 female professional chefs and passionate homecooks contributed to the recipes. The addition of this female-focused point of view to these women's Talmudic stories—which were recorded and edited by men—is a bright and encouraging testament to a modern generation of women engaging in Jewish learning.

These community cookbook/studybook projects are collective efforts, involving diverse Jewish women from all around the world. [*Feeding Women of the Talmud, Feeding Ourselves*](#) is the co-creation of 129 Jewish women: 69 Rabbis, Rabbinical students, Jewish teachers and emerging thought leaders contributed to the Talmudic narratives and 60 female professional chefs and passionate homecooks contributed to the recipes.

- This cookbook is organized around female stories in the Talmud, alphabetically presented.
- Each chapter is devoted to one female character in the Talmud and has the following sections:
- Story: a concise “true to the text” recounting of the female character's story in the Talmud.
- Context: This section seeks to enhance the stories by exploring their context: providing historical, social, literary and/or liturgical context for the story; describing what falls before and/or after the particular story in the Talmud and exploring how the context and position of the story reveals more about its meaning.
- Aggadah: a modern commentary or fictional story, uplifting the subject's voice without attempting to neutralize her imperfections, flaws or struggles.
- Prompts: meaningful questions arising from the story, meant to inspire further reflection for readers today.
- Food offering: one vegan or plant-based recipe, each inspired by or honoring the female Talmudic character.

יהודית / Yehudit

Story

In Tractate Yevamot, the Babylonian Talmud shares a story about Yehudit¹.

Yehudit's husband, Rabbi Ḥiyya, was considered the greatest scholar in Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi's Academy and was known for his religious dedication and scholarship. It is recounted that "all of his prayers were answered"²

Yehudit was the mother of two sets of twins: twin girls, Pazi and Tavi, followed by twin boys, Yehuda and Hizkiya. The Talmud recounts that one of the two boys was born in the seventh month, and the second one was born in the ninth month of pregnancy. Yehudit suffered from extremely painful births.

Directly following the birth of her fourth child, she changed her clothes to disguise herself and went to her husband. Posing as a stranger approaching him as a Rabbi, she asked him a halachic question: "Is a woman commanded to be fruitful and multiply?" Not knowing he was speaking to his own wife, he replied, "no." Following this exchange, Yehudit drank an infertility potion.

Many years later, when Yehudit and Rabbi Ḥiyya's four children were fully grown and renowned in their own right as Torah scholars, or as mothers to renowned Torah scholars, the actions that Yehudit took to prevent further pregnancies were revealed. Rabbi Ḥiyya told her that he wished she had given birth to another set of twins.

Passages

Talmud.b. Yevamot 65b

יהודה וחזקיה תאומים היו אחד נגמרה צורתו לסוף תשעה ואחד נגמרה צורתו לתחלת שבעה יהודית
דביתו דר' חייא הוה לה צער לידה שנאי מנא ואתיא לקמיה דר' חייא ואמרה אתתא מפקדא אפריה
ורביה אמר לה לא אזלא אשתיא סמא דעקרתא
לסוף איגלאי מילתא אמר לה איכו ילדת לי חדא כרסא אחרייתא דאמר מר יהודה וחזקיה אחי פזי וטוי

Yehuda and Hizkiyya, were twins, one was fully developed after nine and one was fully developed at the beginning of the seventh. Yehudit, the wife of Rabbi Ḥiyya, had

¹ Yehudit is also mentioned in Talmud.b. Kiddushin 12b:1. in a halachic debate about the validity of marriage in a failed engagement of early adolescence.

² Sefaria, Resources "Rabbi Chiyya"

birthing pain, changed her clothes and came before Rabbi Ḥiyya. She said: Is a woman commanded fruitful and multiply? He said to her: No. She went and drank an infertility potion.

Eventually the matter was revealed. He said to her: If only you had given birth to one more belly for me. As the Master said: Yehuda and Ḥizkiyya brothers Pazi and Tavi.

Context

Yehudit's story is shared right after a story of another woman who came before Rabbi Ami and requested divorce due to her husband's inability to father children³. The Rabbi tells the woman she is not obligated to be fruitful and multiply and therefore has no legal right to demand a divorce. She counters that she wants to have children so that she will have someone to care for her when she is old to which Rabbi Ami says that in her situation, the Rabbis can force the husband to grant her divorce.

