

Miro Gavran

Judith

(excerpt)

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Chapter 1

When I became a widow and dressed myself in haircloth, peace pervaded me.

Yahweh called my husband Manasses to him two days after the completion of the festival of unleavened bread.

He died suddenly - collapsing mid-step in the meadow, walking into emptiness, into non-existence, in front of the frightened servants who, in a short inhalation, noticed the first sign of their master's languor, and as they exhaled, recognised his merciless death.

I did not shed a single tear, nor did sobs disturb our chambers.

Everyone interpreted my equanimity as wondrous strength and faith in the Lord; nobody saw it as the absence of love.

Fortunately, I have kept secrets since my birth like captured warriors, to whom honour is more important than life.

My father said that my taciturn mouth was more trustworthy than the most sober of men, and that it was a pity that I saw the world as a woman, as, despite my exceedingly beautiful exterior, the strength of my person belonged to the worthier gender.

I had truly never been prone to frivolous prattle, so that my mouth gave utterance only to the most necessary of sentences, resembling a diligent water carrier who puts a deliberate amount of precious liquid in the pitcher, so that not a single droplet would spill as he walked.

Perhaps this is the reason why I am entrusting my story to letters, instead of a weakly living being, not wishing to put anyone's reliability to the test.

I feel that I would have become deranged had it not occurred to me to write, this being the only form of liberating myself of the onus of the secrets, which oppressed me.

The alleviation which flowed through my toil-worn entrails with the very first sentence I wrote convinced me that I had made the correct decision and that, after the completion of this task, unsuitable for a woman, I would live in a better alliance with my memories, as writing about ourselves is similar to the work of a trader, to whom only the order which he restores to his overcrowded warehouse brings tranquillity, so that he can cope more easily with the numerous items he possesses.

No, I am not writing this to myself, nor am I addressing myself to a particular reader.

While I am alive, nobody will read this, but after my death - perhaps my confession will be found by a man or woman who, in my memoirs, will recognise the greatness of the trials to which Yahweh subjects his chosen people.

I was born into a distinguished family, in the town of Bethulia.

My family, like my town, was sublime, distinguished and steadfast, without any loosened stone in its solid, thick walls.

The wealth, wisdom and rationality of my father rendered him one of the most distinguished citizens of our town.

My mother was the adornment and support of his importance, correctly assessing the domain which belonged to a woman - that of a wife and mother.

Merari was the name which my father received from his father, with the oath that no dark shadow would ever fall on him.

Leah was the name of my mother, a name sufficiently short and sonorous that she was able to comply even more quickly with my father's swift utterances.

Yahweh, our God, blessed their marriage in the second year of their union, when Benjamin was born to them, my brother and the heir of our family.

A year later, I, Judith, the second and last of my parents' children, saw the light of day, at the will of the Lord our God, by his infinite grace.

After my birth, my mother's womb became a barren ground, which no longer produced any fruit. My father Merari interpreted this as the will of the Almighty that our family estate would not be squandered or fragmented in the future.

From the first day of my childhood, when a ray of consciousness imbued me with the intellect which distinguished me from the world, I became aware that I was different from the girls and boys who surrounded me.

Everyone told me that I was more intelligent than other children of my age and my parents and neighbours observed in me the foreboding of some kind of greater significance to which only the future would give ultimate fulfilment and an explanation understandable to mere mortals.

Even my brother Benjamin, in his early boyhood, showed consideration to me, so that I never experienced from him the unpleasantness or rudeness with which the brothers of our neighbourhood unsparingly overwhelmed their less worthy sisters.

The beginning of the prayer with which the male children of Israel thanked our God for creating them as men did not have for me the strength of verity that it did in the ears of the ordinary daughters of Israel.

For I was not like other women.

I sometimes realised this by means of foreboding, and afterwards, by means of the revelation and works of Yahweh, I received confirmation that I was chosen on the day of my birth.

On the great day of temptation, I did that which Yahweh our God requested me to do unquestioningly, although...

O Lord, pacify my mirthful memories, restrain the chaos which emerged from the entwining of my past and present - help me to maintain order in my writing, as only order brings peace and fulfilment.

