



Universität Hamburg

DER FORSCHUNG | DER LEHRE | DER BILDUNG

ספקנות  
Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies  
JEWISH SCEPTICISM

# JUDITH R. BASKIN

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## RABBINIC FORENSICS: DISTINGUISHING EGG WHITE FROM SEMEN IN *bGittin 57a*

LECTURE SERIES:  
**FEMINISM &  
SCEPTICISM**

JUDITH R. BASKIN  
is Philip H. Knight Professor  
of Humanities at the  
University of Oregon/USA.

This lecture begins with a discussion of a brief passage within a passage in *bGittin 57a* that demonstrates how rabbinic knowledge of a forensic technique for distinguishing egg white from semen protected a woman from her husband's fabricated accusation of adultery. I then go on to discuss how this investigative procedure is cited in medieval and early modern Jewish exegeses of the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife (Gen 39), where the same forensic test is used to absolve a man who was falsely accused of rape by a woman. Interestingly, this scientific test is also cited in a medieval Muslim source. Additionally, the lecture looks at the values these narratives attach to female passivity and agency, and establishes, as well, how the anecdote about the husband who was found guilty of falsely accusing his wife in the Talmudic passage is also part of a late ancient polemic against Christianity.

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18:15–19:45

**MAIMONIDES CENTRE  
FOR ADVANCED STUDIES**

SEMINAR ROOM 5060  
SCHLUETERSTRASSE 51  
20146 HAMBURG

**DFG**