Answers to Quiz Questions and Other Comments, part 1

By Marc B. Shapiro

It is now time to announce the names of those who were able to answer the quiz questions I posed. The only two people to answer both questions correctly were Alex Heppenheimer and Yonason Rosman. I fortunately had two CDs so both of them received the prize.

Question no. 1 was: The word for turkey is תרנגול דוות. There is a dagesh in the dalet. Why? Bring a proof for your answer from Berakhot between page 34a and 38a.

Alex Heppenheimer emailed as follows: “The dagesh represents a missing nun in the word תרנגול דוות The Aramaic form, in Berachot 36b, is תרנגול דוותא. (There is also similarly תרנגול דוותא in Yoma 34b and תרנגול דוותא in Kiddushin 22b.)”

This is correct. The name India (and thus also Hindu) originates with the Persians and Greeks for the land beyond the Indus River. You can see in the Aramaic terms referred to by Heppenheimer that the nun is part of the word. See also the Targum to Esther 1:1 where תרנגול דוותא is translated as תרנגול דוותא. Bava Batra 74b, Avodah Zarah 16a, and Bekhorot 37b have other forms of the word, all including the nun.[1] Berakhot 37b refers to תרנגול דוותא, i.e., “Indian bread.” Targum Ps. Jonathan to Gen. 2:12 translates תרנגול דוותא as תרנגול דוותא.

(As to why turkey was referred to by those in Spain, and later the rest of Europe, as “Indian fowl”, that is because when it was first brought back to Europe it was believed to be coming from the area around India, which is where Columbus himself thought that he had ended up.)

For those who are interested in grammatical matters like how the dagesh is used, let me recommend a new book, Adir Amrutzi’s Dikdukei Aviah (Tel Aviv, 2010). In speaking of nuns
that drop off, on p. 13 he calls attention to *Kiddushin* 70a where the word אטרונגא appears. The nun in this word shows us that the plural of etrog is not etrogim, but etrugim, with a *dagesh* in the *gimel* and a *kubutz* under the *resh*. The singular word *etrog* should be written as אטרוג (All this follows the pattern of *tov-tupim* כף--cols, *dov-dubim* דב-דבים). When the *vav holam* is in the word, the *holam* sound remains: חול-חולות.

Returning to India, the passage in *Berakhot* 36b reads: “The preserved ginger which comes from India (הנדואי) is permitted.” The problem is that when you look at Rashi, for his translation of הנדואי he writes: כושיים. *Cushi‘im* means “Ethiopians” (Translating “Cush” as “Ethiopia” does not imply that it corresponds to the borders of modern day Ethiopia. Some even prefer “Nubia” to Ethiopia”, as Ethiopians are Semitic while Nubians are “Hamitic” [and Cush was a son of Ham]. It perhaps also can refer generally to black Africa. This can explain *Pesahim* 94a which states that Egypt is one sixtieth of Cush. Also, the Targum to II Chron. 21:16 translates כושים as אפריקאי.

So where does Rashi get the idea that Cushites are Indians? Did he not know that הנדואי means India? In his commentary to *Kiddushin* 22b he writes as follows: הנדואה: מארץ כושי כוש מתרגמינן הנדואה

We see the same identification by Rashi in *Yoma* 81b. Since the book of Esther distinguishes between India (הדו) and Cush, and Rashi identifies הנדואה with Cush, one might be tempted to conclude that Rashi didn’t realize that הנדואה is the same as הדו. But is it possible that he wouldn’t know this? And to confuse matters even more, in *Avodah Zarah* 16a, where הנדואה is mentioned, Rashi explains that it means ארץ הדו.

So not only do we have the problem of Rashi identifying הנדואה as Cush, but we also have the problem of consistency, because in one instance he identifies the place correctly. To add one
more thing to the mix, in his commentary to *Sukkah* 36a Rashi states that Cush is further from the Land of Israel than it is from Babylonia. This means that Rashi thought that Cush is to the east of Babylonia. In other words, Rashi does not believe that Cush is Ethiopia.[3]

So where does Rashi get this notion? He actually gives us his source in his commentary to *Yoma* 34b, where he refers to the Targum to Jeremiah 13:23. This verse famously states: “Can the Cushi change his skin, or the leopard his spots?” If you look at the Targum on this verse Cushi is translates as . In the Targum to Isaiah 11:11 Cush is also identified as India.

So again, I ask, what is going on here? How could the Targum translate Cushi as “Indian”?

P. S. Alexander writes as follows: “It was a common view in ancient geography, shared by Ptolemy and probably also the author of the book of Jubilees . . . that Ethiopia was joined to India in the east. It is this idea that lies behind the [talmudic] statement that Cush and Hodu are adjacent.”[4] He also notes that the Indians dark skin was one reason for the identification. Furthermore, Alexander tell us, there was an ancient belief that there was a land connection between Ethiopia and India south of the Indian Ocean.

Since we have been speaking of India,[5] let me share with you what I found in R. Hayyim Hirschensonh’s *Nimukei Rashi* on Bamidbar (a copy of which I will give out to the winner of my next quiz[6]). On p. 81b he suggests that the revolt in India against English rule was a punishment of England for splitting the Land of Israel when it created Transjordan.

Returning to the quiz, my second question was: There is a rabbinic phrase that today is used to praise a Torah scholar, but in talmudic days was used in a negative fashion. What am I referring to?

*Megillah* 28b speaks of a צנא דמלא סיפרי . Today this
expression is used to praise scholars. Yet if you look at the
talmudic passage its meaning is the exact opposite. Rashi
explains:

אינו אלא כסל שמילאוהו ספרים ואין площ מה בתוכה אף שונה הלכות
ולא שימש ת"ח נדרשם לתבינה טעמי משנה ופעמים שדברי משנה סותרין
זה את זה וצריך לתרצה כגון הכא במאי עסקינן וכגון הא מני רבי
פלוני היא וכגון חסורי מיחסרא אינו יודע מה שונה.

