

## *The Tragedy and Triumph of Bruriah*

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*many thanks to Rav Uri Cohen for his help in making this shiur*

### Sec1: BRURIAH IS A TORAH SCHOLAR (and smarter than her brother!)

#### 1. Talmud Bavli Psachim 62b

1 Rabi Simlai went before Rabi Yochanan.  
 2 Rabi Simlai said: Let Master teach me Sefer Yuchsin [i.e. a tan'anic teaching about Divrei HaYamim.]  
 3 Rabi Yochanan said: Where are you from?  
 4 Rabi Simlai said: From Lod.  
 5 Rabi Yochanan said: and where do you reside?  
 6 Rabi Simlai: In Naharada  
 7 Rabi Yochanan: We do not teach Sefer Yuchsin to the people of Lod or Naharada, and moreso to you  
 8 because you are from Lod and reside in Naharada!  
 9 Rabi Simlai insisted and Rav Yochanan consented.  
 10 Rabi Simlai: teach it to me for the next three months.  
 11 Rav Yochanan took a stone and threw it.  
 12 Rav Yochanan said: **"Bruriyah, Rabi Meir's wife,**  
 13 **the daughter of Chanina ben Tradyon** who  
 14 learned 300 teachings a day from 300 Rabbis – and even so – she could not finish it in 3 years; and you  
 15 say you want to learn it in 3 months?!

#### 1. תלמוד בבלי, פסחים, דף סב:

1 רבי שמלאי אתא לקמיה דרבי יוחנן.  
 2 אמר ליה: "ניתני לי מר ספר יוחסין".  
 3 אמר ליה: "מהיכן את?"  
 4 אמר ליה: "מלוד".  
 5 "והיכן מותבך?"  
 6 "בנהרדעא".  
 7 אמר ליה: "אין נידונין לא ללודים ולא לנהרדעים, וכל ששכן דאת מלוד ומותבך בנהרדעא".  
 8 כפייה וארצי.  
 9  
 10 אמר ליה: "ניתנייה בשלשה ירחי".  
 11 שקל קלא פתק ביה. אמר ליה: "ומה ברוריה דביתהו  
 12 דרבי מאיר, ברתיא דרבי חנניה בן תרדיון, דתניא  
 13 תלת מאה שמעתתא ביומא משלש מאה רבוותא –  
 14 ואפילו הכי לא יצתה ידי חובתה בתלת שנין;  
 15 ואת אמרת בתלתא ירחי?!"

#### 2a. Tosefta Masechet Keilim 1:6

1 A klustra (=door bolt with a moveable fastener) – Rabi Tarfon says it is impure, and the Sages say it is pure  
 2 Beruriah says: It can be taken out of one doorway on  
 3 Shabbat and placed on another  
 4 When they said the matter before Rabi Yehudah, he said, **"Bruriah said well."**

#### Tosefta Masechet Keilim 4:17

1 An oven...how is it made pure?  
 2 Said Rav Chalafta a man from the village of  
 3 Chananya: I asked Shimon ben Chananya who asked the son of Chananya ben Tradyon.  
 4 And he [the son] said: From when they break it  
 5 And his daughter says: When you cut it into its sections  
 6 When they said these words before Rabi Yehudah  
 7 ben Bava, he said: **his daughter said better than his son.**

#### 2. תוספתא מסכת כלים (צוקרמאנדל), א"ו, ד"ז:

1 א"ו קלוסטרא – רבי טרפון מטמא, וחכמים מטהרין,  
 2 וברוריה אומרת: שומטה מן הפתח זה ותולה בחברו  
 3 בשבת  
 4 כשנאמרו דברים לפני רבי יהודה, אמר, **"יפה אמרה ברוריה"**

#### תוספתא מסכת כלים (צוקרמאנדל) ד"ז:

1 ד"ז תנור . . . מאימתי טהרתו?  
 2 אמר רב חלפתא איש כפר חנניא: אני שאלתי את שמעון  
 3 בן חנניא, ששאל את בנו של ר' חנניא בן תרדיון,  
 4 ואמר: משיסיענו ממקומו,  
 5 ובתו אומרת: משיפשט את חלוקן.  
 6 כשנאמרו דברים לפני ר' יהודה בן בבא, אמר:  
 7 **יפה אמרה בתו מבנו.**

#### 2b. Dr. Rachel Adler in The Virgin in the Brother and Other Anomalies: Character and Context in the Legend of Beruriah

In one of the earliest of these texts, her competitor is her own brother. The Tosefta poses a legal question concerning the purification of an oven. Hananyah's son says it becomes pure when it is moved from its place. His daughter (Beniriah) says it becomes pure when its pans are disassembled, a more elegant solution, since as soon as its parts are disassembled, the oven reverts to a pile of stones. Because it is no longer a cultural object, it is not susceptible to ritual impurity. The two opinions are told to Rabbi Yehudah, who remarks, "His daughter

said better than his son."

Question: How do you know that Rabi Simlai does not want to teach Rabi Yochanan? How is mentioning Bruriah posing an insult?

Question: When offering her halachic opinion about the Klustra or oven – why do the Rabbis prefer Bruriah's reasoning over her brothers? See what Dr. Rachel Adler suggests in 2b.

Question: Which character traits can you infer about Bruriah? What about the dynamic between her and her brother?

