

WHY ARE YOU ENRAGED?  
YALTA AND THE SAGES (BERACHOT 51B)

IDO HEVRONI

Abstract

At the end of the seventh chapter of Bavli Berachot appears one of the most famous stories about Yalta: A guest of her husband refuses to share the Cup of Blessing with her and she reacts aggressively. The story has been the subject of many analyses, but none of those has offered a reading in light of the whole chapter. This article suggests a reading of the story in light of the halakhic deliberations, the stories, and the derashot that appear in the chapter, with an emphasis on identifying the recurring motifs and on the temporal aspect of the act of reading. Its conclusion is that although the chapter does not offer a halakhic deliberation on the Mishna's ruling that women do not join in the quorum (of three) for zimmun, it does deal intensively with the status of women in its non-halakhic parts and it offers a more complex picture than that which emerges from the halakhic passages alone. The story of Yalta brings the tension between the various attitudes toward women to a crescendo: 'Ulla presents the chapter's most offensive stance toward women, and Yalta struggles against him with full force, demonstrating an independent outlook. The editors have granted her the last word in the story, and almost the last word in the entire chapter, thereby making it clear toward which side their own opinion leaned.