Rashi’s explanation should remind people of a phrase used by
R. Bahya Ibn Paquda in Hovot ha-Levavot 3:4. In its medieval
Hebrew translation it became famous: חמור נושא ספרים. I first
heard this expression in yeshiva. Only later did I realize
that it came from R. Bahya, and only some time later did I
learn that R. Bahya didn’t invent it. Rather, it originates in
the Quran 62:5.[7]

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Since this post is not up to my normal length, let me make
some more comments. At least one person thinks that my
criticism of Artscroll regarding Kalir is unfair. If you
recall, I originally criticized them for identifying Kalir as
a tanna. In my last post I mentioned that in the first edition
of the Artscroll Machzor this identification is rejected, and
only in subsequent editions does the Machzor state that Kalir
was a tanna. I also claimed that Artscroll knows the truth but
in order to mollify its critics, changed what it originally
wrote.

This, incidentally, is not the only time that I assume that
Artscroll knows what it is writing is incorrect, but writes so
anyway. I have a good example of this in the book I am
currently working on, so I don’t want to give it away now. I
already noted another example in Limits, where I call
attention to the introduction to the Artscroll Chumash which
states: “Rambam sets forth at much greater length the
unanimously held view that every letter and word was given by
God to Moses” (emphasis added). This statement, that the view
of the Rambam is unanimously held, is false. Furthermore,
Artscroll knows it is false, and in its commentary to Deut.
34:5 it mentions the talmudic view that the last verses were
given to Joshua.[8]
Here is another example along these lines that I think readers will find interesting. It comes from the new Artscroll Midrash Rabbah, and was called to my attention by R. Avrohom Lieberman (who already called my attention to the Kalir change in the Machzor).

In explaining Tikun Soferim, Artscroll’s note states that this “cannot, Heaven forbid” be taken literally. Yet the editors of Artscroll, who are learned men, know perfectly well that there are traditional sources that state precisely this (See Limits, pp. 98ff). There is no question that the intent of the text “Heaven forbid” is to make the reader think that Artscroll’s perspective is unanimously held.
Since we are now on the subject of Artscroll (the most important and influential Orthodox publishing venture of all time), and lots of people want me to post more on this topic, let me give one final example. It comes from Ecclesiastes, as I dealt with this book in the last series of posts. The upshot of what I and others have already pointed out is something everyone already knew, namely, that Artscroll has a religious agenda. Much like the New York Times’ agenda can be seen not only in the editorial page, but in the news reports as well, so too Artscroll’s agenda is seen not only in the “overviews,” but in the selection of commentaries also. There is enough material for a very long and detailed article spelling all this out.

Eccl. 2:8 states: אֲשִׁיבָּה יָדִי עַל חָזָן
What does this mean? The simple explanation is that the author, traditionally Solomon, is telling us about all the wonderful things he amassed with which to enjoy himself, and among them are “men singers and women singers.” Artscroll translates the passage as “I provided myself with various musical instruments.” Now this might be an apologetic translation, but if so, it is not Artscroll that is to be too criticized, but the Talmud, Gittin 68a, since according to Rashi this is how the Talmud explains the words. Artscroll is obviously within its rights to adopt this understanding, even if one assumes that this explanation is not in accord with the simple sense of the verse.

The problem comes with the next passage in the Artscroll commentary which states: “Rav Yosef Kara, Alshich, Metzudas Zion and others translate ‘singers.’” I will get to Kara and Alshich shortly, but let’s begin with Metzudat Tziyon, since this is easiest for most people to access as it appears in the Mikraot Gedolot. He writes as follows:

שרים: משוררים זכרים. ושרות: משוררות נקבות

So now I ask my fair-minded readers: Is Artscroll’s statement that Metzudat Tziyon translates כָּלָה כַּלָּה as “singers” accurate? I think the answer is clearly “no”. Metzudat Tziyon translates the words in question as “male singers and female
singers,” and yet—don’t tell me you are surprised—in Artscroll this morphs into “singers”. Why would Artscroll fudge the translation? The answer is obvious. They don’t want people to think that Solomon would have listened to women singing. I am not sure why this is so problematic for them. After all, if Solomon engaged in idolatry (at least according to the biblical text’s simple meaning), hearing women sing is not so far-fetched. In fact, in his comment on some other words in the verse, R. Jacob Lorberbaum[12] writes as follows):

"רמז על עבר על לא ירבה נשים שהזהירה התורה"

Lorberbaum, therefore, has no difficulty in seeing the verse as pointing to misdeeds of Solomon.

Let us now see what Kara and Alshich say on the verse, since they too were quoted by Artscroll. Kara’s commentary is printed in Otzar Tov, ed., Berliner and Hoffmann (Berlin, 1886-1887), p. 10: 

"עשיתי לי שרים ושרת: תיקנתי לי זכרים ונקיבות לשורר לפניי"

Alshich explains the verse to be referring to 'משוררים ומשוררות'

So we see that the commentators Artscroll refers to are explicit that the meaning of the passage is “male and female singers.”

Among other sources that interpret this way are Kohelet Rabbati, ad loc:

"שרים ושרות: זמרין וזמרתא"

Yalkut Shimoni, Kohelet no. 968:

"עשיתי לי שרים ושרת: משוררים זכרים ונקבות"

See also the Targum to Eccl. 2:8, where 'שרים ו痧ות' is translated as 'זמריא ודמריתא'.

R. Moses Almosnino, Yedei Moshe (Tel Aviv, 1986), Eccl. 2:8 (p. 58), even explains why the female singers were desirable, as they helped create a better harmony:
When the Jews returned from Babylonia to the Land of Israel in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Bible (Ezra 2:65, Nehemiah 7:65) states explicitly that they came with "משוררים ומשוררות," "male and female singers."