<p><b>3a. Masechet Smachot 12:13</b></p> <p>1 One cannot bring out the dead unless its head and most of its body are intact, 2 Rabbi Judah says: the spine is "most"</p> <p>3 There was an incident with the <u>son</u> of Rabi Chananya ben Tradyon who went to an evil culture, [then] 4 bandits took him and killed him, and he was found three days later, and they put him in krachadot 5 and lay him on a bed, and brought him into the city, and they placed him before the honor of his father.</p> <p>6 And <u>his father</u> said the following verse about him, 7 "And thou moan, when thine end cometh, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed" (Proverbs 5:11) 8 And you said, "How do I hate the morals and the 9 rebuke is blasphemous to my soul, and I didn't listen to the voice of my teachers and I didn't inclined to my lessons, it was as though I was all evil in this 10 congregation and assembly." And he went back to the beginning of the verse.</p> <p>11 And <u>his mother</u> said this verse: "A foolish son is 12 vexation to his father, and bitterness to her that bore him." (Proverbs 17:25)</p> <p>13 And <u>his sister</u> said her verse: "Bread of 14 falsehood is sweet to a man; but afterwards his 15 mouth shall be filled with gravel." (Proverbs 20:17)</p>	<p><b>3א. מסכת שמחות יב:ג</b></p> <p>1 אין מוציאין את המת אלא אם כן היה ראשו ורובו קיים, 2 רבי יהודה אומר: השדרה הן הן רוב</p> <p>3 ומעשה בבנו של רבי חנינא בן תרדיון שיצא לתרבות 4 רעה, תפשוהו ליסטין והרגוהו, ונמצא תפוש לאחר 5 שלושה ימים, נתנוהו בכרכדות, והניחיהו על גבי המיטה, 6 והכניסוהו לתוך העיר, והיו מקלסין לפניו בכבודו של 7 אביו,</p> <p>8 וקרא עליו <u>אביו</u> המקרא הזה, "ונהמת באחריתך בכלות 9 בשרך ושארך," (משלי ה:יא) 10 ואמרת "איך שנאתי מוסר ותכחת נאץ לבי, ולא שמעתי 11 בקול מורי ולמלמדי לא הטייתי, כמעט הייתי בכל רע 12 בתוך קהל ועדה." וחזר לתחילת המקרא</p> <p>13 ואמו קראה עליו המקרא הזה, "כעס לאביו בן כסיל 14 וממר ליולדתו" (משלי יז:כה),</p> <p>15 ואחותו – המקרא הזה, "ערב לאיש לחם שקר ואחר 16 ימלא פיהו הצץ" (משלי כ:ז)</p>
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**3b. Dr. Rachel Adler in The Virgin in the Brother and Other Anomalies: Character and Context in the Legend of Bruriah**

A text from Tractate Semachot 12:13 depicts further the rogue's progress of Rabbi Hananyah's disappointing son and his replacement by his pious sister. Having fallen into evil ways, the son is murdered by outlaws. Each of his relatives recites over him a condemnatory verse from Proverbs. His sister's verse—"bread of falsehood is pleasant to a man, but in the end his mouth is filled with gravel" (Prov. 20:17)... The narrative rationale for the high visibility of Rabbi Hananyah's daughter is thus established: she is a replacement for a worthless son.

Question: The father (=Rabi Chananya ben Tradyon), the mother, and the sister (=Bruriah) each name a verse to mourn their son and brother. What does their chosen verse indicate about how they are mourning this loss?

Question: Given the verse she chooses -- why does Bruriah think her brother died?

### Section 2: **BRURIAH IS CLEVER AND FEISTY**

<p><b>4a. Talmud Bavli Masechet Eiruvim 53b</b></p> <p>1 Rabi Yosi HaGlili was going on the road; he 2 encountered Bruriya. 3 He asked her: Which way do we walk to Lod? <b>4 She responded: Stupid Glili!</b> Didn't the Rabbis say 5 'do not speak too much with the woman?' (Pirkei 6 Avot 1:5). You should have just said: 'Which to Lod?'</p> <p><b>6 Bruriya observed a student who learned silently.</b> <b>7 She kicked him.</b> 8 She told him: Doesn't it say, "Arranged [in all of your limbs] and secure." (Shmuel II 23:5)? 9 If your learning is arranged in <i>all</i> of your limbs – it is 10 secure and not forgotten, and if not – it is forgotten</p>	<p><b>4א. תלמוד בבלי, עירובין, דף נג:</b></p> <p>1 רבי יוסי הגלילי הוה קא אזיל באורחא; אשכח 2 לברוריה. 3 אמר לה: "באיזו דרך נלך ללוד?" <b>4 אמרה ליה: "גלילי שוטה! לא כך אמרו חכמים 'אל 5 תרבה שיחה עם האשה' (פרקי אבות א:ה).</b> 6 היה לך לומר: 'באיזה ללוד?'"</p> <p><b>6 ברוריה אשכחתייה להווא תלמידא דהוה קא גריס 7 בלחשיה. בטשה ביה.</b> 8 אמרה ליה: "לא כך כתוב 'ערוקה בכל ושמרה' (שמואל ב' כג:ה)?" 9 אם ערוכה ברמ"ח אברים שלך – משתמרת, ואם לאו – 10 אינה משתמרת."</p>
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#### **4b. Dr. Rachel Adler in The Virgin in the Brother and Other Anomalies: Character and Context in the Legend of Beruriah**

1 This story is laden with ironies. Rabbi Yose, fearing that a superfluous pleasantry will open him to lust, rudely asks directions without a greeting. Beruriah obligingly demonstrates how he might have made the conversation briefer yet, thereby prolonging their contact. Not only must Rabbi Yose converse with a woman, he must be rebuked by one; not only rebuked, but taught Torah; and not just any Torah, but precisely the dictum he had been trying so zealously to observe.

2 But the ultimate joke, if it is a joke, is on Beruriah. The Torah she has taught Rabbi Yose is genuine, and it clearly discriminates against her. The originators of this text have come to the crux of the problem: Were there a woman like Beruriah, schooled in and committed to a tradition which views her as inferior, how could she resolve the paradox inherent in her loyalty to that tradition?

3 The irony through which the potential explosiveness of this paradox is conveyed is itself multi-levelled. Irony is, first of all, a language that the self speaks to the self over the heads of the unwitting. That is how it functions within the text. Beruriah speaks ironically to the obtuse Rabbi Yose. In response to his zeal, she exposes the sexist dictum herself, and teasingly reproaches its adherent for not observing it.

*Question:* Why does Bruriah admonish Rabi Yosi Haglili and the student? Is her outrage justified?

*Question:* What is ironic about Bruriah's admonishment? See source 4b.

<p><b>5a. Talmud Bavli Brachot 10a</b></p> <p>1 That Apostate asked Bruriya: It is written (Yishaya 54:1) 2 'Sing barren one that you did not give birth.' Because she didn't give birth she should sing?!</p> <p><b>3 Bruriah responds: Fool!</b> Read the end of the verse 4 which says, 'for more are the children of the desolate than children of a married wife says HaShem.' 5 Rather, what does it mean 'Sing barren one that you did not give birth'? Sing People of Israel, who is 6 compared to a barren woman who didn't birth people <b>who will go to Hell – like you!</b></p>	<p><b>5א. תלמוד בבלי, ברכות, דף י, עמוד א</b></p> <p>1 אמר לה ההוא מינא לברוריא: כתיב (ישעיהו נד:א) 'רְבִי 2 עֲקָרָה לֹא יִלְדָה'. משום דלא ילדה, רני?! <b>3 אמרה ליה: שטיא! שפיל לסיפיה דקרא, דכתיב 'פי 4 רבים בני שוממה מבני בעולה אמר ה'.</b> 5 אלא מאי 'עקרה לא ילדה'? רני כנסת ישראל, שדומה 6 לאשה עקרה שלא ילדה בנים לגיהנם כותייכו!</p>
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**5b. Rachel Adler in The Virgin in the Brother and Other Anomalies: Character and Context in the Legend of Beruriah**

1 Beruriah's displacement to men is also achieved by confuting them. Tractate Berakhot describes a dispute between Beruriah and a Sadducee. The Sadducee challenges the verse "Rejoice, O barren one who has not given birth" on the grounds that a barren woman has no cause for rejoicing. Since this is a Pharisaic narrative, the plot requires that the Sadducee seeking a theological alliance... be stopped in his tracks by a woman learned enough to direct him to recall to the end of the verse: "For more numerous are the children of the forsaken than the children of the favored wife."

