The Yemima Method: An Israeli Psychological-Spiritual Approach

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by Yael Unterman

Let me begin by stating that along with a deep suspicion of charismatic figures, I recognize the value of having a good teacher in one's life. At its deeply Hassidic apotheosis, this latter side of me yearns to have someone to call "*rebbe*," with all the baggage that that word brings. I have, in fact, been fortunate to have had several people to call my *rebbe* so far. Of these, two recent and prominent ones are women, who passed away in 1997 and 1999.[2]

The first is Nehama Leibowitz (1905–1997). After ten years spent writing and immersing in her biography and her Torah,[3] I presume I can call her my *rebbe*.

However, I truly learned what having a *rebbe* is from Yemima Avital (1929–1999). Very little is known about this special individual's biography.[4] Born in Casablanca, Morocco in 1929 to a religiously observant family of kabbalists, Yemima made *aliya* at age 20 to Be'er Sheva. There she married, before completing Bachelor's and Master's degrees in French literature and psychology. She subsequently moved to Tel Aviv where she studied psychology at Tel Aviv University and began healing treatments in her house, along with teaching a new approach in emotional management to groups of students. In 1987, she founded Machon Ma'ayan in Herzliya to disseminate her therapeutic teachings, which coalesced into a method that officially goes under the title *Hashivah hakaratit*, "Cognitive/Awareness Thinking," and unofficially *Shitat Yemima*, "The Yemima method."[5]

Yemima was not your run-of-the-mill teacher. She viewed herself as a channel for heavenly teachings that descended through her. She taught while covered in white scarves, sitting at first behind a curtain and then actually a full story above her students. This was so that the students' attention would be focused on her message and not on her, to prevent the cult of personality from developing[6]—and also because she claimed to be able to "see" things about her students, which she found distracting when in their proximity.[7] People reported that she told them things about themselves that she could not have known, and she purportedly healed people of terminal diseases.[8] And yet her actual topics were not mystical at all, but rather focused on the basic building blocks of how a person functions emotionally, and how this

functioning can be improved, for greater happiness, wellbeing, and centeredness.

If asked what her influences were, I would have to say that I do not precisely know what these were, and I have not come across anyone listing them. If forced to hazard a guess, apart from heavenly inspiration, I'd assume both psychological knowledge (from her studies) and Jewish knowledge (from her background) played large roles in her work. Suffice it to quote one psychologist very familiar with her work, who notes that Yemima's emphasis on one's responsibility to the collective separates her from the discipline of psychology: "According to Yemima, you are obligated to fix your soul. It's not a luxury, because all of Israel is responsible one for the other."[9]

Jewish ideas play a significant role in Yemima's work. On the one hand, they are embedded in her teachings only sporadically: a few verses on the role of men or women, on loving your fellow as yourself, or on the essential meaning of Jewish holidays.[10] The sessions with her could not be described as *shiurim* or Torah classes in the classic sense. Her lessons would be discovered to be instructions for conscious self-work and psychological balance, containing unique terminology and catchphrases. Yet her acolytes would categorically claim that her system was connected to Jewish spirituality and Torah, or even revealed the inner meaning of the Torah to this generation. One student explains: "You can study 'Yemima' only in order to be calmer and happier and you do not necessarily touch spirituality or religion. But from the beginning, there are very specific and deep connections to Jewish spirituality hidden in the teachings, which one can understand only in subsequent stages."[11] Indeed, a significant number of students became *ba'alei teshuvah* through Yemima.[12]

I will return to this topic soon. First, though, I'll bring some examples of her terminology to give a sense of her approach. One key term is "*diyuk*" (precision), meaning the precise action required in or by the moment. Taking into account the entire picture, and separating yourself as far as possible from your baggage, you arrive at the understanding of what is the most correct or highest course of action to take.

Of particular interest to me was the fact that while this action will sometimes involve giving to others, the question the student is encouraged to consider from the outset is, "What is precise and right *for me*?," thus prioritizing one's own needs.[13] Though this might seem at first blush to encourage selfishness—and indeed initially seemed so to me—in fact, Yemima was helping people (and religious women in particular[14]) to rebalance a socialized tendency to put others first that leaves them drained and dysfunctional. Amongst a number of mottos and pithy maxims that she coined was the saying: "*I need to give to myself in order to give to others*," echoing Hillel's statements in *Pirkei Avot*.[15] We learn how to give to others by learning how to how to give to ourselves; and giving to ourselves, when this is done with *diyuk*, can positively influence others around us.[16] Thus the intent was not to boost self-absorption; far from it.[17] For myself I can say that it was only when studying the Yemima method that I first discovered that it was not only legitimate but also crucial to attend to my own needs—a lesson that laid the foundations for my life and strengthened me immeasurably.