As for how Solomon could listen to women sing, for those who feel the need to answer this question, perhaps Solomon agreed with those authorities who feel that there is no blanket prohibition on hearing a woman’s singing voice,[13] a viewpoint that has recently been resurrected by Rabbis Moshe Lichtenstein,[14] David Bigman[15] and Avraham Shammah.[16]

According to this perspective, only singing that is sexually arousing is forbidden.[17] Let us not forget that the Talmud speaks of a woman’s voice. It is the post-Talmudic authorities who clarify that this refers to a singing voice, but does this mean any singing voice or only one that in the minds of normal men could be arousing?

R. Marc Angel agrees with the rabbis mentioned in the last paragraph. He writes: “When the prohibition of "קול ישראל" is applied to all instances of women singing in the presence of men, this is a distortion of the intent of the halakha. . . . Men and women may sing in the presence of those of the other gender, as long as the songs are of a religious nature, or of a general cultural nature (e.g., opera, folk songs, lullabies).”[18]

R. Yonatan Rosenzweig doesn’t go so far as to permit one to attend a concert with a female singer, but he does say that since today many people are used to hearing recordings of women’s voices, that possibly it is even permissible to watch a woman singing on television.[19]

A number of years ago there were ads in New York Jewish papers for a concert by Neshama Carlebach. The ads stated that the concert was open for women, as well as for men for whom the
singing was permissible. This was a very strange formulation. Knowing that R. Mordechai Tendler was Neshama’s posek, I asked him about this. He explained to me that the language originated with him and was based on the notion that the prohibition against *kol ishah* is not a blanket prohibition, but depends on whether the singing is sexually arousing. (This approach can be supported by the view found in some *rishonim* that *kol ishah* that is not sexually arousing is only forbidden during *keriat shema*. Otherwise, there is no prohibition.[20]) Therefore, men who are used to hear women sing and will not be aroused by Neshama are permitted to attend the concert, and this explains the strange language in the ads.[21] Tendler also told me that this view of *kol ishah* as being what we can call a “situational prohibition” rather than an absolute *issur*, was held by his grandfather, R. Moshe Feinstein.[22]

This opinion, that whether or not a woman’s singing voice is prohibited depends on how men will react to it, will no doubt strike some as “unorthodox.” This approach is definitely not as widely held today as in years past. Yet many people reading this post can recall a time when *kol ishah*, as a general prohibition, was simply not an issue for the Modern Orthodox, or even for many of the more right-wing Orthodox. This was no different than the situation in Germany, where pretty much all of the Orthodox, including members of Hirsch’s community, saw no problem in attending the opera.

If you went back to the 1960s, other than the hasidim and the tiny yeshiva world, it would be hard to find an Orthodox Jew in New York City who didn’t see the Broadway performance of “Fiddler on the Roof.” I would even assume that that there were some roshei yeshiva who saw it. Until the 1980s there was no problem with Modern Orthodox synagogues sponsoring trips to Broadway musicals. My own shul even put on a performance of “Fiddler on the Roof” in the early 1980s. That would be unimaginable today at almost all Orthodox shuls.[23] (Yet somehow YU is able to continue its long tradition of a
fundraising night at the opera, and I have not heard of any attempt by the roshei yeshiva to end this practice.)

Until the 1980s, girls would also have solo singing roles in the musical productions put on by many Modern Orthodox yeshiva high schools and summer camps. (Was there a Modern Orthodox summer camp where girls did not sing?) Readers can correct me if I am wrong, but as far as I know, only Ramaz, Flatbush, and SAR still have girls singing solos.[24] The other schools that have girls sing have them do so in groups, or at least with one other girl.

To bring us back to the earlier era, where women singing was acceptable in the Modern Orthodox world, let me quote Rabbi Marc Angel:

I was raised in the Sephardic community of Seattle, Washington, and well remember our many family gatherings where romances were sung. Jews of great piety sang right along with those of lesser piety. I do not remember anyone ever objecting to the singing of love songs by men and women. In the early 1980s, Haham Dr. Solomon Gaon, himself a Judeo-Spanish-speaking rabbi, taught classes in Sephardic folklore at my Congregation Shearith Israel in New York City. I well remember him singing love songs, enthusiastically and nostalgically. Both of us participated in a program of Sephardic culture sponsored by the Hebrew College of Boston. A female soloist sang a selection of romances, after which Haham Gaon not only applauded loudly but rose to speak in praise of the singer for her beautiful rendition of the songs. Haham Gaon, who served as chief rabbi of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregations of England and as head of the Sephardic Studies Program of Yeshiva University in New York, was a very prominent Orthodox Sephardic rabbi and a man of impeccable piety.[25]

R. Eliezer Berkovits wrote:

Nowadays, the singing of a woman is not fundamentally different from what the original Halakhah termed “her
regular voice.” A woman’s voice, even when she is singing, is nothing unusual today, and it is no more distracting during the Shema prayer than that of a man singing. Only in specific amorous situations as in the Song of Songs, may it have a sensual quality.[26]

In Hirsch’s famous Schiller speech, delivered at his Frankfurt school, a note states that male and female students alternatively sang songs.[27] As I pointed out in my own note to the speech, girls were permitted to sing at Hirsch’s school. Mordechai Breuer, Modernity Within Tradition, p. 411 n. 11, calls attention to a report in Jeschurun 18 (1885), p. 11, of a public function at the school at which a teenage girl sang in the presence of a crowded audience.

In Between the Yeshiva World and Modern Orthodoxy, p. 216, I quote Jacob Rosenheim who attempts to explain why Hirsch permitted girls to sing at public examinations in the higher grades (and I also note that this passage was censored in the Netzah translation). A halakhic justification of hearing unmarried girls sing was actually penned by R. Isaac Unna, the rav of Mannheim. The short responsum appears in his Shoalin ve-Dorshin no. 2.
סוף הביקור

ב. תמוק
בנערי ההזירה נופש

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ב"א, יוחיהosc.