2 But Beruriah then presses her advantage. "Why 'barren one who has not given birth?'" she questions. 'Rejoice, O community of Israel, which is compared to a barren woman, which has not borne children for perdition like you!' *Not only does Beruriah resist the Sadducee's temptation to argue that the text does not represent women's experience, she vehemently rejects all kinship with him.* Like her Pharisaic creators, the Beruriah of this story views herself as a representative of the normative tradition. It is not she but the Sadducee who is marginal: the implication of her taunt is that he is not a member of the community of Israel at all.

Question: How does Bruriah undermine the Infidel's question?

Question: Why does she choose to shame him? How does she shame him?

### Section 3: BRURIAH IS CLEVER AND KIND

#### 6. Talmud Bavli Masechet Brachot 10a

1 There were punks in Rabi Meir's area, and they would  
2 bother him a lot. Rabi Meir would pray for them to die.

**3 Bruriah his wife said: What are you thinking?!**

4 Because it is written "sins will die within the land"

5 (Psalms 104:35)? Who said the verse spoke about sinners?! It said "sins"!

6 And also, look to the end of the verse: 'And the  
7 wicked be no more.' When sin ends, and wicked will  
8 be no more? **Rather, pray for them to repent, and turn away from their wickedness."**

9 Rabi Meir prayed for them, and they repented.

#### 6. תלמוד בבלי, ברכות, דף י, עמוד א

1 הנהו בריוני דהוו בשבבותיה דרבי מאיר, והוו קא מצערו  
2 ליה טובא. הוה קא בעי רבי מאיר רחמי עליהו כי היכי  
3 דלימותו.

**3 אמרה ליה ברוריא דביתהו: מאי דעתך?! משום**

4 דכתיב 'תמו חטאים' (תהלים קד:לה)? מי כתיב

5 חוטאים?! 'חטאים' כתיב!

6 וועוד, שפיל לסיפיה דקרא: 'וְרָשָׁעִים עוֹד אֵינָם'. כיון

7 דיתמו חטאים, ורשעים עוד אינם? אלא בעי רחמי

8 עליוהו דלהדרו בתשובה, ורשעים עוד אינם."

9 בעא רחמי עליהו, והדרו בתשובה.

Question: Why did Rabbi Meir want them to die? Rabbi Meir was from the wisest men of his generation. Certainly he knew that he could pray for them either to die or to mend their ways. Why did he choose to pray that they should die?

Question: If he had such power of prayer that his prayers were answered, why did G-d not answer him when he prayed that they should die? Why did G-d only answer him when he prayed that they should mend their ways?

#### 7a. Midrash Mishlei, section 31

1 Another interpretation: "Who can find a Woman of  
2 Valor." It was said that there was an incident with Rabi  
3 Meir:

4 He once gave a torah class in the study hall on

5 Shabbat afternoon and his two sons died [suddenly].

6 What did their mother [Bruriah] do? She took her  
7 two sons, laid them on the bed, and covered them with  
8 a sheet.

9 Rabi Meir [her husband] came home from the study

10 hall. He asked: "Where are my two sons?"

11 Bruriya: "They went to the study hall."

12 Rabi Meir: "I looked in the study hall and I didn't see  
13 them."

14 She gave him a cup for Havdala [=of distinction],  
15 and Rabi Meir made Havdala [=he distinguished].

16 Again he asked: "Where are my sons?"

17 Bruriah: "They went out before and are coming

#### 7א. מדרש משלי (בובר), פרשה לא

1 דבר אחר: "אשת חיל מי ימצא". אמרו מעשה היה ברב  
2 מאיר:

3 שהיה יושב ודורש בבית המדרש בשבת במנחה, ומתו

4 שני בניו. מה עשתה אמן? הניחה שניהם על המטה,

5 ופרשה סדין עליהם.

6 במוצאי שבת, בא רבי מאיר מבית המדרש לביתו. אמר

7 לה: "היכן שני בני?"

8 אמרה: "לבית המדרש הלכו."

9 אמר לה: "צפיתי לבית המדרש, ולא ראיתי אותם."

10 נתנה [ה] לו כוס של הבדלה, והבדיל.

11 חזר ואמר: "היכן שני בני?"

12 אמרה לו: "הלכו למקום אחר, ועכשיו הם באים."

