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AND SARAH LAUGHED:
Towards an Educational Guide for the Study
of the Jewish Woman

Vicki Lee Hollander

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for Ordination
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Cincinnati, Ohio

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Referee, Professor Sylvan D. Schwartzman

He used to say: One whose wisdom exceeds his deeds, to what is he like? To a tree whose branches are many, but whose roots are few; and the wind comes and plucks it up and overturns it upon its face, as it is said, "And he shall be like a lonely juniper tree in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, a salt land, uninhabited." But one whose deeds exceed his wisdom, to what is he like? To a tree whose branches are few, but whose roots are many, so that even if all the winds of the world come and blow upon it, it cannot be stirred from its place, as it is said, "And he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, that spreadeth out its roots by the river; and it shall not perceive when heat cometh, and its leaf shall be green, and shall not be troubled in the year of drought, neither shall it cease from yielding fruit."

Avot III, 22

This thesis is dedicated to those who help me seek wisdom,
who aid me in times of darkness, who teach me through their
lives, love, and deeds:

Eugenia Esther Hollander

Alan Marshall Hollander

Linda Jane Hollander

Anson Hugh Laytner

Digest

"And Sarah Laughed: Towards an Educational Guide for the Study of the Jewish Woman," is an attempt to create a guide for informal groups of college-age and older Jewish women, with the goal of aiding them to examine their identities. The introduction gives further details on the motivation for such a course and the rationale, as well as the approach and methodology used. The preliminary session attempts to set the tone for the succeeding sessions of the course. It is here that ground rules are established, mechanics agreed upon, and an interchange begun.

The course itself consists of ten sessions, divided into three main units. The first unit centers upon the general topic of identity which is explored in five sessions. The sessions move from a consideration of the identity of women and Jewish women, specifically, to the impact of Jewish values upon their identities -- particularly education and marriage -- and concern with certain stereotypes, most notably those of the "Jewish American Princess" and the "Jewish Mother."

The second unit focuses on the topic of sexuality. Two sessions explore stereotypes about the Jewish woman and her sexuality, and proceed to examine niddah as a possible tool of affirmation of her sexuality and identity as a Jewish woman.

The final unit examines the Jewish woman's participation in religious and communal life. The three sessions begin with an exploration of her spiritual nature and continue with such related issues as her role in worship services, God imagery, and liturgical language. The course concludes with a look at women's participation in the current structures

of communal and synagogal life, and attempts to delineate their future tasks and goals.

Every session focuses on basic questions appropriately motivated through exercises, readings, or activities that are designed to stimulate discussion and lead the participants to the stated observations and conclusions. Each topic also offers significant readings culled from the best articles available. The course provides a relatively complete and current bibliography for further consideration and study.

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INTRODUCTION

The day was hot. The desert sun beat down. She sat within her tent, resting her eyes. She was ninety years old and today somehow she felt those years hang on her like weights. It was the heat that did it. She heard strangers' voices. Odd, she had not heard anyone approaching. She heard her husband's voice and soon his footsteps approaching her tent. He poked his head in and called, "Quick, three measures of choice flour! Knead and make cakes." Then he was gone.

She rose and sighed and walked out of her tent. She took a look at her guests, three robust men. She gathered the flour and sat behind her tent and kneaded the dough into cakes. Their voices carried clearly across the sand, and their conversation was terse. She heard one voice saying, "I will return to you when life is due; and your wife Sarah shall have a son!" She looked down to the cracked, parched earth and from somewhere down deep, deep inside, she heard a laugh, a dry, throaty laugh.

I find Sarah's laugh haunting. For me her laugh is filled with an equivocalness. Was she in despair or joy? Was she tired or excited? Was she bitter or was she resigned? For some reason, I find that those few moments hold a feeling that every woman knows. We have all laughed that laugh, though at times without understanding why.

In our age, more women than ever before are exploring their experiences as women. We are learning why we laugh, and what our laughter means. Jewish women similarly are moving along the path of self-exploration. We are examining our roles, and we are examining the sources that have

prevented us from these discoveries of self for so many centuries. We are examining the sources of oppression.

The word "oppression" is an emotionally laden word. To many of our generation it seems rather passe, almost trite. Generally, "oppression" has an ominous ring to it, yet it is an important word in our discussion. Oppression has two major forms. Persecution represents an overt and often violent form of oppression. This, however, is not focal in our discussion. The second form of oppression is embodied in the concept of discrimination, in which oppression takes on a hidden, subtle form. This form is more difficult to deal with because it is a psychological attitude joined together with covert actions and words. But it is a form of oppression nonetheless, because it prevents specific groups from self-actualization. It is this form of oppression against which Jewish women today are struggling. Jewish women are members of several oppressed groups. Jewish women are oppressed as Jews in the general society, as women in the general society, and as Jewish women within the Jewish community.

Who or what is the "oppressor?" The "oppressor" is not a person or a sex. The oppressor is a psychological attitude. This attitude is expressed explicitly at times, at other times it is implicit. It also expresses itself as our own conscious/sub-conscious attitude which we hold towards ourselves and towards others of our group. I believe the only way an oppressed group or individual can gain "liberation," is through the process of analysis. The first step in the process of liberation begins with the act of examining, examining who we really are, examining what we really think and believe,

and examining what we really want in life. It is to aid Jewish women in the process of examination that this particular course of study was designed.

I began my work on this guide by trying to find out what had already been done in this area. I contacted women's studies programs of various universities, organizations and seminaries of various Christian demoninations, Jewish educational organizations, as well as the representative organizations of the Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative, and Orthodox movements. At the same time I contacted various resource people for additional insights and materials. I found that little had been done in terms of creating actual courses of study. However, the few courses which I did find to be helpful included:

In the Jewish community:

- 1) "Study Guide on the Jewish Woman," by Ezrat Nashim.

This contains various topics, for each of which there are lists of halachic terms, questions to consider, as well as listings of relevant books and articles.

- 2) "Twentieth Century Jewish Women: A Teacher's Guide," by Susan Gordon.

(Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for a M. A. J. E., HUC-JIR, 1977.)

This is geared for high school students. Its major thrust is to look at the role of women in modern Jewish history.

- 3) "Towards a Course of Study for Reform High School Youth, dealing with the Historic and Changing Role of the Jewish Woman," by Sally

Priesand.

(Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for a M. A. H. L. and Ordination, HUC-JIR, 1972.)

This thesis deals with a variety of issues, from that of the Biblical woman, to Biblical and Rabbinic practices; i. e., ketubah, halitza, Israeli women. It also looks at contributions made by women's organizations.

In the Christian community:

- 1) "Women Choosing - Women Growing," by Rev. Dane Packard.
- 2) "LCWR Focus on Women," by the Ecclesiastical Role of Women Committee.

In addition to courses, a great many articles on the issue of Jewish women, Christian women, and women in general were consulted. In general, most of the Jewish ones tended to look at past history, to the seeking of role models in the past, and also manifested a concern with the halacha. On the other hand, the Christian materials seemed to forge new paths, and experimented far more with present concerns and issues. For example, the Christian works offered more exploration of God concepts, of self concepts of spirituality, of the role of language in general, and more specifically, the role of language in worship, as well as an analysis of women's participation within the churches and community. Particularly striking was the lack of interchange between Jewish and Christian women's task forces.

In contrast, this course attempts to include both the past and the present, both tradition as well as innovation. For each element fulfills a necessary

task, and each stands in need of the other. As Dewey stated so aptly:

...The achievements of the past provide the only means at command for understanding the present. Just as the individual has to draw in memory upon his own past to understand the conditions in which he individually finds himself, so the issues and problems of present social life are in such intimate and direct connection with the past that students cannot be prepared to understand either these problems or the best way of dealing with them without delving into their roots in the past. In other words, the sound principle that the objectives of learning are in the future and its immediate materials are in the present experience can be carried into effect only in the degree that present experience is stretched, as it were, backward. It can expand into the future only as it is also enlarged to take in the past.¹

As Jews we have a history of four thousand years with which to reckon, and with a corresponding cultural and legal heritage. This has shaped and formed us in countless ways. Yet at the same time, we are also creatures of the present. We are affected by our society, by the impact of living in a democracy, by living in a secular community, and by the women's movement. This course, hopefully, will convey this tension as we look back to our past, at our present situation, and towards our future.

This course of study was designed for an informal group of college-age women or older. It is within such a group that a special environment of trust can more successfully be built, for risks can be taken and new ideas tried on. This process can lead to growth and a strong sense of self-affirmation; this in turn, reinforces and nurtures the learning experience, and promotes the impetus for change.

Though specifically designed for groups of women, this guide can be adjusted to meet the needs of different leaders and different groups. With appropriate modifications, some sessions can be adapted for use in a mixed group. This course of study, is as the title states, simply a guide. It

offers a route of exploration. It touches upon issues of our identity as women and as Jews, as mothers and as daughters. It explores our sexual selves and our spiritual selves. It is the cloth from which each group will take according to its needs.

The major methodological technique this guide utilizes is that of discussion group/consciousness-raising. As Sheila Collins described it:

Consciousness-raising ... is the process by which we begin to make a break with the old authorities and to come to a new vision of reality. The term does not connote a passive consciousness of oneself, as Descartes described consciousness. Rather, consciousness-raising is a process of dynamic reflection which impels one into action. It turns one's former perceptions of reality inside out, so that one can no longer live in the old world but must create a new one out of this vision.

For each group which involved itself in consciousness-raising the direction of movement is similar, although the focus of one's perceptions may differ in detail. One begins the process with an awareness of division, alienation, limitation, and constriction. One then goes on to affirm one's liberation from those constrictions and to move towards a vision of wholeness and unity.²

Each person will bring her own experiences and insights into the sessions to share with one another, thereby creating a special dynamic. This methodology involves not only the intellectual side of ourselves, but also involves the full person. It is both dynamic and renewing. It can lead us to new perceptions of our lives. It can point to new horizons and vistas.

