EARLY MODERN WORKSHOP: Jewish History Resources

Volume 8: Egodocuments: Revelation of the Self in the Early Modern Period, 2011, University of Texas at Austin, August 21-23

Introduction to Megillat Sefer by Rabbi Jacob Emden

Jacob J. Schacter, Yeshiva University, USA

ABSTRACT: Introduction to Megillat Sefer by Rabbi Jacob Emden Jacob J. Schacter, Yeshiva University, USA Rabbi Emden (1698-1776) was one of the most significant figures in eighteenth century Jewish life. Reared in a learned home, he was a preeminent scholar whose achievement in the field of rabbinic literature was substantive and significant. He was a highly prolific author, whose literary oeuvre contains works on all genres of rabbinic creativity. Toward the end of his life he witnessed the emergence of the Haskalah and, unlike some of his more traditional colleagues, was sensitive to the shifting nuances of thought represented by that movement and was aware of the changes in Jewish life that it potentially represented. Finally, Emden played a major role in the eighteenth-century battle against Sabbatianism and, in the last two and a half decades of his life, fully devoted himself to exposing and hounding all vestiges of the movement. Among Emden's many works is Megillat Sefer, one of the most unusual, open, revealing, and unself-conscious egodocuments in Jewish and even general history. Written between 1752 and 1766, this work existed only in manuscript form for one hundred and thirty years, first in Emden's hand and then in the hand of someone who copied the original. Emden's handwritten version is no longer extant and only the copy exists. The work was first published in Warsaw, 1896 by David Kahane. In 1979 it was printed again in Jerusalem by Abraham Bick-Shauli who claimed that he was correcting mistakes in the earlier Kahana edition although his version is much less reliable, to the point of being worthless. I am now completing a new edition of this work with an introduction and extensive annotations. This work is a multi-faceted one and deserves analysis on a number of different levels. My interest in my presentation is to focus on one aspect of this fascinating work, what motivated Emden to write it, thereby situating this work in the context of other early modern Jewish examples of such writing.

This presentation is for the following text(s):

- Jacob Emden's Megilat Sefer (The Scroll of the Book)

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Jacob Emden's Megilat Sefer (The Scroll of the Book)

Megillat Sefer

1752-1766

Translated by Jacob J. Schacter, Yeshiva University, USA

May my Father, *Who keeps truth forever* (Ps. 146:6), keep you. By the light of God, *gather together and listen* (Gen. 49:2) to Jacob so *that the Almighty*, my God, your God and the God of your fathers *may hearken unto you* (Jud. 9:7).

[Let me tell of the] decree (Ps. 2:7) *and let me ascribe righteousness to my Maker* (Job 36:3). And I will say, *You, O Lord my God, have done many things; [Your wonders and Your thoughts are for us, none can compare to You]; if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be told* (Ps. 40:6). . . . . *Where is one who could weigh? Where is one who could count [the towers]?* (Isa. 33:18). *Even [his friends have distanced themselves from him]* (Prov. 19:7). It is impossible to force the judgment or defer its appointed hour. *O Lord, my God, I will exalt You, [I will give thanks to Your name for You have done wonderful things,] even councils of old* (Isa. 25:1). *The Lord revealed Himself to me* (Jer. 31:2) through the deeds and actions which He has shown me *against [my enemies]* (Ps. 23:5). . . . . *Would that my words were inscribed* (Job 19:23) in a book, *hewn forever upon a rock* (Job 19:24) *in the record of the House of Israel* (Ezek. 13:9), [so that] *children yet to be born will arise and tell to their children* (Ps. 78:6), *to a future age* (Ps. 48:14). Then our mouths shall be filled with laughter . . . . . and injustice.

I shall commence with my paternal grandfather, the father of my father, may the righteous man's memory serve as a blessing, whose name I bear.

The details of the events that occurred regarding all this, the stratagems [and] conspiracies, *vessels of diverse form* (Esther 1:7), the bitter lies that were perpetrated and occurred in this matter are already well known and disseminated among those still alive. They remember well the events of that harsh occurrence which is not yet fifty years old. It was also publicized in several works and pamphlets which were printed regarding it, during the time of that difficult conflict which lasted about a full year. In particular, the prominent Hakham Hagiz, may he rest in peace, fixed them in print. [He was] the first to enter the fray and presented the narrative of the event in the pamphlets, *War Unto the Lord* and *Disaster of the Wicked* and others. It is difficult for me to present all those details and to record them in this book. Behold, they would fill up many sheets and would still not be finished.