<p>back now.”</p> <p>13She brought before him food and he ate, and he blessed.</p> <p>14After he blessed she said to him: “Rebbe, I have one question to ask you.”</p> <p>15Rabi Meir: Say your question.</p> <p>16Bruriah: “Rebbe, this morning a person came and gave me something to watch. And now he has come to take it. Should I return it or not?”</p> <p>17Rabi Meir: “My daughter, whomever has something to watch, he needs to return it to its owner.”</p> <p>18Bruriah: Rabbi, I’ll do it because you said so</p> <p>22What did she do? She took him by the hand and lead him upstairs to the children’s bedroom, and brought him to the bed and pulled back the sheet, and he saw both dead and lying on the bed.</p> <p>25He began to cry and said: “My sons! My sons! My teachers! My teachers! My children who treated me with respect and were my teachers who enlightened me with their torah.”</p> <p>27At that moment Bruriah said to Rabi Meir: “Master, didn’t you tell me that I should return the object to its owner?”</p> <p>29Rabi Meir: “HaShem gave and HaShem took; Let God’s name be blessed.” (Iyov 1:21)</p> <p>29Said Rabi Chanina: She comforted him with this matter and settled his mind; thus it is said “A woman of valor, who can find?”</p>	<p>13הקריבה לפניו המאכל, ואכל, ובירך.</p> <p>14לאחר שבירך, אמרה לו: "רבי שאלה אחת יש לי לשאול לך".</p> <p>16אמר לה: "אמרי שאלתך".</p> <p>17אמרה לו: "רבי קודם היום, בא אדם אחד, ונתן לי פקדון. ועכשיו בא ליטול אותו. נחזיר לו, או לא?"</p> <p>19אמר לה: "בתי, מי שיש פקדון אצלו, הוא צריך להחזירו לרבו".</p> <p>21אמרה לו: "רבי, חוץ מדעתך, לא הייתי נותנת אצלו"</p> <p>22מה עשתה? תפשתו בידה, והעלה אותו לאותו חדר,</p> <p>23והקריבה אותו למטה ונטלה סדין מעליהם, וראה שניהם מתים ומונחים על המטה.</p> <p>25התחיל בוכה ואומר: "בני בני! רבי רבי! בני בדרך ארץ, ורבי שהיו מאירין פני בתורתך".</p> <p>27באותה שעה, אמרה לו לרב מאיר: "רבי, לא כך אמרת לי אני צריך להחזיר הפקדון לרבו?"</p> <p>29אמר: "ה' נתן וה' לקח; יהי שם ה' מברך" (איוב א:כא).</p> <p>29אמר ר' חנינא: בדבר הזה נחמתו, ונתיישרה דעתו; לך נאמר "אשת חיל מי ימצא".</p>
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### **7b.Rabbi Burton Visotzky Sage Tales: Wisdom and Wonder from the Rabbis of the Talmud p.51**

1One final possibility must be mentioned – for it cuts to the heart of rabbinic storytelling and how the ancient rabbis thought. Meir’s wife, the boys’ mother, has a famous name, Beruriah. Yet her name is not a Hebrew name. Beruriah actually is a Latin name. By means of a linguistic shift, the first *r* in her name represents the letter *l* in Latin – not unlike the shift that would take place were a Japanese speaker to try and say the word *shalom*. And the letter *B* at the outset of the name is readily softened in Hebrew to a *V* sound (SR note: Valeria →valor). Beruriah is quite literally the “woman of valor.” Given the verse at the start and end of the story, the rabbis may have been quite content that they had identified our heroine rather clearly.

2Beruriah acts in a rabbinically proper fashion. Since it is still the Sabbath when the boys die, there is no formal mourning or preparation for burial that can take place. She does exactly what Jewish law demands under the circumstance: rests the corpses upon a bed or bier and covers them with a sheet pending the Sabbath’s end. Further, she asks Meir a simple query regarding the return of a loaned object to its master. The answer is obvious to her, to Meir, and to us, the listeners. Why then does she ask it? She not only manipulates him into saying the words of theodicy that will allow him to “return the deposit to its master,” which is to say, accept the death of his sons and their return to God. She also briefly empowers him by allowing him his rabbinic expertise in the moment before he perhaps will feel more impotent than at any time in his adult life. His sons are dead, and there is nothing he can do about it but accept the reality of it. “The Lord gives and the Lord takes away” are words of theodicy that still are recited at Jewish gravesites. In this story and the Rabbi Yohanan narrative that preceded it, we are offered consolation to comfort the mourner for his or her loss. No sin needs to be assigned, no blame established. Instead the storyteller seems to take up the words of Isaiah, “Take comfort, take comfort, O My People, says your God” (Isaiah 40:1)

Question: Why is Bruriah an Eishet Chayil – Woman of Valor in this story?

Question: Just to keep track so far – how many of Bruriah's family members died so far?

<p><b>8. Talmud Bavli Avoda Zara 18b</b></p> <p>1 They said in a brita: The days weren't as bad until 2 the death of Yosi ben Kisma 3 And the Roman officials went to bury and eulogize for Rav Yosi ben Kisma a great eulogy</p> <p>4 And when they returned they found Rabi Chananyah 5 ben Tradyon sitting and teaching Torah study to 6 multitudes with a Torah scroll rested on his breast. 7 They wrapped him with the Torah scroll and 8 surrounded him with bundles of vines which they lit 9 on fire. They put a wet wool sponge on his heart so he would not die quickly.</p> <p><b>11 His daughter [Bruriah] said: Father, I see you like this?!</b></p> <p>12 Rabi Chananya ben Tradyon: If I was burned alone it would be hard for me. Now that the Torah scroll is 13 being burned with me, the one who will avenge the 14 offense of burning of the Torah will also avenge the offense against me.</p> <p>15 <u>His students said:</u> Rabbi, what do you see? 16 Rabi Chananya ben Tradyon: the margins of the parchment burning, and the letters soar upwards. 17 [His students]: Open your mouth so the fire will enter you [and you will die quickly.] 18 Rabi Chananya ben Tradyon: It is better that I die by the One who gave me [my life] and that I shouldn't 19 harm myself [more by quickening my death].</p> <p><u>20 The executioner said:</u> Rebbi, if I increase the flames 21 and remove the sponges, will you bring me to the 22 world to come? 23 Rabi Chananya ben Tradyon: Yes, swear to me 24 [The executioner] swore to him. 25 Immediately, [the executioner] increased the flame and removed the wool sponge from his heart. 26 His soul left quickly. 27 Even the executioner jumped and fell into the fire. 28 A Heavenly Voice came and said: Rabi Chananya 29 ben Tradyon and the executioner are invited to life in the world to come! 30 Rebbi cried and said: some acquire their share in a 31 moment and some acquire their share over many years.</p>	<p><b>8. תלמוד בבלי מסכת עבודה זרה יח:</b></p> <p>1 אמרו: לא היו ימים מועטים עד שנפטר רבי יוסי בן 2 קיסמא, 3 והלכו כל גדולי רומי לקברו והספידוהו הספד גדול</p> <p>4 ובחזרתן מצאוהו לרבי חנינא בן תרדיון שהיה יושב 5 ועוסק בתורה, ומקהיל קהלות ברבים וספר תורה 6 מונח לו בחיקו 7 הביאוהו וכרכוהו בספר תורה והקיפוהו בחבילי זמורות 8 והציתו בהן את האור והביאו ספוגין של צמר ושראו 9 במים והניחום על לבו כדי שלא תצא נשמתו מהרה</p> <p>11 אמרה לו <b>בתו:</b> אבא אראך בכך! 12 אמר לה: אילמלי אני נשרפתי לבדי היה הדבר 13 קשה לי. עכשיו שאני נשרף וספר תורה עמי, מי 14 שמבקש עלבונה של ספר תורה הוא יבקש עלבוני</p> <p>15 אמרו לו תלמידיו: רבי מה אתה רואה? 16 אמר להן: גליון נשרפין ואותיות פורחות 17 אף אתה פתח פיך ותכנס בך האש 18 אמר להן: מוטב שיטלנה מי שנתנה ואל יחבל הוא 19 בעצמו</p> <p>20 אמר לו קלצטונירי: רבי אם אני מרבה בשלהבת 21 ונוטל ספוגין של צמר מעל לברך אתה מביאני לחיי 22 העולם הבא? 23 אמר לו: הן, השבע לי 24 נשבע לו 25 מייד הרבה בשלהבת ונטל ספוגין של צמר מעל לבו. 26 יצאה נשמתו במהרה 27 אף הוא קפץ ונפל לתוך האור</p> <p>28 יצאה בת קול ואמרה: רבי חנינא בן תרדיון 29 וקלצטונירי מזומנין הן לחיי העולם הבא! 30 בכה רבי ואמר: יש קונה עולמו בשעה אחת ויש 31 קונה עולמו בכמה שנים.</p>
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Question: What does Bruriah mean when she says, "Father, I see you like this?"

