

## **Women's Image as Reflected in Verses from Jewish Sources Cited by Yemenite Israeli Immigrants**

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### **Abstract**

The article presents examples of Moshe Gavra's book "With My Staff" (2012) of passages from the Jewish sources that Immigrants from Yemen to the Land of Israel were reciting in their homeland and still quote for rhetorical purposes. These interpolations served two main purposes: (a) to take into account appropriate circumstances, to convey the original message of the quoted passage; (b) to express their disappointment at the decline in their status through irony. The article focuses on quotations whose original meaning turns from the sublime to the ironic, mainly for the purpose of criticizing the status of women in Israeli society. Using the verses, the Yemenite man who was used to being the sole authority at home expresses his great disappointment at the decline in his status due to the feminist revolution and criticizes the woman's behavior.

### **Key words:**

Women's image, Yemenite Israeli immigrants, quotations, women's status, feminist revolution

### **1. Introduction**

Israel is known as a country where the Jewish people lived for about 1500 years from the 13th century BCE to 135 CE. After the destruction of the Temple, which was its spiritual and cultural center, most of the Jews were expelled from their land. Beginning in the mid-18th century, groups of Jews from all over the world immigrated to Israel. Before the establishment of the State of Israel, beginning in 1882, immigrants arrived in five large and significant migrations, and after its establishment began to reach large waves of immigrations, the largest of which is the Jews Yemen's immigration in 1950-1949 (Seri & Ben-David, 1991: 201).

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The immigrants brought with them living habits and a completely different culture from what they found in the country, and within a short time they had to adapt to a reality that was the opposite of the reality they were used to. One of these changes was the change in the status of women. In Yemen the status of women was equal to their status in the ancient world – the male controlled them without question and they had to obey him. They avoided being in the company of men and had to keep their modesty in their dress, their quiet speech, and their submissive behavior. Their job was to serve the male and engage in all household tasks from morning to evening and avoid being seen in public places. After immigrating to Israel, the Yemenites were exposed to a modern democratic society in which the male is no longer the authority in the house, and the woman who started to work early years of immigration to support the family, became more and more independent.

These changes caused many conflicts in the family and violated the husband-wife relationship (Seri & Ben-David, 1991, 204; Arusi 2011; Bar-Maoz 2011, etc.) The article will present one of the ways in which Yemenite men cope with the change in their life that is expressed in the connection between language and society – the rhetorical discourse. In the communication between women and men the modern Yemenite woman is presented in an insulting and ridiculous image by using passages from the Bible and citations from the Sages in an ironic sense. Yemenite Jews who were very proficient in the language of the sources used these passages in their two meanings in Yemen as well, but in Israel the crisis of immigration led to the intensification of this rhetorical device. It should be emphasized that in the ironic or critical use of the biblical passages, there is a distortion of their original meaning, which was done in order to diminish the image of the woman or to educate her. The article will deal with this phenomenon which was used by the Yemenites immigrants of the mid-twentieth century, and will also relate to the more veteran immigrants from Yemen who immigrated a generation earlier to understand the background of the phenomenon. The Literature review will deal with the status of the Yemenite women, the integration of Yemenite immigrants into Israel and the use of irony as a form of humor. The passages will be illustrated with two interpretations: the original meaning according to the Bible interpretation and the ironic meaning based on the Gavra's book "Only with My Staff" [*Ki Kemakly*] (2012). The discussion will present the conclusions and answer the question of whether the use of the passages of Yemen in an ironic sense achieved its purpose.

## **2. The Status of Women in Yemen**

Even in the days of creation, when the woman was created from the man's image, the Creator defined her only as an assistant near him (Genesis, 2, 20). The woman was perceived as secondary in importance to the man who was first created, and when both of them sinned from eating the forbidden fruit, God cursed them with a curse that accentuated their differences. The husband was assigned to be the breadwinner, and the woman had to bear the burden of child rearing and housekeeping.

From the dawn of history for thousands of years, human society has lived in the dualistic conception of men and women in a stereotypical manner: the man is perceived as independent and powerful while the woman is dependent and sentimental. Virginia Woolf in her feminist essay "A room of one's own" wrote in 1929, mocking the woman's feminine roles and men's expectations of women. Since then, Western society has come a long way, and today the status of women is almost equal to that of men.

