

Simchat ha-Nefesh: An Important But Often Ignored Work on German Jewish Customs

By Eliezer Brodt

While doing research for a forthcoming article on the topic of saying תושרד at wedding celebrations, I kept noticing secondary sources citing to the work שפנה תחמש. Yet, after obtaining many editions of the שפנה תחמש I was still unable to locate the quotes regarding wedding speeches! After a while, I came across a citation to a specific edition of the תחמש שפנה and came to the realization that there was a second volume to this title, one that is very rare, and has only reprinted once. While the first volume was reprinted numerous times, it was this second volume of שפנה תחמש that contained the information I needed. It was in 1926 that Professor Yaakov Shatsky published an edition of שפנה תחמש which includes this second section and thus I was finally found the elusive source!

The question remained, though, as to why this source was not in all the other editions that I had looked at; in order to understand why, a discussion of שפנה תחמש is warranted.

The author of the שפנה תחמש was ר' ונהכריק ונהלא – son-in-law of the famous author of בק, ר' רשיה בק, R. Tzvi Hirsch Kaidanov – was born in 1666 in ונהכריק (hence his surname) which is not far from Hamburg. ר' ונהכריק ונהלא was a quite a *Talmid Hakham* and is evident from his sefer and correspondences with many מילודג of his time such as ר' קישבייא ונהוי (See מוי תוכלה מיתעל הניב Introduction, pp. 31-32 ; דומע. תוליבא לע וב לכ ; 200-201)

ר' ונהכריק ונהלא wrote seforim on many topics, but only one of his other seforim, רפסמ מישודיה (see שפנה תחמש, Shatsky ed., 1926, pp. 29-30.), was published and the others still remain in manuscript. It seems from his writings that he was a professional darshan. It is also clear that he traveled all over Europe, as throughout the sefer, he gives accounts of his travels. In 1707, he printed anonymously the first two parts of what would ultimately become his famous work, שפנה תחמש. The first two parts were printed many times in many places, while the third part, the one printed in 1727, was printed only once. (See Shatsky's introduction, especially pp. 23-28, where there is an extensive bibliography of the exact printings. See בקעי ובל מירפסה רצוא ; 864. תוא 594 דומע.)

It is this mysterious third part, which is very rare; indeed, few copies exist in libraries worldwide. In 1926, however, it was reprinted by Professor Yaakov Shatsky in a facsimile edition.

Many important personages praised שפנה תחמש. For example, ר' קישבייא ונהוי (in his שבד תורעי, א, עצמאב, בי שורד, א, רבונאה ד"בא ריאמ פסוי ר' ; שפנה תחמש), strongly praise the שפנה תחמש (זפת אדריפ ארודהמל המכסה); טנרת שקאפ תרודהמל רפוס וועמש ר' לש המכסה), רפוס מתה also spoke very highly of the sefer, (Intro to the מילשורי edition pg 36-37.)

ר' ונהכריק ונהלא writes that his father, רפוס בתכ, used to learn the שפנה תחמש on תבש with his sister. He also writes that within the copy of the שפנה תחמש of his grandfather, ר' רגיא אביקע, he had seen comments in the sefer. Interestingly enough, we find that ר' רגיא אביקע quotes from the sefer in his notes וילג וורע ונהלש. The sefer was among the list of seforim in the library of ר' ונהכריק ונהלא. (See בכק תוא נ דומע וילהנמ שי and Dan's post

Ghosts, Demons, Golems and their Halachik Status about ר' (ועגיובילאנעצטאק סחנפ ר' In 1898, in Faux, Hungary, at the suggestion of ר' רפוס וועמש, a copy of שפנה תחמש was reprinted with a שורפי by ר' סיורק הוהי. For other examples of those praising the שפנה תחמש, see the introduction to the most recent edition by ר' אירול לאומש.

שפנה תחמש was extremely popular amongst the general populace as is evident from the fact that it was reprinted throughout Europe at least twenty-eight times. Even the most recent edition (a Hebrew translation) was reprinted just a year later. What is so exceptional about the sefer? I believe that the answer lies in the way it was written. With its very captivating and down-to-earth language, the sefer speaks to the reader in a clear manner and keeps one interested using many stories and parables (see תורפס תודלות, דומע לארשי תורפס תודלות, 103-108.) In addition, שפנה תחמש was an excellent halachic guide for the masses for regular day-to-day situations.

Unfortunately as with many of our seforim, at one point this book was banned, and even, according to some, burnt. Zinberg explains that the reason it was burnt was because at the end of the first volume, there is a second part containing halakhot, about which the printer wrote in the shar blatt “הנשה לכ לש מיגהנמו העד הריוו מייח חרוא, דורע והלש.” People felt it was dangerous to give a sefer which allowed the masses to easily find the law (תורפס תודלות, ד, דומע, לארשי תורפס תודלות) (107 דומע, ד, לארשי תורפס תודלות) (107 דומע, ד, לארשי תורפס תודלות). This was despite the fact, as mentioned previously, that ר' ריאמ פסוי (174-176 דומע, פייסו רפס; ריאמ פסוי ר' בא says in his המכסה to the sefer, that one could נקספ from the sefer, and despite the fact that ר' רגיא אביקע actually did נקספ from it. However, after this one incident, there is no indication of any other strong opposition as is self evident from the amount of subsequent printings.

