

# Yalta

Source Sheet by Danielle Kranjec



Berakhot 51b:5-7

**Ulla happened to come to the house of Rav Nahman. He ate bread, recited Grace after Meals, and gave the cup of blessing to Rav Nahman. Rav Nahman said to him: Master, please send the cup of blessing to Yalta. Ulla responded to him: There is no need, as Rabbi Yohanan said as follows: The fruit of a woman's body is blessed only from the fruit of a man's body, as it is stated: "And He will love you, and bless you, and make you numerous, and He will bless the fruit of your body" (Deuteronomy 7:13). The Gemara infers: "He will bless the fruit of her body" was not stated. Rather, "He will bless the fruit of your**

**ברכות נ"א ב:ה'ז'**

עולא אקילע לבי רב נחמן. פריך ריפתא, בריך ברכת מזונא, יהב ליה כסא דברכתא לרב נחמן. אמר ליה רב נחמן: לישדר מר כסא דברכתא לילתא. אמר ליה: הכי אמר רבי יוחנן: אין פרי בטנה של אשה מתברך אלא מפרי בטנו של איש, שנאמר "ויברך פרי בטנך". "פרי בטנה" לא נאמר, אלא "פרי בטנך". תניא נמי הכי, רבי נתן אומר: מנין שאין פרי בטנה של אשה מתברך אלא מפרי בטנו של איש — שנאמר: "ויברך פרי בטנך", "פרי בטנה" לא נאמר, אלא

[masculine singular]

**body.” That opinion was also taught in a *baraita*: Rabbi Natan says: From where is it derived that the fruit of a woman’s body is only blessed from the fruit of a man’s body? As it is stated: And He will bless the fruit of your body; He will bless the fruit of her body was not stated. Rather, He will bless the fruit of your body. The Gemara relates that meanwhile Yalta heard Ulla’s refusal to send her the cup of blessing. She arose in a rage, entered the wine-storage, and broke four hundred barrels of wine. Afterward, Rav Nahman said to Ulla: Let the Master send her another cup. Ulla sent Yalta a different cup with a message saying that all of the wine in this barrel is wine of blessing. She sent him a response: From itinerant peddlers, come meaningless words, and from rags come lice.**

”פְּרִי בְטוֹנָךְ.” אֲדַהְכִי שְׂמֵעָה  
יִלְתָּא, קָמָה בְּזִיְהָרָא, וְעֵלִית לְבִי  
חֲמָרָא, וּתְבַרְא אַרְבַּע מָאָה דִּינִי  
דְּחֲמָרָא. אָמַר לִיה רַב נַחְמָן:  
נְשִׂדֵר לָהּ מֶרַק פְּסָא אַחֲרִינָא,  
שְׁלַח לָהּ: כֹּל הָאֵי נְבָגָא,  
דְּבִרְכָתָא הִיא. שְׁלַחָהּ לִיה:  
מִמְהַדוּרֵי — מִיָּלִי, וּמִסְמָרְטוּטֵי  
— כְּלָמֵי.

Judith Baskin, *Midrashic Women: Formations of the Feminine in Rabbinic Literature* (2002): 85.

Her intrepid actions are cited with approval . . . It is evident, however, that such a figure, or even the idea of such a figure, caused extreme discomfort to a social policy predicated on the dominance of men.

Rachel Adler, "Feminist Folktales of Justice," *Conservative Judaism* 45:3 (1988) pp. 50-51

In Ulla's biological metaphor, male potency is conflated and fused both with spiritual blessing and with social dominance. By analogy, just as a woman cannot be fertile through any act of her own so too they cannot be blessed through any act of their own, but only through the agency of men acting for and upon them . . . Given the existence of other interpretations in texts which include women in the ceremony, we might ask why Ulla is bent upon reducing Yalta to a womb. Perhaps he is compensating for other disparities. Yalta, daughter of the fabulously wealthy leader of the Jews in Babylonia, is Ulla's superior both in affluence and lineage. The only thing that Ulla has which Yalta does not is the appendage around which he and his sources have been creating a satisfactory structure. Small wonder that Yalta heads for the wine storage to castrate Ulla symbolically 400 times, shattering the containers and spilling out the sanctifiable liquid, whose blessing, according to Ulla, is a man's prerogative to dispense.



Shabbat 62a

שבת ס"ב א

**Rather, Rav Yosef said: Ulla holds that women are a people unto themselves.**

[אלא] אמר רב יוסף קסבר  
עולא נשים עם בפני עצמן הן

Inbar Raveh, *Feminist Readings of Rabbinic Literature* (2014)

My reading of literature has always been accompanied by an awareness of the place and the role of the reader. Since becoming a reflective reader, I have identified with the insights of Hans-Georg Gadamer, who points out that the reader finds himself within the text as an inevitable result of the overall sociopolitical context of which he and the words form a part. When I began to study feminism and gender theories of reading, it seemed natural to view rabbinic literature as a locus where gender knowledge, inter alia, is formed. This represented further proof that commentators always view matters from within their own context, since there is no other way of reading a text.

Alieza Salzberg, "Feminist/Gender Interpretation of Rabbinic Literature", *Reconstructing the Talmud* by Joshua Kulp and Jason Rogoff (2014), pp. 201.

Again we would emphasize that this is not "Yalta's" unmediated voice speaking through the text. After all, Talmudic texts were written by men for a male audience, and the women they depict are -- at least in part -- male creations. The pure, unmediated voice of an actual Talmudic woman is sadly irrecoverable.



*Source Sheet created on Sefaria by Danielle Kranjec*