However, this social revolution did not apply equally to women from Eastern countries living in a conservative and traditional society. In Arab countries, for example, the status of women is far from satisfactory<sup>2</sup>, as is Yemen. In this country in the middle of the 20th century, the lifestyle of people was very conservative, as was the case for thousands of years since in biblical times (Tuby, 1994; Arusi 2011; Seri & Ben-David, 1991: 89). As evidence of this, according to the Jewish religion, women cannot testify in court<sup>3</sup> and they do not inherit their fathers<sup>4</sup>, men are asked not to talk with women,<sup>5</sup> and fathers are instructed not to teach their daughters Torah<sup>6</sup>.

According to Tubi and Tubi (1994), a girl's education in Yemen was usually the mother's responsibility. Already from the age of 6 or 7, the society imposed an absolute separation between boys and girls. An encounter between the two sexes was

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<sup>2</sup> There are eastern countries where progress began in the early 20th century, such as Iraq and Turkey, but the *Imam* (Yemen king) in Yemen who opposed this, prevented the influence of the modern world on its citizens so as not to harm religious life.

<sup>3</sup> Based on Deuteronomium, 19, 15.

<sup>4</sup> The daughter inherits only if the father has no sons. Inheritance law according to the Torah is detailed in tractate Bava Batra, 115, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> According to Avot, 1, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Based on: "You have learned your sons" (Deuteronomium, 11, 19).

possible only within the family, and even then, was subject to certain restrictions. A distance was maintained between a girl and her father, and she attached herself very closely to her mother. A girl was brought up mainly through role modeling, which in the Yemenite Jewish community had always been an important educational principle. A girl took part in housework from a very early age and accompanied her mother to family visits and social gatherings. These rules were intended to accustom the girls to proper behavioral norms, which were based on the fear of god, modesty, willingness to make do with little, moderation, hospitality and respect for adults.

Every girl who got married left her father's authority to her husband. The women in Yemen were closed in their homes, did not study and worked from morning till evening. The husband who worked to support the family kept the money with him and was responsible for shopping and running the household. In order to please her husband, she had to fulfill all his needs and obey him. Throughout her life the Yemenite woman was subject to male authority - before her marriage she was under her father's control and after her marriage was ruled by her husband (Kazir, 1994).

Girls who were born in the first years after their parents had immigrated to Israel From Yemen, were brought up in this manner (Bashari, 2005). They always felt inferior to their brothers and felt compelled to remind themselves not to be idle or loiter, lest they should displease the male members of their family. They were precluded from laughing out loud, for fear of reprimand and were forbidden to sit in male company because such behavior was not deemed proper for a girl. Young girls were instructed to display modesty when sitting down, and if the hem of the skirt should be lifted ever so little, they were censured. Besides, Yemenite parents prohibited their daughters to go out in the evening, because According to Yemenite custom, girls are not supposed to walk about at such an hour.

### **3. The Immigration to Israel**

The Yemenite immigration to Israel began in small groups at the end of the nineteenth century, but the mass immigration of Yemenites was between 1949 and 1950 immediately after the establishment of the State of Israel. Every ethnic community has, at some point, experienced the divide between the traditional and the modern way of life, which found expression, in attitudes towards women; that evident in proverbs, sayings, and passages cited by its members. Katz (1960: 304–311) states that those coming from a traditional society cannot adapt themselves completely to the

differences in the areas of economy, government, political structure, family, education and leisure, and as a consequence, experience a conceptual clash between the two worlds. Such a conflict is especially pronounced in Israel, because there the transition from tradition to modernity is, in most cases, not the product of historical development but rather comes abruptly, following immigration.

Bashari (2005) describes the traumatic process of Yemenite immigrants' absorption into Israeli society and their efforts to adapt to it, which were quite extraordinary in terms of human experience. The immigrants' integration trajectories were subject to two simultaneous opposing forces: attraction and repulsion. On the one hand, Yemenite Jews wished to preserve the tradition of their fathers in everything relating to religious life, while on the other, they strove to integrate in the life and culture of the new society and its institutional frameworks – an endeavor in which some succeeded only in part. An example of such religious alienation is found in the article by Yosef Kapach (1983), in which he deplors the gradual erosion of the original Yemenite customs that had been preserved for thousands of years. He brings examples of foreign practices that had found their way into the lives of Yemenite Jews in Israel and calls on his compatriots to return to religion and observe the traditional customs they learned from their ancestors.

