**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

**Midrash on the Parasha**

**Dr. Tziporah Lifshitz**

*Parashat vayeSHEV*:

"HE CREATES THE LIGHT OF THE MESSIAH"

**Introduction:**

**An Overall Divine Plan**

One who reads the last four books of the Torah learns about God's love for his people, His keeping His promises to the patriarchs, His power and His absolute rule over the universe. Among other things, the reader encounters the principle of reward and punishment, which guides God's governance of the people of Israel throughout history. In contrast, one who reads the Book of *Bereishit* learns about the establishment of the people of Israel from the seed of Avraham, a process that reconciles the actions of mortals with the plans of God, who weaves all human deeds into processes that encompass the entire world at all times. The most striking examples of this are Ya’akov's theft of the blessings, the sale of Yosef and the story of Yehuda and Tamar.

The overall Divine plan, which finds expression in the story of Yehuda and Tamar, is the central theme emerging from the statements of *Chazal* on this matter in *Bereishit Rabba.* This plan manifests itself in the establishment of the kingdom of Israel in the past and in the future: the kingdom of the house of David and that of the future messiah. First, we will examine the words of *Chazal* in *Bereishit Rabba*; then, we will compare them to what is found in other layers of Rabbinic literature, while pointing out their uniqueness and exclusivity.

The matter of kingship and the messiah appears in *Bereishit Rabba* in connection with our matter seven times:

**The Light of the Messiah**

I.

Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachman opened:

"For I know the thoughts [that I think of you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope]" (*Yirmeyahu* 29:11).

The tribes [i.e. the sons of Ya’akov] were occupied with the sale of Yosef.

And Ya’akov was occupied with his sackcloth and his fasting.

And Yehuda was occupied with taking a wife.

And the Holy One, blessed be He, was creating the light of the messianic king.

"And it came to pass at that time" (*Bereishit* 38:1). (*Bereishit Rabba* 85, 1, ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 1080)

The three characters from the book of *Bereishit* mentioned in Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachman's *derasha* are occupied with family issues, and the crises and events to which they give rise. God, on the other hand, is busy "creating the light of the messiah" — bringing about the union of Yehuda and Tamar for the purpose of establishing the eternal ruling dynasty of Israel.[[1]](#footnote-1) God's part in the process is not separated from human actions, but rather woven into them. Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachman points here to the two layers found in human reality, and perhaps in reality in general. In a manner that is beyond human understanding, God's guiding hand does not impair man's freedom of action, and it is only in hindsight that the process may be discerned. "And it came to pass at that time" — the precise timing of the interactions between the protagonists is a powerful multi-dimensional phenomenon.

Ya’akov and the tribes are "occupied" (*osekim*)[[2]](#footnote-2) in continuous activity; Yehuda and God, *mutatis mutandis*, are “occupied” in the immediate present*.* But whereas Yehuda is "occupied" in building continuity for himself, God is creating a new reality not previously in existence, and that is itself the essence of the matter: the light of the messiah.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Rav Yitzchak Arama points to the contrast between the activities listed in the *derasha* and the Divine plan:

The partial actions are the very opposite of the all-encompassing matters, just as their actions follow from evil thoughts, which is wonderful testimony that they are not directed toward the Divine whole, which aims at the good.[[4]](#footnote-4)

That is to say, there is a fundamental contradiction between human activity and the Divine process. The sale of Yosef and Yehuda's marriage to a Canaanite woman are evil occupations; Ya’akov's grief does not accord with reality. Nonetheless, they lead to the birth of the messianic dynasty.

The verse brought from the book of *Yirmeyahu* relates to a good end: "For I know the thoughts that I think of you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (*Yirmeyahu* 29:11). In other words, even though reality seems bleak on the human plane, Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachman, following Yirmeyahu the prophet, emphasizes that it is precisely at this low point that God causes Israel's salvation to blossom. Out of the rupture ensuing from the sale of Yosef, the seeming breakdown of the family, and the awful shared secret that the sons of Ya’akov bear for many long years, a new narrative of destiny and healing is to be built.

