

SEPARATION ALONG GENDER LINES: THE EDUCATION OF SARAH FEIGA AND JOSHUA BER MEINKIN

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Two memoirs, one by Sarah Feiga Foner née Meinkin and the other by her brother Joshua Ber Meinkin, convey the different educational experiences of two Jewish siblings growing up in late nineteenth century Russia. The contrast between the two accounts illustrates the Jewish community's view on the education of boys and girls in that period, and ultimately the different positions that men and women embodied in that community.

Meinkin-Foner's memoir relates her struggle to study with the boys in the *Cheder* and her tenacious studying on her own. Joshua Ber Meinkin's memoir describes the Jewish community's admiration and reinforcement for his aptitude, his advancement in the *Cheder*, and finally his admission to the St. Petersburg's prestigious academy.

Was the education of the Meinkin siblings representative of the "separation along gender lines" in the realm of education in the Jewish community of late nineteenth century Eastern Europe? Or was Joshua Ber simply brighter than his sister? Additional sources, such as newspaper clips from the Hebrew press of the period that deal with the education of Jewish girls, as well as the accounts of other Jewish women about their education, may answer this question.

In 1880, a correspondent for *Russkeii evrei*, the Russian Jewish newspaper, described the difference between the education of Jewish boys and that of Jewish girls as follows: "And these two systems exist simultaneously within the same family, sister dressed in the latest fashion, speaking several languages and playing piano, and brother in a long garment, with longer *peyot*, not knowing how to write in even one language, even ancient Hebrew."¹

The correspondent was voicing the position of the *Maskilim*, the enlightened, russified Jews who were dedicated to the modernization of the Jewish community in the Russian Empire. He was concerned with the deficiencies of the education of Jewish boys, but apparently was satisfied with the education of Jewish girls, who were, in his opinion, properly acculturated into bourgeois European society.

Like the correspondent of *Russkeii evrei*, the *Maskilim* wanted to get Jewish boys out of the *Cheder*, not to bring Jewish girls into the *Cheder*. In

¹ E. R. Adler, "Women's Education in the Russian Jewish Press," *Polin Studies in Polish Jewry* 18 (2005): 130.

this manner, they inadvertently preserved the traditional exclusion of Jewish girls from the study of canonic Jewish texts and the language in which they were written—Hebrew. Jewish girls were traditionally exempt from the study of the *Torah* and the *Talmud* due to the halakic prohibition: “He who teaches his daughter *Torah* as if he taught her foolishness.”² The girls were expected to have minimal knowledge of Hebrew in order to recite the prayers not in order to understand the meaning of the words, and their study of Jewish Law was limited to the few commandments incumbent on Jewish women.

In 1853, the Rabbinic Commission appointed by the Russian Tsarist regime to report on the feasibility of reforming Jewish education—a commission comprised of *Maskilim*—reported that “the opening of schools for girls would not agree with the understanding of the majority of Jews and thus would be premature.”³ The Russian authorities followed the recommendation of the Rabbinic Commission, and as a result, the Russian reforms were limited to the education of Jewish boys, for whom special government schools were opened, where Jewish and European subjects were taught.⁴ The education of Jewish girls remained in the hands of their parents and the Jewish community, and girls could be tutored at home or attend private schools, either Jewish or non-Jewish.⁵ As pointed out by Adler⁶ as well as Parush⁷ and Stampfer,⁸ the Jewish private schools for girls, most of which were established by the *Maskilim*, did not teach Hebrew beyond minimal reading skills, and did not use the Bible or Talmud to teach Jewish subjects—this, in contrast with the government’s schools for Jewish boys, which used traditional Jewish texts.

There were few enlightened Jewish women, however, who had been able to acquire proficiency in Hebrew and its canonic texts—through tutors and self-study.⁹ Some of them had even attended the *Cheder* with the boys for a

² משנה סוטה, ג, ד: “כל המלמד בתו תורה כאילו לימדה תפלות.”

³ E. R. Adler, *In Her Hands: The Education of Jewish Girls in Tsarist Russia* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011), p. 36.