Preparatory Session

It is one thing to have the goal of achieving a plane of trust among group members. It is another thing to actually achieve that goal. This is why the group should be encouraged to have one or more preliminary sessions before they embark upon this guide, in order to talk together and get to know one another better. It is here that we can build an atmosphere where each person feels free to speak her real feelings, or to experiment with new ideas without fear of being misjudged or ridiculed. This following outline is simply a guide for this first session.

1) Introductory Exercises

A) Choose one or more of the following:

1) Who Am I?

- a) As each person arrives give her a piece of a picture puzzle, made by cutting a picture, perhaps from a magazine, in two, puzzle fashion. This will be the individual's name tag.
- b) When ready to begin the workshop, ask each person to find the other piece, or pieces, that will complete the puzzle.
- c) After each has found a partner, or partners, discuss the following questions:

1) Who am I?

2) What do I want to happen at this meeting?

- d) Partners will introduce each other to the total group, using information from the foregoing discussion.³

2) Introduce yourself by name and tell how you feel about your name. (Five minutes a person.)

3) Describe yourself without reference to your marital status, roles or functions. (Five minutes a person.)⁴

- 4) The facilitator should pass out to every person a 5 x 7 index card and a straight pin. Then give the following instructions:
 - a) Write your first name in large print on your card.
 - b) Using smaller print, write your last name, place of birth, number of brothers and sisters, and any other specific information.
 - c) Turn your card over, and again write your first name in large print.
 - d) With smaller print, write down adjectives which describe you.
 - e) Turn your cards to the factual side and pin them on. Silently roam the room, reading everyone's cards.
 - f) Silently, choose a partner. Then turn your cards over and share them with your partner.
 - g) Reconvene as a group. Each person should introduce her partner to the group.⁵

2) Keynote

- A) The facilitator for the evening should hang up on the wall the following list that she earlier wrote on newsprint. Review these points, and discuss any if necessary.

Ground Rules:

- 1) Agree to a date and time commitment. Do not extend the session beyond the set time. Clearly mark off the time of the session from socializing which comes after the time.
- 2) Make an agreement on confidentiality. Only have discussion about persons in attendance; support and questions are only of use when the woman is present to listen and respond. Direct communication builds trust and growth.
- 3) Speak of yourself and direct concerns, not about "issues" or "problems" as if they are unrelated to you.
- 4) React to others from your self and experience. Don't become an answer-giver or criticizer.

- 5) Enjoy your differences. Don't fear others or defend yourself.
- 6) Respond in honesty and respect. Any and all feelings, emotions, actions, and attitudes can be expressed. Expect tensions and agreement, boredom and interest, fear and love, tears and laughter. The main concern is that support and understanding emerge. Fear of oneself, of others in the group, or of society have to be faced and challenged in favor of supporting those in the group and expecting the same support for yourself.⁶

B) The group should determine a time limit for the exercises below in order to leave time to discuss some technical questions regarding the group process.

3) Exercises

A) According to the available time, select any of the following exercises.

- 1) Take five minutes to write down the important events or facts in your life that shape who you are. Each of those who want to share do so in five minutes. Don't get into responses, suggestions, or discussion.
- 2) What natural or inanimate objects says most about who you are and why?⁷
- 3) Have each person draw a crest. Divide the crest into four sections.
In section 1: Draw what you most enjoy doing when you have free time.
In section 2: Draw the person who most inspired you.
In section 3: Draw a Jewish symbol that means the most to you.
In section 4: Draw something that represents an important value in your life.
The facilitator can add sections to this exercise. Have the group share their crests.⁸

4) Business

A) Group's Role:

One premise of this course of study is that every person in the group is responsible for participating in the sessions. Each group member will also have the responsibility of preparing a special assignment in advance of the designated session.

B) Leadership Role:

The facilitator should explain the need for the group to decide the leadership model for the duration of the sessions. This should be either: a permanent facilitator or a rotating facilitator role among group members.

The tasks of a facilitator are:

- 1) to ensure that the necessary materials are at each session.
(i. e., paper, pens, etc.)
- 2) to supervise the group process.
- 3) to keep the discussion moving.
- 4) to preview each session and to do any supplemental reading or preparation necessary.
- 5) to delegate special assignments to group members prior to the upcoming sessions.

Notes to Introduction and Preliminary Session

1. John Dewey, Experience and Education (New York: Collier Books, 1938) p. 77.
2. Sheila D. Collins, A Different Heaven and Earth (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1974) p. 17.
3. Doris Campbell, "Aware Women," Leadership Development Committee of the National Executive Committee of United Presbyterian Women, New York, (n.d.) p. 1, (mimeographed).
4. Rev. Dane Packard, "Self-Awareness," Women Choosing -- Women Growing Local church Resource Staff of Women's Affairs, Berkeley, California (Fall 1975) p. 1, (mimeographed).
5. Sidney B. Simon, Leland W. Howe, and Howard Kirschenbaum, Values Clarification (New York: Hart Publishing Company, Ind., 1972) pp. 174-175.
6. Packard, "Support Group," Women Choosing -- Women Growing, p. 1.
7. Idem., "Self-Awareness," Women Choosing -- Women Growing, p. 1.
8. Simon, Howe, Kirschenbaum, Values Clarification, pp. 278-280.

Unit I: The Jewish Woman and Her Identity

Session 1: Identity as a Woman in Western Society

- Goals: -- to note how general social values and structures concerning women influence us.
- to see how we have absorbed these social values as one of our points of reference.
 - to examine the traditional roles women have held in our society.
 - to move towards a sense of defining ourselves (indeed a type of liberation) which can free us from conventional roles and enable us to explore new options for self-fulfillment.

Advanced Preparation:

Materials needed: pens, paper, overhead projector.

Question #1: In what ways does society define us as women?

Motivation: A) Read and React

... What is most objectionable in the legend is not that Eve eats the forbidden fruit first and thereby causes their expulsion from Eden, but the characterization of her and her motives. Seen from another point of view, Eve might have been portrayed as a hero-anti-hero like Prometheus, for there are parallels between them. (I would not want to stretch the analogy too far, for I realize that there are also many differences, including the whole concept of the Divine and the consequent evaluation of obedience. The central point is still valid, however, that Eve's disobedience could have been interpreted differently.) Prometheus defied the gods and brings fire, that is knowledge, to mankind. For this deed he is severely and eternally punished; but he is also a hero. Eve might have been pictured somewhat similarly. Instead of seeing her as "easily beguiled," legend could have emphasized her curiosity, her imagination, her questioning even of God's word. She would have been imagined as reckless and foolish, perhaps, but with a kind of raw courage which preferred wisdom to immortality...

This image of women, I suggest, is a box into which women have been placed for thousands of years. Men believe that women are weaker, more naive, less trustworthy, less intelligent than themselves, and a girl is taught from infancy

to believe this of herself. The myth of Eve thus becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. And as more and more women project this image of themselves, the more men can point their fingers and say, "I told you so!"¹

B) Discuss

- 1) What were your images of Eve before reading this article? If you could describe her, what adjectives would come to mind?
- 2) Which Eve figure do you most identify with: the Eve of the Bible or the Eve of the above reading? Why?
- 3) When the author above speaks of being put in a box, being "defined," does that speak to you? In what ways?
- 4) Do you feel that you as a woman are defined by our society? In what ways?

C) Exercise

- 1) Jot down the first ten words that come to your mind when you hear the words:

Woman, female, feminine	Man, male, masculine
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5
6	6
7	7
8	8
9	9
10	10

- 2) Now look over the list for female, mark those words that the culture values for females.
- 3) Do the same for males.
- 4) Now look at both lists and mark those items that the culture holds in high esteem, but are not necessarily linked to male or female. (competitiveness or aggressiveness for example)

- 5) Now mark those characteristics in both lists that you value.
- 6) In groups of three or four, share and discuss your lists, feeling free to add to them. Check to see if your descriptions and the cultural descriptions for male and female are the same. Also, look closely at your values as compared with the culture's and begin to explore what characteristics the culture values generally, and how this affects women. Report any insights or surprises to the total group, with the leader facilitating the responses.²

Observation: Society does have preconceived ideas as to women's nature.

This conception can become a self-fulfilling prophecy for women.

Question #2: In what ways have we absorbed society's definition of ourselves as women?

Motivation: A) Exercise

- 1) Put "f" by the following words that remind you of female and "m" by the words that remind you of male.

blue	cool	rabbi
prostitute	nurse	broad
hairy	professor	shirt
lace	director	soft
fighter	sweeper	raper
weeping	cook	pink
service	employer	master
doctor	boss	reason
teacher	narrow	brown
pilot	childlike	submissive
waitor	violet	dishwater hands
secretary	hardened hands	horsehair

- 2) Arrange in columns according to gender.
- 3) As a group, go around the circle and have each person read off one word under the column "male."
- 4) Repeat this process for "female."³

B) Discuss

- 1) Where did we get these conceptions? Can you remember how some of these words gained their identification with "male" or "female" for you?

- 2) Pick some of the words from the list of male, and try to identify them with women. How does this feel? Comfortable? Awkward? Why?

Observation: While growing up, we have picked up certain influences that have shaped our definitions of ourselves. For example, on television, in newspapers, in magazines, certain images of women are projected. These definitions shape and determine our self-images, as well as our future roles in life.

Question #3: What comprises a "traditional role" for women?

Motivation: A) Exercise

- 1) Jot down your conceptions of what comprises a traditional role for women (or various traditional roles).
- 2) What are the advantages of this role? Share both of these perceptions with the group. Then jot down some of the disadvantages.

B) Stimuli

- 1) Project upon a screen the The New Yorker cartoon, found in the appendix to this session.
- 2) Skim the article "I Want a Wife" by Judy Syfers also in the appendix to this session.
- 3) Discuss your reactions to this article.

Observation: Some of the traditional roles society fosters are the roles of women as Wife, Mother and Housewife. These roles contain both advantages and drawbacks, both of which need to be recognized. We need to stand apart from the images society paints and evaluate these roles ourselves, and shape them, instead of having them shape us.