Yemima employed a number of other terms and concepts relating to emotional functioning, including: *omess* (literally "(over)load," referring to emotional baggage and unconscious defense mechanisms from childhood); *tihum veHafradah* (creating boundaries and separation from the baggage); *hakarah pe'ilah* (active awareness); and *regesh leKiyumi* (positive feelings toward one's own existence). Further terms she used included identifying, self-acceptance, coming close to oneself, not becoming entangled with others, and many more, repeating themselves in myriad ways throughout the lessons. Her general approach was that the human psychology is fundamentally positive.[18] She did not encourage picking at childhood wounds, but rather contemplating negative emotions as they arose in real time.[19]

Yemima often commented on the relationships between her students and their parents and how pain from those early relationships should not be carried over into the present day. She directed her students to separate between negative behavior acquired through childhood *omess* and *mahoot*, the real essence

of the human being which is of a good nature and well-constructed.[20] “The main purpose of her theory,” notes scholar Tsippi Kauffman, “is quite prosaic: to be able to listen and respond calmly to everyone who turns to us, to be able to stay emotionally balanced in the face of every event in life.” [21] This is done by creating a separation between the *omess* and the aware observing self, which can then, in the space created, expand into wellbeing, good, and self-love. This is what a person’s genuine self looks like, when finally free of *omess*.[22] One practitioner, a clinical psychologist, reported: “The baseline of my life rose to a higher level. I don’t fall down as much. I am a much happier person. I don’t hear this constant disturbing buzz of pain and bitterness that I did before I started.”[23]

Yemima’s teaching was given over in *halakim*, “portions”;[24] the word “portion” indeed subsequently became the official name for any Yemima teaching. The portions were like “therapeutic conversations” addressed in second- or third-person singular. Yemima explained: “A ‘portion’ can awaken understandings that separate between the *omess* that creates distance from the sought-for balance. The more she strives to be accurate, the more likely that she will discover the blockages. The mending also mends the body.”[25] Her students would write these down as she spoke—often struggling to keep up with her pace, the speed of regular speech—and subsequently use them as a springboard for their own personal reflection, which would also be done in writing and shared with others.

For Yemima, writing was an essential part of the practice, creating a necessary point of distance and reflection, and aiding the cleansing of baggage,[26] as well as serving to intensify the impression left by those things written about upon the field of awareness.[27] When writing one’s personal understandings of the portion, one is directed to examine one’s heart and being. Sharing such writings with the group leads to rich mutual gain. And when this sharing was done with Yemima herself, it could at times actually trigger other portions to come down to her.[28]

This writing took place for the most part with old-fashioned pen and paper. Due to this, many of these portions remain unpublished. She left behind no written legacy per se;[29] but her teachings are recorded in the notebooks of those students who went on to teach others from them. Occasionally, the portions reflected current events at the time of writing.[30] Some of the writings have now made their way onto the internet and Facebook.[31] Today the Yemima method continues to be taught all over Israel by her students,[32] as well as by students of students, using the same technique of dictating Yemima’s portions and then reflecting upon them for their specific personal relevance in the moment.

Yemima died in 1999, and I jumped on the bandwagon too late to meet her. But circa 2005 I spent a year and a half studying with a student of hers, Sara Schwartz, in the Nahlaot neighborhood of Jerusalem. This study was, as mentioned, life-changing, helping me to find balance and to be intentional in every moment’s “*diyuk*.” Our job is, I learned, simply to ascertain what the *diyuk* is, time after time, moment after moment. It was during this time that I grasped, probably for the first time in my life, what it means to have a *rebbe*. The way I articulated it to myself back then was, “there is someone who is so far above you in understanding that all you can do is grab onto their coat-tails and begin to soar.”[33]

While this experience of discovering a female *rebbe* for myself stood out as unique for me then, I was, unbeknownst to me, far from being alone in this when it came to Yemima. Many of those in contact her with her viewed her as the female version of the Hassidic *tzaddik*: the *tzadeket*.[34] It’s not for nothing that Yemima has been called the “Rebbe Nahman of our time.”[35] Both Rebbe Nahman and Yemima contributed profound and surprising insights into the workings of the inner world, and transmitted texts with the power to heal overwhelmed or broken souls.[36] Miracle stories were also told about her, such as wilted flowers coming back to life in her presence;[37] but I knew nothing of that (and, with my anti-groupthink tendencies, better so!). All I knew was the wisdom and insight I experienced, that had the power to cleanse my inner encrustations in a way I had never experienced.