Help me to utter these words clearly and unequivocally and to describe my life with the simplicity with which You, most gracious Lord, set forth the ritual of the consecration of the priests to Moses, when you ordered him to take Aaron, and with him, his sons, garments, anointing oil, a young bullock as a sin-offering, two rams and a basket of unleavened bread, and to gather the whole community at the entrance of the tent of meeting, to wash Aaron and his sons with water, to dress Aaron in a coat, gird him with a girdle, wrap him in a robe and put an ephod on him, then dress him with the skilfully woven band of the ephod and with this tighten the ephod on him, put a breastplate on him, and on the breastplate place the Urim and Thummim, put a mitre on his head, and put a golden plate at the front of the mitre - a golden crown. Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the Tent and everything inside it, to consecrate it, with this he sprinkled the altar seven times and anointed the altar and all its accessories, the basin with its base, to consecrate them, and poured anointing oil on Aaron's head, to consecrate him...

Most gracious Lord who in the Law spoke clearly and unequivocally through the mouth of Moses, help my words to restore order to my narrative, and, by means of that order, to bring peace to my toil-worn soul.

Chapter 2

Just as the beginnings of a fruit are in the seed, the beginnings of a life are in childhood - therefore I am beginning to speak about the earliest days of my life like a source from which the whole river can be observed - its beginnings, its current and its basin.

For as long as they can remember, my parents have adhered to the Law, respecting and celebrating His name.

When my mother Leah gave birth to me in pains which exhausted her from dawn until early dusk, adhering to the Law, she remained unclean for two weeks, just like every woman is unclean during the time of her monthly cleansing, and then she remained so for another sixty- six days to clear herself of her blood.

In these days, adhering to the Law, she was not allowed to touch anything consecrated, or to come to the Sanctuary, until the time of her purification had passed.

And when the time of her purification had passed she brought the priest at the entrance of the Temple a one-year-old lamb as a burnt-offering and a turtle dove as a sin-offering.

The priest sacrificed it in front of Yahweh. And under it he carried out the ritual reconciliation.

And so she was cleansed of her bleeding. She then returned to her husband's home with me in her arms. To the fright of all the female servants, it never again occurred that little Judith began to cry again, slept restlessly, or woke up during the night on account of pains.

It was as though, with the ritual of reconciliation, God's blessing descended onto me, protecting me from the customary troubles to which other children were subject.

The town priests began to call upon our house, wishing to see the child, which, by the mercy of Yahweh, did not know of pain and suffering in the early months and years of her life.

Only in my maturity shall I become aware that the Lord spares us from small ills, so as to prepare us better for greater trials still in the peace of a tranquil life - as all of us who look at the rising sun before the end of life must experience our share of suffering and pain, whether they are kings or beggars, chosen or abandoned.

I now know that exemption is always temporary - just an opportunity for the strengthening of the soul which, at the moment of truth, has to display a strength which surpasses our consciousness and courage.

My parents were just towards their servants and slaves, never uttering a needless word, they achieved harmony in acquisition and giving, always adhering to the sublime Law, not forgetting even for a moment that there was only one Lord, in whose glory every animate and inanimate object was created and constructed.

In these early years of my childhood, even the neighbourhood children saw me as being chosen by destiny - feeling that an impenetrable wall stood between them and me.

It therefore occurred that solitude became my companion from my earliest days - so that they seldom invited me to play, and even more seldom joined me in the arranging of little stones into rows, that for only me had a purpose.

I am not sure of what I am about to say, but I imagine that they were afraid of me, as my eyes betrayed a maturity unsuitable for a child. A secret inexplicable to a mortal was reflected in them.

My brother, Benjamin, a year older than me, was the only being who saved me from solitude in these days.

I am grateful to him that, through his laughter and lightheartness, I too touched upon the secret nature which we call childhood.

For it was only with Benjamin that I was at times an ordinary child.

Through effortless play, I learned from my brother how to read and write.

I mastered a skill inappropriate for a woman.

Unfortunately, because of me, Benjamin had troubles which I did not consciously bring upon him, but of which I was the cause.

When I reached the fifth year of my life, I became aware that our Community, in the space of a year, carried out numerous sacrificial rituals.

I became aware of what a burnt-offering was, and what a meal-offering was, I became aware of what a peace-offering and a sin-offering were.

I became aware that when one of the children of Israel wished to offer Yahweh an offering of cattle, he sacrificed large or small cattle.