Question #4: What is our reaction to the word "liberation?" Can it describe our own feelings?

Motivation: A) Exercise

1) Project the following list on an overhead projector.

Stages of response to Women's Liberation:

- a) Shock: "What do these women want? What is the trouble?"
- b) Denial: "That's not true for me. I've never felt I was discriminated against. I am happy being feminine."
- c) Sense of Guilt: "Why didn't I realize this? I've always accepted traditional roles. Why was I so dumb?"
- d) Projection of Guilt onto Others: "Women Libbers are a bunch of freaks. It's their problem. I don't have to deal with it."
- e) Integration: "How do I change my life? How do I re-think my values, attitudes, behavior?"
- f) Acceptance: "I want to work to effect changes in people and in society."

2) Ask yourself where you are on this scale.

B) Discuss

- 1) Have we personally had these feelings?
- 2) Do they vary from time to time, and if so, why?
- 3) Where are we now in these varied stages; where were we last week?
- 4) How do these feelings affect our attitudes, style, goals?⁴

Observation: The word "liberation" scares many people due to the various associations with that word. For us, it means the freedom to be who we are, to be full and equal people. However, it also

connotes that we have not yet achieved this status -- that it is in the state of becoming.

General Conclusion: As women we have inherited certain self conceptions and roles from our society. This applies no less to Jewish women. These inherited beliefs and values we have sometimes unconsciously accepted without serious evaluation. These beliefs and values have had an affect in shaping our personalities, as well as our lives thus far. If we recognize this shaping, acknowledge its input, and look critically upon it, then we have the potential to personally and creatively shape our future lives and identities. This concept of self-shaping leads to a sense of "liberation," for it can expand our choices, horizons and lives as women.

Appendix to Session I



BOOTH

"Mrs. Van Leezis-Smythe, third wife of your chairman of the board, said to me this evening at the corporate hooding, and twenty people within earshot, 'We all know what Mr. Parmalee does. He is a very important vice-president of the Hi Lee Lolly Corporation. What are all wondering, Mrs. Parmalee, is . . . just what is it that you do? Do you do anything?' I said, 'Mrs. Van Leezis-Smythe, Your Grace, I fix dripping faucets around our house. I prop up sagging bookshelves. I glue broken china. I clean windows, mirrors, floors, walls, pots and pans, and dishes. I jiggle the doodads on running toilets. I repair and refinish furniture. I cane chairs. I paint and sew. I do electrical work, drive mills, saw boards, and I give birth to our babies. I wash and iron and make the beds. I prepare the meals. I get the children to school. I trim the hedge, plant and maintain a vegetable garden and flower garden. I mow the lawn, clean the basement, feed the birds, the cats, a dog, and a chicken, and I chauffeur a very important vice-president of the Hi Lee Lolly Corporation to and from the bar every blessed day.'"

I WANT A WIFE

Judy Syfers

I belong to that classification of people known as wives. I am A Wife. And, not altogether incidentally, I am a mother.

Not too long ago a male friend of mine appeared on the scene fresh from a recent divorce. He had one child, who is, of course, with his ex-wife. He is obviously looking for another wife. As I thought about him while I was ironing one evening, it suddenly occurred to me that I, too, would like to have a wife. Why do I want a wife?

I would like to go back to school so that I can become economically independent, support myself, and, if need be, support those dependent upon me. I want a wife who will work and send me to school. And while I am going to school I want a wife to take care of my children. I want a wife to keep track of the children's doctor and dentist appointments. And to keep track of mine, too. I want a wife to make sure my children eat properly and are kept clean. I want a wife who will wash the children's clothes and keep them mended. I want a wife who is a good nurturant attendant to my children, who arranges for their schooling, makes sure that they have an adequate social life with their peers, takes them to the park, the zoo, etc. I want a wife who takes care of the children when they are sick, a wife who arranges to be around when the children need special care, because, of course, I cannot miss classes at school. My wife must arrange to lose time at work and not lose the job. It may mean a small cut in my wife's income from time to time, but I guess I can tolerate that. Needless to say, my wife will arrange and pay for the care of the children while my wife is working.

I want a wife who will take care of my physical needs. I want a wife who will keep my house clean. A wife who will pick up after me. I want a wife who will keep my clothes clean, ironed, mended, replaced when need be, and who will see to it that my personal things are kept in their proper place so that I can find what I need the minute I need it. I want a wife who cooks the meals, a wife who is a good cook. I want a wife who will plan the menus, do the necessary grocery shopping, prepare the meals, serve them pleasantly, and

then do the cleaning up while I do my studying. I want a wife who will care for me when I am sick and sympathize with my pain and loss of time from school. I want a wife to go along when our family takes a vacation so that someone can continue to care for me and my children when I need a rest and change of scene.

I want a wife who will not bother me with rambling complaints about a wife's duties. But I want a wife who will listen to me when I feel the need to explain a rather difficult point I have come across in my course of studies. And I want a wife who will type my papers for me when I have written them.

I want a wife who will take care of the details of my social life. When my wife and I are invited out by my friends, I want a wife who will take care of the babysitting arrangements. When I meet people at school that I like and want to entertain, I want a wife who will have the house clean, will prepare a special meal, serve it to me and my friends, and not interrupt when I talk about the things that interest me and my friends. I want a wife who will have arranged that the children are fed and ready for bed before my guests arrive so that the children do not bother us.

And I want a wife who knows that sometimes I need a night out by myself.

I want a wife who is sensitive to my sexual needs, a wife who makes love passionately and eagerly when I feel like it, a wife who makes sure that I am satisfied. And, of course, I want a wife who will not demand sexual attention when I am not in the mood for it. I want a wife who assumes the complete responsibility for birth control, because I do not want more children. I want a wife who will remain sexually faithful to me so that I do not have to clutter up my intellectual life with jealousies. And I want a wife who understands that my sexual needs may entail more than strict adherence to monogamy. I must, after all, be able to relate to people as fully as possible.

If, by chance, I find another person more suitable as a wife than the wife I already have, I want the liberty to replace my present wife with another one. Naturally, I will expect a fresh, new life; my wife will take the children and be solely responsible for them so that I am left free.

When I am through with school and have a job, I want my wife to quit working and remain at home so that my wife can more fully and completely take care of a wife's duties.

My God, who wouldn't want a wife?

Unit I: The Jewish Woman and Her Identity

Session 2: Judaism and Feminism

Goals: -- to view our preconceptions of what a "Jewish woman" is.

- to explore both the experiences and difficulties of traditional and non-traditional Jewish women, and further a bonding relationship between the two groups.
- to examine the impact of feminism upon our Judaism, and our Judaism upon our feminism.

Advanced Preparation:

Materials needed: Newsprint, magic markers, masking tape, paper, and pens.

Assignments:-- One woman to participate in the keynote, see Motivation, question #2a.

- Five women to participate in a panel, see Motivation, question #3a.
- Two women to participate in a presentation, see Motivation, question #3b.

Question #1: What is our mental image of the "Jewish woman?"

Motivation: A) Exercise

- 1) Imagine that a rabbi stands in the next room. Think of words that would describe this person.
- 2) Take a large sheet of newsprint and jot down a collective list of these words.
- 3) Repeat this process with the image: Jewish man; Jewish woman.

B) Discuss

- 1) From where did we get these images?
- 2) Are the words we used to describe the Jewish woman, words we would use to describe ourselves?

C) Exercise

- 1) Hand out copies of "A Woman of Valor," and have one woman read this aloud. (See appendix at the end of this session for this reading.)

D) Discuss

- 1) How do you react to this reading? Do you identify with it? Why or why not?
- 2) Does this describe what people would cite as the ideal Jewish woman? In what ways?

Observation: We all carry around with us pictures in our minds of what a Jewish woman is. It's our goal to enlarge these definitions, and to include ourselves in them.

Question #2: What position do traditional Jewish women have in relationship to traditional Judaism? Non-traditional women?

Motivation: A) Keynote

- 1) The group facilitator for that day (or a traditional Jewish woman within the group) gives a brief description of halacha, and the traditional Jewish woman's relationship to that halacha. The purpose is to give the group an understanding of the framework from which a traditional Jewish woman works, and to understand her world outlook.
- 2) The same should be done regarding the position of a non-traditional Jewish woman. (See appendix to this session for two brief descriptions of halacha.)
- 3) Take time for questions and clarifications of these two frameworks.

Observation: The traditional Jewish woman has a special framework from which she views her Judaism and her feminism, which differs from the non-traditional Jewish woman's experience. This is essential to understand before we can see what struggles Jew-

ish women feel in relationship with their identities as Jews and as women. This struggle both traditional and non-traditional Jewish women experience commonly, and it is here that we can work together and support one another.

Question #3: In what ways do we feel a tension between our identity as Jews and as women?

Motivation: A) Panel Discussion and Role-Play

- 1) Form a panel of five women chosen beforehand from the group.
- 2) Four of these women will role-play the life-positions listed below based on the articles in the appendix to this session.
- 3) The fifth woman will have previously reflected and jotted down her views as a Reform Jewish woman. (See appendix to this session for a worksheet containing a few thoughts to be addressed by this member.)
- 4) The roles are as follows:
 - a) Bracha Sachs (Traditional)
 - b) Arlene Reba Pianko (Traditional)
 - c) Rachel Adler (Traditional)
 - d) Estelle Sirkin (Conservative)
 - e) Group member (Reform)
- 5) The question the panel will deal with is:

What is your relationship to feminism? How do you see yourself as a Jewish woman?
- 6) Each woman should discuss her position, with the group asking questions afterwards.

B) Presentation and Discussion

- 1) Have two women who have previously chosen to work with this section read Blu Greenberg's article "Judaism and Feminism," which appears in the appendix to this session.
- 2) One woman should present her summary of the first section: "What Judaism Can Learn from Feminism."

The second woman should then present her section entitled: "What Feminism Can Learn from Judaism."

