

Adversity and Authorship: As Revealed in the Introductions of Early Hebrew Books

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Readers, regrettably, all too often ignore the front matter in books.¹ Introductions and prefaces are not without purpose, often allowing writers to express opinions and feelings and describe experiences that may not be related to a book's subject matter. Commenting on this I have written that "It is the reader's loss if he bypasses this prefatory matter, which is often not related to the subject matter of the book, for it may well equal or surpass the text in interest."

Among the interesting asides, that is apart from the subject matter of the book, are the reasons the author wrote his book and so entitled it, as well as pathos, halakhic methodology, festivals, *gematriot*, and much more. Among an author's motives may be describing his experiences, recounting hardships and travail encountered and overcome, often in conjunction with difficult periods in Jewish history, others purely personal events. What all of the front matter noted here, several by eminent rabbis, share, is that they are deeply moving descriptions of personal encounters.

Kor ha-Beḥinah. We begin with R. Joseph Samuel Landau's *Kor ha-Beḥinah* (Breslau, 1837),

I am but thirty-seven years old. I had not thought to publish until I had reached an age of understanding. However, "the hand of the Lord has touched me" (cf. Job 19:21) these years and I have been ill. At this time my illness has worsened until all have concurred that I must travel to physicians in Berlin to seek help. [As our blessed sages say] "And to heal He shall heal" (Exodus 21:19). From here it can be derived that authorization was granted [by God] to the physician to heal" (*Bava Kamma* 85a). I trust in the Lord for "loving kindness

¹ That readers all too often bypass the front matter in books has been noted previously by me in *Quntres*, 2:1 (<https://taljournal.jtsa.edu/index.php/quntres>, winter, 2011), pp. 1–21, reprinted in *Further Studies in the Making of the Early Hebrew Book* (Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2013), pp. 345–70.

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