Transition from the traditional to the modern way of life also had an impact on the functioning of a Yemenite woman in her home. In addition to her roles as wife and mother which, in Yemen, had taken up all her time, in Israel she became a breadwinner on par with her husband, as it was difficult to make ends meet on his meager salary alone. Bar Maoz (2011) describes the change in the household budget that women had to face after moving from Yemen to Israel, but also their quick adaptation to the new living conditions, and the way they coped with the financial difficulties and other problems, which they had not had in Yemen. It was explained above that the first immigrants from Yemen arrived at the end of the 19th century. As early as the 1920s, over less than one generation from the time the first Yemenite immigrants settled in Israel, women's involvement in public affairs increased exponentially, as they joined women's organizations that dealt with women's issues in Israel at large (see also Berlovitz, 2010).

A research study carried out by Sharabi (2007) examined women's status in the first Jezreel valley labor settlements (named *Moshv*) in the 1920s. According to her, the ideology of the *Moshv* saw a woman as a partner without whom the family

economy could not exist and developed. Because of this concept, the family unit was designed as a geographical continuum between the house, the branches of the yard, the orchard and the field of flora, a sequence that increased the range of women's occupations. So the distinctive socio-economic structure of the settlement and its female members' efforts to negotiate the boundaries between the private and public spheres resulted in the formation of a more powerful and active female identity. Yet, on account of deep-rooted traditional perceptions, the settlement failed to evolve either complete equality or role reversal, and women's efforts at negotiating their position often ended in the preservation of traditional gender boundaries.

Against this background came the mass immigration of the Yemenites in the middle of the twentieth century, which also encountered the same difficulties of transition from culture to culture. The State of Israel was still very young, after a brutal war for its existence that lasted about a year. The economic situation in Israel was difficult and Yemenite men did not have enough work. To help with the household economy, the women went out to work outside the house in the most available work—house cleaning.

In these houses, the Yemenite women were exposed to the modern way of life and to the social norms of the new reality, and began to bring these changes to their home. The opportunity to earn a living, to help the man and sometimes to support the family instead of him strengthened their self-confidence and they became more independent and more influential. They were sensitive to the cultural difficulties experienced by the children in their absorption process and sometimes helped them to get rid of the symbols of the traditional world. For example, in Yemen, boys used to grow two strands of hair near each ear called *peot*. These *peot* would remain for the rest of their lives in order to separate themselves from the non-Jewish society, but after the immigration, the children suffered harassment from the Israelis children who mocked their *peot*. Some of the mothers who understood the children, allowed them to shave their *peot* or at least turned a blind eye when the children did so on their own initiative. This initiative aroused the fury of the fathers and they expressed their anger at the kids. The mothers understood that the sons should be made easier to integrate into the new reality and therefore supported their children even if they had to confront the husband.

The objective of this article is to present passages and verses from the Bible were taken out of their context and used as a means of instruction, or to shape the

image of a woman and her roles as a wife and a daughter. Half of these verses convey ironic messages, while others serve as injunctions, criticism or reprimand, or describe the woman's image. As the proportion of verses that are used ironically is relatively large, some background information on this rhetorical tool

#### **4. Irony as a Variety of Humor**

Since the dawn of history and the beginning of society, humor has been part of human experience and served as an escape from the hardships of day-to-day life. Humor has a wide range of functions: it contributes to enjoyment, makes it possible to touch on subjects that are otherwise social taboos, attenuates aggression, serves as a means to improve society, and helps create defense mechanisms against fears and anxiety. Ziv (1984: 12) divides humor into two categories: visual and verbal. Sover (2009: 148; 2011) elaborates that the greater one's proficiency in a language, the more open one is to the creation and enjoyment of verbal humor. Apart from one's command of language, one's understanding of verbal humor depends on one's general knowledge and cognitive abilities. On the topic of verbal humor wrote also Chiaro, (1991), Shalom Vitel-Gaiger Perlman (2000), Fruchtman (2005, 2006) and others.