Tsippi Kauffman is an academic and scholar of Hassidism who, prior to her untimely passing in September 2019, was researching the connections between the Hassidic movement and Yemima's work. She is the author of one of the very few scholarly articles about her, which I have cited extensively in this article. (A long-time friend, she was also the person who introduced me to the Yemima method in the first place; it is marvelous for me to read her sensitive academic analysis of something that was, for both of us, a meaningful experience that we shared as friends way back when). In the course of her article, Kauffman credits Yemima with founding "a contemporary Hassidic female movement." She argues that while we could categorize Yemima and her method under the title of "new age" or other contemporary spiritual practices, the correct classification is as a Hassidic approach proper. The criteria Kauffman cites to support her claim are the existence of: (a) a goal of personal redemption; (b) a *tzaddik* mediator; (c) a method of mediation that conforms to the mystic-magic model; (d) the uniqueness of communal mysticism; and (e) an immanent theology.[38]

Einat Ramon, author of another very helpful article cited here, suggests that what Yemima did was to take Hassidic teachings one step further and to a more pragmatically-oriented approach, employing their language in the daily spiritual discipline (*melakha*) of recording personal-emotional observations, and creating her own idiosyncratic language along the way.[39] Oded David, a teacher of Yemima's method, has termed it an "Israeli-kabbalistic creation," but without further elaboration or explanation.[40] It should also be noted that not everyone took kindly to her innovation of a new approach with neither Torah precedent, rabbinical chain of tradition, nor approval from leading rabbinical figures.[41] Kauffman deliberately terms Yemima's school of thought a Hassidic-*female* one (and specifically female, but not feminist).[42] Although Yemima taught men, too—separately from the women—many of whom connected to her teachings and went on to become teachers themselves, the women represented the majority and continue to do so. If Kauffman's claim is correct, then we can note that in leading a Hassidic spiritual movement as a woman, with chiefly women followers and also some men, Yemima is unique in the Jewish landscape.[43] For those who claim that the rise in the feminine augurs messianic times, she represents another step towards global redemption.[44] This helps to pinpoint, too, how she differed from my other *rebbe*, Nehama Leibowitz, who appealed to both women and men equally, and also led no movement per se—and certainly not a Hassidic one.

The momentum of Yemima's teaching did not abate after her death. On the contrary, it picked up steam and continues to do so. On Thursday, May 30, 2019, I found myself at an event marking her twentieth *yahrzeit*, apparently the first of its kind. I walked into the grounds of a beautiful home in Gimzo, a religious *moshav* in central Israel: to my left, a barn containing several beautiful horses; to my right, a table selling Yemima paraphernalia. All around me, women milled around, dressed in colorful clothing, many sporting headscarves. Most were dressed in religious women's clothing; some more modern and some less so, along with a small minority that were dressed in less traditional fashion. Regardless of their religious identification, what is certain is that every one of these women was interested in a path of personal growth, infused with a unique spiritual quality.

After an introduction by our hostess and owner of the lovely house, Edit Shalev, a psychotherapist and Yemima teacher and practitioner, we split off into groups for workshops. The workshop I attended, by Avital Bar-Am, was based on what has apparently become known as the Yemima prayer, a "portion" containing the repeating phrase *yehi ratzon*, "May it come to pass." As is typical in Yemima's writings, the sentences are somewhat obscure and not always grammatically coherent. Here is a snippet, which will also provide a taste of a session studying Yemima's teaching (my translation is inadequate in conveying the full force of her language):

May it come to pass that we all merit the genuinely good, in truth.

May it come to pass that your heart shall cease its crying, and you will know happiness in it.

And that you shall be happy, too, in the profound understanding of existence.

And that you shall sleep well at night, and arise happy again, and that you will understand differently.

That you will understand the heart and what occurred and also your parents, to know them well, the good in them and what is not good, if such there is, it is not your business.

Live your existence.

Then there will be within you a secure awareness of quiet existence, of whole existence.

Light that flourishes grows from your deeds.