As mentioned previously, שפנה תחמש is composed of three volumes. The author lists the contents of his sefer on the title page. Amongst them are: (1) רסומ and החכות with many מילשמ חילשמ; (2) Proofs of why one should not get upset about anything, as everything that happens is from G-d and for ones benefit; (3) Proof of the existence of the המשנ; (4) The תוכלה of the whole year including תוכלה for woman on הלח הדנו (this was the second part of the first volume). In his introduction he adds that he wrote the part of תוכלה because there are many places where people do not have מינבר to ask there questions to. So he included the תוכלה so everyone could now what to do. He even writes that one could rely on it not like other seforim that have many mistakes. (This is in contrast to many *Halakha* seforim where the author writes “do not rely on me.”) This last part stating that one could rely upon the sefer, however, was not reprinted in all the editions of the sefer. In the introduction he writes even more clearly the goal of the sefer:

“I prove that one does not have to worry I give many solutions to deal with pain... I show that the המשנ is created to serve g-d. With this I have included all the מיניד, so one should know how to serve him. All that you do should be with החמש therefore I called the sefer שפנה תחמש.” In 1727 he wrote a third part which (called part two). This part consists of רסומו תוכלה in the form of songs for תבש, מיארנו מוי, תוכוס, חספ, הכונה, מירופ, הנותח, הלימ, הנשה לכו, הלימ. He even included the musical notes for the songs. The inclusion of musical notes was an innovative method of giving mussar. The author’s goal was to reach the masses, even the people who lived in the villages he had visited and had seen that they were negligent in many of the areas discussed in the sefer.

שפנה תחמש, is a practical, down to earth book. We can see this through many points mentioned in the sefer such as: when doing הבושח, one should do it slowly and not be too hard on oneself with excessive fasting (מילשורי ed., p. 154); don’t hit a child before age four (*Idem* at p. 175); a recurring theme throughout the book is the author comforting people who lost children (*Idem* at pp. 27,28,30,55,62), which was a common occurrence in those days. The

When the author talks about הנשה שאר, he says, “we do not sleep on שאר, rather we learn the whole day but it’s worse not to sleep and talk”. מילטב מירבד. (See חג דומע הנשה שאר תוכלה פוס. דומעה.)

He also includes an extensive chapter on נימוחת as it seems many villages were lax in this area (See “Jewish Folkways in Germanic Lands,” p. 323 note 104; מילשורי ed., pp. 30-31). In the third part, (called volume two) which is written in song, as previously mentioned, the author speaks against women that drank excessive amounts of alcohol at wedding and הלימ יתירב (vol. two, p. 18). People in the villages children dealt with the farm animal’s תבשות (see תודלות 145), and people wrote רחסא תלגמ on paper (*Idem*).

One topic which is dealt with throughout the sefer is tznius. The author goes so far as to say that the reason why many Jews died in ט"ו ה"ת and other תוריג was because of lack of *tznius* (מילשורי ed., pp. 64, 124). Examples of *tznius* the people of his times were lax in include: men and women who weren’t married to each other danced together in public, some women were very involved in dressing in order to be attractive to men. In contrast to all this, the author was told that in Turkey, the people were so careful with *tznius* that men hardly ever saw women. Women didn’t go to shul, and when guests stayed in someone’s house, the man of the house didn’t allow his wife and daughters to see the guests (*Idem* at p. 64).

Another issue the author takes a strong stance was the education system. In the first part of the sefer, he recommends that when starting to teach children to learn, you ought to begin with קודקד and ך"נת. Only after that should one continue on to הנשמ and ארמג. That’s the only way people will have success in learning. He states that many people leave the field of learning at a young age, and because they don’t know the basics of ך"נת and קודקד, they can’t understand the tefillos they say daily. To quote the sefer, “I’m writing this in German so that everyone can understand, especially women who are busy with child raising. The women should not think that their sons have to learn ארמג at an early age. The ל"רהמ and others already said that one should first learn ך"נת, then קודקד, and only then move on to הנשמ and ארמג.” He repeats this in the third part of the sefer, in short, where he mentions that people only teach their children ארמג and not ך"נת. (See חג דומע זפת תרודהמ. Professor Simcha Assaf in תודלות תורוקמ only quotes the last source on education.)

In conclusion, the שפנה תחמש is a truly unique sefer. The first part of שפנה תחמש was translated but it could use much more extensive notes. It would be very worthwhile for someone to undertake to translate all three parts of the sefer with extensive footnotes, as was recently done to Gluckel von Hameln.

Many editions of the שפנה תחמש is available online here, including the first - the 1707 edition as well as the rare 1727 edition. Aside from שפנה תחמש the site, from the Frankfurt University Library, contains over 700 Yiddish prints, all free.