

## **"The Defense Has Become the Prosecution:" *Ezrat HaNashim*, a Thirteenth-century Response to Misogyny<sup>1</sup>**

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*Ezer kenegdo*—if he is worthy, she is a helpmate; if he is not worthy, she is an opponent against him—*Rashi on Genesis 2:18*

[1] Rashi's famous comment to Genesis 2:18 encapsulates the medieval view of women as simultaneously necessary and dangerous, and as both similar to and other than men. In pre-modern times, the debate over the appropriate classification of women formed an important part of religious and literary discourse among Jews, as well as among Christians and Muslims. Rabbinic literature devotes much energy to defining women's nature, physical characteristics, and sexual desires. From the time of the New Testament, Christian writers debate the compatibility of marriage with the Christian life. In the medieval Arabic-speaking world, literature devoted to the condemnation and defense of women becomes a genre unto itself.<sup>2</sup>

[2] The obsession with defining and evaluating women presumably stems from the identification of women as other in relation to the men composing works of literature and religious treatises. The ambiguous nature of the biblical Eve forms an important subtext for debates about women in Jewish and Christian literature. Christian biblical interpretation overwhelmingly blames Eve for introducing sin into the world, but also credits Mary with bringing about redemption. Christian writers thus find themselves constantly negotiating between these opposing models of womanhood. While ancient and early medieval Jewish commentary generally avoids defining Eve as the originator of sin, Jewish writers are certainly aware of the potential to understand Eve as evil.<sup>3</sup> The existence of Lilith in rabbinic literature testifies to the early ambivalence about whether women, in their original state, are good or evil.

[3] The debate about the nature of women—and the parallel debate about the nature of men—take many forms. This paper will not attempt a comprehensive study of these debates, but rather, will examine the manifestation of the debate over women in two thirteenth century texts, Judah Ibn Shabbetai's *Minhat Yehuda Sone HaNashim* and *Ezrat HaNashim*, a response to this work written by Isaac<sup>4</sup>.

[4] *Minhat Yehuda Sone HaNashim*, written in Castile in the late twelfth/early thirteenth century purports to be a misogynist work although, as we will see, it is probably a parody of misogynist literature. *Ezrat HaNashim*, probably written in Provence in 1210, understands *Minhat Yehuda* as a serious misogynist work and sets out to defend women against the charges that Ibn Shabbetai levels against them. As much has already been written about *Minhat Yehuda*, we will focus on *Ezrat HaNashim* and explore the defense of women that this text presents.

[5] *Minhat Yehuda* begins with a heavenly figure appearing to Judah, the author, and asking him to compose a work that will dissuade other men from marriage. In the story that Judah writes, Tahkemoni, known for his wisdom, instructs his son Zerah to remain celibate rather than fall victim to women, identified as the source of all evil. Heeding his father's advice, Zerah, joined by three male friends, forms a celibate community of men,

who eat, play, and study together. For a month each year, Zerah leaves this enclave and returns to his former home to preach celibacy. Under his influence, other men begin avoiding marriage. Upset by their new inability to find husbands, the women of the town ask Kozbi the witch to help them defeat Zerah. Kozbi selects a beautiful, talented and seductive woman, Ayala Sheluḥah, to tempt Zerah. Through an exchange of poetry, Ayala Shluḥah seduces Zerah and he agrees to marry her. During the wedding, Kozbi places a hag, Ritzpa bat Ayah, in the place of Ayala Sheluḥah. Focused only on his desire for Ayala Sheluḥah, Zerah pays no attention to the ketubah, and learns only the next morning that he has wed Ritzpa bat Ayah. Upon Zerah's announcement of his intent to divorce this woman, the women of the town protest and insist on bringing the case before the king. When the group appears before the king, Zerah reveals himself as Judah, the author, and informs the king that the story is fictional, and has been created for the pleasure of the king, Judah's patron. Furthermore, Judah proclaims his own love for his wife and children.