Humor whose purpose is entertainment and diversion alone is direct; it is expressed through telling jokes and comedy performances. However, there is another kind of humor, one that is mainly episodic and unplanned, and such humor is indirect. One of the ways to articulate this extemporaneous humor is through irony, a rhetorical tool that can be used in both spoken and written communication. Baruch and Fruchtman (1983: 43) define irony as a disguised expression of ambiguity. A person says a word or a sentence but means something different. Usually an ironic utterance implies the speaker's ridicule of the subject and therefore also his feeling of superiority in the matter. A sentence like "This article is too convincing" cannot be read as ironic because it projects a moderate attitude. The sentence "This article is instructive and is sure to form a tier in the edifice of literature" is obviously bombastic but can nevertheless be taken at its face value. However, its hyperbolic style carries with it the potential for an ironic reading. Weizman (2008) adds that irony is a violation of the principle of cooperation between the speaker and the listener that is intentionally and openly made by the addresser. In this situation, the addressee identifies in the conversation a hint that the meaning of the addresser's utterance is

probably different from the verbal meaning, and therefore he searches for an alternative speaker meaning by using the contextual clues.

According to Livnat (2003), the interpretation of an ironic utterance makes use of both verbal and non-verbal clues, and in oral communication, the latter are in part anchored in intonation. Giora (1995) explains that when interpreting an ironic expression, the addressee does not reject the propositional meaning, but uses both meanings—verbal and ironic. The literal meaning is the basis of the ironic meaning and that's why it is possible to understand the ironic meaning of the verbal utterance. For example, when it is said "What a beautiful day for a picnic" when it rains, it is possible to understand the gap between the specific situation and the desired situation in the verbal message.

This article analyzes ironic utterances, mostly Biblical verses, that elderly Yemenite immigrants took out of context and have used in conversation – a practice that has been widespread in the Yemenite Jewish dialect, both in Yemen and in Israel. The quotes are taken from the book by Moshe Gavra entitled "Only with My Staff" [*Ki Kemakly*] (2012). This book is a compilation of hundreds of such passages from the Bible and other Jewish sources that he collected with the help of his friends and those close to him, or which, from early childhood, he had heard spoken by Yemenite Jews. While in my previous article (Yemini, 2014) I focused on ironic utterances that communicate social critique, the ones presented here center around criticism leveled specifically at women.

The use of verses from the Bible and citations from the Sages in a conversation carried in Israel today encompasses several registers of the Hebrew language: Biblical Hebrew, Mishnaic Hebrew (the language of the Sages), and Modern Hebrew. Marcus (1997: 214–216) discusses the mixing of Hebrew registers with the purpose of creating comical effects in literature, but her conclusions hold for spoken language as well. She argues that the mixture of registers gives rise to a stylistic mismatch which induces contradiction, contrast and a surprise element, and which engenders humorous effects. In a similar vein, Sarel (1990) suggests that the mixing of styles, which she terms "stylistic dislocation," often serves as a linguistic means to create humorous effects verbally. The use of Biblical verses to express humor involves the lowering of the sublime, and results in a change of meaning; in other words, a transition from one meaning to another through inverting and contrasting the language of the sources lends itself to an ironic reading. In addition, integrating verses



with a normative message in a mundane interaction on a topic that contravenes the values they express effectively intertwines the sacred and the profane, which is a hallmark of secularization.

The terms “the sublime” and “the humorous” are borrowed from the book by Barzel (1979: 10), who distinguishes the sublime (from *segev*, lofty) and the ironic, in terms of both their expression and the response they elicit. The sublime is articulated in a poetic and elevated language, while the humorous is phrased in terms of inferiority and diminution. The sublime evokes the reaction of astonishment, admiration and reverence, while humor gives rise to laughter, criticism, doubt and confusion. Indeed, a close scrutiny of the verses presented in the book, “Only with My Staff” [*Ki Kemakly*] (2012), reveals that most of these passages are in Biblical Hebrew, which is exalted and uplifting; what’s more, 504 of these are from the *Psalms*; 55 from the *Ecclesiastes*; and 142 from the *Proverbs*—all these sources characterized by festive and lofty phraseology typical of poetic language.

