Exorcism and Violence: Contexts Internal and External

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Hillel Ba‘al Shem, “Sefer ha-Heshek” (ca. 1739), 125a-127s
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Part 1B
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[…] According to my understanding, amulets can be used only after some preparatory work with holy names and the help of special oaths or healing charms, as described in this holy book. Sometimes the use of amulets depends on place and sometimes on timing. In the lands of Volhynia, in the holy community of Ostroh, I faced, with God’s help, a horrible case of the spirit AIAUAIM, that had settled in [the body of] a woman, God protect us, in that holy community. For several days I was not able to do anything. I proclaimed great oaths [bans of excommunication] in the synagogue with the Torah scrolls and the members of the holy council, [but did not succeed], until the spirit answered and told me from the body of that woman, may God protect me: “You, Rabbi-exorcist (rabbi ha-poel), have intimidated me with oaths and excommunicated me with all the holy names, yet you have not managed to have any effect on me. You only weakened those murderous and harmful spirits surrounding my soul, who are damaging and weakening all 252 [sic!—instead of 248] members and 365 sinews and bones of my body. It is precisely the place which is affecting [your holy work], as it is impossible to use the holy names here, since there is a overriding place of abomination [i.e., a church] close to, l’havdil (mutatis mutandis), the holy synagogue. If you wish to bring your work to completion, you should by all means move with me to a different place. Only with seven Torah scrolls and seven young boys who have not yet sinned or with seven adults or [even] more pious (voter kesharim) men [will you be able to finalize your holy
work]. These men should go with you on the day of the oaths to the ritual bath and then pray together with you, and afterwards you will be able to do your [holy] work, with God’s help and I will then leave the body of this woman. The only thing I do not know is whether I will leave her body with or without her soul, since I have lived for a couple of years in the body of this woman already, and nobody was able to recognize me from everything I committed from within the body of this woman. When I entered her body, she was pregnant with a girl, and on that night from Saturday to Sunday, with the permission of my supervisors standing around me, I caught and murdered her husband until he died a terrible death, and I also intended to murder the fetus in her womb, but I was not allowed to damage the fetus, just the husband came to his end. I tortured him until he died. [Therefore] in this place you will not be able to do anything to this woman but I will tell you a story about myself and the evil deeds of my hands so that they [all the Jews] will learn and see from me how to serve the Creator, blessed be he. Here is the advice you should hearken. Go with me to the holy community of Tutchin, four leagues from this holy community, and there you will complete the oath [of exorcism]. And you, Rabbi-exorcist, do not be afraid and do not turn back and do not distance yourself from me, even if the priests open their mouths and give all their evil advice—fire and flames in their false words. In the end they will fall before you, with God’s help. And now you will atone for your sins, which you committed from your youth until this very day, as I have heard from the other side of the curtain [from the Christians—or from other spiritual beings--YPS]. And now, do not be afraid, since “you should not rely on informers.” The work will be accomplished! You should take me from the ritual bath before morning prayers and start shouting at me. Swear at and curse the spirit in the body of the woman in the Great Synagogue, while the spirit speaks before all the people and confesses the actions he accomplished when he destroyed the foundations [here: converted--YPS], may his name be blotted out, and took for himself a certain non-Jewish woman for a wife, and gave birth to many offspring with her, and then murdered several Jewish souls, God protect us, and they wanted to bring me to justice [the spirit alternated “I” and “he”--YPS], but I became a priest of the Christian Orthodox rite (be-emunah yavanit), and then died a terrible death and suffered enormous tortures
according to his deeds. After a couple of years he became a spirit, and the spirit momentarily entered the body of this woman, God protect us, through her right eye, and she lost sight in this eye. That very night [the spirit] tortured her husband until he died, God protect us. And afterwards she gave birth to a baby girl, and the infant was healthy and strong, and the spirit lived in the body of this woman, God protect us, for about seven consecutive years, and caused her all sorts of indescribably enormous and bitter sufferings, until she, because of these suffering, lost sight in her left eye, and nobody, not any expert in the world, could recognize through her actions what the spirit had done to her. Everything was done in secret.”