In addition, the later calamities cause one to forget the earlier ones, for one calamity at a time is enough. (We do not find it possible to fully record, in all its details and judicial [ramifications] even this actual current event, which motivated me to write this scroll in order to memorialize the wonders of God, may He be blessed, and His kindness, *old as well as new* (Song of Songs 7:14). *The father to the children will make known* (Isa. 38:19) its truth; all that occurred to the father occurred to the sons.) Therefore I will not deal [in great detail] with this matter which occurred over forty years ago.

Although I was then young of mind when I began to blossom like the young priests who cracked the skull of an alien who [dared] serve [in the Temple] and, like the pained Levites, *I raised my voice* (Gen. 39:15), *the voice of Jacob* (Gen. 27:22), and placed my hand and finger between the hairs [atop the lips] to establish *a written memorial* (Ex. 17:14) reflecting that event, without deviating to the right or to the left. Because of its wide prominence, I have presented to you, beloved reader, with truth and in faithfulness, only the essence and the core of the destruction [described] in this, my delicate and tender scroll. [I do so] in order to save you from the stumbling block conflicts and to bestow upon you a blessing this day. And that you may know and make known that the incident [which occurred to] my revered father, may his memory be for a blessing, is identical to that which befell me in the incident of the abominable Eibeschuetz, *may the name of the wicked rot* (Prov. 10:7). They are precisely equivalent. What happened to the father happened to the son. For at the outset they turned him over to the members of the Triple Community to inform them as to what his judgment should be and the nature of his amulets. Afterwards (the aforementioned faction that gained supremacy through falsehood and evil means . . . .) regretted this. . . .

Let us now return to where we were.

Before I commence with the story of what occurred to me I will make the truth known that I have not come to this *that my name* and praise *be declared* (Ex. 9:16). For I know myself, that that I have no merit at all; not Torah, not wisdom and not greatness do I have as an inheritance that I should glorify or distinguish myself. Would that I not place on my parchment that which will make known my shortcomings. *For all the men in the gate of my people know* (Ruth 3:11) that I have chosen lowliness. From the day I began to gain knowledge I recognized my [little] value and my defects. Therefore, for this reason alone I do not care and am not worried if my lowliness will become known to all. For it is only truth that I have loved.

On account of three reasons I came to this point to explain my occurrences in writing. I will not refrain from informing my descendants about all my matters to the extent to which possibility allows. And if I do not reach them all, at least I will mention everything I remember as of now and that which occurred to me until now.

Indeed, the strong reason that motivated me to do this is to make known the kindnesses of God upon me from my youth, in spite of the fact that much has afflicted me, it would not be believed if it were told. . . . . *I was almost in dire trouble* (Prov. 5:14), in difficult circumstances and mishaps without even a moment's surcease. The Lord, may He be blessed, rescued me from them all and aided me until now. He *has punished me severely, but did not hand me over to death* (Ps. 118:18). . . . I therefore said that *I would proclaim your Name*, O Lord, *to my brethren* (Ps. 22:23), my children and my descendants so that I forget not His kindnesses and my soul *not forget all His bounties* (Ps. 103:2). *And amid the multitude I will praise Him for He stands at the right of the destitute, to save [him] from the condemners of his soul* (Ps. 109:30-31). The multitude of His wonders that He wrought for me, the most impoverished of my clan, I will make known to a future generation. Therefore listen all who fear the Lord who constantly placed my soul in my hand. *My mouth gives praise with joyous language* (Ps. 63:6) and with my quill I will express the multitude of His kindness. I will cause praises to be heard aloud, *so that the final generation might know; children yet to be born will arise and tell their children* (Ps. 78:6). They will *praise the Lord for He is good, His steadfast love is eternal* (Ps. 118:1, 29) for he has saved *the soul of the needy from the hands of evildoers* (Jer. 20:13).

And, second of all, to strengthen *the hands of the weak* (Isa. 35:3), *those crushed in spirit* (Ps. 34:19) and broken of heart, who are offended and pursued for no iniquity in their hands *as I am today* (Isa. 38:19). Upon my neck am I pursued from those who hate me for no reason, *those who repay me with evil instead of good harass me for my*

pursuit of good (Ps. 38:21). *May many see it and be awed, and they shall trust in the Lord* (Ps. 40:4). *May they put their trust in God, and not forget the works of the Lord* (Ps. 78:7). May their hearts not falter from *the multitude of powerful ones* (Isa. 29:5) and from the hatred of *the arrow tongued men* (Gen. 49:23).