[6] The ending of this work, as well as the symbolic names, the humorous takeoff on the *ketubah*, and the exaggerated nature of Tahkemoni's diatribe against women all mark the story as a parody. However, Isaac and at least one other thirteenth century author<sup>5</sup> read the story as a serious attack on women and respond with serious defenses of women and marriage. To understand Isaac's defense of women, we must, for the moment, accept his premise that Ibn Shabbetai's work is not entirely a parody. In adopting this view, we are joined by at least one contemporary scholar, Tova Rosen, who argues that the work, while a parody, also may hint at true misogynist feelings:

Ibn Shabbetai's disclaimer of seriousness at the end of his work does not itself have to be taken seriously, and his entertaining purpose does not necessarily mitigate anti-feminism. . . . Judah's misogynic message is contradicted in the story's conclusion, but its misogyny remains intact." (176-177)

[7] A literary work can, of course, easily offer two or more messages simultaneously. While we cannot ignore the obvious parody of *Minḥat Yehuda*, perhaps it is too simplistic to cast it only as a parody and to ignore the misogynist elements within it. The fact that at least two of Ibn Shabbetai's near contemporaries, albeit both possibly unfamiliar with Spanish-Arabic literary conventions, understood the work as a serious attack on women further compels us to read the text as a web of often conflicting messages. While we take issue with Rosen's anachronistic application of the designations "feminist" and "anti-feminist," we certainly can allow for the possibility that *Minḥat Yehuda* includes both condemnation and praise of women.

[8] This assumption of complexity also allows us a more precise lens into *Ezrat HaNashim*, Isaac's defense of women. At first glance, according to our contemporary egalitarian and feminist perspective, this work does not strike us as an effective argument on behalf of women. The ideal woman in this work is the perfect wife, who devotes her life to serving her husband. Our first reaction to this work might fully agree with Rosen, who writes, "The defending voices spring from the heart of patriarchy. The case for women is made by male voices. It is men who retaliate against other men for their misogyny. The admiration of "feminine virtue" is in fact a commendation of patriarchal feminine stereotypes." (179)

[9] Upon further examination, however, the picture becomes more complicated. We will not argue that *Ezrat HaNashim* is a proto-feminist work; as indicated above, we are reluctant to apply contemporary definitions of feminism to medieval literature. At the same time, the work is not only a re-inscription of the patriarchy. Rather, the piece is a complex negotiation between the opposing medieval concepts of woman as desired and necessary and woman as dangerous and sinful.

[10] *Ezrat HaNashim* consciously models itself on *Minhat Yehuda*. At the beginning of the story, an angel appears to the narrator and instructs him to compose a work in response to the attack on women offered by Ibn Shabbetai. In the story that this narrator writes, a father, Absalom, instructs his son, Hovav, to find and marry the perfect woman. Absalom offers a set of criteria for judging this woman as well as a series of biblical verses celebrating love and marriage. After his father's death, Hovav goes in search of the ideal woman. Rachel, the woman he finds, is beautiful, chaste, and beloved by her parents.<sup>6</sup> Hovav requests, and receives, permission from Rachel's father to marry her. When Rachel's relatives learn of the marriage, they become jealous and conspire to kill Hovav. The couple escapes, and meets with a series of adventures. During the course of their journey, Rachel talks her way out of being permanently captured by an evil government official, rescues Hovav from a death sentence imposed by the same official, saves the life of her child, and discovers a treasure. Newly wealthy, Rachel and Hovav return home to a warm welcome by her family. At the end of the story, the angel returns and reveals himself as Isaac's patron. This patron compares Rachel to his own wife, to whom Isaac then dedicates the story.

[11] To understand *Ezrat HaNashim's* defense of women, we first must understand its objection to *Minhat Yehuda*. For the purpose of this discussion, we will speak only of the core narrative of *Minhat Yehuda* and will not address the frame story. While acknowledging that this frame may reverse our initial reading of Ibn Shabbetai's misogyny, we also recognize that Isaac does not consider the frame story of *Minhat Yehuda* to cancel out its attack on women, and responds accordingly.

[12] The central narrative of *Minhat Yehuda* attacks all women. Tahkemoni instructs his son not to marry any woman, Zerah crusades against all women and all marriages, and all of the women in the area conspire against him. Even Ayala Sheluha, the apparently ideal woman, turns out to be as conniving as the others. When Zerah awakes to find himself in bed with Ritzpa bat Ayah, we can imagine him lamenting his failure to follow his father's advice to remain permanently in a secluded, all-male community.