⁴ On the Russian government schools for Jewish boys see מרדכי זלקין, אל היכל ההשכלה: תהליכי מודרניזציה בחינוך היהודי במזרח אירופה במאה התשע-עשרה, תל-אביב, תשס”ח, 81-84.

⁵ As noted by Zevi Scharfstein, the private schools for Jewish girls were established by teachers fluent in Russian for the purpose of teaching general subjects to the girls. See צבי שרפשטיין, תולדות החינוך בישראל Only in the 1890’s Jewish girls began to receive comprehensive, structured Jewish education in co-ed schools or schools for girls. See *Ibid*, 395–396.

⁶ E. R. Adler, *In Her Hands*, p. 88.

⁷ איריס פרוש, נשים קוראות, תל-אביב, 2001, 62-100.

⁸ Sh. Stampfer, “Gender Differentiation and Education of the Jewish Woman in Nineteenth-Century Eastern Europe,” *Polin* 7 (1992): 63–87.

⁹ טובה כהן ושמואל פיינר, קול עלמה עבריייה, תל-אביב, 2006. For a comprehensive study of these women see

brief period during their pre-adolescent years.¹⁰ Prominent among these *Maskilot* were Miriam Markel-Mozessohn, the first woman to publish a Hebrew translation of a foreign work (Isaac Asher Francolm's historical novel *Die Juden und die kreuzfahrer in England unter Richard Löwenherz*);¹¹ Rachel Morpurgo, the first woman to publish Hebrew poetry,¹² and Sarah Feiga Foner née Meinkin, the first woman to publish Hebrew fiction.¹³ Of the three *Maskilot*, Meinkin-Foner was the only one who published a memoir about her education alongside her brother's memoir about his education. Her schooling as a girl can therefore be compared to that of a boy from an identical background.

Meinkin-Foner was born in 1854 in present-day Latvia (then part of the Russian Empire) and lived in Congress Poland, England, and the United States. She published her first novel *Love of the Righteous, or, The Persecuted Families* in 1881,¹⁴ while she was still living with her parents in Riga. The second part of *Love of the Righteous* was completed in 1883, when Meinkin-Foner was working as a tutor in Bialystok, but she could not raise enough money to have it published. Shortly after her marriage to the Hebrew dramatist Meir Foner, she resumed publishing with the children's story *The Children's Path, or, A Story from Jerusalem*.¹⁵ The couple moved to Bielsk (Poland), where in 1891 Meinkin-Foner published the historical novella, *The Treachery of Traitors: A Story from the Time of Shimon the High Priest*.¹⁶ Her last publication in Europe was a collection of anecdotes about her hometown, *Memories of My Childhood, or, A View of Dvink*,¹⁷ published in

¹⁰ אברהם גרינבוים, "יחדר הבנות' ובנות בחדר הבנים במזרח אירופה לפני מלחמת העולם הראשונה", חינוך והיסטוריה: הקשרים תרבותיים ופוליטיים, רבקה פלדחי ועמנואל אטקס (עורכים), ירושלים, תשנ"ט.

¹¹ א.א. פרנקולם, היהודים באנגליה, או, היהודים נוסעי הצלב במלך ריכארד לב-הארי, תרגום: מרים מרקל-מוזסזון, א.א. פרנקולם, גיבורי א.א. פרנקולם, 1944 in Tel-Aviv. See later Hebrew translation was published in 1944 in Tel-Aviv. See תרנ"א. מרים מארקל-מוזסזון, ידידתו של המשורר: אגרות מרים מארקל-מוזסזון אל יהודה ליב גורדון, שמואל ורסס (עורך), ירושלים, תשס"ד. מצודת יורק, שמואל ורסס (עורך), ירושלים, תשס"ד.

¹² Morpurgo's poems appeared in the periodical יצחק כוכבי from 1847 until her death in 1871. A posthumous collection of her poetry was published in Trieste and Krakow in 1890 under the title רחל עוגב רחל. For information about Morpurgo see W. Zierler, "The Haskala Poetry of Rachel Morpurgo," in her *And Rachel Stole the Idols: The Emergence of Modern Hebrew Women's Writings* (Detroit, 2004), pp. 23–28; see also יפה ברלוביץ, "התשוקה אל המוות, התשוקה אל השיר: לטיבה של המשוררת העברית הראשונה בעת החדשה", סדן, ב (תשנ"ז), 40–11; טובה כהן, "מתוך התרבות ומחוצה לה: על ניכוס 'שפת האב' כדרך לעיצוב אינטלקטואלי של האני הנשי", סדן, 69–110.