בענן, חמה השנה, עד בחודש כספים, בענן להתיאר עם פ综合治理
הבוסóc. הגנה: ניסיונות על חיה של צאן, כי ושני והשכילים. ה-
镫רוס מתוך לשארם לי. בני העם, מחברים נฎ לעקר העברה של

בしまט, קנה וה nhé רָכז.
Unna cites the *Ba’er Heitev* that תקינא קול פנויה מותר קול פנויה מותר. In context, what this means is exactly what it says, namely, that unlike a married woman’s (singing) voice, which is always prohibited, the singing of an unmarried woman is permitted to be heard. When he says this is permitted, he means if it doesn’t cause sexual thoughts. (Moderate sensual thoughts would be permitted...
according to Maimonides, as I mention below.) If it does, then of course it is forbidden. But this prohibition is a general prohibition against arousing oneself sexually and has nothing to do with the prohibition of kol ishah, which only refers to married women and is apparently based on the assumption that the voice of a married woman is always sexually arousing.[28] In recent generations, poskim have all written that the פנינה referred to here is one who does not have the status of a Niddah, that is, a pre-pubescent girl. The first source to adopt this approach seems to be the eighteenth-century Peri Megadim, Orah Hayyim 75:3. As far as I can tell, none of the early poskim who discuss the matter even mention this point, and they all assume that פנינה mean an unmarried woman, of any age. This approach also continued among certain poskim even subsequent to the Peri Megadim.

See for example this page R. Jacob Pardo’s Apei Zutrei (Venice, 1797), Even ha-Ezer 21:8:
Pardo is very clear that פניהם means exactly what it says. He compares the halakhah of kol ishah to that of hair covering, and just like only a married woman has to cover her hair, so too it is only a married woman’s voice that is prohibited, not the voice of a single woman. (As mentioned already, this would only be prohibited if it was sexually arousing.) As for extending the prohibition to unmarried women, he sees this as
an excessive stringency and applies the rabbinic phrase *kol ha-mosif gorea*, noting that the people will not listen to such a ruling and this will turn them into brazen sinners.

This is not to say that Pardo approves of listening to single women sing. He doesn’t, and applies to such singing the rabbinic phrase *מוטב שיאכלו ישראל בשר תמותות כשרות*, which comes from *Kiddushin* 22a and is stated with reference to something distasteful. It is distasteful, yet permitted nonetheless. Pardo’s careful distinction between what is preferred behavior and what the halakham actually requires is seen in this comment as well, where he refers to Job. 31:1: “[I made a covenant with mine eyes;] how then should I look upon a maiden?”[29]

Here is a page from R. Aaron ha-Levi, *Mateh Aharon* (Salonika, 1820), p. 260b, where we see some more interesting comments, including defending a rabbi who permitted listening to the voice of a single woman.
And finally, here is a page from R. Hayyim Kasar’s *Shem Tov*, a twentieth-century commentary on the *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Issurei Biah* 21:2. While Kasar is quite strict in forbidding a man to hear the voice of an *ervah*, even if he is not familiar with her, he is also clear that a *penuyah* means an unmarried woman and that there is no blanket prohibition on hearing her voice, just like there is no blanket prohibition on seeing the hair of an unmarried woman.
I would only add that this makes perfect sense according to Maimonides. If, as Maimonides says, one is permitted to look at an unmarried woman and enjoy her beauty,[30] it stands to reason that one can listen to the singing of an unmarried woman and also enjoy it.[31]
Returning to German Orthodoxy, *Der Israelit* was the newspaper of the German separatist community. Yet it seems to have had no problem highlighting an Orthodox female opera singer and stressing her commitment to Orthodoxy.[32] Mordechai Breuer called attention to this last point, and I assume that he didn’t have any knowledge of opera or he would have pointed out that the female singer referred to by the paper, Rosa Olitzka (1873-1949), was quite famous in her day. Here is a picture of her.

Right after telling us that Olitzka is the daughter of the
hazan of the Berlin Adass Jisroel (i.e., R. Esriel Hildesheimer’s separatist community), Der Israelit mentions her starring as Carmen in the London Opera production. One can find a good deal of material about Olitzka online,[33] and can even purchase recordings of hers.[34] Maybe a reader knows whether she remained observant in her later years.

Breuer also refers to the JüdischePresse’s review of the opera “Samson and Delilah”. [35] While Der Israelit was the paper of the Frankfurt Orthodox, Jüdische Presse was published by the Orthodox of Berlin.[36]

The view that kol ishah is not an absolute prohibition, but depends on whether or not the singing is sensual in nature, was also held by R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, at least according to R. Aharon Rakeffet.[37] Rakeffet has also reported on a number of occasions that the Rav attended the opera in Berlin.[38] At the Maimonides School first Hanukkah Banquet in 1939, “the program included Betty Brooks, a prominent radio personality singing a variety of Jewish and English songs, Mabel Wingert, a dancer, and Frost and Helene, society dancers.”[39]

R. Ovadiah Yosef’s viewpoint on kol ishah is also worth noting, especially as it has undergone a change. In the first volume of Yabia Omer, published in 1954, R. Ovadiah deals with the following question (Orah Hayyim no. 6):

"נשאלתי בדין קול זמר של אשה בגרמפון או ברדיו, אם יש בו משום קול באשה ערוה, וצריך להזהר שלא לשמעו בעת ק"ש ותפלה."

His formulation reflects the notion we have already seen, expressed by some rishonim, that the prohibition of kol ishah is a special prohibition related to shema (and prayer), rather than a general prohibition on hearing women sing (which if sexually arousing would be forbidden on other grounds.)