This is followed by the story of Yehudit, a married woman with four children who wishes to prevent further pregnancies. The Rabbis support *both* women, whether they need intervention in order to reproduce, or to stop. There is a seeming paradox at play: men are obligated to reproduce, and cannot do so without women; meanwhile, women are *not* obligated to have children at all.

Yehudit drinks some sort of root-based medicinal drink. In the Talmud, there are several discussions of this "cup of roots": a form of orally consumed medicinal birth control. On the issue of birth control, the Talmud also shares a key statement that has been called, "The *Baraita* of the Three Women" about specific women and the circumstances in which they are permitted to use birth control.⁴

From the position of Yehudit's story in the Talmud, it seems that the Sages are sharing stories about how deeply fertility impacts women (i.e. Yehudit), men (i.e. Rabbi Ḥiyya) and marriage relationships. Yehudit's story also points to a larger question of when Jewish law allows women (and men) to use birth control. This issue of contraception and Jewish law is an ongoing discussion.

Aggadah

³ Talmud.b.Yevamot 65b:17

⁴ Talmud. b. Yevamot 12b

The status of women in any society is connected to their control over their fertility.

The story of Yehudit demonstrates the tension around female fertility: for women themselves, for their partners, and in religious and civil law.

By including Yehudit's story, the Gemara gives her female experience legitimacy. She faced unexpected health consequences in childbirth, namely extreme pain. This suffering impacted her so deeply that directly following the birth of her fourth child, Yehudit wanted to prevent further pregnancies. She disguised herself as "another woman" before her husband, a religious authority, for a legal ruling on *their* case.⁵

The Gemara points to the tension at play for this couple by also giving space to her husband's experience. Rabbi Hiyya is able to be objective in relaying the law to his wife precisely because the reality of his personal implication is obscured by her disguise. Perhaps lacking confidence in her husband's capacity to support her decision, or knowing he wanted more children, Yehudit took the decision alone. Despite the fact that Yehudit's final choice was legally allowed, her decision making process excluded her husband. When Rabbi Hiyya finds out that she took a fertility potion, he finally shares his feelings of regret and his wish that he had had more children.

Today, there is still on-going debate in many countries and religions regarding if and how women may control their own fertility: under which circumstances is it permissible and what methods are allowed.

Yehudit's story shows an enduring truth: it is essential that women have the religious and civil legal right to access safe methods of birth control. These rights can only be secured when women's lived experiences exert a fundamental influence on laws governing their bodies - this requires women to be consulted and to participate as lawmakers.

Prompts

⁵ Similar to the story of Tamar in the Hebrew Bible, Yehudit disguises herself in order to obtain rightful control over her own fertility. Genesis 38:13-30.

- The commandment to "to be fruitful and multiply" applies to men and not women. What do you think this means today?
- Yehudit was able to make her own decisions because she understood the law. To you, what are the most important issues or aspects of fertility law today?
- What factors affect negotiation and decision making about fertility in relationships today?

Kenden Alfond

Nourishing Womb Tonic

This recipe is to heal Yehudit's womb. It is useful for every female who wants to nourish and support their womb with a natural herbal approach.

This simple recipe brews a highly nutritive tea for the reproductive organs. These herbs are safe to drink daily for toning the uterus, promoting blood flow to the pelvic floor, aiding digestion, and calming the nervous system.

The medical herbs and plants which ease painful menstruation, and support mothers and babies throughout the birth and postpartum.

These medicinal herbs and plants can be purchased online from reputable herb shops. Herbs can be stored in an airtight container out of direct sunlight for up to one year. I recommend buying at least 2-4 oz. of each herb to make your own blend.

Ingredients

- 3 parts nettle leaf
- 2 parts red raspberry leaf
- 2 parts tulsi leaf and flowers
- 1 part hawthorne leaf, flower and berry
- 1 part milky oats tops
- 0.5 part rose
- 0.5 part cinnamon bark

Prep Time: 8 min

Cook Time: 25 min

Serving Size: 32 oz. Quart Jar

Tools:

Teapot with a strainer or 32 oz. glass jar
Fine Sieve

Ingredients:

3 tablespoons of herb blend

Instructions:

1. Make the herbal tea blend by combining each herb and store in an airtight glass container.
2. Boil 1 quart of water
3. Add 2 tablespoons of the herbal tea blend to a 32 oz jar
4. Pour boiling water over the herbs
5. Cover and let steep for 25 minutes
6. Strain into your favorite mug and enjoy
7. Enjoy 3-5 cups per day. Safe for daily use. Safe for pregnant and nursing women.

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