Question: What is the difference between what Rabi Chananya tells Bruriah versus what he tells his students?

Question: Why do Rabi Chananya ben Tradyon and the executioner receive Olam Haba?

Section 4: **BRURIAH'S TRAGIC END**

<p><b>8a. Talmud Bavli, Avoda Zara 18b</b></p> <p>1 Bruriah, Rabi Meir's wife, the daughter of Rav 2 Chananya ben Tradyon said vainly: 3 She said to the Sages: Its a waste of words when they 4 say 'women are easily seduced'...</p> <p>5 Rabi Meir arose, fled, and came to Bavel. 6 (a) Some say it was due to this incident 7 (b) Others say it was due to <b>the Beruriah Incident.</b></p>	<p><b>8א. תלמוד בבלי, עבודה זרה, דף יח:</b></p> <p>1 ברוריא, דביתהו דר' מאיר, בריתה דר' חנינא בן תרדיון 2 הואי. 3 אמרה לו: "זילא בי מלתא דיתבא אחתאי בקובה של 4 זנות" ... 5 קם, ערק [ר' מאיר], אתא לבבל. 6 (א) איכא דאמרי: מהאי מעשה. 7 (ב) ואיכא דאמרי: ממעשה דברוריא.</p>
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<p><b>**8b. Rashi to Avoda Zara 18b</b></p> <p>1 "And some say it was due to the Beruriah Incident" 2 One time she mocked the Sages about their saying, 3 "Women are light-headed" (Bavli Kidushin 81b, Shabbat 33a) 4 Rabi Meir said to Beruriah: "By your life! You will ultimately affirm their words."  5 He instructed one of his students to test her with a sinful matter [i.e. to seduce her].  6 The student urged her for many days until she consented.  7 <b>When the matter became known to her, she strangled herself.</b>  8 And Rabi Meir fled [to Bavel] out of disgrace.</p>	<p><b>**8ב. רש"י על עבודה זרה, דף יח:</b></p> <p>1 "ואיכא דאמרי משום מעשה דברוריא". 2 שפעם אחת ליגלגה על שאמרו חכמים "נשים דעתן 3 קלות הן עלייהו" (קדושין פא:; שבת לג.) 4 ואמר לה: "חייך! סופך להודות לדבריהם".  5 וצוה לאחד מתלמידיו לנסותה לדבר עבירה.  6 והפציר בה ימים רבים, עד שנתרצית.  7 וכשנודע לה, חנקה עצמה.  8 וערק רבי מאיר מחמת כסופא.</p>
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<p><b>8c. Talmud Bavli Kiddushin 80b</b></p> <p>1 <i>Mishna</i>: A man may not be alone with two women, 2 but one woman may be alone with two men.... 3 <i>Gemara</i>: What is the reason for the halacha? 4 It was taught in the House of Eliyahu: <b>women are temperamentally lightheaded</b> [i.e women might be bullied into incest or marital rape]</p>	<p><b>8ג. תלמוד בבלי קידושין פ:</b></p> <p>1 <b>מתניתין</b>: לא יתייחד אדם עם שתי נשים, אבל 2 אשה אחת מתייחדת עם שני אנשים.... 3 <b>גמרא</b>: מאי טעמא? 4 תנא דבי אליהו: הואיל ונשים דעתן קלות עליהן</p>
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*Question #1: Why does Bruriah mock the Sages?*

<p><b>9. Responsa Maharil 199 (Rav Yaakov Molin)</b></p> <p>1 Behold Bruriah proved her end from the beginning: And there are those who say that she did not rely on the Sages words who said "Women are simple minded" 2 And the head of Sages, King Solomon said, "I will get more [Egyptian horses, women, and money] and I will not transgress and I will not stray, etc." 3 <b>Here too, she relied on her righteousness that she would not transgress by the hands of the student.</b></p>	<p><b>9. שו"ת מהרי"ל, סימן קצט (רב יעקב מולין)</b></p> <p>1 שהרי ברוריה הוכיחה סופה על תחילתה: ואיכא דאמרי שלא סמכה על דברי חכמים שאמרו "נשים דעתן קלות."  2 וראש לחכמים, שלמה המלך, אמר "אני ארבה ולא אסור ולא אטה וכו'", 3 והכי נמי סמכה על צדקתה שלא תעבור על ידי הלומד</p>
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*Question #2: How can Rabi Meir ask a student to seduce his wife?!*