Here is how he formulates the question and answer in the table of contents:

"קול זמר של אשה ברדיו וגרמפון, אין צריך להזהר מלשמעו בשעת ק"ש ותפלה, כשאינו מכיר את המשוררת, ואין בזה משום קול באשה ערוה."

We see from here that there is no problem of kol ishah when...
you are not familiar with the female singer. In other words, you can recite shema and tefillah while hearing this. Again, however, this is not related to the wider issue of sensual songs. If you are “turned on” by hearing a song even if you don’t know the singer, then it is forbidden at all times. But by the same token, since the prohibition of kol ishah is exclusive to shema and tefillah, the implication is that a woman’s voice at other times is not prohibited if it doesn’t arouse sensual feelings.

Based on this understanding of R. Ovadiah’s responsum, I don’t think there is a contradiction between this teshuvah and R. Ovadiah’s well known love for the music of the Egyptian singing sensation Umm Kulthum.[40] Here is what Umm Kulthum looked like in her younger years.
If R. Ovadiah’s responsum in Yabia Omer intended a blanket prohibition on hearing the voice of a woman you are familiar with, rather than just confining this prohibition to shema and tefillah, then we would be confronted with a tremendous contradiction between the responsum and how R. Ovadiah lived his own life. It is not like R. Ovadiah wrote something in his responsum and did something else in his private life where people couldn’t see. His love of Umm Kulthum’s music was something everyone knew about, and he listened to it in the company of others. Clearly, therefore, his responsum which prohibits listening to the singing of one you are familiar with only applies during shema and tefillah. At other times, it is only prohibited if one is sexually aroused by the music, and since R. Ovadiah was not, he was permitted to listen to Umm Kulthum. Rabbi J. David Bleich is therefore incorrect when he summarizes R. Ovadiah’s responsum as follows: “Rabbi Yosef concurs in this ruling but adds that it is forbidden to listen to a female vocalist who is known to the listener even if the woman in question is known to him only through photographs.”[41] (I hope no one attempts to argue that R. Ovadiah didn’t know what Umm Kulthum looked like. She was only the most prominent celebrity in Egypt, with her picture everywhere.)

I was also informed by R. Avraham Yosef that his father, R. Ovadiah, later retracted his ruling in this responsum that if you are familiar with the singer that you can’t hear her voice in shema and tefillah. I later saw that R. Ovadiah himself states as much in Yabia Omer, vol. 9 no. 108:43:


R. Avraham Yosef states that while it is permitted to hear a woman sing even if you know what she looks like, it is not
permitted to attend a live performance or even watch on television. R. Avraham assumes that all live performances are prohibited, not only those that could be sexually arousing.[42] It also needs to be stated that despite how I interpreted R. Ovadiah, that female singing is only prohibited if it is sensual music, the upshot of what R. Ovadiah states throughout his writings is that by definition a live female singer is sexually arousing and thus prohibited. Although I think the evidence shows that R. Ovadiah agrees that theoretically *kol ishah* is only forbidden if it leads to <>hirurim >, in practice he assumes that <>all live female singing falls into this category. (I wonder, however, if he would also forbid the live singing of a very old woman, which would in no way be sensual.)

I found another interesting passage regarding *kol ishah* in the *Meshivat Nefesh* of R. Yohanan Luria (16th century). On p. 144, after explaining how the women of the desert could sing in front of the men (Ex. 15:21), he writes:

_ומזה הטעם ראוי למחות לנשים המשוררות לכלות לפני האנשים רק הבתולות שמותרים בזה כדי לחבב הבחורים לקפוץ עלם לשם אישות._

He makes the same point on the previous page, and concludes (p. 143):

_מהממה בתולה לעשות כן גersed אחריה על חורף иностранות Gobierno._

What it means is that while married women can’t sing in front of men, unmarried women are permitted to do so in order to attract the attention of the young men, similar to what they did in Temple days when they would dance before the eligible bachelors.

Some might be wondering, how was this permitted since married men will also hear the women sing, and being that they are not in the “market” for a wife, what permission is there for them to listen to and be physically attracted to the young women? I think the answer is obvious, that those men who would have had
improper thoughts were not supposed to listen to the women, just as I presume they were not supposed to watch the single women dance in Temple days. Yet the Sages did not ban this dancing because of what some men might be thinking, and similarly, Luria permits the singing by single women and is not concerned that some married men might also be listening. The logic behind Luria’s position is that young men looking for brides are supposed to be attracted to young women. The latter dress up nicely so that the men look at them, they put on makeup for this purpose, and yes, they sing in front of the men, all in order to make themselves attractive.

Here is the title page of Luria’s sefer.
I already mentioned the opera, so before concluding I refer you to S.’s post [here](#).

He points to an early eighteenth-century communal decree in Altona-Hamburg-Wandsbek forbidding attendance at the opera,
except for on Hanukkah and Purim when it was permitted. The text is also found in Simhah Assaf, *Ha-Onshin Aharei Hatimat ha-Talmud*, p. 116.

Finally, I would like to point to a very interesting source that as far as I know has never been mentioned in any of the many halakhic articles dealing with *kol ishah*. I refer to R. Joseph Hayyim’s *Imrei Binah*, ch. 3, no. 79. Here is the page.

For those who are unclear as to what he means, he explains it himself in his book *Ateret Tiferet im Pelaot Rabot*. Here is the title page of the book, which for some reason is not on hebrewbooks.org or Otzar ha-Hokhmah. The text that appears in
Imrei Binah also appears in this book, and R. Joseph Hayyim’s explanation is found on p. 116 (no. 202).
According to R. Joseph Hayyim, if the singing of an individual woman is accompanied by instruments, meaning that there are “many voices”, then it is permissible. This is an incredible limud zekhut, because pretty much every singer today is accompanied by music.[43]

[1] Referring to the beginning of Esther, where Ahasuerus is said to rule from Hodu to Cush, the Talmud, Megillah 11b,
states:

From Hodu to Cush: Rav and Samuel gave different interpretations of this. One said that Hodu is at one end of the world and Cush at the other, and the other said that Hodu and Cush adjoin one another, and that [the meaning is that] as he ruled over Hodu and Cush, so he ruled from one end of the world to the other.