- 3) As these women are presenting their summaries, everyone else should be jotting down notes on what for them are significant issues.
- 4) At the end of the presentation, discuss those notes.
- 5) Discuss
 - a) Did you agree with the points made?
 - b) Which ones struck you as being on target? Which ones did not?

Observation: At times we feel that our Judaism and our feminism seem to be at odds with one another, and yet both seem essential to our identity as Jewish women. Sometimes just understanding that there indeed is such a struggle is a step towards identifying the underlying problems.

General Conclusion: We all carry with us stereotypes of the Jewish woman. As we explore this stereotype, we can see that there are indeed many choices within this identity, as well as the possibility to create our own definitions. We also have at times conflicting identities as women and as Jews. In this struggle, an intolerance tends to arise when we interact with Jewish women of different beliefs. It's important for us to realize

our common struggles, and overcome our differences. We need to strive to reach a place of mutual enrichment and support.

Appendix to Session 2

A Woman of Valor

A good wife who can find?
She is far more precious than jewels.
The heart of her husband trusts in her,
and he will have no lack of gain.
She does him good, and not harm,
all the days of her life.
She seeks wool and flax,
and works with willing hands.
She is like the ships of the merchant,
she brings her food from afar.
She rises while it is yet night
and provides food for her household
and tasks for her maidens.
She considers a field and buys it;
with the fruit of her hands she plants
a vineyard.
She girds her loins with strength and
makes her arms strong.
She perceives that her merchandise is
profitable.
Her lamp does not go out at night.
She puts her hand to the distaff,
and her hands to hold the spindle.
She opens her hand to the poor,
and reaches out her hands to the
needy.
She is not afraid of snow for her house-
hold,
for her household are clothed in
scarlet.
She makes herself coverings;
her clothing is fine linen and purple.
Her husband is known in the gates,
when he sits among the elders of the
land.
She makes linen garments and sells
them;
she delivers girdles to the merchant.
Strength and dignity are her clothing,
and she laughs at the time to come.
She opens her mouth with wisdom,
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.
She looks well to the ways of her house-
hold,
and does not eat the bread of idleness.

Her children rise up and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praises her:
"Many women have done excellently,
but you surpass them all."
Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.
Give her of the fruit of her hands,
and let her works praise her in the gates. ⁷

Halacha and the Jewish woman's relationship to it.

A traditional Jew believes that God gave Torah to the Jewish people. The Torah, comprising both Written and Oral Law is considered as being of divine origin. All the commandments within the Torah and their later expansions in the Talmud, Responsa, Codes, etc. form a life-system called the halacha. The halacha is a general term used to denote the body of Jewish law. The halacha is composed of mitzvot, or commandments, which are incumbent upon every Jew to observe. All commandments are holy, and all must be followed.

A traditional Jewish woman accepts this framework of halacha, observes its lifestyle, and cherishes its beliefs. If there are elements about which she is unhappy, or about which she has questions, she has two options. One option would be to take the position that God in His wisdom made a certain mitzvah in a certain way with a specific purpose in mind. The questioning woman's task then, is to attempt to seek out this purpose or to acquiesce to God's greater wisdom. The second option, would be to work for halachic change, but this is a near impossible task. Firstly, there is no one central decision-making body capable of making the necessary legal change, and secondly, our modern halachists are hesitant to create any change.

The non-traditional Jewish woman does not work from a halachic foundation. These Jewish women see Torah not as divine, but rather as something shaped by the work of centuries of men who may or may not have been inspired by God. As they do not consider themselves bound by the halacha, they have the option of accepting that which they find to be inspiring and

relevant to living a good Jewish way of life, and rejecting that which goes against their conscience. The non-traditional Jewish woman has challenged the position of women under the halacha, for she does not feel bound by halacha, and thus can step outside it and view it critically.⁸

Bracha Sachs

The orthodox Jewish woman and the modern feminist would appear to be natural enemies. The religious sister is seen by her counterpart as a placid cow who happily cooks and cleans, accepts her seat in the back of the synagogue, and smiles calmly each morning when she hears her husband thank God he was not made a woman. And to the religious woman "those Lib girls" dress and talk "unfemininely," insult men, and tell happy women they are really oppressed. Neither image is accurate.

While Orthodox Judaism may appear male-supremacist, I and many women like me have found that Judaism actually provides a positive, affirmative way of life for the intelligent, active woman...

...Instead of trying to adapt our religious life to the age we live in, we must adapt ourselves (products of our environment though we are) to our laws. If, at first glance, a particular observance or ritual appears to subordinate or degrade women, I do not decide to ignore it or change it -- I study its meaning and origin for a better understanding of what it really means to women...⁹

Understanding the meaning of the differences in customs and obligations for men and women has made it possible for me to be a feminist and an Orthodox Jew at the same time. Although some customs based on sociology, not law, remain resistant to change -- methods of educating women, for example -- I feel constructive work from Jewish women would be the best way to accomplish such things. As for Jewish law itself, I find that women are accepted and respected physically and intellectually.

I have found the Jewish way of life to be immensely satisfying; it offers the beauty of tradition, a long and lovely heritage, the discipline of the law and service to God. At the same time, Judaism stresses respect for the needs of the individual male or female, in all aspects of life. I find that Orthodox Judaism allows me self-expression, while providing inner joy and peace.¹⁰

*Editor's note: From what I have read, her general headset seems to be the positive identification as a woman and a Jew. For her, both complement one another and are harmonized.

Why the women's conference is not for me

Arlene Reba Pianko

From its inception, the Women's Liberation Movement has had a profound effect on many "unliberated" Jewish women who looked at the numerous Jewish acts which belong almost exclusively to the Jewish male and who then began to wonder which of those Jewish acts they should be doing as well. In the Reform and Reconstructionist movements, there was a simple answer: all of them! Their leaders included women as equal members in the entire scheme of things. Only inertia, and a lack of feminine initiative, accounted for the fact that no women were ordained as rabbis before the 1970's. Surely, the movements were ready long before that.

Orthodox and Conservative women, on the other hand, faced more serious conflicts. Wishing to remain within the general *halakhic* process, they decided that serious study was a necessary prerequisite for any change in the woman's place in the Jewish community. And despite their different approaches to basic Jewish philosophy, Orthodox and Conservative women joined together for study, feeling that their opposition to male domination was at least one issue that could unite them. Consequently, some of the *Ezrat Nashim* women studied both at the Orthodox Lincoln Square Synagogue and at the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary. On *Simchat Torah* 5733, they helped conduct the first all women's *minyán* at Lincoln Square.

Study creates committed Jewish women

Much good thinking came out of these educational programs. As women became more adept with the *halakhic* sources (which were the basis of their study), many

women became more committed to the observance of *mitzvot*. In fact, when I first became interested in the women's movement, I was encouraged by this trend toward greater *halakhic* observance — and was rather annoyed by the opposition of the Orthodox establishment! How could they fail to realize that out of this Women's Movement would come a revival of religious commitment, based upon serious textual study? After all, what could bring people to Judaism better than *Torah* study?

But as I had more and more contact with the Women's Movement, my own journey took a curious turn. In one sense, my own sexist predisposition faded as I came to believe that in areas of Jewish education and communal leadership, women should be more involved — not only as teachers, but as principals and directors of boards of education. Why should the upper echelons of the Jewish communal service structure be closed to women?

But the religious questions — that gnawed at other women — failed to move me. As an Orthodox Jew, I understand my role. Every moment of my life is infused with "Jewish things." Since I recognize that the prime purpose of human existence is the fulfillment of the Divine Will, which is made manifest through the *halakhah*, sexual distinctions are meaningless. For from within a traditional context, both men and women fulfill the ultimate purpose of a Jewish life — following the will of G-d by following the *halakhic* proscriptions.

Religion creates rift among Jewish feminists

I first became aware of this significant gap in philosophy between Orthodox and non-Orthodox feminists at last year's National Jewish Women's Conference. Many unlearned women questioned the *halakhic* process to which I am primarily committed, and questioned the role of rabbinic authority in the traditional formation of *halakhah*. They asked, "Who are these old men anyway? How can guys who lived one thousand years ago tell us how to live our lives today?" These non-Orthodox women saw the *halakhah* as a human creation — the work of male hands. From their perspective, the *aggadah* (folklore) — and even the Bible itself — were written by males. And naturally, as long as they conceive of the *m'tzaveh* (commander) as a human being, they have a perfect right to reject a particular *mitzvah* whenever it is not in keeping with their emotional or rational makeup.

However, at this point it is difficult — if not impossible — for me, as an Orthodox woman, to communicate on religious issues with these women. We no longer speak the same language. The young Orthodox woman today. 11

Feminism, a cause only for conservatives

Arlene Reba Pianko

Rachel, when I described my disillusionment with the "halachic" orientation of the Women's movement I expressed a personal sentiment. If you will reread my article, it will become clear to you that I am not foreclosing the possibility for either *halachic* or for swift change. My objection is to the use of the term *halacha* to describe changes, like the Conservative reform of *minyán*, which result from social pressure and political demands. Unfortunately, you have misunderstood my tolerance. As far as I am concerned, if women feel a need to establish a new rite which will correspond with circumcision or to don prayer shawls these options should be made available for them. But to call these *halachot* is to demean the Divine nature of the true laws. While I find the truth of G-d in the *halacha*, I recognize that many modern Jews are unlearned in Torah. Therefore, I can understand that they might not find fulfillment in a system they stopped studying at age thirteen. My response to them is that *learning* will prove the validity of Torah. Until they can be happy in the *halachic* system I suggest that they search for religious fulfillment using as many Jewish norms as they can. However, this exploratory process cannot be termed Orthodox Judaism.