After these seven years I came to the afore-mentioned holy community [of Ostrog] to the house of the luminary Rabbi of the kloyz, named after Isaac Ayzik, son of the great Rabbi Betsalel who was earlier the head of the rabbinic court and the head of the Talmudic Academy in the holy community of Ostrog. I spent a couple days in the special room of the prayer house. One day, in the evening, the spirit sent for a respected man who had been before the beadle serving the great Rabbi, the pious (hassid), and great Kabbalist, the honorable Rabbi Naftali Kohen Tsedek, of blessed memory, knowledgeable in all realms of the Torah. The spirit told that man, who lived in the house near her house [HBSh alternates between “he” and “she” addressing the spirit and the house where the possessed woman lives—YPS], and the spirit told him thus: “Go immediately to the man, whose name is Hillel Ba’al Shem, who has come on this day to our community, and he will put an end to me by proclaiming the oaths in the synagogue itself. Perhaps he will find me some sort of healing remedy.” But the former beadle did not want to listen to his words, and started to gossip in the streets of the town in public, and the entire town was shocked. And then the spirit said from the body of the woman to that man: “If you go to the ba’al shem, it would be wonderful, but [if not], you will regret it at the end.” Then that man went to the head of the community (parnas hodesh) and told him directly what the spirit had said. The head of the community sent the beadle for me, together with that former beadle with the request from the entire community that I should do something helpful for that woman, may God protect us, and I told them directly that I [was ready and] had no fear at all as it was the third spirit with which I had been involved since the beginning of my career as a
practical Kabbalist (ba’al shem). The first was in the holy community of Sieniawa. At the beginning I did not know how to start nor how to use the oaths. I used only magical charms, as the order [of the holy work of healing] and patterns of conduct were written in my book—all of which I copied from the books of the Rabbi, the luminary, knowledgeable in Hasidism and Talmudic scholarship, and in all realms of the Torah, the genius Rabbi Zvi Hirsch the son of the great Rabbi Avram, known also as Abraham, and everybody knew him under this name. But because of my sins and before the modest man [tsanua oft-used as a euphemism for the Sabbateans] I became extremely frightened, so that my soul almost left my body in fear and awe before the spirit; I will not go into detail here. With the spirit in the holy community of Ostrog, however, I resorted to great oaths and pleas and still could not accomplish anything for a couple of days with seven Torah scrolls, blowing of the rams’ horns, and terrifying bans of excommunication. The spirit did not want to disclose the name he had before. But when six days passed, he told me: “You are the Rabbi-exorcist, and I will reveal to you a great secret: in this place you will not be able to do anything to me and will not be able to repair my soul because of Christian time (church bells marking time in the major Ostrog Church in front of the Great Synagogue or a Christian holiday—YPS) and, mutatis mutandis, because of the powers of the Jew-haters who hate you. And because of them, confessed the spirit, [my] operation was untimely. And he disclosed before the entire congregation and the heads of the community the terrible, awful and nasty things that occurred in that community among the Jews. Everybody realized that a horrible revelation had taken place. At the end of the day, everything that had been hidden was revealed