¹³ Meinkin-Foner's Hebrew works were translated into English. See M. Rosenthal, *A Woman's Voice: Meinkin-Foner, Hebrew Author of the Haskalah* (Wilbraham, 2001).

¹⁴ שרה פייגה מיינקין, אהבת ישרים, או, המשפחות המורדרות, חלק א, וילנה, 1881.

¹⁵ שרה פייגה פונר, דרך ילדים, או, סיפור מירושלים, וינה, 1886.

¹⁶ שרה פייגה פונר, בגד בוגדים: סיפור מימי שמעון כהן גדול, ורשה, 1891.

¹⁷ שרה פייגה פונר, מזכרונות ימי ילדותי, או, מראה העיר דווינסק, ורשה, 1903. This book does not include biographical information about Meinkin-Foner's education.

1903 while she was running a private school for Jewish girls in Lodz. In the mid-1900's, Meinkin-Foner lived in England, where she published a Yiddish novella titled *The Women's Revolt*.¹⁸ In 1909, she immigrated to the United States with her grown son and settled in Pittsburgh, where she passed away in 1937. Meinkin-Foner's only publication in the United States, however, was a short story titled "Memories of My Youth,"¹⁹ which appeared in the children's magazine *Shacharut*²⁰ in 1919.

The Meinkin family was a traditional middle-class Jewish family: the father Yosef was a wine distiller and the mother Sheina a dressmaker.²¹ Both parents were descendants of the Vilna Gaon²² and respected members of the Jewish community in Zager, Dvinsk, and Riga (all in Latvia). The couple had four children: Sarah Feiga, Joshua Ber, Sholom, and Gitl. Little is known about the last two, who left no known writings.

Joshua Ber was born in 1863 and served as Rabbi in England, the United States, and South Africa.²³ His only known published work, however, is a collection of Hebrew poems and English essays about historical Jewish figures, including a memoir about his childhood in Riga, which was published in New York in 1926.²⁴

The memoirs of Sarah Feiga and Joshua Ber provide two contrasting accounts of the education each of them received, and of the attitude of their parents and the Jewish community at large toward their demonstrated intellectual abilities. Sarah Feiga's five-page account describes her struggle to become literate in Hebrew against her family's misgivings and ridicule. Joshua Ber's fifty-page account describes the praise and reinforcement he received for his aptitude from his family and the Jewish community. The two memoirs demonstrate the "separation along gender lines" in the Jewish community of late nineteenth century Russia, manifested within one family.

Sarah Feiga's memoir begins with recalling her observation, at age five, that her neighbor, a grown woman named Miriam, was reciting a memorized Hebrew prayer without understanding the words, concluding with the

¹⁸ שרה פייגה פונר, דער פרויען בונט, לונדון [ללא תאריך].

¹⁹ שרה פייגה פונר, "מזכרונות ימי נעורי", שחרות ירחון לנערים ולנערות, ו-ז' (אלול תרע"ט-תשרי תר"ף), 91-93, 109-110.

²⁰ The editor of *Shacharut* was Zevi Scharfstein, the Russian-American Hebrew educator, writer, and publisher, renowned for his work on the history of Jewish education. See צבי שרפשטיין, תולדות החינוך בישראל בדורות האחרונים, ירושלים, תש"ך-תשכ"ו.

²¹ Information on the Meinkin family was provided by the Latvian National Archive.

²² See the author's dedication in *Memories of My Childhood, or, a View of Dvinsk*.

²³ See Ch. Freedman, *Eliyahu's Branches: The Descendants of the Vilna Gaon* (Teaneck, 1997), p. 338.

²⁴ J. B. Meinkin, *Essays, Novels and Poems of Highly Jewish Purport* (New York, 1926).

phrase: “May blessings and success fall on my little head, Amen, Selah.”²⁵ Realizing that Miriam kept using the expression “my little head” taught to her in her childhood, never growing beyond what she had memorized, Sarah Feiga was determined to grow beyond what girls were expected to know.