The halacha is not sexist

The internal war you describe is what separates you from Orthodox Judaism, as I understand it. While I cannot conceive of any situation when my feminism would contradict my commitment to *halacha*, if such a situation should arise, I pray that I will have the strength to opt for the *halachic* way without hesitation. Part of one's commitment to *halachic* Judaism is the belief that no other system of belief may take precedence over the will of G-d. Your ambivalence causes you to question the grey areas of *halacha* and to omit the basic issues. I much prefer Reform Judaism's rejection of Jewish divorces to your attempt to force Orthodoxy to compromise so that it will correspond

with your other values. Rather than spending time learning about the true intent of the *halacha*, you criticize a system you understand but superficially. Your description of the laws of witnessing, for example, borders upon pervariation. The "severely circumscribed situations" you allude to include all the aspects of *Issurim* — religious law. One witness, *man or woman*, is sufficient in any of these cases. Not only are women trusted, but the law extends this trust from one area to another. Therefore, if a visitor sees that a woman keeps the Sabbath, he may assume that her food is *kosher* as well. No husband need check that his wife has properly observed the laws of family purity. Trust is the basis of the family — "the basic unit of the Jewish community." (In this "collection of individuals" there is no doubt that the woman does count!) As far as the latter situations which you describe, even Moses could not testify in a case where his brother Aaron would be involved. This law is consistent with the basic rules of human psychology. To label it sexist is to reveal one's ignorance of both human nature and G-d's law.

Learning: not for men only

Sh'ma is not the forum for an extended debate on each of the issues you raise. While many of the points sound convincing, a mere scratch at the issue reveals the audacity of the claim. Women are *obliged* to learn all the Written Law and *all* of the Oral Law which applies to commandments, for which women are responsible. (At the end of his *Book of Mitzvot* (After Positive Law 248) Maimonides states that women are exempted from fourteen of the positive commandments for which men

today are obliged, but that these may remain as an option for women. In all the negative laws women are bound like men.) Therefore I fail to comprehend your assertion that women are exempted from the study of Torah. In his *Laws of Talmud Torah* Maimonides further states that women, who are self-motivated, are not only permitted to teach themselves the other areas of the Oral Law, but receive Divine reward for such an action. *The intelligence of the human being comes from G-d's transfer of His image to Adam. When properly employed, one's learning can be a key channel to G-d. Serious, sincerely motivated learning will not only reveal the ultimate truth in G-d's system, but will resolve all conflicts between the halacha and other philosophic concerns.*

The accusations at the end disturb me only because you misread my sincerity. As I wrote last Spring, I will laud the successes of the Feminist Movement because in it I see a creative force which may indeed liberate women and men from positions as "objects" of the other. However, I remain adamant in my objection to the "halachic" oriented group which refuses to grant Orthodox Jews the very same freedoms that they demand for themselves.

struggling to find her place in the secular society into which she has been thrust by education and opportunity, sees a need for a redefinition of role — not because the *mitzvos* no longer apply, but because she hopes to make them even more relevant to her lifestyle. She realizes that whereas traditionally women married early and were so busy with their families that they had to be exempted from some community-oriented *mitzvos* for which males were responsible, now with extra free time, the young woman can search for ways to be a better Jew. But the over-riding commitment to the *halakhic* process demands that change be worked out within that process. For Orthodox women, who recognize that G-d is the source of the *mitzvos*, change is meaningless unless it is accomplished through the means set by the rabbinic tradition.

Endangering one's freedom of choice

The most disturbing aspect of the Jewish Women's Movement is the feminists' disrespect for Orthodox women. In any endeavor, people with different philosophical *causes-d'etre* can only work together if they respect each other's freedom of choice. It does not disturb me that women read *torot*, preach sermons, or chant services — as long as they do this in their own temples. But it is indeed suspicious when non-Orthodox women are unsatisfied with all the available options in Reform and Reconstructionist synagogues. That they want to infiltrate the other branches of Judaism indicates a narrow fanaticism. How else can one explain the allegation that no woman can be totally free until *halakhah* is revamped so all women can be free? The irresponsible proposals that no man pray in a synagogue where there is separate seating, or that no person dance in separate circles, encroaches upon my freedom.

I began to suspect the feminists' sincerity when I heard Ms. Blu Greenberg being jeered at a National Jewish Women's Conference because she suggested that the holocaust experience might predispose a committed Jewish woman against Zero Population Growth; and when Rabbi Saul Berman was berated for his contention that *halakhic* change is a slow process. It was then that I realized that many women are looking for a meaningless figurehead who will give them blanket approval to remodel the *halakhah* according to their whim.

A decision of conscience

Clearly, much must be done to elevate the social standing of the Jewish woman. I will be watching to see what positive suggestions are raised at the Second National Jewish Women's Conference this spring. While I will laud their successes, however, my difference in

religious perspective makes it impossible for me to join with them. Instead I will continue working within my community to raise the consciences and consciousness of Jewish men and women.

We have already begun to improve the educational opportunities in Orthodox women's schools, and from this learning many women do acquire the need to become more involved in religious life. But as we Orthodox women follow our sisters out of the home and into society, the challenge before us is that we be *selective*. We must demand social equality, while rejecting religious dishonesty. 12

Feminism, a cause for the halachic

Rachel Adler

Arlene, I was very disappointed to read your denunciation of the Jewish feminist movement (*Sh'ma* 4/73). I can understand and sympathize with your feelings. When we explore feminism, we are in territory which presents serious challenges to our halachic commitment. That is frightening to us in a way non-traditional feminists can never fully understand. Our halachic commitment is as much a part of us as our feminism, so that when the two clash, we are internally at war.

I have always refused to choose between my adherence to the halachic process and my dignity as a human being. That leaves me with many problems. What can I say to the fact that vast areas of the laws of witnessing are based on the assumption that, except in severely circumscribed situations, I cannot be trusted to answer truthfully whether or not I have received a *get*, whether or not my husband has died, whether or not I or another woman have been raped in captivity? What can I do with the fact that if my husband went insane, I would not be able to obtain a *get* from him, but if I went insane, the consent of a hundred rabbis would make it possible for him to take a second wife? How can I reconcile myself to the fact that when nine male Jews and I gather to pray, we do not comprise the basic unit of the Jewish community, but if another male Jew just stands there without participating in the service, he can make that collection of individuals into a *minyan*? How does it feel to be one of those who "neither learn nor teach?" (*Kiddushin* 29b).

Can a woman be a total Jew?

I once asked someone, "If God did not want me to have the mitzvah of *talmud torah*, why didn't He make me a cretin, so I wouldn't understand what I was missing?" The man replied, "Did it ever occur to you that God might want you to suffer?" My answer is, "Not in that way, He wouldn't." The God I worship wants Jews to fulfill themselves through His Torah. I do not believe He gave a Torah so narrow that people have to limit and deform themselves to squeeze into its confines. Nor do I believe that God degrades or humiliates His creatures through halacha or requires them to deny their own natures or destroy the gifts He created in them.

It is painful to ask the dangerous questions feminists must ask about the nature of halacha and its application, to risk the shattering of faith and subsequent life in an empty, silent universe. But for me it would be worse to stop, to try to persuade myself that injustice is really justice, that lack of fulfillment is the only true fulfillment, that our greatest offering to God is a stunted, starved little soul which comes before its Master saying, "You see what I did not become for Your sake."

Nevertheless, I can understand your concern, Arlene. What I can neither understand nor excuse is your intolerance and lack of generosity toward Jewish feminists. You accuse women of attempting "to remodel the halacha according to their whim" (italics mine). While it is true that many feminists do not understand the process by which halacha may legitimately be re-applied, it does not follow that their intentions are frivolous. You and I might disagree with some proposed "new mitzvot," but how dare we doubt that they were conceived b'*kedusha u'v'taharah*, out of someone's longing to serve God. I have never met a woman who served as a *chazzanit* or *baalat tefila* simply to prove that she could, just as I never met a woman who put on *tefillin* or learned *gemara* for "political" reasons. Wouldn't it be more charitable to assume that a Jew desires to do *mitzvot* because the soul is drawn to them? If one simply wants to be a feminist, the easiest way is to join NOW. If Judaism discriminates against women, the logical response is to reject Judaism. I must conclude that women who attempt to harmonize their Judaism and their feminism do so because Judaism is precious to them.

Conflicts of orthodox feminists are real

You charge that the feminists do not respect the Orthodox woman's right to oppose reforms. "Let them read *torot*, preach sermons, chant services — as long as they do so in their own temples." Are you not ignoring the fact that there are Orthodox feminists who are troubled by halachic role-stereotyping? Or have we been relegated to the temples too?

You suspect the feminists' "sincerity" because Blu Greenberg and Saul Berman were criticized at the Network Conference last year. I also recall getting a few biases for some ideological "sin," but I understand that people are not always polite when discussing what is very important to them. We traditionalists are often very impolite to non-traditionalists, except that we call it "zeal." I think we all learned a lot from the Women's Conference, thorns and all. Certainly Saul Berman's recent article in *Tradition* displays far more insight into the real problems of Jewish feminism than his speech at the Conference did.

Finally, you make a blanket accusation of "religious dishonesty" against all feminists who are dissatisfied with halacha as it now stands. It seems to me that if you cannot believe that someone is incorrect or inconsistent without calling him a hypocrite and a liar, then you need a crash course in *chesed*. I can comprehend and respect your decision to leave Jewish feminism, but I will be greatly saddened if you cannot find some shred of virtue in those who remain.

Rachel Adler

The experience which made me a Jewish feminist was my grandmother's death. I loved her greatly and I wanted her to have a *kaddish* (prayer for the dead). Since she had no male relative, I asked if I might assume this responsibility. I was told that I could not say *kaddish* because I was a woman, but that for \$350 I could hire a man to say *kaddish* for her. For a teenager that was an astronomical sum. I told the rabbi I could not possibly pay it but pleaded that someone say the *kaddish* just out of compassion, because she had been so good a person. The rabbi refused.