Many of the passages in Gavra’s book (2012) are used mundanely with a view of improving society, the function of humor that is listed as No. 4 in the opening part of Ziv’s book (1984: 39). They ridicule unpalatable qualities of all too fallible humanity, in hope of eradicating them. By deriding an individual to change and improve his nature and behavior, the speaker renders the phenomena he deems objectionable and reprehensible as ridiculous, and the laughter that comes from perceiving their ludicrous aspects improves the world, as it were. Sometimes the speaker’s strategy is subtle, mild, and unobtrusive, while on other occasions the ridicule borders on brutality. The gentler alternative ironically disguises the message, by inverting the meaning.

In the introduction to his book, Gavra (2012) writes that “Yemenite Jews’ minute knowledge of the Pentateuch prompted them to use Biblical verses and Sages’ sayings in everyday interactions [...] Every Yemenite Jew used to cite passages from our sources practically in every sentence, however mundane its topic, and discourse flowed and cascaded with the words of the Torah” (pp. 4-5). As already stated, approximately half of the verses discussed in the present article convey an ironic message; accordingly, in what follows, I will demonstrate how Yemenite elders inverse the meaning of the passages cited to express irony. The Yemenite speakers use the passages with the purpose of correcting the behavior of girls and women in Israel of every age and standing—in childhood and as wives and mothers. The object

is to mold their image as modest women, compliant with the wishes of their fathers and husbands, i.e., men who rule over them throughout their lives, as it was in Yemen. Another kind of passages is not used ironically but serves the same purpose by implicitly emphasizing the distinction between proper and improper conduct. The third set is portrayals of the female image. The passages that are illustrated here are an expression of the difficult feelings of the elders of Yemen who saw the disintegration of religious and cultural values. By quoting the verses their goal is to restore the normal life style in Yemen, or at least, to be realistic in expressing their criticism of the modern way of life in Israel. The following passages will be presented alongside two interpretations: The original interpretation of the verses that were taken from the words of the interpreter Rashi,<sup>7</sup> whose attached to each verse as written in the original, and the other interpretation that based on the book of Gavra, "Only with My Staff" [*Ki Kemakly*] (2012). Rashi's interpretations of the verses can be found in the source beneath the biblical text and the interpretations of Gavra can be found in his book in the order of the Hebrew alphabet.

## **5. The Use of Passages from the Jewish Sources by Yemenite Jews**

### *5.1 The demoting of the lofty to describe and shape the female image*

Song of Songs 6:10: "*Who is she that looketh forth as the dawn?*" This verse describes the beauty of the beloved, but Yemenite Jews have used it to criticize a maiden or a young woman who looks out of the window at passers-by, a behavior that, according to the norms prevalent in Yemen, was taken to signify a lack of modesty.

Deuteronomy 28:10: "*Then all the peoples on earth shall see...*" This verse opens the weekly parasha "Ki Tavo" and is part of the blessings; it relays the rewards that the people of Israel will be granted if they follow God's path and observe His commandments. According to this verse, the observance of commandments shows the non-Jews that the people of Israel acknowledge and worship God, and that, as a reward, these nations will fear the Jews and refrain from challenging them. Yemenite

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<sup>7</sup> Rashi was a well-known French scholar and considered the greatest interpreter of the Bible and the Talmud.

immigrants have used this verse to ironically reprimand a woman who dresses immodestly and exposes parts of the body that are supposed to be covered.

Jeremiah 31:21: *“How long wilt thou turn away coyly, O thou backsliding daughter? For the LORD hath created a new thing in the earth: a woman shall court a Man.”*

This verse was interpreted by Sherki (2017) as follows: Throughout history, the government and authority structures have been run by men; the process of redemption, however, is fraught with change, to the effect that “a woman shall court a man,” in the sense that a female leads and guides a man toward progress. This verse was cited to a bride’s mother by a renowned rabbi, who was standing, during her daughter’s marriage ceremony, under the wedding canopy and watching the mother and her daughter circle her Ashkenazi son-in-law and his mother. The rabbi was implying that, according to the Yemenite norms, the proceedings involved a role reversal—the female courts a man instead of a man courting a woman.