She approached her mother and told her: “I want to pray from the Siddur, not from memory like Miriam.”²⁶ Her mother laughed good-heartedly and told her to ask her father. Sarah Feiga approached her father about learning to read Hebrew, and he tried to talk her out of it: “Wait another year or two and then you’ll begin to learn.”²⁷ Sarah Feiga pressed on, and the father acquiesced, teaching her the first two letters from an *Aleph Beth* book. Sarah Feiga demanded that he teach her all the letters, and once he did she promptly repeated them forward and backward, without error. The father was amazed but told her to go play with her friends because he had work to do.

Sarah Feiga proceeded to practice reading from a prayer book on her own, and when her father returned from work, she proudly read to him the prayer *Ma Tovo*. Her father was astonished and wanted to tell the neighbors about it, but at that moment, her uncle walked in, and the father asked Sarah Feiga to read from the prayer book again for the uncle’s benefit. The uncle’s response was wistful: “I’m sorry that she’s a girl. If she was a boy, she probably would have been a *Gaon* in Israel.”²⁸ Sarah Feiga was perplexed: “A girl cannot become a *Gaon*?”²⁹ she asked. Her father and uncle burst out laughing, and she was ashamed and hid in a corner, refusing to come to dinner.

At this point there is a gap in the memoir. Meinkin-Foner tells us laconically that after several weeks, her father delivered her to the *Cheder*, where she learned with the boys and advanced quickly until she gained proficiency in the Tanak and the Talmud. The memoir does not indicate what took place during those weeks that convinced her father to send her to the *Cheder*. Nor does it relate how the *Cheder*’s teacher and pupils reacted to having a girl in class. According to several accounts of girls who attended a *Cheder*, they were not allowed to progress like the boys, were mistreated, and had to leave the *Cheder* before adolescence.³⁰

²⁵ M. Rosenthal, *A Woman's Voice*, p. 76.

²⁶ M. Rosenthal, *A Woman's Voice*, p. 77.

²⁷ M. Rosenthal, *A Woman's Voice*, p. 77.

²⁸ M. Rosenthal, *A Woman's Voice*, p. 79.

²⁹ M. Rosenthal, *A Woman's Voice*, p. 79.

³⁰ גרינבוים, "יחדר הבנות' ובנות בחדר הבנים במזרח אירופה לפני מלחמת העולם הראשונה", 298-301.

Sarah Feiga indicates that she left the *Cheder* after a while, giving no explanation. It probably occurred when the Meinkin family moved from Zager to Dvink, when she was seven years old. Sarah Feiga only tells us that she subsequently read every Hebrew book she could get her hands on. She concludes her memoir with the triumphant statement: “When I reached the age of twenty-five, I wrote a Hebrew novel, and this was the first of my books to be printed, *Ahavat Yesharim*.”³¹

The years between Sarah Feiga’s departure from the *Cheder* and the writing of her first novel are left blank in her short memoir. It can be assumed that she attended a private Jewish school for girls in Dvink, where two such schools were in operation in 1861–1871, the years that her family lived there.³² As pointed out before, private schools for Jewish girls did not teach Hebrew beyond the rudimentary tasks of reciting the prayers, and used Yiddish or Russian translation of the Tanak or the Talmud to teach Judaic subjects to the girls. It can be inferred that Meinkin-Foner was mostly self-taught in Hebrew and its canonic texts beyond her brief time in the *Cheder*.

The absence of structured schooling in Hebrew had its effect on Sarah Feiga’s first two books,³³ which were riddled with grammatical errors. Her flawed Hebrew was consequently criticized by the author and critic David Frishman, who recommended that she abstain from writing altogether.³⁴ Meinkin-Foner carried on, however, and published two additional books. Her Hebrew improved with her writing (perhaps due to her marriage to Meir Foner) and her last book won the acclaim of the author Yosef Zelig Glick.³⁵ She was already fifty-eight at the time, however, apparently too old to carry on her literary career.