As with every Yemima class, the teacher initially dictated Yemima's words and we wrote them down verbatim. We then scrutinized the sentences and attempted to decipher them. Participants were asked for their personal understandings of the phrase "the understanding of existence that goes deep/deepens" (*havanat haKiyum haMa'amik*).

Avital then shared what she drew out of this prayer, what she defined as a surefire and accessible recipe for happiness: to do things piece by piece. If we internalize that the world is inherently imperfect, and that our job is simply to engage with those small units of goodness that are in our reach, implementing them steadily act by act, then we will be content in life, for these units are indeed within our grasp. She cited the Baal Shem Tov's statement (concerning God's oneness) that when you grasp a part, you have grasped the whole.[45] She related this to the idea that in doing our work incrementally, we will also be led to a gradual and steady cleansing and purification of our hearts; and hence to much joy. This, for Yemima, is the understanding of the ever-deepening existence and journey of life, which is to be found not in large gestures but in the daily portion of good work. Similarly, I recall to this day, after so many years, my own teacher quoting Yemima as saying, "May it be [*halevai*] that I may carry out my *diyuk*, like a simple laborer, day by day." After all, what else is there?

Following this, we heard a few short TED-style talks from different speakers. Tsippi Kauffman noted lines of similarity between the thinking of the Baal Shem Tov and Yemima. Aluma Lev, a popular young teacher, spoke about the gap between understanding and implementation, between awareness and emotion—likening it to two children on a school hike, with thought being the child that eagerly runs ahead of the bunch, skipping over rocks, whereas emotion is the child most often found lagging behind, heavy and awkward. "They don't even see the same landscape," she noted poignantly.

Ilan Haran, one of the few men present, then took the microphone and recounted the beginnings of his relationship with Yemima. When Ilan, secular and successfully working in hi-tech, first heard Yemima's name, both he and his wife were curious. His wife was the first to attend a lesson with Yemima, and responded afterwards to his "*Nu*?" with the words, "I didn't understand anything; but it was nice." The following week she gave a similar report, and seemed to want to continue. At this point, her husband decided to go see for himself. "I pride myself on speaking Hebrew fluently," he informed us, "but I couldn't comprehend in the least bit what was being said! Yet there was something special there. At the time I was not familiar with the concept of 'light,' but there was light there, so I continued."

This journey was ultimately to bring Ilan to religion. He would familiarize himself with, and become part of, the light he had sensed initially but did not understand. This was true for many, though not all, of her students. Yemima was not an outreach ("*kiruv*") teacher; she taught tools for improved mental wellbeing and cognitive and emotional functioning, of benefit to all. Yet Kauffman observes that people living according to the method reported feeling bathed in light, experiencing "openness to another dimension of reality, of spiritual life, of revealing the divine spark. They say that by being 'in their place' (*al mekoman*) according to Yemima's teaching, they encounter 'The Place' (*Ha-Makom*),

which means God in the Sages' language."[46]

Yemima referred to the generation of her students as "the generation of confusion," indicating that many of the Jewish spiritual values had become blurred during the generation born and raised after the establishment of the State of Israel. She perceived this as due to increased polarization of both secular and religious extremes.[47] Her work was clearly an attempt to moderate this ill.

Today, as noted, thousands of women and men continue to study the Yemima method,[48] including an entire new generation of millennials, for whose self-reflective/self-improving tendencies and emotional sensitivities the method is very well suited. She is often quoted by those active in the fledgling field of *livuy ruhani* (pastoral or spiritual care/chaplaincy) in Israel.[49] Her terminology has actually crept into day-to-day language in certain circles. Devotees of her method include high-profile Israeli celebrities such as Etti Ankri, Avri Gilad, and Shlomo Artzi. Her adherents span the religious spectrum and encompass many types.[50]

However, Yemima's work has not become known widely in the English-speaking world. Ilan Haran reports that, as a fluent English speaker, when he tried to convey Yemima's portions in English, "the language was transmitted, but none of the light came through with it." Thus, those wanting to study Yemima in depth will, for the most part, need to do so in Hebrew.[51]

[1] This is a slightly modified version of an article that appeared at the Lehrhaus: https://thelehrhaus.com/timely-thoughts/the-yemima-method-an-israeli-psychological-spiritual-approach/.