If his contribution to the burnt-offering was of large cattle, a male without blemish was offered.

It would be taken to the altar to be received by Yahweh.

Then the bullock was placed on a stake before Yahweh.

And the priests sacrificed the blood. With it they splashed all sides of the altar which stood before the entrance of the Temple.

Then the offering was skinned and cut into pieces.

The priests laid a fire on the altar and on the fire placed wood and on the wood piled the parts with the head and tallow which were on the fire on the altar.

The entrails and the legs were washed in water and then the priest compressed everything into the font on the altar.

This was a burnt-offering, a burnt-offering to Yahweh with a pleasant smell.

I learnt everything about the meal-offering and about numerous other sacrificial offerings, and, before my brother Benjamin I said:

"The sacrifices which we children of Israel offer Yahweh, our Lord, are numerous; therefore I feel sorry for the large and small cattle which perish on our altars. Perhaps the Lord does not wish so many sacrifices."

The following day my six-year-old brother Benjamin spoke my idea before our father Merari as if it were his own:

"Father, why does so much cattle die on altars in the glory of Yahweh? Perhaps Yahweh does not wish to take their lives."

Blood rushed to my father's calm face, and for the first time in my life I heard him scream:

"Who has lead you to utter such blasphemous absurdity?! Tell me who?!"

Benjamin turned pale, and, wishing to protect me, stammered a lie:

"Nobody, Nobody talked me into it, I only wanted to say, to ask..."

But our father, Merari, did not wish to listen to the justification of his "possessed" son. Instead he led him to the Temple where the priests were, so that they could drive from the boy's body the shameful force which had prompted him to blaspheme against the Law and the customs which Yahweh had communicated to Moses, so that he would lead the children of Israel to a righteous life.

That same day, my father slaughtered his largest ox and sacrificed a sin-offering.

My brother Benjamin remained with the priests for two days and two nights - and when I saw him again he gave the impression of being twice as old as he was, and a dark shadow settled on his face.

Nobody spoke a word to me about how the priests drove the shameful force from his body, and nobody spoke a word of reproach to me about the fact that he was suspected and punished on account of my doubts about the numerous sacrificial rituals.

Even today I am surprised at myself when I think that I doubted the righteousness of the Law as a five-year-old child, and what a marvel it was that the Lord turned his gaze from me, so that a shameful thought overwhelmed me at an unexpected moment.

For doubting the Law means doubting life and our only God - and that is as terrible as a shameful death.

In these early childhood days, I was obsessed by the thought of Moses, of the greatest prophet of the Israelites.

In my prayers, I thanked him for everything that he had done for the sons and daughters of Israel, I thanked him for forming an Alliance with God and for rendering us the chosen people whom the greatest possible joy befell - the joy of serving our Yahweh.

I was obsessed in my childhood by the thought of Moses`s death, of the moments when, in his one hundred and twentieth year, Yahweh, after wanderings through the desert, led him to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, over against Jericho, where Yahweh showed him all the land: from Gilead to Dan, all of Naphtali, the lands of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah to the hinder sea, and the South, the plain of the Valley of Jericho - the city of palm trees - to Zoar, and said to him: this is the land which I pledged to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that I would give your descendants. I have allowed you to look at it with your own eyes, however you will not pass over to it.

I could not fathom why Yahweh did not allow him to tread the promised land, to live for at least a year, a month or a day in the destination towards which he had aimed all of his life.

I was persecuted by the question of why the chosen one did not receive the grace received by the numerous sons of Israel whom he delivered from slavery and led to the promised land, without having even set foot in it.

I did not dare to ask anybody the question about the sad Moses who received great grace from the Lord, but did not receive the last grace.

That question tortured me for years, even at a ripe age, and only now does it seem to me that I know the answer as to why Yahweh denies his chosen people that which he graciously bestows on the most ordinary of mortals.

It seems to me that I am now aware of the reason. However I dare not speak or write of it.

Chapter 3

The most beautiful part of Bethulia was its extensive town square.

On the south side, the grand Temple was raised, constructed in the glory of our only Lord.

On the north side, stretched the town market, to which came peasants from surrounding villages and merchants from far-off lands.

As a child, I saw many times at the foot of the Temple rituals attested by the most select men of our town.