Joshua Ber’s memoir is written in the third person, a device that allows him to use hyperbole when describing his scholarly achievements and the response of his milieu. He refers to himself in the memoir as “Berele.” He begins by telling how, at age four, Berele was accompanying his cousin to the *Cheder*, where he was allowed to play while the boys were studying the Pentateuch and the beginning of the Talmud. After three or four months, when the teacher was testing his pupils and Berele was playing under a desk as usual, he realized that he knew the answers whereas the older boys were

³¹ M. Rosenthal, *A Woman's Voice*, p. 79.

³² E. R. Adler, *In Her Hands*, p. 39.

³³ *Love of the Righteous and A Children's Path*.

³⁴ דוד פרישמן, “משפט ספרים חדשים”, הבקר אור, ה-י (תרמ”א); [כותר לא ידוע] הבקר אור, א’ (תרמ”ז).

³⁵ יוסף זליג גליק, “משנת חכמים על הספר ‘מזכרונות ימי ילדותי או מראה העיר דווינסק’”, אבני גזית, פיטסבורג, תרע”ב, 5-8.

struggling and hesitating. Out of pity for them, Berele began to whisper the answers, whereupon he was discovered by the teacher, who demanded to know who he was and what *Cheder* he was attending. Realizing that the boy memorized everything he had heard while playing in his own *Cheder*, the teacher dismissed the class and rushed to the *Beth-Hamidrash* to spread the news about the new prodigy.

That evening, Berele's home was visited by a group of dignitaries from the Jewish community, who asked to see and hear the "boy of great promise." Berele's father was away on business, so his mother allowed an old Rabbi to set little Berele on his knee and induce him to recite the portions of the Talmud that he had committed to memory while playing at the *Cheder*. Berele recited four full pages from the Talmud, complete with commentaries, to the delight and awe of everybody around him. The Rabbi laid his hand on the boy's head and blessed him, and the dignitaries departed, not before insisting on giving Berele's mother a kerchief full of silver coins.

Soon afterwards, Berele's mother summoned him to learn to read from an *Aleph Beth* book, telling him: "You have a clever little head with a wonderful memory and good sense, and I want you to learn quickly to read your prayers out of your prayer book, which would gladden your father's heart."³⁶ The mother taught him the Hebrew letters and vowels in one sitting, and Berele proceeded to practice reading from his prayer book on his own. Soon he had all the prayers committed to memory.

When the father returned from his business trip, Berele accompanied him to the synagogue. There, he startled the congregation by reciting the prayer aloud alongside the *Chazan*, flawlessly pronouncing the Hebrew words. Nobody dared to interrupt the prayer in order to hush the little boy, and when the prayer was over, he was not reprimanded—to the contrary, he was asked to say the *Kiddush* over the cup of wine.

Joshua Ber's memoir picks up six years later, when ten-year old Berele is the star pupil of his *Cheder*. He is doing some studying on his own as well, reading Greek philosophy in Hebrew translation. Berele befriends Rosalie, a girl his age and the daughter of the Jewish community's most prominent member, Gavriel Gurevitz. Berele influences Rosalie to do well in her studies (it is unclear if she attends a school for girls or studies with a tutor at home, but as the daughter of a wealthy man it was probably the latter), and teaches her to play chess with him, but Rosalie's progress serves to lionize Berele as

³⁶ J. B. Meinkin, *Essays, Novels and Poems*, pp. 44–45.

role model and teacher, not to demonstrate the girl's intellectual aptitude. For example, Berle tells Rosalie: "The rusty tomes of the *Talmud* and the *Shulchan Aruch* and that ilk...are far above my age, but, God be praised! not above my understanding"³⁷—but he never proceeds to introduce the tomes of the Talmud and *Shulchan Aruch* to Rosalie. She is excluded from the study of the Torah even by her learned friend.

Eventually, Rosalie's father is impressed with Berele's positive influence over his daughter, who is admitted to the St. Petersburg Academy for girls, and resolves to finance Berele's education at St. Petersburg Academy for boys, where Berele is admitted, as expected.³⁸ The memoir ends with the scene of Berle leaving on the train to St. Petersburg, accompanied by Rosalie and his proud and protecting father.