[2] It's likely no coincidence that two of my primary influences are women who are no longer alive, and who, when they were, made strenuous efforts to reduce the personality cult (they both prohibited recording of their lessons, and assiduously avoided being photographed), and place the focus on their teachings. How we could wish that all teachers would safeguard themselves likewise from the highly destructive ego trip that can accompany great teaching and spiritual talent. The Israelite king was commanded to wear a Torah on his arm in order to remember heaven above; perhaps we should instigate a modern equivalent, to prevent arrogance, in the spirit of Novardok? Let us also beware of placing people on pedestals. A pedestal is not a suitable base for a living, growing, and moving individual to stand upon, and limits him or her as much as it does us.

[3] The result of my labors was published as *Nehama Leibowitz: Teacher and Bible Scholar* (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2009).

[4] Many of these biographical details are taken from Einat Ramon, "Gratitude, Israeli Spiritual Care and Contemporary Hassidic Teachers: The Theme of Thankfulness in the Works of Rabbis Brazofsky (the Netivot Shalom), Rav Arush and Yemima Avital," *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review* 5 (2014): 91–92 (accessible at http://www.schwartz-center.org/wp-content/uploads/Gratitude-Israeli-Spiritual-Care-and-Contemporary-Hassidic-Ramon.pdf); and also Tsippi Kauffman, "The Yemima Method as a Contemporary Hassidic Female Movement," *Modern Judaism* 32:2 (2012): 195–215 (available for download at www.academia.edu).

[5] Edit Shalev, a prominent Yemima practitioner who will be mentioned later in this essay, rejects the term "method": "There really is no 'method' because if you call it a method you miss the depth and the delicacy that is impossible to transmit." (Quoted in Micha Odenheimer, "Studying 'Yamima'," *Haaretz* (February 25, 2005). Accessible at https://www.haaretz.com/1.4755102? Odenheimer spells Yemima's name throughout his article as "Yamima," but for consistency's sake I will spell it Yemima, even when quoting him directly).

[6] Ramon, 92. She also took care to disperse authority by not singling out one successor to take over after her death—see Kauffman, 196, 202. However, it is true that she had a community of students around her who held her in awe and engaged in the language of adulation, similar to that reserved for saints. This, together with the specialized terminology used in her method, does create a certain cultish atmosphere. Fortunately, I encountered and benefited from her teachings before being exposed to all of this.
[7] Kauffman, 196. Odenheimer writes: "She saw too much, saw into their souls, and it distracted her, broke her concentration." He notes that she would sometimes reprimand a student, with "Don't look at me!" Or, sensing that a student was thinking about her, say: "Stop, don't think about me, think about what I am telling you!" "You're too emotionally turbulent," she would sometimes say to her students in the middle of receiving teachings from a higher dimension. "The words have stopped—they're not coming down anymore."
[8] She devoted two days a week to healing and prayers for the sick, including traveling to hospitals in order to stand in prayer near patients' beds. See Kauffman, 196.
[9] Odenheimer.
[10] Ramon, 93.

[11] Quoted in Kauffman, 199.

[12] Odenheimer: "By all accounts, Yemima did not urge people to return to Jewish observance. The lessons she dictated to her students did not include religious instructions or admonitions; they can be studied and practiced by religious and nonreligious alike. And yet hundreds of people who were influenced by her personality and ideas have 'returned' to Jewish practice in some form or another. Most, but not all, of the 20 or so Yemima disciples who she encouraged to teach her writings and methods are observant, although a significant number of them were not when they began to study with her."

[13] "Precision regarding oneself comes first. That means striving to find the golden path between self-rejection (over-criticizing oneself or ceding too much) and rejecting others" (Ramon, 94; this is her translation of a passage from the book published by Yishai Avital, Yemima's son, *Torat Yemima*: *Four Lessons of Introduction* (Be'er Sheva), 4).

[14] Religious people in general are brought up to give to others, and religious women in particular may pay a high price in terms of healthy selfhood. Kauffman suggests a comparison with women's consciousness-raising groups of the 1960s and onward, and writes: "Yemima's students also learn to be 'centered,' to stay… in their selfhood, to be able to conduct relationships while drawing border lines between the self and the other… that sacrificing one's needs is not a prerequisite for the wellbeing of those one loves. The learning enables them to make different kinds of choices seen previously as impossible or immoral" (204–205).