Further examination of the verse in *Yirmeyahu* reveals that it appears in the context of a prophecy that sees Israel's exile to Babylonia as a process that will lead to renewal. Remaining in Eretz Israel, on the other hand, will only lead to dissolution:

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the captivity, whom I have caused to be carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylonia: Build you houses, and dwell in them, and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them…

For thus says the Lord: After seventy years are accomplished for Babylonia, I will remember you, and perform My good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think of you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope…

And I will return your captivity, and gather you from all the nations, and from all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord; and I will bring you back to the place from where I caused you to be carried away captive…

For thus says the Lord… your brethren that are not gone forth with you into captivity… I will pursue after them with the sword, with the famine, and with the pestilence, and will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth… (*Yirmeyahu* 29:4-18).

This prevents a striking and fascinating parallel to Yosef's descent to Egypt as the beginning of the realization of the decree, "Your seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs" (*Bereishit* 15:13).

What does God think about? *Tehillim* 33:10-11 relates it to the historical process:

The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to naught; He makes the thoughts of the peoples to be of no effect. The counsel of the Lord stands for ever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations.

Similarly, the prophet Yeshayahu (55:8-11) characterizes God's "thought" in relation to the created world as a process that comes into being over the course of time, standing in contrast to the limited thoughts of man:

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain comes down and the snow from heaven, and returns not to there, except it water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, and give seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall My word be that goes forth out of My mouth: it shall not return to Me void, except it accomplish that which I please, and make the thing whereto I sent it prosper.

**Sudden Redemption**

II.

"Before she travailed, [she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man-child]" (*Yeshayahu* 66:7).

Before the last subjugator is born, the first redeemer is born.

"And it came to pass at that time" (*Bereishit* 38:1). (*Bereishit Rabba* 85, 1, ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 1080)

The global Divine plan refers to salvation. While the first *derasha* deals with its very emergence from the complexity of human reality, the second *derasha* relates to the timing. The verse that is brought for the *derasha*, "Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man-child" (*Yeshayahu* 66:7), describes sudden salvation, which arrives without preparation on the part of man, skipping over the difficult stages that precede it. In the *derasha*, not only does the natural birth process become shortened and reach a successful conclusion earlier than expected, but the order is also reversed, and the first redeemer comes before the last subjugator.[[5]](#footnote-5) When the Torah describes an occurrence from God's perspective, the dimension of time, as it were, shrinks.

**Yehuda and Shimshon**

III.

"And it was told Tamar, saying: Behold, your father-in-law goes up to Timna [to shear his sheep]" (*Bereishit* 38:13).

Rav said: There are two Timnas, the one of Yehuda and the one of Shimshon [“And Shimshon went down to Timna, and he saw a woman in Timna, of the Pelishti girls” (*Shofetim* 14:1)].

Rabbi Simon said: There is [only] one Timna.

Why is mention made of going up and going down?

Rather, going up for Yehuda, for he gave rise to kings. And going down for Shimshon, for he married a non-Jewish woman.

Rabbi Aivo bar Nagri said: Like Bet Maon, that one goes up to it from Tiberias, and one goes down to it from Kfar Shuvti. (*Bereishit Rabba* 85, 1, ed. Theodor-Albeck, pp. 1039-1040)

In contrast to Rav and Rabbi Aivo bar Nagri (an Amora of Eretz Israel of the third-fourth generation, a disciple of Rabbi Chiya bar Abba and of Rabbi Yochanan), who relate to the geographical data of the city (or cities), Rabbi Simon refers to the symbolic meaning of the Torah's wording which expresses spiritual ascent or descent. The names of the places in which the stories of Yehuda and Shimshon transpire emphasize the similarity and the difference between the two protagonists.

In both stories, men in leadership positions establish intimate relationships with non-Jewish women native to the area. So too, in both stories, the initiator of the relationship is not interested in the act itself but in its consequences: Tamar wants to bear children for the house of Yehuda, and Shimshon wishes to create grounds for conflict with the Pelishtim.[[6]](#footnote-6) However, the Mishna points to the existence of other intentions in Shimshon's dealings with the Pelishti women, beyond his mission: "Shimshon followed his eyes" (*Sota* 1:8).

