



The *Tsene-rene*: The Story of the Yiddish “Women’s Bible”

Limmud Festival 2022



Created by Pamela Brenner

ספר

צאינה וראינה

על

חמשה חומשי תורה

עם

הפטרות וחמש מגילות ותרנום למגילות

בלשון אשכנז. עברי מייטש.

עשהו האלף דוקר כמתי יעקב כמתי יצחק מלך יאנאווא

חלק שני

דער צאינה וראינה איז ארויס גענומען געווארן פון פיל ספרים און פיל פרושים. און איז געשריבן אויף מייטש כדי עס זאלן פאר שטיין. גרוש און קליין. און אויך האבן מיר אנגעטון די פסוקים פון דער תורה געטעלט אלע גקדוה כדי עס זאל קענען לייגען אן שום קעות. גאר דאש געטון:

אויך האבן מיר בייא געדון חודש גידדוקט איין לוח אויף פופציג יאדן. קען זאל ווישן ווען עס גיפאלט דער מולך. און וועלכער טאג איז ראש חודש. און ווען עס גיפאלט יום טוב. הנקבה. פורים. תשעים. חמשה עשר. לצ בעשר. און ארבע פרשות. אלס אויך עברי מייטש.

אויך האבן מיר גידדוקט אלע צייטן וואס זייער גידדוקט געווען פון אלע קאל.

ווילנא

ברפוס של ר אצ ראוענקראנץ, ור מ'ם שריפטומעצער.

שנת תרנ"ה ל"ק

ЦЕНА УРЕНА.

Переводъ Пятикнижія на жаргонъ.

Оъ Виленьскаго изданія 1887 г. 60% измѣненій. Часть II.

1895.



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Background

Author: Jacob ben Isaac Ashkenazi (1550-1625), of Janów

Timeline: ca. 1590

Earliest extant edition: 1622, but at least 3 older editions existed

Why?

So that “all the people of the land, both small and great, might themselves know and understand how to read all of the twenty-four books. For the people hear sermons in the synagogues and do not understand what the sermon is. They speak too rapidly in the synagogue, but in the book one can read slowly, so that one can understand by oneself.”

“The beginning of the seventeenth century saw the publication of a Yiddish work on the liturgical Bible that **eclipsed what came before it and transformed the world of the Yiddish Bible.**

This work...has **been reprinted [over] two hundred and seventy-five times**, both in Yiddish and translations into a number of languages.

There were other attempts to make the Bible available in Yiddish for a popular audience, from the translations of Joseph Witzzenhausen and Yekutiel Blitz at the end of the seventeenth century to the modern translation of Yehoash (Solomon Bloomgarden) in the early part of the twentieth century.

None of them has come close to matching the cultural influence and historical importance of the Ze’edah U-Re’edah.”

– Morris M. Faierstein, Introduction, *Ze’edah U-Re’edah: A Critical Translation into English*

A Cultural Introduction

1. Tevye 41:45
2. Shtisel, Season 1 Episode 12, 9:03-11:13



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The Title

Shir Hashirim - the Song of Songs 3:11

צִאִינָה | וְרֵאִינָה בָנוֹת צִיּוֹן בַּמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה בְּעֵטְרָה שֶׁעֲטָרָהּ לּוֹ אִמּוֹ בְּיוֹם חֲתֻנָּתוֹ וּבְיוֹם שִׂמְחַת לְבָבוֹ

O maidens of Zion, go forth And gaze upon King Solomon, wearing the crown that his mother gave him on his wedding day, on his day of bliss.

1663 Prague



What can we infer from the title?

The conventional wisdom, since the beginning of modern scholarship in the nineteenth century, has been that Early Modern Yiddish literature was primarily written for and addressed to “**women and men who are like women**” in that they are not learned and cannot read a Hebrew text.

The **assumption** that the audience for the Ze’edah U-Re’edah was primarily women was central to virtually every reference to this work in all the modern popular and even much of the scholarly literature on the subject. It was considered to be so self-evident that no proof or evidence need be provided.

To the extent any **proof** was offered, it was usually a reference to the “title” of the work, Ze’edah U-Re’edah, “go forth and gaze,” a phrase from Song of Songs 3:11. The full phrase is, “O maidens of Zion, go forth and gaze.”