[15] *"If I am not for myself, who am I? And yet if I am only for myself, what am I*?" (*Pirkei Avot* 1:14). I heard it suggested in the name of teacher Neta Lederberg that this core principle of Yemima's constitutes a kind of restatement of Hillel's famous maxim. Her *diyuk* concept, which changes moment by moment as circumstances change and so is dependent on the "now," parallels the final sentence of the maxim: "*And if not now, when?*"

[16] Kauffman, 198.

[17] "Rather than focus on why something has happened to us in our lives, Yemima suggests that we must train ourselves to give generously, to listen to ourselves and to others, and to lead a balanced life" (Ramon, 94.) Odenheimer notes: "To the extent that a person is able to stand within 'his own space'—i.e., the space of his essential nature—he will increasingly be able to rely on an ever-more precise and delicate awareness of when his actions toward others are in line with the biblical injunction 'Love thy neighbor as thyself,' which is perhaps the ultimate goal of Yemima's method."

[18] Ramon, 95–96.

[19] Odenheimer. To me, this sounds like the methodology of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and the two methods have been combined by practitioners; but it is beyond my expertise to undertake a comparison.

[20] Ramon, 93.

[21] Kauffman, 197.

[22] See Kauffman, 198, and Oded David, "*Eshet Pele*," Makor Rishon weekend supplement, May 23, 2017. Accessible at https://musaf-shabbat.com/2017/05/23/%D7%90%D7%A9%D7%AA-%D7%A4%D7%9C%D7%90-%D7%A2%D7%95%D7%93%D7%93-%D7%93%D7%95%D7%93/.

[23] Quoted in Odenheimer. I find it significant that the Yemima method was able to offer something to this individual that his clinical psychological background presumably failed to do.

[24] Odenheimer translates it as "segments."

[25] Translated by Ramon, 94. I presume her use of "accurate" is her way of translating the *diyuk* concept that I translated with the word "precise."

[26] David, *ibid*.

[27] Kauffman, 198.

[28] "…[S]ometimes she would stop the dialogue and begin to dictate again. 'So and so,' she would say, referring to a student who had asked the triggering question, 'has brought us down a segment'" (Odenheimer).

[29] Yemima's son Yishai Avital published *Torat Yemima, Four Lessons of Introduction*, which may be found along with other items of interest at http://www.toratyemima.co.il.

[30] Ramon (93): "Some 'portions' record Yemima's response to her audience's struggle with the terror attacks that followed the Oslo accord in 1992–1993. They reflect her insistence on maintaining an optimistic disposition—both personal as well as national—even as Israelis were tormented by mourning and fear."

[31] See for example http://www.toratyemima.co.il. Various other teachers have disseminated typed up material here and there.

[32] Before she died, Yemima "ordained" certain students to continue her approach.

[33] I have since discovered that many students shared a similar experience of being elevated, as Kauffman notes: "In a way, without declaration, she also elevated her disciples in a long process of spiritual development, as many of them testify" (203).

[34] Kauffman writes: "In Hassidism, the Tsaddik… brings down knowledge, visions, abundance, blessings, and brings up prayers, cleaves to the divine realm, and elevates his disciples through close relationships—communal and personal…. Yemima was actually a Tsadeket. People speak of her in awe, describing her sublime personality. She also functioned like the Hassidic Tsaddik in many facets of her activity, bringing real help to people, in body and soul. Stories abound of how she cured illnesses" (200–201). Many praises can be found within the eulogies, personal testimonials, and remembrances dating from different periods collated in the booklet *Likhvodah Lezikhrah U-l'Illuy*

Nishmatah Shel Yemima Avital ZT"L, printed by Machon Ma'ayan.

[35] See https://www.edit-shalev.co.il/%D7%90%D7%95%D7%93%D7%95%D7%AA/. It would be interesting to research the question of to which Hassidic master Yemima bears the closest resemblance in her approach.

[36] The Baal Shem Tov, and following him the occasional Hassidic master, made reference to the wise man or *tzaddik* who is the "*rofe nefashot*,"or sometimes, "*rofe neshamot*," both meaning the healer of souls (the phrase is also sometimes used to refer to God). See for example R. Natan of Nemirov, *Likutei Halakhot Hilkhot Hoshen Mishpat, Hilkhot Hona'ah* 5. Rebbe Nahman is referred to by contemporary Breslov Hassidim as a "healer of souls," see for example, https://gatesofemunah.wordpress.com/about/. Yemima, as mentioned, also prayed for the healing of the body; while this is not synonymous with the soul, Ramon notes that, "the underlying assumption of the connectedness of body and soul and the influence of the spirit on a person's well-being is a common thread that runs through all of these works" (*ibid*.). Kauffman (201): "A sick person is someone who has obstructions. She knew how to open those obstructions."