In the margins of one of the important manuscripts of *Bereishit Rabba*, an explanation is added to the words of Rabbi Simon: "Because it was for the sake of heaven."[[7]](#footnote-7)What this addition means to say is that whatever Tamar does is for the sake of heaven, and therefore it leads to spiritual ascent and not descent. This explanation accords with *Chazal's* tradition concerning Shimshon, in contrast to Tamar. What is more, it accounts for another difficult point in the *derasha*, that Yehuda too appears to have married a non-Jewish woman. This teaches the critical impact of the purity of one's intention upon one's action.[[8]](#footnote-8)

**Signs of Authority**

IV.

"When Yehuda saw her, he thought her to be a harlot; [for she had covered her face]" *(Bereishit* 38:15).

Rabbi Yochanan said: He wanted to move on, but the Holy One, blessed be He, prepared for him an angel who was appointed over lust.

He said to him: Where are you going, Yehuda? And from where do kings arise, and from where do redeemers arise?

"And he turned to her" (*Bereishit* 38:16), against his will, and not for his benefit. (*Bereishit Rabba* 85, 8, ed. Theodor-Albeck, pp. 1041-1042)

Rabbi Yochanan emphasizes Yehuda's passivity in contrast to Tamar's resoluteness and the heavenly assistance she receives when she carries out her plan. The Rambam in the *Guide for the Perplexed* cites this *derasha* as proof for his interpretation of the word *malakh* in Rabbinic literature as a power in the soul or in reality.[[9]](#footnote-9) Yehuda is merely a means for establishing kings and redeemers from his seed.

V.

"And he said: What pledge… And she said: Your signet and your cord, and your staff…" (*Bereishit* 38:13)

Rabbi Chunya said: The holy spirit was kindled within him.

“Your signet” — this is kingship.

This is what is stated: "Though Koniya the son of Yehoyakim king of Yehuda were the signet…" (*Yirmeyahu* 22:24).

“And your cord” — this is the Sanhedrin.

This is what is stated: "And they shall put at the fringe of each corner a cord of blue" (*Bamidbar* 15:38).

“And your staff” — this is the messianic king.

This is what is stated: “The staff of your strength the Lord will send out of Zion” (*Tehillim* 110:2). (*Bereishit Rabba* 85, 9, Theodor-Albeck, pp. 1042-1043)

This *derasha* is the earliest of the *derashot* about kingship and the messiah that are brought in connection with Yehuda. Rabbi Chunya is among the first Amoraim of Eretz Israel, one of the teachers of Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi. Like the previous *derasha,* this one as well sees Tamar's actions as a realization of the Divine desire to create the light of the messiah. The articles that Tamar asks of Yehuda are signs not only of political rule, but also of Torah authority. The exposition “’And your cord’ — this is the Sanhedrin" relates to the fact that most of the members of the Sanhedrin come from the tribe of Yehuda and wear *tallitot*.[[10]](#footnote-10) In contrast to the signet, which expresses the authority of kingship, the staff expresses the ability to subdue the enemy until it is destroyed, which is the role of the messianic king. This follows from the psalm from which the verse “The staff of your strength the Lord will send out of Zion” is taken:

A Psalm of David. The Lord says to my lord: Sit you at My right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool. The staff of Your strength the Lord will send out of Zion: Rule you in the midst of your enemies. Your people offer themselves willingly in the day of your warfare; in adornments of holiness, from the womb of the dawn, yours is the dew of your youth. (*Tehillim* 110)

VI.

"And it came to pass about three months after, that it was told to Yehuda, saying, Tamar your daughter-in-law has played the harlot, and moreover, behold, she is with child by harlotry" (*Bereishit* 38:24)

This teaches that she would slap her belly and say: I am pregnant with kings and redeemers. (*Bereishit Rabba* 85, 10, ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 1044)

In contrast to Yehuda's perspective which is stated explicitly in the verse, the *midrash* presents Tamar as expressing the Divine plan which she is implementing.

**Peretz and Resourcefulness**

VII.

"And it came to pass, as he drew back his hand… she said: Why, surely you have broken through!" (*Bereishit* 38:29)

This one is greater than all other breakers.