<p><b>10a. Tiferet Yisrael</b>  <b>Rabi Meir knew that his student feared HaShem and would not engage in prohibited activities even if she would consent,</b> and thus, Heaven Forbid, Rabi Meir placed a stumbling block before her, as it seems to me.</p> <p><b>Rav Eitam Heinkin hy”d on the Tiferet Yisrael</b>  1 Meaning, there was no actual stumbling block of sex – it wouldn’t have crossed Rabi Meir’s mind to teach his student to seduce a married woman – rather to cause desire and licentiousness only.  2 Consequently, The Tiferet Yisrael’s words raise different questions: <b>How did Rabi Meir trust his student not to stumble, for ‘there is no guardian for sexual matters’?</b> Putting that aside, the student certainly would become sexually excited, so how could Rabi Meir permit this?</p>	<p><b>10א. תפארת ישראל</b>  שהיה יודע שהוא ירא שמיים ולא יעשה עמה איסור אף כשתתרצה, וכן הווי דחס ושלום דר' מאיר יכשילנה, כנראה לפי עניות דעתו</p> <p><b>רב עיתם היינקין הי"ד על התפארת ישראל</b>  1 כלומר, לא מדובר בהכשלה ממשית בגילוי עריות – שלא יעלה על הדעת שר' מאיר יורה לתלמידו לנאוף עם אשת איש – אלא על ריצוי והפצרה בלבד.</p> <p>2 אמנם, דבריו של ה'תפארת ישראל' מעלים שאלות אחרות: <b>כיצד סמך ר' מאיר על תלמידו שלא ייכשל הלא "אין אפוטרופוס לעריות"?</b> ... מלבד זאת, התלמיד בהכרח יהרהר בהרהורי עברה, וכיצד התיר זאת ר' מאיר?</p>
<p><b>10b. Ben Yehoyada on Avoda Zara 18b, Ben Ish Chai</b>  1 How did Rabi Meir permit his student to do this temptation, and he was not concerned lest sexual thoughts would arise in his heart as he was speaking to Beruriah at the moment of seduction?  2 And it seems to me with the will of God that <b>this student was a eunuch</b>, and he did not have any desire or sexual thought, and she did not know [that he was a eunuch] for there are eunuchs who are born naturally as eunuchs [e.g. asexual]  <b>Rav Eitam Heinkin hy”d re Ben Ish Chai</b>  It is difficult to me for the problem is only on the student? For there is a strong difficulty not on this, <b>but to transgress ‘do not put a stumbling block before the blind!’</b> At least, how did Rabi Meir permit himself to sin so much with his wife to test her?</p>	<p><b>10ב. בן יהוידע על אגדות הש"ס, עבודה זרה יח:</b>  1 איך נתן רשות לתלמיד לעשות לה פיתוי זה, ולא חשש פן יעלה בליבו הרהורים רעים בעת שמדבר עמה בדברי ריצוי ופיתוי?</p> <p>2 ונראה לי בס"ד דאיתו תלמיד היה סריס, ואין לו שום תאוה והרהור, והיא לא הייתה יודעת בו, כי יש סריס בידי שמיים שאינו ניכר מבחוץ כלל</p> <p><b>הרב איתם היינקין הי"ד על הבן איש חי</b>  קשה לעניות דעתי, וכי הבעיה היתה רק מצד התלמיד? הלא קושיה חזקה לא בכך, <b>ולעבור על 'ולפני עיור לא תתן מכשול'</b>! פחות היא כיצד התיר רבי מאיר לעצמו לחטוא כל כך בנפש אשתו לנסותה?</p>
<p><b>10c. Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin 81b</b>  1 Rabi Meir used to scorn sinners.  2 One day, the Satan appeared to him as a woman on the other side of the river.  3 There was no boat.  4 Rabi Meir tried crossing on planks holding a string stretched across the river.  5 When he was halfway across, the Satan abandoned him.  6 [The Satan] said: “If it weren’t for a voice from the Heavens which said ‘Be careful with Rabi Meir and his  7 Torah,’ I would have valued your Torah’s value at two ma’ah</p>	<p><b>10ג. תלמוד בבלי, קידושין, דף פא:</b>  1 רבי מאיר הוה מתלוצץ בעוברי עבירה.  2 יומא חד, אידמי ליה שטן כאיתתא בהך גיסא דנהרא.</p> <p>3 ללא הוה מברא.  4 נקט מצרא וקא עבר.  5 כני מטא פלגא מצרא, שבקיה.  6 אמר: "אי לאו דקא מכרזי ברקיעא 'הזהרו ברבי מאיר ותרתי', שויתיה לדמך תרתי מעי".</p>

***Question #3: Why is the story first mentioned in Rashi's commentary? Shouldn't this be in the Talmud?***

**11a. Rav Tzvi Hirsch (Maharatz) Chajes 1805-1855**

[A]ll stories which were disrespectful toward any of the rabbis of the Talmud were omitted, such as the story about the father of Shmuel and the Medes woman [from Media], and the incident of Berurah wife of R. Meir is only alluded to in the Talmud (*Avodah Zarah* 17b), and **Rashi there explains the occurrence according to that which he had heard passed from one person to another orally**, but was omitted from the Talmud.

**11b. Dr. Rachel Adler in The Virgin in the Brother and Other Anomalies: Character and Context in the Legend of Beruriah**

1 We might question how it is that sophisticated readers have expended a great deal of energy attempting to discredit this story without succeeding in budging it from its place in the legend. If Beruriah and Meir's behavior were truly inconceivable, the story would not work for us; it would simply be one of the many bizarre or incoherent rabbinic legends that do not speak to us in our context. **The ugliness of this story haunts us precisely because it is credible, because we can imagine not only Beruriah's rage and rebellion against the tradition, but also the great scholar and miracle-worker, the charismatic Rabbi Meir, playing the pimp for his own wife in order to vindicate the Torah.**

2 This is the story through which our teachers truly break our hearts. For at what price is the Torah vindicated? Once our teachers had brought into being the Beruriah of the legend, this outrageous hypothesis, the woman with a moral life like a man's, they could not imagine her initiating an affair or falling into casual promiscuity. The only way they could envision Beruriah's adultery was by imagining the guardians of the Torah entrapping her into violating the Torah with them.

3 The discrediting of Beruriah, then, is accomplished only by means of a betrayal that profanes every relationship that rabbinic Judaism holds to be holy: the bond of marriage, the bond between teacher and student, the very covenant with God that the commandments of the Torah express. **The cost of discrediting Beruriah is cosmic.**

**11c. Dr. Itamar Drori, The Beruriah Incident: Tradition of Exclusion as a Presence of Ethical Principles**

1 The temptation to 'correct' the situation, and present the Beruriah Incident as foreign to Jewish culture, led to a disregard of the centrality of Rashi's commentary, which was viewed as a 'secondary text.'... The attempt to discuss the accuracy of Rashi's text independently from its historical acceptance that includes such terminology as 'canon,' 'marginal,' and 'prejudice,' is tantamount to erasing reading consciousness spanning at least 500 years, from the 16th to the 20th century....

2 The observation that the story was originally transferred orally, in a process that naturally includes distortion, concealment, and a certain amount of blurring and silencing, is of the utmost significance. These are not external or technical features that relate to lost or incomplete documents.... When each storyteller has to determine what to reveal and what to conceal, the act of historical documentation is reduced in order to reflect the cultural, social, and theological outlook of the narrators. In view of this, the written preservation of the story without questioning its canonic status from the Middle Ages until the 20th century reflects an internal attitude toward the reception of the story within Jewish culture, despite the stated problems and complexities....