This passage should immediately raise a couple of questions in people’s minds. 1. Since there is no doubt that both amoraim knew where India and Ethiopia were located, why did one of them explain that the two countries are next to each other? How come he didn’t accept the common identification of Cush and Ethiopia? 2. According to the first opinion, that Hodu is at one end of the world and Cush at the other, are we to understand from this that he thought that the world was flat? (I realize that “end of the world” could be used the same way we use it today, but I wonder if that is the peshat.)

[2] See also his commentary to Isaiah 18:1, where he regards Cush as being in the East.

[3] In the last post I spoke a bit about what Rashi regarded as beautiful, based on his commentary to Song of Songs. We also find from other comments of his that he did not regard Cushim as beautiful. Based upon what we have already seen, I assume that for Rashi a Cushi would have an Indian complexion. (See Moed Katan 16b regarding the skin of the Cushites.) In his commentary to Gen. 12:11 he speaks of “black and repulsive people, brothers of the Cushim.” In Num. 12:1 the Torah speaks of the Cushite that Moses married. Rashi does not take this literally and writes: “Because of her beauty she is called Cushite, as one calls his handsome son ‘Cushite’ in order that the evil eye should not have power over him.” (This same passage appears in Midrash Tanhuma 96:13, and see Yitzhak Aviner, Heikhal Rashi [Tel Aviv, 1960], vol. 4, p. 234, that it was inserted from Rashi into the Tanhuma). I think it must be very hard to teach this Rashi in elementary and even high school. One can easily see that if one of the students is a “person of color” or the student’s parent is, that the assumption of this Rashi could be very hurtful to the student. Has any reader had to deal with this?
For the same approach by Rashi, and here too it appears to be his own interpretation (although obviously based on the earlier rabbinic understanding of Cushite), see Sukkah 53a, where it mentions that Solomon had two Cushite servants. Rashi writes:

תרי כושאי: על שם היו יפים קרי להו הכי
See Arukh la-Ner, ad loc., who questions Rashi’s explanation, since while the Sages speak of Tziporah as being called Cushite in Num. 12:1 because of her beauty, they never say that a man would be called Cushite if he was handsome. This is precisely why I noted that what Rashi writes here is apparently his own interpretation.

Incidentally, the Artscroll translation to this passage makes as unfortunate error. While the Talmud speaks of “two Cushites”, Artscroll translates תרי כושאי as “two Cutheans.”

The Vilna Talmud’s version is תרי כושאי, while Rashi has תרתי כושאי. Rashi’s text preserves the correct version (see also Arukh ha-Shalem, s. v. כוש, p. 348 n. 4) as כושאי is masculine while כושאי is feminine. In R. Meir Mazuz’s new book, Darkhei ha-Iyun, p. 5, he deals with these words and calls attention to the common grammatical error when people write תרתי כושאי. Since כושאי is masculine, the proper formulation is ether תרתי כושאי or תרתי כושאי.


It contains the Chief Rabbinate of Israel’s acknowledgment that Hinduism is monotheistic. I don’t even think that one can speak of shifuf when it comes to Hinduism. What you have in Hinduism are manifestations of the one God, and this does not appear to violate any Noahide commandment. This is significant
since in the Jewish imagination Hinduism has often been seen as a classic example of real idolatry. Thus, right at the beginning of many seforim it states that passages dealing with Gentiles are only referring to idolators in places like India.

Related to the latter point, there is an unbelievable error by the great R. Judah Aszod. In 1833 the Hatam Sofer responded to the following query of a Hungarian rabbi: During Christian religious ceremonies that pass through the city, are Jews permitted to put candles in their windows? The fear was that if the Jews don’t do that, their homes would be attacked on Christian thugs (Hatam Sofer, Yoreh Deah, no. 133 [end]). The Hatam Sofer concluded that while it was permissible to indirectly request a non-Jew to light the candle, it is absolutely forbidden for a Jew to do so.

In the Hatam Sofer’s responsum he speaks of the candle lighting that takes place in “India”.

There is no doubt whatsoever that the word “India” is not to be taken literally and that the Hatam Sofer is referring to local Christian practices. After all, he was responding to the question of a Hungarian rabbi! The responsa by his son, grandson, and Deutsch don’t even feel that it is necessary to point this out, as it is so obvious.

It is incredible is that R. Judah Aszod, Yehudah Ya’aleh, Yoreh Deah, no. 170, takes the Hatam Sofer to really be speaking of India, even though as just mentioned, he was responding to a halakhah le-ma’aseh question from Hungary, not from a rabbi in Bombay! This misunderstanding contributes to
Aszod’s lenient decision.

In this passage he cites two sources. The second one is the Shakh, whom he cites as claiming that the Christian religious item (I assume he means the crucifix) does not have the status of an אֱלִיל. However, the Shakh actually says the exact opposite of what Aszod quotes him as saying.

The other source he cites is R. Moses Isserles, whose comments are indeed quite significant. I don’t understand why this source is not cited in support of celebrating Thanksgiving even by those who assume that there is some religious component to the holiday.

Presumably, the opponents of Thanksgiving assume that there is no enmity in not celebrating, so the Rama’s permission doesn’t apply. I wonder though, do the people in Lakewood who require the non-Jewish bus drivers to work on Thanksgiving really think that this insistence doesn’t create enmity?