[13] Given *Minhat Yehuda's* attack on all women, we might expect *Ezrat HaNashim* to respond with a defense of all women. Instead, Isaac offers us one ideal woman, whom he admits is extraordinary. Even Absalom, the primary spokesman for women, love and marriage warns his son to choose a wife carefully. After naming several ideal biblical women, Absalom advises Hovav to search for a woman who is, among other things, beautiful, chaste, godfearing, and just. The fact that Absalom must caution his son so carefully and explicitly about selecting a wife hints at an assumption that most women do not qualify as suitable to marry. At the end of the work, Todros HaLevi HaNasi, Isaac's patron reinforces this idea that only a few exceptional women are worthy of praise. In comparing Rachel to his own wife, he says, "Never has there been, and never has there been seen a woman of valor like [Rachel], other than my own beloved, who is in her image and likeness."

[14] There are at least three ways to understand this emphasis on the exceptional woman. The most romantic option is to assume that every man will consider his own wife an "*eshet chayil*," to whom other women cannot be compared. Todros is struck by the similarity between Rachel and his own wife; perhaps other men would also see their own wives reflected in Rachel, the ideal woman. However, if we follow this interpretation, we must explain Absalom's insistence that Hovav search for a woman who possesses certain characteristics. If Hovav will idealize any woman he loves, it should be enough for his father to advise him to fall in love.

[15] Alternately, we can suggest that Isaac assumes a basic similarity among women and would extend his defense of one woman to all women. This possibility gains support from the centrality of Eve in the ancient and medieval discourse on women. For medievals, the debate about Eve's role in introducing evil into the world is crucial not only for theological reasons, but also for the purposes of defining women in general. When Rashi comments that the snake approaches Eve first because "women are easy to seduce and they know how to seduce their husbands,"<sup>7</sup> he interprets the Genesis story by means of characteristics he considers universally attributable to women. If women are, in fact, stereotyped as "easy to seduce" and seductive, it seems most likely that women gained this reputation from Genesis 3, and not that observable female characteristics explain the story. Regardless of its origin, Rashi's description of women assumes that all women share certain qualities, and that what applies to one woman necessarily applies to all others.

[16] Even more explicitly, the early Christian writer, Tertullian accuses all women of sin, by virtue of their relation to Eve. He writes, "You are the devil's gateway. . . you are she who persuaded him whom the devil did not dare attack. . . Do you not know that every one of you is an Eve? The sentence of God on your sex lives on in this age; the guilt, of necessity, lives on too."<sup>8</sup> In contrast to Rashi, who offers the traditional Jewish perspective that Eve succumbs to the serpent out of weakness, Tertullian presents Philo's claim, which becomes the standard Christian interpretation, that Eve intentionally seduces Adam. This representation of Eve/woman as malicious, though generally associated with Christianity, also appears in a number of Midrashim, and is reflected in Ibn Shabbetai's depiction of women as schemers intent on ensnaring men.

[17] The effort to define all women by means of Eve is particularly striking in the absence of a parallel effort to define all men by reference to Adam. Similarly, while there is a developed literature of misogynist writings and responses, there is no ongoing debate about the nature of men. Given that men are the primary participants in this debate, we are not surprised to discover an attempt to define women as a monolithic whole. As Trinh T. Minh-ha points out, definitions of the Other tend to erase differences among this Other, in order to create a manageable object that the subject can possess. She writes, "Naming is part of the human rituals of incorporation. . . the threatening Otherness must, therefore, be transformed into figures that belong to a definite image-repertoire."<sup>9</sup>

[18] If we assume then, that medieval male writers presuppose uniformity among women, we can argue that Isaac would extend to all women his praises of Rachel. Just as biblical commentators consider all women to share Eve's characteristics, and just as Ibn Shabbetai portrays all women as deceitful, so too, perhaps Isaac defines all women according to a specific set of characteristics. In contrast to Ibn Shabbetai, Isaac would describe women

according to a positively marked set of characteristics. Despite a disagreement about the nature of women, both writers would subscribe to the basic assumption that all women do share a particular nature.

[19] This explanation gains support from Isaac's stated intention to respond to *Minhat Yehuda*, whose core story explicitly attacks all women. In order effectively to counter this portrayal of all women as scheming and cruel, Isaac should offer a more positive description of all women. However, as with our first interpretation, the emphasis on Rachel as extraordinary, combined with Absalom's advice to look for a particular type of woman, challenges the suggestion that Isaac would compare all women to Rachel. Rachel, the biblical women whom Absalom mentions, and the wife of the patron are noteworthy because they are exceptional. When the patron appears, he does not commend Isaac for offering an accurate portrayal of all women, but rather comments on his surprise at seeing his own, extraordinary wife represented in the story. Furthermore, in the prelude to the story, Isaac tells us that "all women, all trees, and all ovens are not equal"<sup>10</sup> and that Ibn Shabbetai therefore cannot generalize about women based on his own negative experience.