Genesis 29:34: *“Now this time will my husband be joined unto me.”* These words, uttered by our foremother Leah after she gave birth to Levi, her third son, express her hope that now Jacob would show her more favor and that their relationship would get stronger because of the three sons that she had born him. The verse was cited by an elderly Yemenite man to show his dissatisfaction with a widespread Israeli custom whereby the husband accompanies his wife to the delivery room and is present at birth. This practice was foreign to the Yemenite Jewish community, which displayed excessive modesty in relation to anything connected to pregnancy and birth. It is said that, in Yemen, midwives would suddenly disappear to attend to a woman about to give birth, and even their husbands were often surprised by their absence, even though they knew their occupation.

*“The bride is beautiful and lacking”*—this saying is prosodically identical to *“the bride is handsome and pious,”* one of the few in Gavra’s book (2012) that are taken from the language of the Sages, or Mishnaic Hebrew. It is in effect a distortion of a proverb from the Babylonian Talmud, Tosafot 14, 1. According to the School of Hillel, when dancing before a bride, one must praise her by calling her *“handsome and pious.”* However, Shammai’s school disagrees, saying that, if the bride is ugly, it

is better to keep quiet rather than speak untruth.<sup>8</sup> Yemenite immigrants used to cite this sentence humorously, when a bride lacked in beauty.

Proverbs 31:29: *"Many daughters have done valiantly, but thou excellest them all."* This is the concluding verse of the hymn "The Woman of Valor," which the father and the children sing at the beginning of a Sabbath meal in praise of the mother of the family, saying that she is the best of all worthy women. In addition to its default function, this verse is sometimes cited ironically with reference to a woman whose conduct is improper or who has committed a misdemeanor.

Proverbs 12:4: *"A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband."* This verse, too, comes from "The Woman of Valor" and depicts a worthy woman, who is likened to a crown adorning her husband's brow. While, in most cases, it is cited in praise of a worthy woman and in acknowledgement of her good deeds, on occasion it is used to refer to a woman who has caused an embarrassment or a loss to her husband, For example, a woman who appeared to be with a strange man or a woman who wasted the money in excessive shopping.

#### *5.2 Other verses used as an educational tool*

Genesis 17:9: *"Where is Sarah thy wife?' And he said: 'Behold, in the tent.'"*

Yemenite immigrants have used this verse to portray female modesty and in the first few years after their immigration to Israel, it was the reference to persuade the young girls not to wander late in the evening.

Psalms 45:14: *"All glorious is the king's daughter within the palace."* This verse praises the modest woman, who is likened to the daughter of a king, but Yemenite immigrants have used it as an implicit warning, lest a woman make an appearance where and when it would be considered inappropriate. As already stated, in Yemen, Jews adhered to very strict rules regarding female modesty. From a young age, girls were precluded from being seen in the company of men, going to the market, and even looking out the window lest she should be seen by strangers. As an

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<sup>8</sup> The discussion continues along the following lines: Or find a trait that merits praise and mention it, to avoid telling untruth. However, even the Shammai school concedes that, should a family member inquire after the bride, one must praise her; however, if no such inquiry is made, it is preferable to refrain from telling falsehood.

example, fathers used to mention Sarah, the wife of our forefather Abraham: When three angels came to visit Abraham and asked, "Where is Sarah, thy wife?" (Genesis 18:9), he replied that she was inside the tent.

Genesis 16:4: "*And her mistress was despised into her eyes.*" This verse relays the story of Hagar, the maid of our foremother Sarah, who conceived a child by Abraham. As the child she was carrying in her womb would be Abraham's only heir, Hagar felt that her status in the family had risen and she was superior to her mistress Sarah, who was barren; as a result, her behavior toward Sarah became disrespectful. Yemenite immigrants use this verse to level criticism at a woman who has shown disrespect to her principal or at a man disrespectful of an authority figure or his superior at work.

1 Kings 14:6: "*Why feignest thou thyself to be another? for I am sent to thee with heavy tidings?*" This verse conveys the words of the Prophet Ahijah addressed to the wife of Jeroboam son of Nebat. She had come to the prophet in disguise to ask him what would befall her sick son. After God had revealed Himself to Ahijah, the latter recognizes her, reprimands her for pretending to be someone else, and foretells the end of Jeroboam's reign and the tragic demise of all members of his family. This verse has been used by Yemenite Jews to rebuke a woman who wears disguise, gives others the cold shoulder or tries to conceal her involvement in an incident.