Absent from Joshua Ber's memoir is any mention of his older sister. Sarah Feiga did not attend a gymnasium, the Russian equivalent of High School. The gymnasium for girls in Dvinsk did not admit Jewish girls until 1879, and while the gymnasium for girls in Riga admitted Jewish girls, the Meinkin family arrived in Riga when Sarah Feiga was seventeen, too old to begin her studies.³⁹ It can be inferred that her formal schooling ended at the private Jewish school for girls, where the students graduated at age twelve.⁴⁰

The exclusion of girls from comprehensive Jewish education was decried by the few *Maskilot* who acquired proficiency in Hebrew and its canonic texts. Their letters in the Hebrew press over three decades express their concerns about the deficiencies of the girls' education.⁴¹

The first known letter was published in *Hamelitz* in 1869 by Miriam Merkel-Mozessohn, who called for the establishment of a school for Jewish girls where they would be educated in Hebrew: "How good and appropriate it would be if we take courage to reclaim anew the lovely treasure, the holy tongue that was bestowed on us from our holy ancestors."⁴²

Similar letters were published in 1872 in *Halevanon* by Hannah Burstein, in 1879 in *Halvri* by Toyva Segal, in 1889 in *Hamelitz* by Nechama Feinstein (who later published Hebrew stories under her married name

³⁷ J. B. Meinkin, *Essays, Novels and Poems*, p. 51.

³⁸ On Jewish boys attending Russian High Schools [gymnasiums] in the 1860's and 1870's see צבי שפרשטיין, תולדות החינוך בישראל, א, 321-323.

³⁹ The Latvian National Archive confirmed that the records of the Gymnasium for Girls in Riga for 1860–1880 did not include the name "Sarah Meinkin."

⁴⁰ E. R. Adler, *In Her Hands*, p. 103.

⁴¹ For samples of these letters see 254, 241-249, 229-231, 211-218, 201-202, קול עלמה עבריייה, כהן ופיינר, 7 שנה 20, (1863), 155-156.

⁴² Translation mine.

Pokhachevski),⁴³ in 1896 in *Hatzfirah* by Miriam Leichtman, and in 1900 in *Hamelitz* by Meinkin-Foner herself. The justification given in the letters for teaching Hebrew to the girls was usually their role as mothers and their influence on the next generation. Hannah Burstein, for example, writes as follows:

Give value to the education of the girls and let them too climb the ladder rising at Beit El... So that the daughters of Jacob may hear and respect our religion and holy tongue...the love of God will take root in the hearts of our sons and daughters, our sons will be teachers and lovers of studying, our daughters will be adorned with the sapphires of faith and knowledge, to benefit and enlighten their sons after them.⁴⁴

And Nechama Feinstein writes:

Therefore those concerned about the education of boys will not benefit as long as they do not pay attention to reform the education of girls, to teach them our holy tongue, our history and literature, to instill in their hearts the love of their people and their brothers, so they can endow their sacred spirit unto the generation raised on their knees to turn them into loyal sons to their people.⁴⁵

The problem of the education of Jewish girls was not resolved, however. As late as 1900, Meinkin-Foner published a letter in *Hamelitz* under the title “For the benefit of the fathers” (למען האבות). In her letter, she calls upon Jewish fathers to provide their daughters with proper Jewish education, including knowledge of Hebrew and Judaic texts. She does not resort to the common justification of the girls’ impact on the next generation as mothers. Instead she calls for equality along gender lines by virtue of being Jewish:

Moses commanded the Torah to us in Hebrew. Not only for men it was commanded, but for all of us. We all stood by Mount Sinai. We all listened and we all answered: “We shall do and we shall listen!” (נעשה ונשמע!)⁴⁶

The girls who succeeded—against the odds—to acquire proficiency in Hebrew and its canonic texts usually found that there was no outlet available for their skills. The story of Sheindl Dvorin testifies to the meager prospects of those girls.

⁴³ נחמה פוחצ'ביסקי, ביהודה החדשה: קובץ ציורים, יפו, תרע"א; בכפר ובעבודה: ספורים, תל-אביב, תר"ץ; במדרון: רומן ארצישראלי, תל-אביב, תשס"ד.

⁴⁴ Translation mine. הלבנון, שנה 9, 6 (1872), 46-44.

⁴⁵ Translation mine. המליץ, שנה 29, 23 (1889), 2-3.