From you shall arise: "The breaker is gone up before them" (*Mikha* 2:13). (*Bereishit Rabba* 85, 14, ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 1049)

God will gather the remnant of Israel at the end of days, but it will need leadership that will give it direction and lead it toward realizing its historical destiny:

I will surely assemble, O Ya’akov, all of you; I will surely gather the remnant of Yisrael; I will render them all as sheep in a fold; as a flock in the midst of their pasture; they shall make great noise by reason of the multitude of men. The breaker is gone up before them; they have broken forth and passed on, by the gate, and are gone out there; and their king is passed on before them, and the Lord at the head of them. (*Mikha* 2:12-13)

The messiah is the breaker, he who will lead the entire herd after him. Tamar's initiative and resourcefulness find expression in Peretz, whose name and the story of his birth testify to his innate ability to burst forth and lead, as is fitting for a kingdom whose role it is to establish the throne of God in the world.[[11]](#footnote-11)

**The Uniqueness of Bereishit Rabba**

Four speakers appear in the seven statements cited here: Rabbi Chunya, Rabbi Simon, Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachman. Everyone except for Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachman is among the earliest Amoraim of Eretz Israel. All of the statements mark the birth of Peretz and Zerach as the creation of the light of the messiah, and Yehuda and Tamar as acting and being acted upon in the framework of the Divine will. Nowhere else in the literature of *Chazal* is there further reference to the Yehuda and Tamar story from this perspective.[[12]](#footnote-12) We will examine several sources from different periods of Rabbinic literature.

The first source is found in a halakhic *midrash* from the school of Rabbi Yishmael:

Rabbi Tarfon and the elders were already sitting in the shade of the dovecote of Yavneh…

They said to him: Teach us, our master, by virtue of what did Yehuda merit the kingship?

Rabbi Tarfon said to them: You tell me.

They said: By virtue of his saying: "What profit is it if we slay our brother" (*Bereishit* 37:26), which rescued him from death.

He said to them: It is enough that the rescue rises up and atones for the sale, that he counseled to sell him and not return him to his father.

Or by virtue of his saying: "And Yehuda acknowledged them, and said: She is more righteous than I" (*Bereishit* 38:26).

He said to them: It is enough that the confession atones for the relations…

They said to him: Teach us, our master, by virtue of what did Yehuda merit the kingship?

He said to them: When the tribes stood by the sea, this one said: I am not going down first, and that one said: I am not going down first…

While they were holding council, Nachshon ben Amminadav and his tribe behind him jumped into the waves of the sea. Therefore he merited kingship.

As it is stated: "When Israel came forth out of Egypt, the house of Ya’akov from a people of strange language, Yehuda became His sanctuary" (*Tehillim* 114:2); therefore, "Israel His dominion" (ibid.). The Holy One, blessed be He, said to them: He who sanctified My name at the sea shall come forth and govern over Israel.

And the elders agreed with Rabbi Tarfon. (*Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael*, *Beshalach*, *Vayhi*, 5)

Rabbi Tarfon detaches Yehuda's meriting the kingship from his acknowledgement that "she is more righteous than I" and from the story of Yehuda and Tamar. In addition, he sees Yehuda's relations with Tamar as a sin that requires atonement. He directs his disciples to search beyond Yehuda's personal biography, to a distinct leadership trait that reveals itself in his descendants at the time of a national test. This trait manifests itself in the initiative taken by the tribe of Yehuda under the leadership of Nachshon ben Amminadav, to jump into the waters of the Sea of Reeds on God's orders moments before the miracle of the splitting of the sea occurs. The wording of the *Mekhilta,* "Nachshon ben Amminadav and his tribe behind him jumped into the waves of the sea," emphasizes that this initiative reflects a characteristic of the entire tribe, and not just of the person Nachshon ben Amminadav.

A second source that we will examine is from the Babylonian Talmud:

"She sat at the gate of Einayim" (*Bereishit* 38:14).

Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachmani said: [It is so called] because she gave eyes (*einyaim*) to her words.

When [Yehuda] solicited her, he asked her: Are you perhaps a foreigner?

She replied: I am a convert.

Are you perhaps a married woman?

She replied: I am unmarried.

Perhaps your father has accepted on your behalf a betrothal?

She replied: I am an orphan.

Perhaps you are unclean?