Genesis 34:1: "*And Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne unto Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land.*" Rashi inquires, "*Why does it not say 'the daughter of Jacob'?*" The explanation is that the verse shows us that Dinah went out, taking after her mother, who also went out; as it is said, '*She went toward him [Jacob]*' (Genesis 3:16)." Rashi's interpretation fosters a negative image of Dinah, as if she were a woman of easy virtue. Such is also the attitude of the conservative Yemenite Jewish community toward young girls who go out in search of diversion instead of guiding their conduct by the Biblical saying "All glorious is the king's daughter within the palace." Accordingly, among Yemenites, one may use this verse to refer to young girls who visit places that, in one's eyes, are inappropriate.

### *5.3 Verses that portray the image of a woman as perceived by men*

Genesis 3:12: "*The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me.*" These words were spoken by our progenitor Adam with reference to his wife Eve, who had

tempted him to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Yemenite immigrants have occasionally used this verse to blame their wives for causing harm of one kind or another. The verse "*The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat*" (Genesis 13:3) serves a similar purpose, since, in the Bible, Adam utters these words in an attempt to evade responsibility for his actions and to put the blame on others.

Genesis 21:12: "*In all that Sarah saith unto thee, hearken unto her voice.*" These are the words spoken by God to Avraham, instructing the latter to obey his wife Sarah. Yemenite Jews have sometimes cited them as an advice to a husband. In other situations, when the elders wished to convey an opposite message, they cited Genesis 3:17: "*Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife,*" and proceeded, "*cursed is the ground because of thee.*"

## **6. Discussion and Conclusions**

This article brings examples of passages taken from the book by Moshe Gavra, entitled *Only with My Staff [Ki Kemakly]* (2012), that have been used by Yemenite immigrants for the purposes of educating and instructing women in proper conduct, or that describe a positive female image. Approximately half of these verses have been cited ironically by Yemenite men, to transmit a meaning opposite to the lofty message conveyed by the original. A number of these passages are meant to educate through portraying a female image as perceived by a man. Israeli immigrants of Yemenite origin were educated, from the age of three, in a strict atmosphere and subjected to a rigorous schooling in which the highest authority was wielded by the "mory" [the teacher] and after him, by the parents in the 20th century, before their immigration to Israel. The Educated Yemenites are extremely proficient in all the Jewish sources that have traditionally occupied the bookshelves of every Jewish household: the Bible, The Mishna, the Talmud, the midrashim of the halakha and the agada's midrashim. As a consequence, their day-to-day conversations have been interspersed with quotations from Biblical verses, proverbs, and saying of the Sages and this has been the reality of their lives for thousands of years in exile.

The contribution of this sociolinguistic study is expressed in two aspects: from a social perspective, it reflects the gender differences that have undergone a transformation among Yemenite immigrants. Immigration to Israel exposed the Yemenites to a modern, secular and democratic regime that was foreign to them, and to changes in their way of life, culture and their inter-family relations. One of these

changes was the change in the status of women from a submissive and passive figure to an opinionated figure, independent and leading. Evidence of this can be found in Almog's comprehensive article (2000) describing the social processes in Israel that influenced the advancement of women and their transformation into an independent and influential woman in all spheres of life. Rhetorically, the article shows how the Bible, which is the main canonical text in the culture of the Yemenite, serves as a tool for expressing their feelings and changing the face of society by inserting verses and proverbs that have always been used to express their rhetorical needs (Gavra, 2012: 2). The Yemenite immigrants express the undermining of their status as authoritative and influential fathers and try to educate the women in the family.

It is important to emphasize that most of the Yemenite immigrants who immigrated in the middle of the 20th century have already undergone a process of integration and adjustment in the new modern society, and only the older ones still express their protest at the change in the status of women, especially when they speak to people with the same socio-cultural background.

The question is whether the different use made by the Jews of Yemen in biblical passages achieves its purpose. The women of Yemen who enjoy the turning point in the status of women welcome the fact that they are citizens with equal rights to men, and when they hear men who turn to them with ironic verses, they know how to respond correctly and win the debate without using the verses except through other rhetorical means like rhetorical questions and various ironic statements that are not based on the Bible. Indeed, anyone who has experienced a radical transition between cultures knows and understands that it is impossible to return the traditional and conservative reality—one can yearn for it and dream of it, but if he have adapted to the modern world can not live according to the old world culture.

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