I also saw much stoning with which the sons of Israel, implementing the holy Law, punished the fools who opposed Yahweh's will with their own will, and who, listening to shameful forces and voices of trouble-makers, desecrated the Law and the holy objects of our chosen people.

It was never clear to me how a man born into our community, instructed according to the Law and good customs, and in addition to this gifted with reason, could wish to incline towards blasphemy in deed or word,

It was never clear to me what occurred in these mature heads, and what kind of thought drove them to step out of the only possible righteous way.

And while I, myself adhering to the Law, threw stones on the life of an unworthy person condemned, I would feel neither hate nor fury, but simply pity at a living creature losing the grace of Yahweh and pouring his body and his spirit into ridicule and shame, because of an absurdity or want of caution

As a little girl, I liked going to the town square, also because of the trader Bileam, a favourite with the children, who had no children of his own, and who gave us presents of dried fruit and honey lotion.

When he became aware of the fact that his first two wives were barren, he gave them a letter of dismissal and dissolved the marriages as befitted the Law.

And when he saw that not even his third wife presented him with fruit or an heir, he reconciled himself to his destiny and continued to live without anger towards the Lord, who knew best of all what was good for whom, and what kind of burden best befitted which living creature on his way to Heaven.

One day, the memory is still clear to me today, Bileam stood in front of the priest at the foot of the Temple, and the priest declared him, before the assembled multitude, unclean - leprous.

And, according to the Law, one who has become a leper must wear torn clothes, his hair must be dishevelled, and his upper lip shrouded, and he must shout so all can hear him: "Unclean, unclean!"

And while the disease is in him, he must remain unclean, and, because he is unclean, he must dwell alone, outside the city walls.

I remember how Bileam, before the believers assembled in the square, rent his clothes and with tearful eyes attempted to exclaim with a weakened throat: " Unclean, unclean!"

However instead of an exclamation, only a subdued sob reached us.

His throat did not listen to him.

Like a penitent, he left the walls of our town and went to cleanse himself in isolation, far from healthy people.

Unfortunately, he never cleansed himself, and died as an unclean creature, separated from his brothers.

This was the first death which filled me with sorrow, the first departure which I recognised as an emptiness which was settling in my heart.

I missed Bileam's smile, his unselfishness in giving, his voice in which joy had nestled, joy at the fact that Yahweh had given him the grace of living and working as a small street trader.

Several months later, when my mother's mother died, I once again felt pain and emptiness, and I realised that I had to become accustomed to the fact that the Lord would take dear beings from me in life, in an order known only to him.

For death and birth - they supplement each other so harmoniously that it seemed from time to time that the priests in the Temple exchanged one lot of ashes for another, like when an hourglass turned to the other side, causing the last grain to become the first, which means every end became a beginning,

Yes, I liked that square, and the commotions of the crowd.

I liked seeing how the events in front of the Temple and the events on the market place conditioned each other like two sides of a coin - I liked knowing that everything on the ground, human and everyday, which was created in the throng of the market place, would receive its reflection and proportion in the Temple or in front of the Temple, where, the sublime priest assessed the Divine righteousness of every man and event, so that good deeds brought good up to God, and bad deeds were set in order according to the Law, with a punishment or a sin-offering

My town was a paragon for other towns, and it seemed to me in time of my childhood, that justice and order were brought to it in the harmony prescribed in the holy documents.

I thought that I should be grateful to the Lord for having created me in a place where god-fearing people respected order and the Law, knowing that there was no greater happiness than a life well-ordered and lived according to the rules of honour and respect.

Chapter 4

When I turned thirteen my brother Benjamin began to keep company with a youth called Eliab.

Benjamin often went to Eliab's honourable and distinguished house, but more often Eliab walked to our house, to talk with my brother about hunting and the pastimes befitting of youths of their age.

Nobody could even anticipate that my brother was not the only reason for Eliab`s frequent visits to our home, nobody except me.

The first time our eyes met, it was like the resonant blow of sword on sword.

My body was burned by a fire until then unknown, and I found out that this youth kindled a flame in my heart, both with a twinkle in his eye and with an ordinary sentence uttered under his breath.

This was love.

However I did not speak a word to anyone about what was happening in my heart.

