

# Sanctification of the Moon<sup>49</sup>

A tumult in the house. Outside they are sanctifying the moon, and one runner after another comes to announce: “The sanctification of the moon! It has already been revealed! Hurry! We can perform the sanctification already! In a minute it’ll disappear!”

Everyone hastens, runs, hurries.

One of my brothers is looking for his prayer book, which seems to have disappeared from sight, now of all times.

The second one stands with his prayer book open. He flips through the pages so frantically that the pages almost rip.

He wants to find the place with the sanctification of the moon, but as though to spite him, the right place eludes him.

The small ones grab their coats and throw them over their shoulders in haste. They are worried about coming late and missing their chance.

I stand frightened at a distance.<sup>50</sup>

I know that at a time like this I will be the object of my brothers’ ridicule! “Look at her! What is she doing here? What, do you also need to sanctify the moon?!”

At times like this, recognizing their upper hand, they liked to dig at me and provoke me with their jokes.

I was hardly more than a girl at the time, and this sort of thing pained my heart, because in every other way, I was considered like a boy among my brothers.

I always played a major part in their games. I would run, jump, and climb like a boy,<sup>51</sup> and no one in the house really distinguished between me and them in matters of mitzvot [commandments]. When they were busy preparing the sukkah, I’d climb and go up to the attic together with my brothers and help with everything. Like them, I would collect the *sekhakh* [thatching] and spread it on top according to the instructions of the old servant, whose voice we would obey and fear because of his rebuke.

With my brothers I listened to the lesson of the elderly rabbi, and he’d praise me to my face: “If only she were a boy! Oy, a pity!” he would sigh.<sup>52</sup>

And this sigh would pierce and descend into the depths of my soul.

Because I was born a girl, my rebbe whom I adored was compelled to exclude me from the community when it came to such holy matters as the study of the Torah!

And my heart yearned so for the Torah [*nafshi hashkakh kol kakh batorah*]<sup>53</sup>

I yearned for it so!

And so the hour of the sanctification of the moon became a hidden torment: It seemed to me a terrible wrong that we, the girls, were made to suffer.<sup>54</sup> I could not be consoled, for it struck me then as a very severe decree.

If they had exempted only me alone [*ilu hotzi’u rak oti bilvad*],<sup>55</sup> my pain would not have been so great. But I could not tolerate the insult to the honor of my mother, whose worth was certainly as great, if not greater in my eyes, than many of those who danced before the moon.

Not only did they warn me against participating in the sanctification of the moon, which seemed to me then to be a source of great joy, but my brothers also warned me against even looking at those who were reciting the blessings. And as I walked among those praying, I was also told to cover my eyes with my hands, for any woman or girl who looked at those who were blessing and listened to their voices would be afflicted with special torments.

On one occasion, I just couldn’t resist: I stole outside and purposely stood in front of those sanctifying the moon and listened to the sound of their melodies. And my brothers terrified me, saying to me: A disaster, God forbid, will certainly

befall you.

In the beginning, I paid no attention to what they were saying, but within a few days, I began to be frightened of every “driven leaf.”<sup>56</sup>

Every little whisper brought fear to my heart.

My fear especially worsened at night. It would seem to me then as though all kinds of strange creatures were walking and stalking and approaching my bed, leaning over me and swaying. I closed my eyes from fear, and lo and behold, the creatures move about and change form. They stretch out ever wider and taller. I awaken with a frightened cry.

And one night, I lay in my bed but could not sleep. Quiet prevailed in the house. In our room too—quiet. My sister was already asleep, only I alone was awake. Strange visions and apparitions terrified me, and I lay afraid to raise my head or open my eyes.

Suddenly, I hear the footsteps of a man coming ever closer to the closed door of our room. Perhaps I am sleeping? Perhaps I am having a nightmare? I so wanted to believe this, but my heartbeats, which grew so loud that I could almost hear them with my own ears, convinced me that I was hearing actual footsteps.

I held my breath and barely moved . . . and the footsteps continue to come closer. Here they are at the threshold of the door. Someone is groping at the door in the dark to find the handle of the lock.<sup>57</sup>

A cold sweat covered my brow . . .

My heartbeat stopped . . .

Suddenly I heard the voice of the Gentile gatekeeper, calling: “Wake up, go out and pray before the moon! It just now revealed itself.”

I remembered that the gatekeeper was instructed on these cloudy Heshvan<sup>58</sup> evenings to be on alert all night long to watch and check for the moment of the coming out of the moon.

And when it came out, [the gatekeeper was] to inform at

once all the people in the house, except the women.

And wouldn’t you know, he went astray precisely at the opening to our room, the girls’ room . . .