[37] Kauffman, 201. Apparently, people also make pilgrimages to her gravesite in Be'er Sheva, another sign of her status as a *tzadeket* (*ibid*.).

[38] Kauffman, 199. She elaborates on these from p. 200 onward. However, a disclaimer she issues is of general interest and importance, in terms of the connection between the Hassidic movement and Yemima: "I do not claim a straight historical line from Hassidism to the Yemima method regarding the issue of personal redemption or any other issue, but rather an inspiration or at least a phenomenological resemblance" (200).

[39] Ramon, 93, 94.

[40] David, *ibid*. He merely notes that this idea, amongst many other aspects of Yemima's work, remains in need of further elaboration. Odenheimer notes that by her own testimony she was no Kabbalah scholar and that she never formally studied Kabbalah, and yet experts were amazed by her insights. Asking her about a Zohar passage, one such expert received a long, precise interpretation that filled him with wonder. He asked where she knew this from. She answered: "I suppose from the same place that Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai did."

[41] See Rabbi Shimon ben Shaya's responsum in the *Moreshet* website, at http://shut.moreshet.co.il/shut2.asp?id=84486. Rabbi Yuval Cherlow, when asked about the Yemima method, limited himself to expressing reservations regarding any system narrowly revolving around one person; see his responsum at https://www.kipa.co.il/%D7%A9%D7%90%D7%9C-%D7%90%D7%AA-%D7%94%D7%A8%D7%91/%D7%99%D7%9E%D7%99%D7%9E%D7%94/).

[42] "There is no hint of any linkage to the feminist movement and/or its theories…. Moreover, the rare explicit messages regarding femininity expressed in her lessons are traditional, reflecting patriarchal, essentialist conceptions" (Kauffman, 210). In this, Yemima and Nehama Leibowitz are similar. See chapter 14, on Nehama's femininity and feminism, in my book *Nehama Leibowitz, Teacher and Bible Scholar*.

[43] Odenheimer, quoting Yossi Chajes, brings examples of Jewish female spiritual seers from the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries (after which mention of them was censored, due to fallout from the Sabbetai Zevi fiasco); but he notes the important difference, that Yemima was apparently the first female mystic and visionary who left the world a systematic body of teachings, recorded meticulously by her disciples.

[44] This notion is strongly present in Chabad Hassidism, making reference to such verses as Proverbs 12:4, “A woman of valor is the crown of her husband,” and Jeremiah 31:21, “The woman will encircle the man,” as well as the *aggadah* about the diminution of the moon (*Hullin 60b*). See more in Susan Handelman’s article, ‘Putting Women in the Picture: The Rebbe’s Views on Women Today,” (https://www.chabad.org/theJewishWoman/article_cdo/aid/161694/jewish/Putting-Women-in-the-Picture.htm), and in Devorah Heshelis, *The Moon’s Lost Light* (Targum/Feldheim, 2006).

[45] *Keter Shem Tov*, 111.

[46] Kauffman, 198–199.

[47] Ramon, 92.

[48] There is no accurate measurement of the scope of the phenomenon; it was estimated in 2005 that around 10,000 people were involved (see Kauffman, 196). At the time, Edit Shalev stated her belief that too many people were teaching Yemima; that “the method without the person is not really Yemima…. Her absence is felt very deeply. There is a lack of precision in the learning today. People are teaching who did not spend much or any time with Yemima.” Shalev believed that only those who had studied for many years with Yemima had the right to teach her method (Odenheimer).

[49] Ramon, 78. Ramon herself is active in this field and her article was written in the context of these studies.

[50] Attempts were made to bring her method to Haredi society (Odenheimer), but with what success is unclear. This firsthand testimony in a Haredi internet forum suggests that the Haredi adherents present at a memorial evening for Yemima were almost entirely not “mainstream” or “classic” Haredim (the thread actually serves to illustrate very well the diversity of her fans): https://www.bhol.co.il/forums/topic.asp?cat_id=4&topic_id=1926499&forum_id=771.

[51] I have been informed of a possible English-speaking group in Jerusalem, but have not spoken to anyone who has done it. Additionally, an Israeli now living in Berkeley, California, Naama Sadan, is teaching Yemima in English, and is working on a project to translate Yemima’s writings into English.