Third, so that the sun of my righteousness should shine forth and nothing rest upon it *because of the wicked who have plundered me, my mortal enemies who surround me* (Ps. 17:9). They have slandered me, *making me odious among the inhabitants of the land* (Gen. 34:30), to destroy me with a sword in their hands with their lies and recklessness which have spread to every side and corner. *Their shame is throughout the land* (Zeph. 3:19). Many of their libelous writings will certainly remain in the world for some time. Therefore, necessity has compelled me to clarify my case before God and man. May my righteousness go forth like a light. *Those who are not innocent will be saved* (Job 22:30). Truth is my witness; behold it will serve as a vindication for me, for my children and my descendants, may God protect them.

I will commence with the story of what occurred to me *in order to recognize the righteous acts of God* (Michah 6:5), that all who put their hopes in Him will not be ashamed and all who trust in Him will not ever be humiliated. [He is] *a help in distress, very accessible* (Ps. 46:2) as I have seen with my own eyes many times.

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מגילת ספר
Megillat Sefer
1752-1766

Prepared by Jacob J. Schacter, Yeshiva University, USA

[114a] אבי, ישמרכם השומר אמת לעולם

באור ה' הקבצו ושמעו אל יעקב

וישמע אליכם אלהים אלהי אלהיכם ואלהי אבותיכם.

[אספרה אל] חוק ולפועלי אתן צדק. ואומרה רבות עשית אתה ה' אלהי]נפלאתיך ומחשבתיך אלינו אין ערך אליך] אגידה ואדברה עצמו מספר . . . . . איה שוקל ואיה סופר [את המגדלים]. אף כי]מרעהו רחקו ממנו[, וא"א לכוף את הדין והשעה לדחוק. ה' אלהי ארוממך [אודה שמך כי עשית פלא] עצות מרחוק. ה' נראה לי ממעשיו ועלילותיו אשר הראני נגד [צררי] . . . . . מי יתן בספר ויכתבון מלי לעד בצור יחצבון בכתב בית ישראל, בנים יולדו יקומו ויספרו לבניהם ליום אחרון. אז ימלא פינו שחוק. . . . . ועולה.

אשר אני נקרא בשמו ואתחיל מאבי זקיני אבי אבא זצ"ל

. . . . . .[130a] ופרטי הדברים שאירעו בכל זה ותחבולות נכלים כלים מכלים שונים ומשונים שקרים מרים שנעשו ונתהוו בענין, כבר נודעו ונשמעו בין החיים עדנה וזוכרים היטב עניני המאורע הקשה ההוא שעדיין לא נתיישן חמשים שנה. גם נתפרסם בכמה חבורים וקונטריסים שנדפסו על זאת בעת המלחמה הכבדה ההיא שנמשכה כמו שנה תמימה. וביחוד קבעם בדפוס המפורסם בשמו חכם חגיז ע"ה, הנכנס בתגר הזה ראשונה והציע ספורי המעשה בקונטרס מלחמה לה' ושבר פושעים וזולת. וכבד עלי להציג כל הפרטים ההם ולהעלותם על ספרי זה, הנה יכלו כמה יריעות והמה לא יכלו. גם צרות אחרונות משכחות את הראשונות ודיה לצרה [ב]שעתה.)ואפי' המאורע הלז שלנו בעצם אשר עוררני להעלות על ספר מגלה זו לתת זכר לנפלאותיו של הי"ת וחסדיו חדשים עם ישנים אב לבנים יודיע על אמתו וכל מה

שאירע לאבות אירע לבנים אין אנו מספיקים לכתבו כולו בכל פרטיו לכל משפטיו(. לכן לא אטפל בזה שכבר עבר יותר מארבעים שנה.