[20] The third, and most likely interpretation, suggests that Isaac does view Rachel and the other women mentioned as exceptional, and would not describe all women according to the characteristics he ascribes to these notable women. Like Ibn Shabbetai and other writers and commentators of the time, Isaac considers women to be potentially dangerous. He objects to *Minhat Yehuda* not because it depicts evil women, but because it defines *all* women as evil. In his response, Isaac implicitly accepts the possibility that some women are as conniving as Kozbi, Ayala Sheluḥa, Ritzpa bat Ayah and their co-conspirators, but argues that some women step out of the mold. Isaac thus negotiates between two poles—the understanding of women as uniformly evil, and the understanding of women as uniformly good. Isaac, through Absalom, indicates a wariness about many women, but argues that the existence of some exceptional women offers sufficient reason not to assume the worst about any particular woman.

[21] Having established that Isaac considers Rachel, and others like her, to be exceptional women, we must now determine the characteristics of this exceptional woman. We will approach this question in two ways. First, we will examine some of the biblical verses that offer a subtext for the story of Hovav and Rachel. Second, we will discuss the particular nature of Rachel.

[22] The *makama* genre, like other medieval belletristic genres, is characterized by the citation of biblical verses, or puns on biblical verses. *Ezrat HaNashim* contains dozens of such biblical references. We cannot assume that all of the biblical passages referenced should influence our reading of the work; at the same time, we cannot ignore the fact that the work constantly cites biblical verses or variations thereof. We will therefore suggest that the biblical episodes most often referenced do provide a subtext for the piece, but that passages cited only once or twice should be understood as literary tools, and not as comments on the content of the story.

[23] In Hebrew literature, names are almost always significant. We will thus begin our discussion of the subtexts of *Ezrat HaNashim* by examining the names of key characters. In naming the central character Rachel, Isaac points us to the biblical story of Jacob and Rachel. Rachel, in the Bible, is the ultimate beloved, for whom Jacob is willing to work fourteen years under the watch of her dishonest and disingenuous father. Here too,

Hovav falls in love with Rachel immediately, and is willing to brave her jealous family for the privilege of marrying her. In the biblical story, Rachel is the desired wife, who replaces the undesirable Leah. Here, too, Isaac replaces Judah Ibn Shabbetai's portrayal of the undesirable woman—Ritzpa bat Ayah—with the desirable Rachel.

[24] We are also reminded of Rabbi Akiva's wife, to whom tradition ascribes the name Rachel. Just as the biblical Jacob earns his Rachel through work, the talmudic Rabbi Akiva wins his Rachel through study. The association of the name Rachel—ewe—with these two stories prompts Daniel Boyarin to argue that "the shepherd-ewe relationship is being encoded in this story as a marriage ideal for Jews. . . . As subservient as the ewe-wife is, she is not denigrated or despised in this encoding. Indeed, she is both loved and honored when she knows her place."<sup>11</sup>

[25] Boyarin's suggestion that Rachel, in both stories, represents the subservient and devoted wife also helps us to understand the references to the rape of Dinah scattered throughout *Ezrat HaNashim*. Rachel's father is named Shechem, the biblical name of Dinah's violator. Rachel's mother is named Keshita, a play on Genesis 33:19, in which Jacob buys land from Shechem and his siblings for 100 *keshitas*, an unknown value or type of currency.<sup>12</sup> In naming Shechem's wife Keshita, Isaac suggests a Midrash in which Jacob offers Shechem a woman in return for land.<sup>13</sup> In any case, the reference to the verse that immediately precedes the story of Dinah's rape compels us to read this biblical story into *Ezrat HaNashim*. An additional reference to the story of Dinah emerges from a line describing Isaac's acceptance of his mission—"vatidbak nafsho beDinah."—he clung to/ he fell in love with its ruling—a pun on Genesis 34:3, "vatidbak nafsho beDinah" "he fell in love with Dinah."<sup>14</sup>

[26] *Ezrat HaNashim* does not offer a perfect parallel of the story of Dinah. Here, Dinah is the daughter of Shechem, not the victim of his lust. However, the multiple references to the biblical story force us to compare Rachel to Dinah. In the Bible, Dinah is presented as the consummate passive woman. Her only recorded action is "going out" to visit the "*benot haaretz*"—the daughters of the land. From the biblical account, it is impossible to know whether she wishes to marry Shechem or whether she approves of her brothers' actions. Rachel, in *Ezrat Nashim* is decisively not passive during the bulk of the story, but she is passive at the time of her betrothal. It is her father, Shechem, and not Rachel, who agrees to the marriage. With the references to Dinah at the time of Rachel and Hovav's marriage, Isaac depicts the ideal woman as permitting the men in her life to make decisions about her personal status. Even in her active moments, Isaac's Rachel, like so many biblical women, acts only to protect and assist her husband.