3 Reading the story as 'nearly compulsory' for the interpretation of the Talmudic text would not be an exaggeration; **the reading has been integrated, or even merged, into the basic reading of the sugya.** However, it is important to note that until the 20th century the acceptance of the Beruriah Incident as part of the sacred canon was absolute. No known author questioned the authenticity of the story, in contrast with a variety of stories that were tagged as foreign and as a result were rejected from the canon by Talmudic glossators – knowledgeable scholars and halakhic authorities who acted as 'cultural gatekeepers.'

4... **Here, too, one might say, "You have erased a text which was already absent." The attempt to erase the text is the very act that emphasizes what is missing, and thus gives the story its presence.**

**11d. Rav Eitam Heinkin hy"ד**

1 Rashi's source is lost to us; the story does not appear anywhere else in our Sage's literature; to does not appear even in Geonic literature, even in the Medieval era it is not found, no one recalls it except for Rashi.

**11ד. הרב איתם היינקין הי"ד**

1 מקורו של רש"י נעלם מאתנו; הסיפור אינו מופיע במקום כלשהו בספרות חז"ל, גם בכתבי הגאונים אין לו זכר, ואף בתקופת הראשונים איננו מוצאים לו ולו אזכור אחד, מלבד ברש"י

2 From a personal perspective, the story presents an extreme picture: Does it make sense that because of one taunt of the Sages to Bruriah, Rabi Meir would decide to undermine Beruriah to a place where she would want to betray him with another man?! This is not the actions of someone with good judgment, and especially not from one of the greats of the generation. This description is not appropriate for Rabi Meir, by endangering the Peace of the Home, actually, it contradicts what is known about Rabi Meir and Bruriah's marriage. Similarly, the most problematic issue halachically: how did Rabi Meir permit his student to seduce a woman to adultery, transgressing "be killed and do not transgress" for his sake and for hers.

3 I want to offer a different solution regarding the source for the Bruriah Incident... **In my humble opinion Rashi did not write this before he died, rather someone else whose words got mixed in explaining Rashi.**

4 To understand how a strange paragraph mixed into Rashi's explanation, we must emphasize how manuscripts were handled in the Middle Ages. Until the invention of the printing press, practically speaking, even after some time, a person who wanted to write notes and additions on the content of the manuscript, generally did not use a separate piece of paper since it was expensive, rather they would write it on the side of the text – and sometimes, when there was cramped space, sometimes they would write between the lines.

5 So, its is not surprising that many times, the scribe copying the manuscript would confuse the main text with the notes on them, and the outcome of this is that the scribe would produce a document where the notes are not separated from the original text.

2 מבחינה אנושית, מתוארת בסיפור תמונה קיצונית: האם סביר שבגלל לגלוג חד-פעמי ("שפעם אחת") של ברוריה על דברי חכמים, יחליט ר' מאיר לחתור למצב שהיא תתרחק לבגוד בו עם אדם אחר?! אין זו התנהגות של אדם שקול, לא כל שכן של אחד מגדולי התנאים. תיאור זה גם אינו הולם את פועלו של ר' מאיר עצמו בהשכנת שלום בית, ואף סותר את הידוע לנו על הזוגיות, היפה של ר' מאיר וברוריה. כמו כן הדבר בעייתי ביותר מבחינה הלכתית: כיצד התיר ר' מאיר לאותו תלמיד לפתות אישה לניאוף, עברת 'יהרג ואל יעבור' הן מבחינתו והן מבחינתה

3 אני מבקש להציע פתרון שונה למקור מעשה דברוריה'... לעניות דעתי לא רש"י הוא שכתבו לפי תומו, אלא אדם אחר שדבריו נשתרבבו לפירוש רש"י.

4 כדי להבין כיצד השתרבב קטע זר אל פירוש רש"י עלינו להיזכר לאופן הטיפול בכתבי-יד בימי הביניים. עד להמצאת הדפוס (ולמעשה גם לאחר מכן), אדם שרצה לרשום הערות, הגהות והוספות על תוכנו של כתב-יד כלשהו, בדרך כלל לא השתמש בקלף נפרד, שהיה מצרך יקר, אלא רשם זאת בצד הדברים הכתובים – ולעתים, במקרים של חוסר מקום, אף בין השורות המקוריות.

5 ממילא אין פלא שפעמים רבות שגה הסופר שהעתיק את כתב-היד, והתבלבל בין גוף הדברים ובין ההערות עליהם, וכתוצאה מכך הועתקו הוספות שונות כאילו היו חלק בלתי נפרד מהתוכן המקורי.

*Question #4: Parallel Story to Rabi Chiya bar Ashi!?***12. Talmud Bavli Kidushin 81b**

1 Every time Rabi Chiya bar Ashi would fall on his  
 2 face (for Tachanun)  
 3 He would say, "The Merciful One will save me from  
 the Evil Inclination"  
 4 One day his wife heard him  
 5 She said, "Let's see how many years he has  
 6 separated from me, [so] why would he say that?"  
 7 One day when he [Rabi Chiya bar Ashi] was learning  
 [Torah] in his garden  
 8 She adorned herself with a scarf and came before him  
 9 He asked her, "Who are you?"  
 10 She said, "I am Charuta, and I returned today"  
 11 He desired her.  
 12 She said to him, "Bring me the pomegranate from  
 13 the uppermost branch"  
 14 He went and brought it to her.  
 15 When he came to his house, his wife was firing the  
 oven  
 16 He went and sat in it  
 17 She said, "What is this?"  
 18 He told her what happened.  
 19 She said to him, "It was me!"  
 20 He did not believe her until she gave him proof.  
 21 He said "Nevertheless my intention was evil"  
 22 That righteous man fasted his whole life until he  
 23 died from that very death.