through the power of heavenly and earthly oaths. They [the entire community—YPS] witnessed through the divine testimonies that the spirit had disclosed secret things that occurred in that town—things I cannot convey here. And after all those denunciations, may they be blotted out, I travelled to the holy community of Tutchin not far from the holy community of Ostrog, about four leagues. There I pronounced an oath and a great plea in the presence of ten valid men and the Torah scrolls, and the spirit left the body of that woman through the little toe of her left foot, from under the nail, so that some blood came out of her toe. That happened on the fifth day of the week, during the month of Elul, 1733. And
afterwards her sight improved a little, and she started to go to the synagogue and attend to her matters according to her needs, yet the eye through which the spirit had entered her body remained closed because the spirit had damaged it. And the spirit continued daily to reveal terrible secrets about me but I will not inscribe them in this book…
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ומקלל איזה רוח שבגוף אשה בבית כנסת הגדו והרוח מספר בפני כל עם ועדה ממעשיו שעשה מקדם שכפר בעיקר ים ולקח איזה ערלתה לאשה והוליד עמה הרבה והרבה ואחכ הרג כמה נפשות מישראל רורצו לדין אותי ונעשה כומר באמונת יונן ואחכ מת במשנה וסבל יסורים גדולים כפי מעשיו ואחכ כמה שנים נעשה רוח ושכבה תחת איזה אילן בק lk אוסטרא הנתקלどれ בית הכנסת הגדול ואותה אשה הנתקל באזא את אשתו תחת האילן הזה ושכבה על הקרקע ששם היה הרוח ותיכף ומיד הלך הרוח לגוף אשה רロックו על דרך קרו העין ימין וכסה זה העין שלה והלך הרוח לעבר עת ערב שלח הרוח אחר איש נכבד שהיה מקדם שמש אצל הרב המאור הגדול והחסיד ומנהגו גדול וחריף ובקי בכל חדרי תורה عليه השלום כבוד מוהר ר נפתלי כהן צדק ואמר הרוח אל האיש הזה שיתלך תיכף ומיד להאיש הזה הנ캉ל אם אתה תילך להבעל שם אזי מה טוב ואמה תחרט אתה בוודאי באחרונה הילך והאיש להפרנס חודש וסיפר דבריו לפניו ושלח הפחד מהו הים הנגדל באחרונה שלח הרוח לעבר עת ערב שלח הרוח אחר איש נכבד שהיה מקדם שמש אצל הרב המאור הגדול והחסיד ומנהגו גדול וחריף ובקי בכל חדרי תורה عليه השלום כבוד מוהר ר נפתלי כהן צדק ואמר הרוח אל האיש הזה שיתלך תיכף ומיד להאיש הזה הנ캉ל אם אתה תילך להבעל שם אזי מה טוב ואמה תחרט אתה בוודאי באחרונה הילך והאיש להפרנס חודש וסיפר דבריו לפניו ושלח הפחד מהו הים הנגדל באחרונה שלח הרוח לעבר עת ערב שלח הרוח אחר איש נכבד שהיה מקדם שמש אצל הרב המאור הגדול והחסיד ומנהגו גדול וחריף ובקי בכל חדרי תורה عليه השלום כבוד מוהר ר נפתלי כהן צדק ואמר הרוח אל האיש הזה שיתלך תיכף ומיד להאיש הזה הנ캉ל אם אתה תילך להבעל שם אזי מה טוב ואמה תחרט אתה בוודאי באחרונה הילך והאיש להפרנס חודש וסיפר דבריו לפניו ושלח הפחד מהו הים הנגדל באחרונה שלח הרוח לעבר עת ערב שלח הרוח אחר איש נכבד שהיה מקדם שמש אצל הרב המאור הגדול והחסיד ומנהגו גדול וחריף ובקי בכל חדרי Torah عليه השלום כבוד מוהר ר נפתלי כהן צדק ואמר הרוח אל האיש הזה שיתלך תיכף ומיד להאיש הזה הנ캉ל אם אתה תילך להבעל שם אזי מה טוב ואמה תחרט אתה בוודאי באחרונה הילך והאיש להפרנס חודש וסיפר דבריו לפניו ושלח הפחד מהו הים הנגד
ומכוסים מכל שמיומת 돌ב אליך וいただきました ידועו ושנייה الشريف של עומר את כל הקהל שס詳しく כל שוכך נפשך כי הנ栉にして גלעך מכל שבחוויה שמיית מזרחי עידון כי נאמרה המ שגילו דבירים נסתרים מה שבעיר ההוא אשר נאף להפלות הכּן ואחר כל המסירות ימי נacters יומין שמים וארץ מעידן בעדותה המוחלנה מה שגילה דב Rahmen גלעך ונסעתי לק כמו וטוטשין סמוך לק כּאוסטרא לערד螺丝 ו الطريق שמיית𣴒 נשתה ועשיתי שם השבעה אחת ובקשה wiel עם עשרה אנשים הגונים ובספרי תורת 있기 ואחרalmö בצורת גלעך דרך אצבע קטנה שבגלועו העומד שלא ב chóngהו ובשנתו בחודש אלול תצג'גלק אוותי כ פתיחה מנוח לארח ולılırל לבכי הנסות עלת הקברות לכל מקומות עליה כפי שרף רד עינך אתך דרך שבא אל גוף דרך עדין הזה לא ראתה כלום שodial אתו ונירה עין הניהו גלעך כד יומין אליפודת גוראות ופי להפלות בה המפרר [...]

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