That was my first lesson in Jewish feminism: where there is exclusive privilege, abuse of privilege is inevitable. If only men can say *kaddish*, then *kaddish* will become a racket. If there must be *mehitzot* (barriers between men and women in Orthodox synagogues), the *mehitzot* will be built higher, thicker, further from the men, until women can neither see nor hear. If Torah may be learned only by men, men will use the Torah to the disadvantage of women. One can't blame them. It is simply in the nature of exclusive privilege that the unprivileged will be victimized. The victimized, moreover, are bound to start wondering why it should be the will of Heaven that they lack privilege. In the case of my grandmother's *kaddish*, I wondered why the prayer of someone who learned her whole morality from the deceased and helped nurse her through her last illness should be less pleasing to God than that of a man who had to be paid \$350 for his services. I have never been able to submit myself to the idea that *halachah* (Jewish law) alone is the determinant of justice and injustice, and that my own deepest intuitions of right and wrong (conscience, if you will) are to be disregarded.

All this makes a firm and consistent basis for Jewish feminism—or would if it were all that I believed. The problem is that I am not antinomian, nor am I intellectually dishonest enough to make a *halachah* in a my own image. I want there to be a real *halachah*. I want to commit myself to it. For the most part I *do* commit myself to it. My observance of *kashrut*, Shabbat, *mikvah* are indistinguishable from that of an Orthodox Jew but I go to a service where I can participate equally with other Jews, and I will not sit behind a *mehitzah*. If anyone would accept me as a witness, I would act as a witness and if I were learned enough to sit on a rabbinical court I would not let my gender stop me. Finally, I disapprove of the whole structure of Jewish marriage and divorce law with its assumption that women must be acquired or discarded by men.

I am convinced of the rightness of these responses and yet I cannot delude myself as to their significance. If you have not accepted the whole Torah, you have not accepted the Torah at all. It is very painful to me to be denying the Torah. It is not only painful but embarrassing to be denying it in the name of conscience. I had always hoped I would not be one of those people, usually as ignorant as they are arrogant, who talk so confidently about what God wants.

In short, I've fallen between the two stools. My halachic commitment pulls me one way, my feminism pulls me another, and I don't know how to reconcile them. Sometimes I suspect they're irreconcilable. Frequently I ask myself how long I'll be able to live with such a tension. It's grim, but I can't see any alternative. I cannot affirm laws which are morally offensive to me without being a liar, while to be a feminist at the expense of *halachah* is idolatry.

Consequently, I am a woman without a community. I can no longer go to the Hasidic *shtieblach* I loved, but I could no more *daven* in a Conservative synagogue than I could in a mosque. (I don't mean that disparagingly; it's simply that such services are alien to me.) I pray with a tiny egalitarian *minyan* (quorum for prayer) which never has a *minyan* by anyone's reckoning. Sometimes I think I would do almost anything to hear a *kedushah* again, and I ask myself if my refusal to sit behind a *mehitzah* is false pride.

I find myself in the same bind, dealing with my three-year-old son. I am frustrated to think that I'll be sending him to an Orthodox day school where he can imbibe all the sexism I've fought against, yet I am haunted by the fear that I may be teaching him to be an irreligious Jew. I try to give him both sets of values. I tell him stories about the mothers and fathers of the Jewish people, teach him that God both incorporates and transcends masculinity and femininity, and show him by example that women as well as men learn, *daven*, and do the *mitzvot* that define a Jew. I'm hampered by the lack of non-sexist Jewish literature for him, although the Waskow family's non-sexist creation account, *Before There Was a Before*, has been a boon. I find myself writhing when my son asks me questions I can't answer: "Can I wear a dress?" "No, the Torah says men and women aren't allowed to dress like each other." "What's the difference between men and women?" "A man has a penis and a woman has a little bag inside her to grow a baby in." "Is that all?" "I don't know. I wish I did."


Most of all, I ask myself how I can justify giving my child values which I myself can't reconcile. Do I want him to inherit my tug of war?

I console myself that he may very well take after his father, who is troubled by these questions as befits a man of principle, but has managed to preserve the wholeness of his Orthodox faith. It is probably wrong and futile anyway to try to feed a child a predigested faith. I keep hoping that if I tell him the truth as I see it and, more importantly, show him how his father and I are always struggling with the Torah, I'll be giving him the tools with which to forge his own Jewish commitment.

It's very distressing to me that I no longer share the religious beliefs of my husband, whom I love very dearly, and that every time I speak or write on feminist questions I am advertising our difference. He is quick to defend my right to differ, but it can't be any pleasure to a man as bright and creative as he to be known as "the rabbi who can't convince his own wife." (He is also known as "the man who can't control his own wife," a charge whose transparent sexism we dismiss with contempt.)

Between us, religious differences have caused no friction. Our observances, with the exception of communal prayer, are quite alike, so there has been little effect on our lifestyle. We feel each other's struggles too deeply to indulge in cheap oneupmanship. I understand perfectly why Moshe doesn't count women in a *minyan* or let them lead services, and he understands fully why that is insufficient for me. We can stimulate and challenge without trying to convert each other, but the questions we pose to each other have a steadying influence. We keep each other both from stagnating and from going off the deep end.

I try to remind myself that my concern with Jewish feminism has given me more than a dichotomizing tension. Under its stimulus I have learned to respect other women, to learn from them and to share with them. Without it I would never have learned the synagogue skills nor had the synagogue experiences which have so greatly enriched me. Through its inspiration I have learned how inadequate my learning is. I have always been so quick to theorize and now, as I learn more, I see how often I am wrong. The *mikveh* article I did for *The Jewish Catalog*, for example, contains some very unscholarly assertions. I'm trying to learn to be more tentative in my conclusions, as I become more aware that my knowledge is insubstantial.

It's ironic. I was always so convinced that my faith was a product of my reason. Now I have no reasoned defense for my faith, no consistency in *halachah*, no trust in intuition. I hold to the *mitzvot* I do and hang on for dear life. Am I a dreadful example of what happens when a wholesome Orthodox lady espouses feminism? I doubt it. I can see that I am stuck, but I can't help believing that a woman less obtuse or more learned than I could extricate herself, and possibly me, from the impasse. Maybe I'm a warning that if you're a stubborn and less-than-learned Orthodox lady, becoming a feminist will teach you and enrich you, but it may also let you in for a lot of loss and pain.  14

Estelle Sirlin

I didn't start out in life as a Jewish feminist. I started out 48 years ago as the daughter of Orthodox parents. I lived with them and my sister in Brooklyn on the same block with my Grandpa and a single aunt. Ours was what is termed today an "extended family situation" . . . then it just meant that my mother cooked all the meals for Grandpa and my aunt, and made Shabbat and the Jewish holidays in his house.

Sometimes I used to go to shul, always leaving my father and Grandpa downstairs. My mother and I went upstairs to where the women sat behind wooden screens, looking down on the men and the *bimah* (platform from which prayers are conducted). I remember asking, "Why do the women have to sit upstairs?" And my mother answering "Because women aren't allowed to sit with the men." Grandpa used to get angry with me because I asked so many "whys."

The holiday of Sukkot (the fall Feast of Tabernacles) when I was 8 stands out in my memory. The *sukkah* was filled with Grandpa's friends. They used to pray and sing and eat and it looked like so much fun. I sat and watched, thinking that it's a men's club, a very special men's club. Where were all the women and where was my mother? They cooked the food, but they never came to the *sukkah* except to clean up. I asked why, but my mother never answered. I was already in trouble with my whys.

I grew up in an adolescence of unanswered questions so my doubts became part of my life. Prayers were made in Hebrew, which I couldn't understand, but the wine was sweet and homemade, apples and honey were a treat, and the house smelled so

clean. I was an obedient daughter and granddaughter. But where was I as a Jewish girl—and then as a woman? No place. I sat in the synagogue, separate and apart from it all. Did God know this? All the books were directed to He . . . Him . . . Father . . . King of the Universe. But where was I . . . She . . . Mother . . . Person? The words in the prayer books negated my being as a woman. I and my sister, my mother, aunt . . . all my women were upstairs, behind the screens . . . in the back of the bus . . . left out. I could never get a seat of honor by the eastern wall.

I met a nice Jewish guy, and got married like all nice Jewish girls. And the next 25 years were filled with 4 children and making a life for them and a home. I did all the charity work and volunteer work that is part of Jewish life and part of the American system and that keeps women down and out. And I didn't live happily ever after, like MGM said I should.

All my "whys" began to come back at me in terms of my being a woman. I tuned out on my Judaism because Jewish society, it seemed, didn't want me except to make coffee or run the bazaar and to make Bar Mitzvahs for my sons. My view from the back of the shul followed me, and I politicized myself through the women's movement. I left my Conservative temple because even though I sat with my husband, the invisible *mechitzah* (partition between the sexes) was there, separating and dividing. I took my youngest daughter (maybe there was still time for her) and she and I joined a *schule*, a Jewish secular school, to learn about Yiddishkeit—Jewish culture, tradition, music, literature, and politics. It was an equal place with no separations. But something was missing.

At 45, I went back to college and earned a BA degree in Women's Studies. My consciousness and my sense of womanhood was and is at an all-time high. The only low I have (and it's a big one) is that all those years of my first and most important career, that of mothering, housewifery, volunteerism and life experience, don't count toward a paying career. Prospective employers still look at me and say, "What did you do?"

I became interested in the subject of Women and Judaism through a course on Women in the Middle Ages. I researched Jewish women in history, and I found them (a very small group) with much difficulty. My interest grew and I began reading about 20th century immigrant women. I got involved with a committee on Women and Religion, and then went to a meeting of the Jewish Feminists in Long Island. I found other women who didn't want to give up the synagogue but wanted to change it, to bring it into the 20th century. I found myself reactivating all my "whys" again. But this time I had some answers, and this time people were listening. The women's movement had done that.

The men who have the political power in the synagogue, the men who head the ritual and religious committees, are listening—and wringing their hands. When we walk into shul on Shabbat morning, they cry, "Girls, what do you want from us? Don't we give you everything?"

No, not everything!

I want to share equally in the decision-making of the synagogue . . . I want the honor of an *aliyah* (call to recite blessings on reading the Torah) . . . I want to be counted! I don't want to be on that pedestal that says "do for me . . . buy for me . . . give to me." And I want my daughters and sons to come back to the synagogue.