Returning to the responsum of Aszod, the problems I have pointed to were noted by R. Hayyim Eleazar Shapira, Minhat Eleazar, vol. 1 no. 53:3, and he is dumbfounded. It is precisely with regard to this sort of responsum, where the errors are obvious (misunderstanding the clear meaning of the Hatam Sofer, misquoting the Shakh), and it was published posthumously, that people are often tempted to claim that it is not authentic. I won’t go this far, but is it possible that a student wrote the responsum and Aszod just signed his name without examining it carefully?

As with the other volumes of this series, one can find
lots of interesting passages in vol. 4. Here are just a few.
P. 56b: Moses opposed the eating of meat, but he could not
forbid it because the people would regard this as heresy. P.
98b: Hirschensohn mentions the notion, already expressed by
the Vilna Gaon, that sometimes the Talmud’s explanation of the
Mishnah is to be understood as a form of derash. In other
words, the explanation is not in accord with what the Mishnah
really intended. He also refers to Berdyczewski and writes
zikhrono li-verakhah after his name. P. 14a: There is no
obligation in contemporary times for married women to cover
their hair.

This source has not been mentioned in any of the recent
discussions about women’s hair covering. I hope to soon
discuss Hirschensohn’s viewpoint at greater length, including
his radically new understanding of שער באשה ערוה. I will do so
as part of a larger discussion of the issue of women’s hair
covering.

[8] R. Moshe Taub reminded me of Artscroll’s commentary to
Deut. 34:5, which I neglected to mention in my book.
[9] I had been planning to offer one further example, but I
was shown to be wrong. Let me explain: A little while ago R.
Natan Slifkin had a post on werewolves, citing R. Efraim ben
Shimshon’s strange comments in this regard. See here.

Slifkin earlier had written about this in his Sacred Monsters.
None of this was a revelation to me since I had earlier seen
the material from R. Efraim in R. Yosef Aryeh Lorincz’ Pelaot
Edotekha, vol. 2, pp. 136-137. Not surprisingly, Lorincz takes
this all very seriously. Readers might recall that I mentioned
Lorincz’ book here. I called attention to his discussion of
whether it is permitted to eat the flesh and drink the blood
of demons. After this post I had a correspondence with someone
who wanted to know what I thought about what Lorincz had
written. I told him although I don’t know what the halakhah is
in this matter, I nevertheless promise to eat the first demon
that Lorincz is able to capture. I further told him that I would even volunteer to shecht it. My correspondent wasn’t seeing the comedy in this, as he thought that this was a very serious issue, that someone whom we are told to respect for his Torah knowledge could actually, in the twenty-first century, be discussing such a matter as a real halakhic problem. He was also adamant that if such a book was published by someone who taught at a Modern Orthodox school, the principal should immediately fire the author. Further correspondence revealed that he also didn’t think that anyone who believed in demons should be allowed to teach at Modern Orthodox schools.

My response to him was that I don’t think we need to get all out of shape about demons. To begin with, and readers can correct me if I am wrong, I don’t think that most people in the American haredi world really believe in demons. Yes, I know they study the talmudic passages that refer to demons, and will mention them as the reason for washing one’s hand three times in the morning, but based on conversations I have had with people in the haredi world (admittedly, most of them from the intellectual elite), I don’t think that they take it seriously. (When I say they don’t “believe” in demons, I mean real belief in the role of demons and how they affect humanity, as expressed in the Talmud and elsewhere.) It is almost like the emperor has no clothes, in that they don’t believe it but continue acting as if they do, afraid of what will happen if they are “outed”. (I have found a similar phenomenon with regard to Daas Torah. I have discussed this issue with many people in the haredi world, and have yet to find even one who accepts the version of Daas Torah advocated by so-called Haredi spokesmen and Yated Neeman.) But even if I am wrong in this, there are lots more important things to keep out of Modern Orthodox schools than an occasional reference to demons. How about the negative comments about non-Jews and even racist statements (sometimes under the guise of Torah) that children are exposed to in Modern Orthodox schools? How about rebbes telling the students that there is such a thing as spontaneous generation, which is akin to telling the students to sign up with Flat Earth society?

Getting back to werewolves, there is someone much better known
than R. Efraim who refers to them, namely, Rashi. In his commentary to Job 5:23, Rashi explains that חית השדה means werewolf. (He offers the Old French, for which see Moshe Catane, *Otzar ha-Loazim*, no. 4208, and Joseph Greenberg, *Otzar Loazei Rashi be-Tanakh*, p. 211) He further adds that this is also the meaning of אדני השדה (See Kilayim 8:5). I have to admit that I was all set in this post to mention that Artscroll, which always cites Rashi’s interpretation, in this example chose to omit it. Without even examining the commentary, I was sure that Artscroll would choose to avoid mentioning anything about werewolves. Yet when I actually opened up the commentary, prepared by R. Moshe Eisemann, I was pleasantly surprised to see that he indeed tells the truth, and the whole truth, i.e.,, that Rashi was referring to a werewolf. I found something else in this volume that I didn’t expect. In an appendix he discusses whether the commentary attributed to Rashi was actually written by him. Unfortunately, Eisemann did not feel that he should inform the reader which academic sources he used in preparing this appendix.

[10] I don’t understand why Artscroll uses this word. The overviews found at the beginning of their books are actually not overviews. (Look up the word if you are not sure what it means). They should have been called what they are, namely, “introductions.”

[11] The Talmud explains *sharim ve-sharot* as מינים זמר, and Rashi, Eccl. 2:8, clearly based on the Talmud, explains *sharim ve-sharot* as מינים כלי זמר. Either Rashi’s text of the Talmud also included the word כלי, or this is how he understood the talmudic expression מינים זמר. (Literally, מינים זמר means “types of music”, and when the word כלי is added it means “various musical instruments.”)

[12] His commentary, Ta’alumot Hokhmah, is found in the standard Mikraot Gedolot.