[27] The choice of Absalom as the name of Hovav's father is difficult to interpret given the complexity of the biblical Absalom. On the one hand, the biblical Absalom protects his sister, Tamar, and takes revenge on Amnon for raping her. On the other hand, Absalom, who goes to war against his father, is portrayed as the ultimate traitor. We might focus only on the story of Absalom and Tamar and argue that Absalom in *Ezrat HaNashim* is so named because of his role in protecting women. This comparison to the biblical Absalom reinforces the idea that the ideal woman, in Isaac's view, is the passive, raped woman in need of a man's protection. If we take into account the biblical Absalom's nature as a traitor, the picture becomes even more complicated, as we must now consider the possibility that Absalom's instructions to Hovav constitute an act of betrayal and that Isaac undermines his own stated intention to defend women and

marriage. Alternately, we can ignore the biblical Absalom altogether, and consider Hovav's father simply an "*Av Shalom*"—a "father of peace," presumably for his attempt to restore peace between men and women. However, given Absalom's prominent place in the Bible, it is difficult to ignore the biblical connotations altogether and to focus only on linguistics.<sup>15</sup> As other evidence in the story, namely the references to Rachel and Dinah, point to an image of the ideal woman as a passive beloved in need of male protection, we will conclude that the name Absalom both reinforces this image and describes the character's role as peacemaker. Without any other indication that Absalom should be viewed as a traitor either to women or to men, we cannot read the biblical character's role as a betrayer into the story.

[28] Unlike Tamar, Dinah and the biblical and talmudic Rachels, the Rachel of *Ezrat HaNashim* is not only a passive, beloved woman. She is also a trickster, whose cleverness protects her from an unwanted marriage, reverses her husband's death sentence, saves the life of her child, and secures a treasure. In contrast to Ibn Shabbetai's portrayal of female shrewdness as a negative quality, Isaac depicts Rachel's quick thinking as a positive quality that makes her even more beloved to her husband.

[29] The character of the trickster is well established in Jewish literature. Abraham saves his own life by pretending that Sarah is his sister. Jacob manipulates sheep breeding patterns in order to force Laban to pay him higher wages. Jonathan and David devise a system to evade Saul's attempts to kill David. In the Talmud and Midrash, the rabbis constantly outsmart non-Jews who challenge them on points of Jewish law. Women, too, are tricksters. In the Bible, Tamar disguises herself as a prostitute so that Judah will sleep with her, Rebecca helps Jacob to steal Esau's blessing, and Yael seduces Sisera in order to kill him. In general, the character of the trickster is positive. Through his or her trickery, the trickster achieves a goal of which the text approves.

[30] But not all tricksters are created equal. Whereas male tricksters advance their own interests—by saving their own lives or adding to their own possessions—female tricksters scheme in order to help men. Tamar's trick allows Judah's line to continue, Rebecca's trick allows Jacob to receive the birthright, and Yael's trick allows Barak to win a war. By stealing her father's household idols and then preventing him from finding them, the biblical Rachel creates a space in which Jacob can assert his independence from Laban.

[31] Similarly, Rachel in *Ezrat HaNashim* performs her tricks for the benefit of her husband, without whom she would not find herself driven from her home. Because of Rachel's cleverness, Hovav's life is spared, and he is able to ingratiate himself to her family. By reclaiming the positive model of the female trickster, Isaac counters Ibn Shabbetai's portrayal of the female trickster as dangerous. In *Minhat Yehuda*, the women are clever, but use this cleverness for their own benefit and to the detriment of the male, Zerah. Rachel is no less clever than Ibn Shabbetai's women, but she uses her trickster skills to help her husband.

[32] In discussing *Ezrat HaNashim's* defense of women, we also must consider its portrayal of men. Both *Minhat Yehuda* and *Ezrat HaNashim* present frame stories in which men are writers, in complete control of their literary creation. The core stories, though, offer very different types of men. In *Minhat Yehuda*, Zerah is strong and in control of his emotions as long as he remains within his celibate community and refuses to allow himself the company of women. In contrast, Hovav is overwhelmingly passive.