– Morris M. Faierstein, Introduction, *Ze’edah U-Re’edah: A Critical Translation into English*

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What the critics are saying:

"a fascinating, didactic book which could win the approbation of the strict moral leaders of Eastern European Jewry, and at the same time **accompany women** as their favorite literary and devotional text from girlhood to old age. For generations there was hardly a Yiddish home that did not possess a copy."

“**Because of its orientation toward women readers**, the book is particularly focused on the biblical matriarchs, the various courtships mentioned in scripture, and the rescue of Moses by Pharaoh's daughter. Although there are vivid depictions of Paradise and Hell, there is an emphasis that righteousness is to be found in serving God willingly and wholeheartedly, rather than out of hope of reward or fear of punishment. Charity and almsgiving are also emphasized.”

– Sol Liptzin, *A History of Yiddish Literature*, pp. 10-11. (1972)

What the critics are saying:

“Tz’edah Ur’edah became an essential ingredient of the Jewish home. Every shtetl and neighborhood had its *zoger ’keh* [“sayer”], the woman who held audiences enthralled as she read and declaimed from her worn, treasured, Tz’edah Ur’edah. Men, too — even scholars — used it as a review of the weekly Torah reading in its breadth and depth. Many a world-famous rabbi and *rosh yeshivah* recalls fondly how his first inspiration in Torah study grew out of those hours on his mother’s lap as she read to him from her Tz’edah Ur’edah. “

– ArtScroll Jacket Cover, *The Weekly Midrash: Tz’edah Ur’edah, the Classic Anthology of Torah Lore and Midrashic Commentary*. (1993)

Example from Genesis – on eating from the tree

Toldot Yizhak gives another explanation. Adam excused himself by saying, You forbade me from eating of the tree of knowledge before I had a wife because the tree of knowledge creates the desire and inclination to love women. Therefore, since I did not have a wife, You correctly forbade me from eating of the tree of knowledge, so that I should not have the desire or evil inclination for women. However, now that you have given me a wife and it is a mitzvah to have children, therefore I ate it because I have a wife. This is also why she gave it to me so that I should have desire for her. Another explanation is that Adam excused himself because the Holy One gave him a wife who should help her husband because the man is obligated to study Torah. The wife should cook for him and should provide the food for the house and the husband should not ask whether she is cooking kosher or not. He must believe her. That is why the verse says, “*the woman that you gave me as a helpmate*” [3:12]. She gave me to eat and I am not obligated to ask her what sort of apple she gave me. I thought that it was a different sort of apple.¹²⁷

The Title Page vs. The Title

“It would be reasonable to see the phrase Ze’edah U-Re’ena has a subtitle or a short-hand title to differentiate it from the many other works with the title Hama-sha Humshei Torah. The problem, as we will discuss below, is that **too much has been made of this phrase as a reason for seeing this books as specifically some-thing for women**, both for positive and negative reasons. However, there is no need for casuistry or speculation about what message the author intended to send about his intended audience, if any, with the allusion to the phrase Ze’edah U-Re’edah, since he explicitly states a little farther down in his title page that the **intended audience for this work was “Anashim ve nashim,” men and women.**”

– Morris M. Faierstein, Introduction, *Ze’edah U-Re’edah: A Critical Translation into English*

Halakhic References, Part 1

Taz (Turei Zahav), 1586-1667. Published in 1646.

מי שאינו בר הכי ודאי ראוי לקרות בפירוש התורה שיש בלשון אשכנז בזמנינו כגון ספר צאנה וראנה וכיוצ' בו כדי שיבין ענין הפרש':

“Whoever is not learned certainly ought to read **contemporary Torah commentary in the language of Ashkenaz, such as the *Tsene-rene***, so that he can understand the weekly portion”

Halakhic References, Part 2

Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan), 1838-1933. Letter written in 1933:

בדורות הקודמים היה לכל בית ישראל **מסורת אבות ואמהות** לילך בדרך התורה והדת ולקרות בספר "צאינה וראינה" בכל שבת קודש