I caught myself, like a castaway awaiting rescue in a restless sea, awaiting with an equal amount of patience Eliab`s arrival, knowing that only his nearness could bring me bliss.

From day to day, our youthful love grew, but without either he or I affirming it with a single word.

But our gazes spoke more and more eloquently and sublimely, and as if our souls were in our pupils, we blessed our loved one eye to eye.

One day, Eliab came to see my brother in festal garments, with an expression on his face which betrayed expectation.

He sought an interview with our father Merari, who received him without hesitation in the largest chamber of our house, where the most distinguished men of our town were received at our home.

Not long afterwards, Eliab left our home, with a lowered gaze and quickened paces.

From my brother I learned that he had asked our father for my hand, having testified the magnitude of love and respect which he felt for me.

And my father replied to him:

"Young man, if you had come to me only three days earlier, you would have received an affirmative answer, as I cannot see any objections either to you or to your family. Your repute, propriety and proprietary situation, are on an equal footing with the eminence of our family. However, on holy Saturday, as I was coming out of our Temple, I met a distinguished man of the town Oholiab, who asked me if I could find any flaws in his son Manasses and his family. When I replied that I have known them to be excellent all my life, he proposed to me that my daughter and his son form a union. I accepted his proposal, and gave him my word that he could consider

my daughter promised in marriage. I believe that any father who wishes his daughter happiness would have acted in this manner, as Manasses today has the reputation of being the most well-to-do young man in Bethulia, and nobody has ever spoken a bad word about his relations with the Community, with his parents or with God."

Eliab had no reply to these Words, and their conversation terminated with the promise that he would pass on my father's regards to his father, as is becoming of people who honour each other with respect.

When my brother conveyed to me our father's fateful words, it was as though a double unhappiness reverberated inside me.

The first unhappiness and sorrow pervaded me at the thought that the excellent and beloved young man Eliab would never be mine, that I would never belong to him.

And the other unhappiness was in the truth that I was to become the wife of the young man Manasses, whom I had seen a few times on the square and in front of the Temple, and all that I felt for him was repulsion at the sight of his ugly person, bloated cheeks and cold eyes.

I recalled his coarse voice in which I interpreted haughtiness stemming from the great riches which belonged to him and his family, and which had doubled in the skilled trading in the last ten years, provoking marvel and envy in town.

Manasses was his father's only child, and everybody considered him the best possible bridegroom in Bethulia.

Everyone with the exception of me.

O, Yahweh, forgive me for speaking unflattering words about my late husband, and about the horror which I felt when I learned that I was to be his wife.

Forgive me, but my obligation to the truth which You commanded does not allow me to embellish reality.

Although I know that everything had to be exactly how it occurred, I cannot, in these memories, restrain myself from the unpleasant thought: "what would have been had it been", and how my destiny would have been had Eliab arrived at my father's house a mere three days earlier and if...

However, let us return to my story and to that which really occurred, not that which could have been, let us return to the fateful day. When from the mouth of my brother, I learned that I was being prepared for something which I would not have wished even on an enemy in the worst of dreams.

Having seen sorrow and restlessness on my disappointed face, Benjamin asked me under his breath:

"What will you reply to our father when he communicates to you that Manasses will become your husband, and not Eliab?"

"What can I reply to him, my brother, when for as long as I can remember he has taught me to honour the Law and my parents, and in the Law it is unequivocally stated: "honour your father and mother, so that you will have a long life on the land you were given by Yahweh, your God.""

The following day, after the morning prayer, my father proclaimed his decision about the choice of my husband, and blessed my expected consent.

I learned that my wedding awaited me in a year's time, after Manasses had built a big house, beyond his father's house, and prepared his estate for the arrival of a mistress.

I consoled myself with the thought that the wedding was still far in the future and that perhaps unforeseeable destiny would alter the way of my life.

However, my hopes were in vain.

Eliab no longer passed over our doorstep, as, after his unsuccessful proposal, he could not keep my brother's company as though nothing had happened.

I missed his gaze and his nearness, for he was the only being who could offer me comfort and soothe my sorrow.

Unfortunately, a month later, something terrible happened, on account of which Eliab`s character was darkened in my eyes, and bitterness joined my sorrow like a friend.