He takes an active role in selecting and marrying Rachel, but only undertakes the quest for a wife upon the urging of his father. During the course of the story, Rachel concocts tricks, and Hovav only follows her lead. At the end of the story, he gains acceptance in her family not because he has proven himself in any way, but because Rachel has helped him to bring home a treasure.

[33] We can explain Hovav's lack of personality or agency by arguing that Isaac is interested only in defending women and therefore does not concern himself with the secondary, male character. We may also suggest that, since men are both the intended audience for the work and the bearers of societal power, there is no reason to defend men. While perhaps wishing for a single, monolithic definition of the woman "other," men do not expect a similar definition of men, and therefore do not allow a single negative, or neutral portrayal to challenge their understandings of men and maleness. Alternately, we will suggest that Isaac agrees with Ibn Shabbetai's portrayal of men as readily seduced by women, but disagrees with the conclusion that all women are malicious seductresses. Rather, says Isaac, men should be conscious that women can be seductive and clever, and should therefore choose a wife who will use her talents for his benefit.

[34] Isaac, then, neither fully rejects nor fully accepts the portrayal of women offered by the core story of *Minhat Yehuda*. He offers models of exceptional women, but explicitly denies that these women are the norm. He accepts Ibn Shabbetai's claim that women are tricksters, but re-inscribes this female trickster model within a familiar and safer paradigm. In the end, Isaac offers an ambiguous picture of women. His defense of women is really a defense of some women, and his defense of female trickery is a defense of certain kinds of female trickery. His work then is neither, in the words of A. M. Haberman, entirely "*lignutan*" or "*leshivhan*,"<sup>16</sup>—neither degradation nor praise— but simultaneously both and neither.

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<sup>1</sup> The title refers to the concept, repeated several times in rabbinic literature, that the actions/words of an advocate are not expected to become tools for prosecution. (See, for example BT Brakhot 59a, Rosh Hashanah 26a and Kiddushin 5a)

<sup>2</sup> Talya Fishman, "A Medieval Parody of Misogyny: Judah ibn Shabbetai's *Minhat Yehuda sone hanashim*." *Prooftexts* 8:1 (1988): 89-111.

<sup>3</sup> The concept of original sin and *tikkun*, of course, becomes a central idea in sixteenth-century kabbalistic thought.

<sup>4</sup> The rest of his name is not known.

<sup>5</sup> Yedaaya haPenini. *Ohev Nashim* (1295)

<sup>6</sup> Motti Huss ed., *Minhat Yehudah, Ezrat Nashim, ve Ein Mishpat: Critical Editions* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1991). (1991): 106.

<sup>7</sup> Comment on Genesis 3:15

<sup>8</sup> Tertullian, *De Cultu Feminarum*, 1, 12 as quoted in Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Random House, 1988), 63.

<sup>9</sup> T. Minh-ha Trinh, *Woman Native Other* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1988), 54.

<sup>10</sup> Huss, *Minhat Yehudah*, 103.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California, 1993), 153.

<sup>12</sup> Onkelos translates this word as "sheep," and Rashi follows this translation, as does Ibn Ezra in Job 42:11. If we assume Isaac to follow this translation, we have an additional example of the ideal wife described as a female sheep.



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<sup>13</sup> I have not found such a Midrash, though it is easy to understand how such a Midrash could have come to be, given the mysterious nature of the currency that Jacob offers the children of H̄amor. It is possible that this Midrash did exist, but has been lost, or that Isaac creates this Midrash on his own.

<sup>14</sup> Huss, *Minḥat Yehudah*, 101. The verb “*d-v-k*” also appears in relation to marriage in Genesis 2:24.

<sup>15</sup> Whereas in the case of a character such as Ritzpa bat Ayah, we can more easily forget Saul's biblical concubine who, in guarding the bodies of her two sons by Saul and five of Saul's grandsons, shows much more kindness to men than we can ever imagine Ibn Shabbetai's character displaying. (II Samuel 21:10)

<sup>16</sup> "For praise or for shame." see A. M. Haberman, *Shalosh Makamot al HaNashim: Mehen Bignutan umehen Beshivchan, Venosefet Lahen HaSha'ar HaShishi MiSefer "Taḥkemoni"* (Jerusalem: Ben-Uri, 1974), subtitle, 1.

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