**12 תלמוד בבלי קידושין פא:**

1 רבי חייא בר אשי הוה רגיל כל עידן דהוה נפל 2 לאפיה  
 3 הוה אמר "הרחמן יצילנו מיצר הרע"  
 4 יומא חד שמעתניהו דביתהו  
 5 אמרה "מכדי הא כמה שני דפריש ליה מינאי, מאי  
 6 טעמא קאמר הכי?"  
 7 יומא חדא הוה קא גריס בגינתיה  
 8 קשטה נפשה חלפה ותנייה קמיה  
 9 אמר לה "מאן את?"  
 10 אמרה "אנא חרותא דהדרי מיומא"  
 11 תבעה  
 12 אמרה ליה "אייתי ניהליה להך רומנא דריש צוציתא  
 13 שוור"  
 14 אזל אתייה ניהלה  
 15 אתא לביתיה הוה קא שגרא דביתהו תנורא  
 16 סליק וקא יתיב בגויה  
 17 אמרה ליה "מאי האי?"  
 18 אמר לה הכי והכי הוה מעשה  
 19 אמרה ליה "אנא הוא!"  
 20 ללא אשגח בה עד דיהבה ליה סימני.  
 21 אמר לה "אנא מיהא לאיסורא איכווני"  
 22 כל ימיו של אותו צדיק היה מתענה עד שמת  
 23 באותה מיתה

## Section #5: STILL OUR HERO, DESPITE SUICIDE?

### 13. Rav Eitam Heinkin hy”d

1The only woman who merited to be at a parallel status to the Tanaim and served as an educational model in the revolution of women’s torah study, that has begun in the recent decades.

2In the eyes of our generation Bruriah is surely viewed as a positive role model, whether as a scholar of Oral Torah, for matters in her name were brought down to Halcha, whether because she was an unusually scholarly woman, which is a symbol of female success in the Torah.

3 Regardless, her figure is overcast by the strange story of the ‘Bruriah Incident,’ casting a heavy shadow on her character and actions which symbolized her life.

4 Thus, not surprisingly, **the Torah world’s preoccupation with the ‘Bruriah Incident’ is done with an educational purpose to soften the meaning of the story**, and to explain it according to the other similarly known things from what the Sages tell us about Rabi Meir and Brurirah.

### 13. הרב איתם היינקין הי”ד

1האישה היחידה שזכתה למעמד מקביל לתנאים – קיבלה תשומת לב מרובה, ואף שימשה כמודל חינוכי במהפכת לימוד התורה על-ידי נשים, שהחלה להתרחש בעשרות השנים האחרונות.

2בעיני בן דורנו נתפסת ברוריה ללא ספק כדמות חיובית למופת, אם מפני היותה אחת מחכמי התורה שבעל-פה, שדברים משמה הובאו להלכה, ואם מפני היותה אישה למדנית בצורה יוצאת דופן, המהווה סמל להצלחה נשית בעולם התורה.

3כך או כך, על דמות זו מעיב הסיפור המוזר של ‘מעשה דברוריא’, המטיל צל כבד על התנהגותה ועל האופן שבו סיימה את חייה.

4לכן, **שלא במפתיע, עיקר העיסוק בעולם התורה ב‘מעשה דברוריא’ נעשה מתוך מגמה חינוכית לרכך את משמעות הסיפור, ולהסבירו באופן מאמץ דומה הושקע מן שיהלום את הידוע לנו משאר דברי חז”ל על ר’ מאיר וברוריה.**

### 14. Brenda Socachevsky Bacon in Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies & Gender Issues, Number 5, Fall 5764/2003 p.231

The learning of Beruriah, the wife of Rabbi Meir, has turned her into a role model for those who view the relatively new phenomenon of women’s Torah study as an important value. **However, a report of Beruriah’s tragic and shameful end prevents complete identification with her.**

### 15. Dr. Joel Wolowelsky in Nashim A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies & Gender Issues, Number 6, Fall 5764/2003 p.205-208

1Of course, this anecdote does show Beruriah to be imperfect, but that is the approach taken in the Bible and Talmud toward our national heroes. Commenting on what on the surface seems to be Abraham’s questionable behavior, Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch remarks: “The Torah never presents our great men as being perfect.” (Commentary to Gen. 12:10). Unfortunately, mocking others was part of Beruriah’s *modus operandi* [source 4a and 5a]...

2[But even] a trusting soul like hers could be undermined by a mean-spirited campaign to do her in. *Ein apotropus le’arayot*, said the Sages: Everyone—not only the light-headed, and certainly not only women—is vulnerable to sexual temptation, even someone who, like Beruriah, “learned three hundred traditions a day from three hundred masters” [source 1]. I see no reason not to want to make that point to our students.

3**The real purpose of Rashi’s anecdote, I believe, was not to undermine Beruriah but rather to reprimand Rabbi Meir for his outrageous behavior...** Rabbi Meir was indebted to his wife for many important insights... Rabbi Meir certainly knew that Beruriah was not light-headed and that she had every justification to be offended by such a slur. How should he have responded to her hurt? Surely not by violating the biblical command not to put a stumbling block before her. What could his student have thought of his master when he was instructed to behave so reprehensibly? His loyalty to his teacher seems to have blinded him to the ethics of the Torah. Indeed, Rashi quotes this story in connection with a talmudic discussion that illustrates Rabbi Meir’s insensitivity.

*Question:* How do Rav Heinkin hy”d, Brenda Socachevsky, and Dr. Joel Wolowelsky address how we can identify with Bruriah despite her (potential) suicide? Who is compelling to you? Can *you* identify with Bruriah?

## Section #6: CONCLUSION AND MESSAGE

16. Dr. Rachel Adler in The Virgin in the Brother and Other Anomalies: Character and Context in the Legend of Beruriah

**1**What is arresting about the portrayal of Beruriah is the vividness and solidity of her selfhood. She is, in literary terms, a rounded character rather than a flat or stylized one. She does not illustrate a single virtue like Rachel, the magnanimous wife of Rabbi Akiva, nor does she appear in a single role like the learned maid-servant of Rabbi Yehudah Ha'Nasi. In some texts she is the ideal daughter or wife, in others simply the source of a legal opinion, and in still others a caustic and formidable figure....

**2**It is unusual for rabbinic legends to depict women in a rounded or complex way. Since they are exclusively male creations or redactions, rabbinic legends are necessarily androcentric. Women appear in cameo roles at best. At worst, they are shadowy utilities like the black-garbed stagehands of the Japanese Noh drama. But Beruriah is no utility. **Mastering, defending, even mocking the tradition that shapes her context, she embodies, as do the most memorable of the rabbis, a distinctive moral destiny. ...**

**3** [A]n outrageous test case proposed as a challenge to all contextually reasonable assumptions: **What if there were a woman who was just like us?...** Beruriah's story is thus imbued with profound ambivalence. On the negative side, Beruriah is viewed as a threat, a competitor, an arrogant woman contemptuous of men and of rabbinic tradition. On the positive side are Beruriah's brilliance, her special usefulness as a woman who vindicates rabbinic Judaism, and the uniquely appealing depictions of her relationship with her husband.