It was a Friday, the eve of Saturday, when the town vicar rushed through the narrow streets, exclaiming:

"To the square! To the square! Trial! To the square!"

This could only mean one thing: one of the sons or daughters of Israel had committed a great sin, and an urgent trial was being arranged.

Not much time passed, and a multitude of people assembled on the town square.

They whispered to each other, observing that a young man and woman had committed an obscene sin.

Everyone expected the most severe of punishments.

The gaolers appeared, leading the bound defendants.

With difficulty, they made their way through the crowd.

Finally, they arrived at the Temple, where the chief gaoler, as was customary, called upon Reuben, the town priest:

"Most just among us, you who keep order and the Law, listen to the call of the sons and daughters of Israel. Who beg you to judge fairly the young man and woman who have committed an abominable sin."

As he spoke these words, the town priest Reuben stepped out of the Temple, followed by about ten other priests, and addressed himself to him:

"Say before everyone what has happened and how."

The chief gaoler climbed another two steps and turned towards the mob and began shouting so that the whole square could distinctly hear him:

"This young man has been caught in the act of adultery with the wife of his neighbour. Tell us what kind of punishment the Law prescribes for them."

Reuben replied to him:

"Let them show their repentant faces before the Community, so that everybody can see them well."

The gaolers dispelled from the Temple with spears the accused young man and woman and my heart almost exploded when in the person of the arrested man, I recognised Eliab, who I never got over.

Fear and panic were in his face, his body was stooped, he writhed, shackled to the ropes like an animal trapped in the hunt.

And the young woman who stood next to him seemed even more pitiful, her clothes half-torn, her hair dishevelled and her face full of bruises, where the eager gaolers, sickened by her sin, had beaten her.

Above the crowd with the ominous flutter of low-flying wings, a frightened bird announced itself, swiftly changing the direction of its flight, as if it was foreboding what was happening on the square.

Reuben raised his hand, and with a voice full of a century of peace and a power which knew no doubt, uttered the verdict:

"The Law is clear and the same for everyone. Through the voice of Moses, Yahweh told us, "Let a man who commits adultery with the wife of his neighbour be punished by death, let the adulterer and adulteress be stoned, and let their blood fall upon them."."

At his words, the gaolers pushed the condemned down the steps. The people, whose yells of approval had accompanied Reuben's words, all grasped at stones and with the fury of the just man, began to punish the unfortunates who had the impudence to oppose the Law and order, forgetting that only those whose deeds, like their thoughts and words, are clean, unsoiled, deserve Yahweh's grace.

The cries of the crowd overwhelmed Eliab's screams and the screams of that woman, and the stoning lasted right up until the moment when their massacred lifeless bodies lost the distinction of the human form.

In my ears, the echo of the crowd resounded, even long after the multitude had plunged into silence after the completion of their righteous deed.

O, how painfully I experienced Eliab's indiscretion. My heart pained me even more than it did when I learnt I was to become Manasses's wife.

The bitterness and fury flooded me, as at the moment of adultery Eliab had polluted the purity of our love, and with his deed spoiled the beauty of our union, which was established only in the infrequent meetings of our eyes.

O, how I felt betrayed and humiliated.

I loved a being who did not deserve my love, a being who with an odious act destroyed himself before God and all the creatures whose company he had kept.

That day I also saw Eliab's father throwing stones at his son, his mother, destroyed by shame, throwing stones at the child she had nursed, knowing that the punishment could not wash the shame away from the family, but could restore the shaken order without which Heaven would collapse on all of us.

And I saw myself raising a stone, but I did not throw it, my hand began to quiver, because the thought went round my head that Eliab had walked into sin because of me - out of desperation of not succeeding in obtaining me from my father.

My indecisiveness and weakness in the delirium of the crowd remained invisible, as people filled with fury did not see anything other than themselves and the causes of their hatred, which in their powerlessness could not take refuge with weakly hands from large, murderous stones.

The screams of the dying were drowned out by the cries of those who punished in the light of the clear sun, which did not forgive abominable sin.

O, how the delirium seized me, and shocked my thoughts and feelings fundamentally, so that for two days and two nights afterwards, I did not fall into refreshing sleep.

Only in my exhausting prayers did I succeed in subduing the anxiety and returning to the protective embrace of everyday events.