גם כי קטון בדעת הייתי באותה שעה עם שהתחלתי לפרוח כפרחי כהונה המפציעים מוחו של זר ששימש. וכצוערי הלוים הרימותי קולי קול יעקב ונתתי ידי ואצבעי בין הנימין להעלות זכרון בספר מעין המאורע ההוא בלי להטות ימין ושמאל. רק העיקר והמרכז שעליו ורובי קוטבי מגלתי זאת הענוגה והרכה הצגתי לפניך קורא אהוב באמת ובאמונה **[130b]** לרוב פרסומו, למען הציל אותך ממהמורות המכשולות ולתת עליך היום ברכה, ולידע ולהודיע כי כמקרה אמ"ה ז"ל גם ככה קרני במקרה של התועב אייבשיץ שר"י, ממש דומה בדומה, מה שאירע לאב אירע לבן. שמתחלה מסרוהו בידי אנשי ג"ק להודיעם משפטו וטיב קמיעותיו. אחר כך נחמו על זה)הצד המתגבר בשקר ובכלים רעים הנ"ל . . . . .

.נשוב למקום שהיינו

. . . . [140a] קודם שאתחיל בספור קורותי אודיע נאמנה שלא באתי לכלל זה למען ספר שמי ותהלתי, כי יודע אני בעצמי שאין בי שום מעלה, לא תורה לא חכמה לא גדולה היתה לי לנחלה שאתפאר ואתגדר בה. הלואי **[140b]** שלא אעלה על גליוני מה שיגלה חסרוני. אך יודע כל שער עמי שבחרתי בשפלות. מיום עמדי על דעתי היותי מכיר ערכי ומומי. על כן מזה הטעם עצמו לא אכפת לי ולא אחוש אם יודע לכל שפלותי, כי רק האמת אהבתי. ומחמת שלש טעמים באתי לידי מדה זו לבאר בכתב קורותי. ולא אמנע מלהודיע לי"ח כל עניני כפי אשר תשיג יד האפשרות. וא"ל אגיע)ן(לכולו, לפחות אזכור כל הנזכר אצלי כעת ואשר עבר עלי עד הנה.

ואמנם הסבה החזקה שהניעה אותי לזה, היא להודיע חסד ה' עלי מנעורי, אף אם רבות צררוני, לא יאומן כי יסופר . . . . וכמעט הייתי בכל רע ומקרה קשה ופגע בלי הפסק רגע. ומכולם הצילני הי"ת ב"ה ועזרני עד כה. יסור יסרני ולמות לא נתנני. . . . לכן אמרתי אספרה שמך ה' לאחי ולזרעי וי"ח, למען לא אשכח חסדיו ולא תשכחי נפשי כל גמוליו. ובתוך רבים אהללנו כי יעמוד לימין אביון להושיע משופטי נפשו. רובי נפלאותיו אשר עשה עמדי, הדל באלפי, אודיע לדור אחרון. לכן שמעו כל יראי אלהים אשר עשה לנפשי תמיד בכפי, שפתי רננות יהלל פי, ובקולמוסו רוחלסם אביע הודיות בקול אשמיע למען ידעו דור אחרון, בנים יוולדו יקומו ויספרו לבניהם ויודו לה' כי טוב כל"ח, כי הושיע נפש אביון מיד מרעים.

וזאת שנית, לחזק ידים רפות, דכאי רוח ונכאי לבב, הנעלבים והנרדפים על לא חמס בכפם כמוני היום, על צווארי נרדפתי משונאי חנם, ומשלמי רעה [תחת] טובה ישטנוני תחת רדפי טוב. יראו רבים ויירא ויבטחו בה'. ישימו באלהים כסלם ולא ישכחו מעללי אל. לא יפול לבבם מהמון עריצים ומשטמת בעלי חצים.

ושלישית, למען יזרח שמש צדקתי ולא תשכון עליו, מפני רשעים זו שדוני אויבי בנפש יקיפו עלי. והוציאו עלי דבה רעה להבאישני ביושב הארץ להשמידני חרף בידם בשקריהם ופחזותם שנתפשטו בכל עבר ופנה. בכל הארץ בשתם. ובודאי ישארו הרבה כתבי פלסתר שלהם **[142a]** בעולם זמן מה. לכן ההכרח אלצני לברר עסקי נגד ה' ואדם ויצא)כומר([כאור] צדקי, ימלט אי נקי. והאמת עד לעצמי, והנה הוא לי כסות עינים ולבני וי"ח הש"י.

ואחל בספור קורותי למען דעת צדקות ה' אשר לא יבושו קויו ולא יכלמו לנצח כל החוסים בו, עזרה בצרות נמצא מאוד כאשר ראיתי בעיני פעמים רבות

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