She replied: I am clean…

"When Yehuda saw her, he thought her to be a harlot; for she had covered her face" (*Bereishit* 38:15).

Because she had covered her face he thought her to be a harlot?

Rabbi Elazar said: She had covered her face in her father-in-law's house.

For Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachmani said in the name of Rabbi Yonatan: Every daughter-in-law who is modest in her father-in-law's house merits that kings and prophets should issue from her. From where do we learn this? From Tamar…

This is what is written: "For the Chief Musician, the silent dove of them that are far off; of David, a *mikhtam*" (*Tehillim* 56:1).

Rabbi Yochanan said: At the time when her signs were taken far from her, she became like a silent dove. “Of David, a *mikhtam*” — [that means] there issued from her David who was meek (*makh*) and perfect (*tam*) to all…

"She sent to her father-in-law, saying: By the man whose these are, am I with child" (*Bereishit* 38:25).

She ought to have told [the messenger] plainly!

Rav Zutra bar Tuviya said in the name of Rav; and some say, Rav Chama bar Bizna said in the name of Rabbi Shimon the Pious; and yet others say, Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai: Better for one to cast oneself into a fiery furnace rather than shame another in public.

From where do we learn this? From Tamar.

"Discern, I pray you" (*Bereishit* 38:25).

Rav Chama bar Chanina said: With the word "discern" [Yehuda] made an announcement to his father, and with the word "discern" an announcement was made to him.

With the word "discern" he made an announcement: "Discern now whether it be your son's coat or not" (*Bereishit* 37:32); and with the word "discern" an announcement was made to him: "Discern, I pray you, whose are these."

The word "*na*” (“I pray you") is nothing else than an expression of request. She said to him: I beg of you, discern the face of your Creator and hide not your eyes from me.

"And Yehuda acknowledged them, and said: She is more righteous than I" (*Bereishit* 38:26).

That is what Rav Chanin bar Bizna said in the name of Rabbi Shimon the Pious: Yosef who sanctified the heavenly name in private merited that one letter should be added to him from the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is written: "He appointed it in Yehosef for a testimony" (*Tehillim* 81:6) [interposing a letter *hei* from God’s name into Yosef’s name]. Yehuda, however, who sanctified the heavenly name in public, merited that the whole of his name should be called after the name of the Holy One, blessed be He [for Yehuda’s name is the Tetragrammaton with the letter *dalet* interposed].

When he confessed and said: "She is more righteous than I," a heavenly voice issued forth and proclaimed: You did rescue Tamar and her two sons from the fire. By your life, I will rescue through your merit three of your descendants from the fire. Who are they? Chananya, Mishael and Azarya.

"She is more righteous than I" — how did he know this? A heavenly voice issued forth and proclaimed: From Me came forth secrets. (BT *Sota* 10a-b)

The Babylonian Amoraim focus on Tamar and Yehuda's righteousness: The Gemara first brings the words of the Amoraim of Eretz Israel who focus on Tamar's righteousness, and then it brings the words of the Babylonian Amoraim who focus on Yehuda's image. Most of the citations appear also in *Bereishit Rabba*, but they are reworked here. There is almost no reference to the fulfillment of a Divine plan.[[13]](#footnote-13)

So too, in a later *midrash*, Yehuda's meriting the kingship is presented as a reward for his acknowledgement, "She is more righteous than I," and not as the fulfillment of God's original intent:[[14]](#footnote-14)

Rabbi Elazar said: The entire Torah hangs on judgment…

Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, award the crown to Yehuda? After all, he was not the only mighty one among the brothers — for were Shimon and Levi, and the others, not mighty warriors?

But he made a true judgment concerning Tamar, and was therefore made the judge for the entire world.

This may be likened to a judge, before whom was brought the case of an orphan girl, and he ruled in her favor.

So too the case of Tamar that she should be burned was brought before Yehuda, and he acquitted her because he found a favorable argument on her behalf.