[13] According to R. Jehiel Jacob Weinberg, the Rambam’s opinion is that *kol ishah* is only forbidden if one derives sensual pleasure from it. See *Seridei Esh*, vol. 2 no. 8.
[16] See here.
[17] R. Yuval Sherlo does not permit one to attend the opera, but if one is stuck in a situation, such as a soldier at a military event, then he rules that it is permissible to remain even though women are singing. See here.
[18] Conversations 12 (Winter 2012), pp. 43, 47; also available here. At the end of the article, Angel concludes: “Married women need not cover their hair, as long as their hair is maintained in a modest style. The wearing of wigs does not constitute a proper hair-covering for those married women who wish to cover their hair. Rather, such women should wear hats or other head coverings that actually cover their hair.” He also discusses hair covering on YouTube here.
[20] See Seridei Esh, vol. 2 no. 8, and see also the helpful summary of positions available here.
[21] In support of this view, one can cite Hagahot Maimoniyot, Hilkhot Keriat Shema 3:16:
[22] It seems to me that Tendler’s description of R. Moshe’s opinion is contradicted by Iggerot Moshe, Orah Hayyim 1, no. 26, Orah Hayyim 4, no. 15.
[23] For a contemporary example of an Orthodox synagogue allowing women to sing, see here.
[24] See e.g., here, here, here and here.
[26] Jewish Women in Time and Torah (Hoboken, 1990), p. 62. Berkovits also understood the matter of women’s hair covering in the same fashion, and did not regard it as an obligation in contemporary times (heard from Berkovits’ son, Prof. Avraham Berkovits).
[27] See here.
[28] Note the language of the Shulhan Arukh, Even ha-Ezer
I don’t think anyone today assumes that there is a prohibition in seeing the uncovered hair of an ervah, if one is not sexually aroused, the reason being that we see it all the time and are thus used to it. By the same logic, if one is unaffected by hearing a woman sing, even if she is married, there should be no prohibition even according to how I explained the Ba’er Heitev. This is indeed the conclusion of R. Aharon de Toledo, Divrei Hefetz (Salonika, 1795), p. 113a: however, the subsequent words of Toledo show that he only permits listening to a woman who is singing non-sensual songs on her own. He specifically forbids female songs directed towards men, as in a concert.

[29] The verse from Job is used in an Aggadic sense in Bava Batra 16a and Avot de-Rabbi Nathan, ch. 2, and then used by Maimonides in Hilkhot Issurei Biah 21:3.

Since he cites a verse from the book of Job, it appears that looking דרך זונות is only a rabbinic prohibition.

[30] Commentary on Sanhedrin 7:4. What this means is that one can look at a possible future wife and appreciate her beauty, for after all, one is supposed to be attracted to her. As we have seen already, in Hilkhot Issurei Biah 21:3, Maimonides adds a caveat. He states that is forbidden to look at an unmarried woman דרך זונות. What this means is that while one can look at and admire the beauty of a single woman (what I earlier referred to as “moderate sensual thought”), one cannot leer at her, i.e., with lascivious intent.

[31] When Maimonides speaks of enjoying an unmarried woman’s beauty, I am certain that he is speaking of a Jewish woman, whom you can marry.

[32] Breuer, Modernity Within Tradition, p. 150. See Der Israelit, April 5, 1894, p. 503. See my post here, where I
deal with the unsubstantiated rumor that Hirsch attended the opera. I quote from Prof. Breuer’s email to me where he writes: “When I went to the opera as a boy of 13-14 years my father [Isaac Breuer] did not express his dissatisfaction.”

[33] See e.g. here.
[34] See e.g. here.


[36] Since I am speaking about German Orthodoxy, let me use this opportunity to correct something I wrote. In Between the Yeshiva World and Modern Orthodoxy, p. 53, I record the recollection of Judith Grunfeld, “daughter of a learned German rabbi,” that she had never heard of a prohibition against women singing in front of men until she went to Poland (where she taught at the Beth Jacob school). Dr. Yitzchok Levine pointed out to me that Grunfeld’s father, while living in Germany, was actually Hungarian.

[37] Listen to his shiur from Feb. 8, 2010, available here, beginning at 48:20. Rakefet also quotes R. Aharon Lichtenstein that the Rav held that in modern times there is no obligation for married women to cover their hair. Listen to the shiur just mentioned beginning at 62 minutes. I will return to this point in a future post when I deal with R. Michael Broyde’s article on the topic.

[38] See, however, R. Hershel Schachter, Mi-Penenai ha-Rav, p. 269, that the Rav told YU students that due to kol ishah it was forbidden for them to sell tickets to the opera (presumably referring to the annual YU fundraising event). This is not necessarily a contradiction to Rakefet’s point. If the Rav felt that a woman’s singing voice was only prohibited if it was sexually arousing, who can say if that applies to the person you sell the ticket to? Perhaps that is why he told them it was prohibited.


[40] See Zvi Alush and Yossi Elituv, Ben Porat Yosef (Or Yehuda, 2004), p. 37. See p. 408 that to this day he listens to her music, and see also the testimony to this in Or Torah, Tevet 5770, pp. 383-384. According to R. Avraham Shammah, cantors used her tunes for various tefillot, a practice that continues to this day. See here, p. 10.
Contemporary Halakhic Problems, vol. 2 p. 151. One could be led to this summary by reading the conclusion of the responsum, which states as follows:

However, this conclusion needs to be read in conjunction with the question as well as the summary of the answer in the table of contents, both of which are quoted in the text and clearly state that the issue is kol ishah in the context of shema and tefillah.

[42] See here.

For another important limud zekhut by R. Joseph Hayyim, see here. In the newly translated text, we see that R. Joseph Hayyim believed that the practice of European Jewish women to go with uncovered heads can be justified, and is not to be regarded as sinful.