Sitting in shul gives me the space and the time I need for me. I like it. But I don't like what I read or hear. I have to tune out some of the words, chapters, and phrases because again they negate my existence. As I have chosen to remain in Conservatism Judaism, I want the Conservative movement to become united in accepting me, a woman, and all women, as equal participating members of the congregation . . . On the *bimah* . . . politically . . . economically and socially.

I don't want to have to wait any longer. I don't have the time. 15



Reform Group Member:

You will want to reflect on your own experiences as to your relationship to your feminism, and to your Judaism. Just to use in case you feel stale, a quote from another Jewish woman follows:

I am a woman. I am a Jew. I am a Jewish woman. I am both and I want to be both. I have only one problem. I am not quite certain what it means to be a woman; I am equally unclear about what it means to be a Jewish woman. This may sound flippant, but the question causes me much conflict. For I have on the one hand, the traditional view of women, and especially Jewish women, and on the other hand inner thrusts which take me far from this image. How am I to reconcile the two? Can I be "liberated" and still be a "woman?" Can I be "emancipated" and still be Jewish?¹⁶

Possible questions:

- 1) Do you have this feeling? Do you feel estranged from your Judaism?
- 2) How does your identity as a woman fit into this?
- 3) Do you experience a tension between these two identities? an either-or experience?

JUDAISM AND FEMINISM

Blu Greenberg

There is much we can learn from the women's movement in terms of our own growth as Jews; there is much that feminism can gain from the perspective of traditional Jewish values. Yet, at this point, the possibility of a positive relationship between the two seems improbable, if not impossible. Traditional Judaism has written off feminism as a temporary cultural fad, if not an extremist movement. Feminists have vilified the rabbis as woman-haters, male chauvinists or, at best, men with ancient hangups. A religion and an ideology which could interact and nurture each other have instead squared off. Why?

The aims, goals, achievements, and even processes of feminism have been revolutionary. Increasingly, public philosophy, policy, and prescription assume that women are full human beings with a potential capacity for achievement in all spheres in which men function. Our secular legal, social, and educational systems are under constant pressure to include women as equals. Our religious systems and institutions, however, lag far behind in the process of recognition.

If, throughout the centuries, Judaism was capable of generating various revolutionary ethical teachings, why should it not incorporate the lessons of feminism easily? Equality in various spheres is a fundamental idea in Judaism—"equality before law," equal ownership of property,¹ inequality of all men.² Logically and theologically, therefore, should not feminist goals be understood as a means to achieving the equality of women and men in the eyes of God and of community?

Oddly enough, the Jewish community, in which many pioneer feminists were nurtured, is one of the last groups to grapple with the

challenges of feminism. True, Reform Judaism has taken many steps, beginning with the Breslau Conference's call in 1846 for full equality of men and women in all areas of religion. However, its equalization was largely formal; little substance or leadership was given to women. Moreover, Reform made fewer religious demands upon both men and women, and the changes it internalized tended to flow from adoption of liberal, modern values, not from Jewish considerations. Basically, the response of the Jewish community, both male and female, can be characterized in this way: the more traditionally Jewish it was—or the more internally Jewish its orientation (including elements within Reform)—the more it tended to resist the challenges that flowed from feminist ideology.

There are many reasons for this reaction. First, Jewish women, on the whole, have been well treated by Jewish men who have been imbued with strong cultural values sanctioning or demanding good treatment. So Jewish women have been quite content to live with the traditional roles—both religious and social—assigned them. They agreed with the argument that freedom from communal religious responsibilities, such as synagogue prayer, enabled them to better fulfill the familial role which Jewish society had ordained for them.

Second, the halakic model of Judaism is currently resistant to change, and halakic Judaism includes in its all-encompassing rubric the religious institutionalization of social status. What was a sociological truth about women in previous generations—that they were the "second sex"—was codified in many minute ways into the halakic as religious-ethical concepts binding upon future generations as well. What is often overlooked today is that, over the ages, Jewish tradition by and large upgraded the status of women by responding to changes in society at large. One of the virtues of the halakic system is its attempt to maintain the dialectical relationship of needs between community and individual, Jew and non-Jew, authority and freedom, religion and society. However, in this century, the halakic authorities have been overwhelmingly resistant to such change.

Third, although it is not always openly articulated, there is a widespread fear that feminist ideology poses a threat to Jewish survival, similar to the threat that modernism in general has posed. Subconsciously or consciously, Jewish leaders fear opening Pandora's box in exposing Jewish attitudes toward women to the claims of Women's Liberation. This fear is not completely invalid, nor is it restricted to the

Orthodox sector. But feminism will not disappear by ignoring it or rejecting it as a danger. Rather, the dangers posed by feminism should be identified and guarded against in the context of a positive incorporation of feminist virtues into Jewish life.

Today secular society has opened a great new range of roles and psychological expectations to women, while, at the same time, the halakic status and religious life of Jewish women remain circumscribed. The situation is comparable to sitting in a stationary vehicle alongside a moving one. The net effect upon one is a sense of moving backward; upon the other, a sense of pulling away, of losing connection, of leaving behind. When confronted with harsh, but often valid criticism, religious resistance takes the form of apologetics and defensiveness. Some Jewish women accept these prescriptions—others move closer to the secular pole, abandoning not only observance, but all traditional religious values as well. Since there is no currently sanctioned universe of discourse between feminism and Judaism regarding the religious status of women, the feminist movement has often attacked and rejected the basic structures and values which Judaism has contributed to human society.

What is sorely needed today is the creation of a dialectical tension between Jewish values and the mores of modern society in light of the far-reaching implications of Women's Liberation. One crucial part of the dialectic would be to measure the halakic and religious status of Jewish women by the feminist notion of equality of women. But there must be a two-way relationship of communication and influence instead of withdrawal and widening of the gap. Thus, an authentic Jewish women's movement would seek to find new approaches within halakic Judaism to respond to and express women's concerns. Simultaneously, it would seek to imbue women's concerns with Jewish values.

I would propose that there are four areas in Jewish religious life where the goals of feminism can be applied in a dialectical fashion, where the interaction—not mere aping or assimilation. Though the truth is painful to those of us who live by and love the halakic system, as do, honestly bids us acknowledge that Jewish women face inequity in these four areas: in the synagogue and in participation in prayer; in halakic education; in the religious courts; and in areas of communal leadership. These areas have been examined in depth in the literature of the Jewish women's movement. Here I will touch upon some possible halakic changes.

What Judaism Can Learn from Feminism

SYNAGOGUE AND PRAYER

The time is long overdue for a serious reanalysis of the principle of exemption from positive time-bound *mitzvot* in light of Rabbi Saul Bernman's pioneering analysis of the basis of this exemption.⁶ Conceivably, the *halakha* could obligate women to observe time-bound *mitzvot* equally with adult men, yet allow for exemptions during those years when there are massive familial demands made upon their time and energies. This exemption might be operative until a woman's youngest child is seven, ten, or thirteen. The model to follow here would be *haosek bamitzvah patur min hamitzvah*. (One who is occupied in doing one *mitzvah* is excused from the performance of another *mitzvah* which runs in the same time-span.) A further positive implication of this change would be that once women are attuned to prayer, they might continue to pray even during those times when they are exempt.

Sensitive *halakhist*s must recognize that the general effect of the prayer exemption condition: women to a negative attitude toward prayer. Women hardly ever pray at home; thus prayer becomes a function of intermittent synagogue attendance alone—hardly an incentive to serious prayer. Although the Law Committee of the Conservative Rabbinical Assembly recently allowed the inclusion of women in the *minyan*, it did not take the necessary further step of equalizing women and men in prayer responsibilities. As a first step in Orthodox synagogues where the *mezitza* has been used to further the inequality of the sexes rather than to allow separate but equal *tefillah*, women's *minyanim* might be formed as a way of encouraging total development of women in prayer. This means women actually leading prayer, being called to and reading the Torah, etc.⁷

Prayer should not be a vicarious act, but rather one of personal participation. At present, men generally perform for women even those liturgical roles which are binding upon women, such as *sidush* and *Megillah* reading. The woman thus practices them by proxy, and finds herself helpless if the male in her life is absent. Even if the proxy situation were to continue to satisfy Jewish women—which is unlikely as their feminist consciousness changes—it operates only

within the family context. Single women, divorcees, and widows cannot enjoy rituals by family proxy and, therefore, are consigned to very tangential roles in communities which organize themselves Jewishly around a synagogue.

Furthermore, traditional life-cycle ceremonies for women are either nonexistent or less significant than those of men. Moreover, ritual response⁸ to biological events which are uniquely female (such as childbirth and onset of menstruation) are conspicuously absent in the tradition. Little by little, and with the help and encouragement of some men, women are beginning to develop religious forms to tie into the tradition and the community the emotions and experiences which currently find no communal halakhic expression.⁹ A lot more is needed.

EDUCATION

Halakhic education is the most important area for reaching final equalization of women in the Jewish community. A great deal of (leeway for personal judgment is given to poskim (halakhic decision-makers) in *halakha*. Part of human nature as well as the halakhic system is the tendency to find positive solutions to problems with which the judge has the greatest sympathy. Women *poskim* are more likely than men to find sympathetic solutions for women's problems for they share and experience them in the most intense and personal way. Considering how far the *halakha* will have to grow and stretch to meet women's needs and overcome disabilities, women *poskim* are essential. Until now, only men have studied and understood *halakha*, and they alone have made all the decisions. Women have been kept ignorant of the sources and processes of the law, although they knew the details which applied to them. Today women must return to the sources and apply themselves seriously to Jewish scholarship. There must be institutes of higher Jewish education such as *kollelim* (communally supported Talmudic institutes) where women can study uninterrupted with some degree of financial security. Women must be trained to make legal decisions, not only for women, but for the entire Jewish community. And the notion of women rabbis must be accepted in all branches of Judaism, for women can make a contribution to the spiritual growth of the Jewish community.