How so? Yitzchak and Ya’akov sat there, along with all his brothers, and they were covering for him, but Yehuda acknowledged the facts and stated the matter as it truly was, saying, "She is more righteous than I," and the Holy One, blessed be He, made him ruler. (*Shemot Rabba* 30, 19)

These three sources indicate that the approaches of the Amoraim of Eretz Israel, as they appear in *Bereishit Rabba* regarding the story of Yehuda and Tamar, are unique and exclusive within the literature of *Chazal*. This may be due to the nature of their composition, which constitutes a continuous reading that incorporates exposition of the text — the language and style of the Torah — together with penetrating theological-spiritual statements.

This may be the essence of all aggadic *midrash* — listening to the subtle undertones, the music that arises between the stories of the Torah, which relates not only to the narrative but also to the nascent movement, the names of God which become revealed. Thus, between the lines, the *darshan* exposes the emerging process, giving it depth and meaning.

Each generation that reads the Torah uncovers new shades and raise new questions. What are the questions that concern us in the story of Yehuda and Tamar? It seems that the question that concerns today's students would be the following: why is it necessary to establish the kingdom of Israel in such an extraordinary way? This question does not concern the Amoraim of Eretz Israel at all. To them, it is clear that God establishes a kingdom which is the realization of a Divine plan, and as such they have no questions about it.

We live in a time when the light of the messiah is rising up and beginning to shine before our very eyes. God's seeming absence during the Holocaust and the subsequent establishment of the State of Israel are a perfect expression of light emerging from the darkness. Let us strengthen our ability to experience everyday life amidst the emerging light with faith and enthusiasm.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. “Creating the light of the messiah” refers to the birth of Peretz, son of Yehuda and Tamar, from whom King David issues. See *Bereishit Rabba* 68, 4; BT, *Nidda* 53b. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The root *ayin-samekh-kuf* first appears in Rabbinic Hebrew, and it denotes being occupied or involved in a certain activity. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The creation of this light in the tradition of *Chazal* involves revelation and withdrawal, because of the inability of our imperfect world to contain it; therefore, it is stored away for the righteous in the future. See *Bereishit Rabba* 3, 5 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 21):

It was taught: The light that was created during the Six Days of Creation cannot give light during the day because it would outshine the sun, and it cannot give light during the night, because it was created to give light not at night but during the day. Where is it then? It is stored away for the righteous in the future.

The phrase "the light of the messiah" seems to echo something of this magnitude, which has to go through many stages until its power is fully revealed. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Akeidat Yitzchak, Bereishit*, section 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. It is unclear who the "first redeemer" and "last subjugator" are. According to Rav Yehuda Theodor, "the first redeemer" is Peretz, while "the last subjugator" is the birth-pangs of the messiah. See *Minchat Yehuda* (Albeck, p. 1030). God makes sure to sow the seed of the future messiah, despite the fact that the struggle in the days of the messiah is far off. Most manuscripts and printed editions have a different reading: "Before the last sujugator is born, the last redeemer is born." The *Mattenot Kehuna* commentary explains that from his seed will come the messianic king. It should be noted that the versions are close in meaning – God makes sure to sow the seeds of redemption at the commencement of the exile, by way of Yosef's going down to Egypt. Nevertheless, it seems that we should accept Albeck's "Before the first subjugator is born, the last redeemer is born" as the original reading of the *derasha*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See *Shofetim* 14:4: "But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the Lord; for he sought an occasion against the Pelishtim." [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This is in MS London, upon which Chanokh Albeck bases his scientific edition of *Bereishit Rabba*. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. In the story of Shimshon, the initiator is the man, as opposed to the case of Tamar. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Guide for the Perplexed* II, 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See the commentary of Radal ad loc. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Tamar, Rut and Lot’s daughters all manifest extraordinary initiative as women for the purpose of continuing the dynasty. In the literature of *Chazal*, they are all connected to the messiah. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. We do not wish to assert that the *midrash* does not relate at all to the element of human choice in the actions of Yehuda and Tamar. However, the Divine perspective of the story is what distinguishes *Bereishit Rabba* from the rest of the literature of *Chazal.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Of all the traditions from Eretz Israel incorporated into the Babylonian Talmud, there is just one short reference to a Divine plan: “‘She is more righteous than I’ — how did he know this? A heavenly voice issued forth and proclaimed: From Me came forth secrets." [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *Shemot Rabba* belongs to the *Tanchuma* literature, which dates to the 7th-8th century. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)