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Chapter 5

In the months which then came upon us, my mother Leah spent in preparation for marriage, for which the maidens of Israel had to be advised according to customs and the Law, so as they could become distinguished wives.

And I learned from her everything which was necessary for me to know about the rights and obligations of girls, affianced brides and wives, I learned everything which was required to be mature and knowledgeable.

My mother Leah instructed me that the Law dictated and commanded as follows: If any man take a wife, and go into her but then come to hate her, and say shameful things to her charge, and bring an evil name on her, and say: I took this woman, and when I came near to her, I didn't find in her the tokens of virginity - then shall the father of the young lady, and her mother, take and bring forth the tokens of the young lady's virginity to the elders of the city at the gate. Then the young lady's father shall tell the elders: I gave my daughter to this man to wife, and he hates her. Behold, he has laid shameful things to her charge: I didn't find in your daughter the tokens of virginity. And yet, here are the tokens of my daughter's virginity. They shall spread the garment before the elders of the city. The elders of that city shall take the man and chastise him, and they shall fine him one hundred shekels of silver, and give them to the father of the young lady, because he has brought up an evil name on a virgin of Israel. And she shall continue to be his wife, he may not put her away all his days. But if this accusation - that the tokens of virginity were not found in the young lady - should be true, then they shall bring out the young lady to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall beat her to death with stones, because she has done folly in Israel, to play the prostitute in her father's home.

Then my mother Leah instructed me that the Law dictated and commanded as follows: If a man have two wives: the one beloved, and the other hated, and they have borne him children, both the beloved and the hated, and if the firstborn son be hers who was hated, then it shall be, in the day that he causes his sons to inherit that which he has, that he may not make the son of the beloved the firstborn before the son of the hated and give him a double portion of all that he has. For he is the beginning of his strength - the right of the firstborn is his.

My mother Leah also instructed me the following of Yahweh's commands: If any man's wife goes astray, and is unfaithful to him, and a man lies with her carnally, but it is hidden from the eyes of her husband, and is kept close, and she is defiled, and there is no witness against her as she is not taken in the act - and the spirit of jealousy comes on her husband, and he is jealous of his wife, and she is defiled, or if the spirit of jealousy comes on him, and he is jealous of his wife, and she isn't defiled - then the man shall bring his wife to the priest. He shall bring an offering for her: the tenth part of an ephah of barley meal. He shall pour no oil on it, nor put frankincense on it, for it is a meal offering of jealousy, a meal offering of memorial, bringing iniquity to memory. The priest shall bring her near, and set her before Yahweh. Then the priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel, and the Priest shall take of the dust that is on the floor of the Tabernacle, and put it into the water. The priest shall set the woman before Yahweh, and let the hair of the

woman's head go loose, and put the meal offering in her hands, which is the meal offering of jealousy, and the priest shall have in his hand the water of bitterness that brings a curse. Then the priest shall cause the woman to swear. He shall tell her: If no man has lain with you, and you haven't gone aside to uncleanness, being under your husband, be free from this water of bitterness that brings a curse. But if you have gone astray, being under your husband, and if you are defiled, and some man has lain with you besides your husband, Yahweh make you a curse and an oath among your people, when Yahweh allows your thigh to fall away, and your body to swell. And the woman shall say: Amen! Amen! The priest shall write these curses in a book, and he shall blot them out into the water of bitterness. Then he shall make the woman drink the water of bitterness that causes the curse, and the water that causes the curse shall enter into her and become bitter. Then the woman shall drink the water. If she is defiled, and has committed a trespass against her husband, it shall happen that the water that causes the curse will enter into her and become bitter, and her body will swell, and her thigh will fall away - and the woman will be a curse among her people. But if the woman isn't defiled, but is clean, then she shall be free, and shall conceive seed.

Then my mother Leah instructed me that if a woman has a discharge, and her discharge in her flesh is blood, she must remain in her impurity seven days, and whoever touches her shall be unclean until the evening. Everything that she lies on in her impurity shall be unclean, everything that she sits on shall be unclean. If any man lies with her, and her monthly flow is on him, he shall be unclean seven days.

My mother also instructed me how I would manage my economy and be of help to my husband in acquisition and a support to him in saving, and that in no way would I violate the Law or the good customs of the people of Israel.