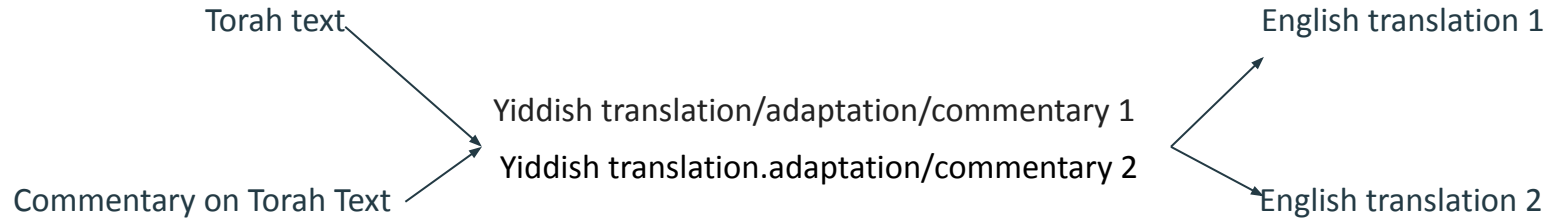
“In the earlier generations, each family in Israel had a **tradition of fathers and mothers** to follow the path of Torah and religion and to read the book Tze'ena URe'ena on each holy Shabbat”

Literary References

“The Tsene-rene really opened my eyes. As I noted above, in the kheyder I studied only discontinuous sections of the Pentateuch, with no relation or connection between them. Through the Tsene-rene, a complete and elaborate picture from the lives of our ancestors was disclosed to me, a picture seasoned with fine and wonderful aggadot [fables], which captured my heart.”

– *Russian and Hebrew writer and publicist Yehuda Leib-Binyamin Katzenelson (Buki Ben Yogli, 1846–1917)*

A Brief Translation History



A Translation Case Study

Parashat Mikeitz

וַיְהִי

כִּי

שְׁנַת־שְׁנָיִם יָמִים וּפִרְעֹה חָלֵם וְהִנֵּה עֹמֵד עַל־הַיָּאָר:ק

After two years' time, Pharaoh
dreamed that he was standing by the
Nile...



A Translation Case Study

פרשת מקץ *Parashas Mikeitz* (41:1 — 44:17)

🕒 Pharaoh's Dream

וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ שְׁנָתַיִם יָמִים — *At the end of two years* (41:1). At the end of the two years during which Yosef was punished for relying on the wine steward, Pharaoh had a dream.

Chizkuni writes of Yosef's punishment that he ought to have had twelve sons, like his father, but ten were taken from him and he had only two. He ought to have been in jail for ten years, but two extra years were added because he had relied on the wine steward.

A Translation Case Study

“After two years time” [41:1]. At the end of two years, Pharaoh had a dream. *Hizkuni* writes. The Talmud writes in [tractate] *Sotah*.¹ Joseph wanted to sleep with his master’s wife, but the image of Jacob appeared and overcame his inclination. He stuck the nails of his ten fingers in the earth and allowed the semen to go out. The king found a nail in it and he was angry. He was supposed to have twelve tribes like his father. Nonetheless, he only had two children, because he had lost the children when he released semen from his ten fingers. Also as a result, Joseph was commanded to be in prison for ten years and a further two years because he had relied on the chief cupbearer.²

A Translation Case Study

Bereishit 41:45

וַיִּקְרָא פַרְעֹה שֵׁם־יֹסֵף צָפְנַת פַּעֲנִיָּה וַיִּתֵּן־לּוֹ אֶת־אֲסֶנֶת בַּת־פּוֹטִי פַרְעֵי כֹהֵן אֵן לְאִשָּׁה וַיֵּצֵא יוֹסֵף עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:

Pharaoh then gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him for a wife Asenath daughter of Poti-phaera, priest of On. Thus Joseph emerged in charge of the land of Egypt.

A Translation Case Study

☞ Yosef Marries Asnas

וַיֵּתֶן לוֹ אֶת אֲסֶנַת בַּת פּוֹטִי פֶרַע — *And he [Pharaoh] gave him Asnas, daughter of Poti-fera [Potiphar] (41:45). Why was he called Poti-fera? Because he fattened (Hebrew — pitem) calves for sacrifice to idols.*

*“He gave him Asenath daughter of Poti-phaera” [41:45]. He gave Joseph a wife, the daughter of Poti-phaera. He was called Poti-phaera because he gave fattened calves for foreign gods. He was called Poti-phaera because he was a *eunuch*. He could not sleep with a woman. He said that he became a *eunuch* because he was ashamed before the other nobles and became a priest³⁰*