⁴⁶ Translation mine. המליץ, שנה 40, 198 (1900), 1.

Sheindl was born in the 1870's near Pinsk in Russia. In 1935 she published a memoir in Hebrew which includes an account of her struggle to educate herself.⁴⁷ Sheindl relates how she convinced her brother-in-law to tutor his son at home, so that she could “audit” her nephew’s classes. She was only allowed to listen, not ask questions, but soon she had the book of Isaiah memorized by heart. Sheindl started to read the Tanak, much to her father’s chagrin, and even convinced a male friend to teach her the book of Job. By the time she reached adulthood, Sheindl knew most of the Tanak, and read Modern Hebrew fiction as well. Once she got married, however, the demands of housekeeping, motherhood, and helping in her husband’s business hindered Sheindl from utilizing her knowledge of Hebrew in any manner.

Unlike Sheindl, Meinkin-Foner succeeded to find an outlet for her proficiency in Hebrew—writing works of fiction. She never gained any credentials for her knowledge of Hebrew and Judaism, however. Her brother, in contrast, was ordained as a Rabbi and received a doctorate from the University of Breslau.⁴⁸ He immigrated to England and served as Rabbi in Cardiff, the Capitol of Wales. An article in *Hamagid* in 1903 extols the virtues of Rabbi Meinkin as an erudite scholar proficient in Hebrew and a dedicated Zionist.⁴⁹ The same year, the *Jewish Literary Annual* of London included a notice about Reverend Meinkin’s lecture on the philosophy of Maimonides before the *Newport Jewish Literary and Social Institute*.⁵⁰ In 1916 Rabbi Meinkin immigrated to the United States, where he appeared as an orator for the *Zion Literary Society* in Chicago.⁵¹ Eventually Rabbi Meinkin settled in South Africa, where he served as the Rabbi of Durban until his death in 1935.⁵²

In contrast with her distinguished brother, Meinkin-Foner had to support herself throughout her life as a tutor of Hebrew and German.⁵³ But as the published author of four books, she always regarded herself as an author rather than a teacher. When Meinkin-Foner arrived in the United States in 1909, the manifest of her ship indicated under the column “Occupation or calling:” *Authoress*.⁵⁴ Unfortunately, Meinkin-Foner did not publish any-

⁴⁷ בת יונה, אם לבנים (זכרונות), פינסק, 1935.

⁴⁸ Ch. Freedman, *Eliyahu's Branches*, p. 338.

⁴⁹ המגיד, שנה 12, 9 (1903), 102.

⁵⁰ *The Jewish Literary Annual* (London, 1903), p. 37.

⁵¹ *The Chicago Jewish Community Blue Book* (Chicago, 1918), p. 129.

⁵² Ch. Freedman, *Eliyahu's Branches*, p. 338.

⁵³ י.ש. וייס, טלטולי גבר: צללים עוברים, תל-אביב, תרצ"א, 50.

⁵⁴ Ellis Island Archives at www.EllisIsland.org.

thing in the United States—beyond the brief memoir in *Shacharut*—until her death in 1937.⁵⁵ In Pittsburgh, where she lived with her son and his family, Meinkin-Foner was known as “Mrs. S. F. Foner,” a dedicated supporter of Jewish education, but not as an author.⁵⁶ She delivered sermons in the synagogue about the importance of education, and impressed her audience with her fluent Hebrew, embellished with quotes from the Tanak and Chazal.⁵⁷

While personal memoirs cannot be accepted at face value as historically precise, the contrast between the memoirs of Meinkin-Foner and Joshua Ber Meinkin still illustrates the “separation along gender lines” in the realm of education in the Jewish community of nineteenth century Russia, as manifested within one family. Even if the two siblings improved on the facts of their childhood, their adult lives testify to the adequacy of their schooling.

⁵⁵ עקיבא בן-עזרא, “סופרות עבריות באמריקה,” הדואר (ד' סיוון תש"ז), 848.

⁵⁶ See ads about her activities in *The Jewish Criterion*, (May 9, 1913), p. 7; *The Jewish Criterion*, (March 28, 1924), p. 15.

⁵⁷ י.ש. וייס, טלטולי גבר, 46.