THE RELIGIOUS COURTS

The third area where great pressure must be applied is in overcoming the legal disabilities which deny the dignity of women or cause outright injustice and unjustified suffering to them. The problem of Jewish divorce law (where a woman is altogether dependent on the will of her husband to grant and write a writ of divorce) has led to frequent discrimination, extortion, and innocent suffering. Similarly, the problem of the *agunah* must be reevaluated halakhically. In every generation, rabbis have worked prodigiously to circumvent the harshness of this law. In this generation, however, divorce has become much more prevalent and, therefore, serious. In addition, war is on a vast scale and wife-dependence is easier. A global solution to the problem of a wife's dependence on her husband is needed. This kind of solution has been offered by Eliezer Berkovits in his work on the use of *tenai* (condition) in marriage and divorce.¹ His proposal has not been treated with due seriousness by halachic leaders here or in Israel. Religious courts must change to accept women's testimony. A law which once protected women by preventing them from being subpoenaed into the public sector must now be rethought in terms of equality of men and women. All these changes can be wrought by using the principle of change for the better, which obtains in the history of halakhah especially in the area of treatment of women.²

COMMUNAL LIFE

In the communal arena, there are still strong obstacles to women's assuming leadership roles in many educational, philanthropic, and political institutions. Aside from the question of sexual discrimination, the Jewish community can ill afford to reject out of hand one half of the potential pool of capable leaders.

Thus, many aspects of feminism are relevant to us as Jews and to the total Jewish community. These changes can be wrought in halachic fashion, within its framework. *Halakhah* need not be asked to conform to every passing fad; neither, however, may the leadership be allowed to hide behind slogans of immutability that are dishonest caricatures of

the halakhah. Fidelity to the halachic system demands openness to new realities of life so as to upgrade and enhance our own ethical and religious system. *Torah im derech eretz* means integrating the best values of society in which we live with our own tradition—especially where they illuminate or coincide with the tradition's own ultimate goals—in this case, the dignity of man and woman as image of God. However, if we move only in the direction of integrating new (albeit good) values into the tradition, we would not be an authentically Jewish movement. To be Jewish means not only to take and learn from societies in which we live, but to serve as correctives within the broader society as well.

What Feminism Can Learn from Judaism

Since we are Jews, we need not buy the whole package of feminism. Rather, we must infuse a changing society with our own values and check the excesses to which all revolutionary movements fall prey. Further, we must walk a very fine line—continually monitoring even those parts of the new which we have integrated into our lives to see whether they adequately meet the test of Jewish authenticity. This means readiness to reflect those aspects of new movements which are antithetical to Jewish values in their very essence. Feminism, for all its worth in upgrading the status of Jewish women, does not bode well in its entirety for Jewish survival. Some of its directions may be wrong—or even destructive—when judged from a Jewish perspective.

FAMILY

One of the by-products of the feminist striving for equality has been a strong attack on the family for having been the locus of abuse of women in all previous generations. Thus, Women's Liberation has escalated the crushing assault mounted on the family by contemporary society. The Jewish family, the most stable of all, is also beginning to crumble. We see signs of this erosion everywhere—increasing divorce rate, lack of communication between parents and children, poor models of family life for the next generation to learn from, etc.

Many young Jewish women today state outright their objections to marriage and having children—in striking contrast to the previous

generation whose primary goals were marriage and child rearing. Today we must recognize that not every woman can find happiness in marriage—or in marriage alone. But peer influence is so strong that we risk the danger of having the other option—a traditional marriage and family relationship—being rejected from consideration altogether. This particularly threatens Judaism, where the family is so central to educational and religious life. Much of our religious life takes place within a family context. And the Jewish family has been the primary source of strength and support in coping with the often hostile and dangerous world Jews lived in for two thousand years. The very centrality of the family means that feminists who take Judaism seriously will explore every possible avenue of strengthening the family and correcting its evils before dismissing it. (This includes a willingness to suffer some disabilities, if necessary, and to live at times with frustration for the sake of the greater goal of Jewish survival and stability.)

We must reintroduce into women's consciousness the concept of a total life. Homemaking, childrearing, career and political action need not be seen as competing activities, each demanding total commitment now. Each activity can be pursued in turn, at different life-stages. This understanding might help women who respond naturally to the roles of wife/mother to feel less anxious in the face of contemporary pressures to choose one role exclusively or to be super-women, pursuing everything simultaneously.

Respect for family is important not merely for old time's sake. Despite contemporary desire to believe otherwise, the family remains the most important determinant of educational achievement and religious values and commitment available.¹¹ The contemporary shift to school and synagogue to do the job of transmission of Judaism for us is mistaken. So central is the family and so effective that I would reverse the modish argument that havrona and peer groups are the educational wave of the future, and suggest that the havrona can best be understood as growing out of the search of many isolated singles (and couples) for a family to provide the necessary climate for practicing Judaism. In *Sexual Suicide*, George Gilder places the responsibility for the decay of society on the breakdown of the traditional family unit.¹² Certainly, the family survived for so many thousands of years as an institution, even with its imperfections, because it was—and is—the most ethical and viable of relationships.

ENABLING

Although the family was the context in which women functioned as the second sex throughout history, and enabler was the only role open to them, neither of these conditions is axiomatic to a woman's choice of the wife/mother role today. The family was also a source of security, honor, merit, and satisfaction for the majority of women in the past and for most women today who consider their freedom to serve exclusively as wives and mothers a sign of their own liberation.

Thus we should not denigrate the traditional role, nor those who choose them. Just as women resented the restrictive mold which confined them in the past, so we must not coerce all women into a new restrictive mold—that which excludes enablers. We must check the negative tone which abounds in references to child rearing. More than this, to counteract the current negative stereotype of wife/mother, we must educate others to the excitement, fun, and sweetness of being married and raising children. True, we must bring the husband into a central role in the family, not just as provider, but as childrearer, as involved husband, for the liberation of men and children as well as women. Support of career women, single women, and women involved in political change need not imply denigration of the family.

Another aspect of safeguarding the family is teaching society to open up more to women who have chosen the marriage/family route. One of the subtle indications of the prejudices of the feminist movement has been its ordering of its priorities to campaign for equal jobs and equal pay for full-time careers, while neglecting discrimination in salaries and benefits for part-time jobs, most of which are filled by mothers. Nor has the feminist movement dealt seriously with the adjustments necessary to help reintegrate women, who have been out of the labor market while raising children, back into careers.

SEXUAL FREEDOM

Another new message that should be confronted by Jewish feminists is the "new morality." Although this code of sexual license was on the scene well before Women's Liberation, feminism has extended these messages to the female population, thereby legitimizing

them for all. Formerly "a man's thing" and oppressive to women, extramarital affairs are now a symbol of the equality of women, undermining family stability and contributing to the soaring divorce rate. Concentrated in urban, higher income, higher educational sectors, Jews are among the most exposed to these new values and their dangers. In previous generations, Jews lived by an internal moral code which may have been based in part on principles coercive to women; however, today's shift in mores is a grim warning of the destructive potential in many well-intentioned feminist clichés—particularly sexual freedom.

Judaism nurtured healthy sexual outlets within marriage, and even recognized them before marriage, yet put very strict curbs on extramarital sexuality. One need not identify with male privilege or the double standard suggested in traditional Jewish definitions of adultery to agree with the main goal of the prohibitions involved. As Jews, we have learned that freedom comes only within an ethical structure. Given human limitations, ethics of interpersonal relationships necessarily involve restraint and frustration. Although Judaism always permitted divorce as a necessary, if regrettable, way to end an unsatisfactory marriage, the parameters of the marital relationship, while it was being lived, were, at the least, sexual fidelity and mutual respect. Feminists who claim that now women should have full sexual freedom define freedom as allowing the ex-slave to have the same right to abuse that previously only the master had. Jewish feminists should rather challenge and censure these values in male society; we should press for equal morality, not equal amorality.

ABORTION

Another example of the dialectical relationship between Judaism and feminism is in our attitude toward abortion. In an era when 6,000,000 Jews were killed—and 1,500,000 of them were children—we have to examine both sides of the abortion issue. From our perspective, we must talk about the preciousness of life, not just the right to life. Stressing a woman's right to control her own body, and the legitimacy of considering the quality of life that she and her child will have, should go hand in hand with emphasis on the sanctity of life and on the risk of devaluing it in unthinking or easy medical solutions.

We must ensure that abortion does not become a preferred method of birth control.

The halakha currently opposes abortion on demand. As Jews, we must demonstrate that abortion need not eliminate reverence for life and joy in creating life. On the one hand, this would lead to new halakic attitudes toward abortion; on the other, halakha could help curb facile and nonchalant attitudes toward abortion and the abuses which have grown out of abortion reform. The protection of the quality of life which is the ethical basis of abortion could be offset or destroyed by a loss of reverence for life.

A further application of this principle would be establishing adoption agencies for pregnant Jewish women who do not want or cannot keep their own babies. The virtual unavailability of Jewish babies for adoption, due to the acceptability of abortion, causes real problems for Jewish couples who wish to adopt.

SOCIETAL VALUES

The feminist movement has brought another unfortunate message of modern society—its materialistic orientation. Men and women's worth are determined by what and how much they produce, what kind of job they hold, their titles, how much they earn—not by what their values and characters are. This has consistently led to dehumanization, worship of success, and rejection of "failures," including the poor. As Jews, we must reject these standards and say that the human being is valuable in his or her very being. As Jews, we affirm that there is value and validity in serving and giving to others—in volunteer action and professional work, in being good family members and friends, in doing good works. The traditional role of enabling is still a valid one; as long as it is not limited to women, or women limited to it. We must attempt to infuse these values into the society we seek to create, rather than simply copy the errors of present male society. The truly revolutionary (and admittedly more difficult) task is to change these societal values and judgments, to overcome the production-value standard and liberate men and women for more human living. Many interpret Women's Liberation as liberation to fulfill their own personal needs, narrowly defined. This leads to an attitude which values self-actualization to the exclusion of considering others' needs,

and a denial that there can be fulfillment in giving to others. Good family situations have been exploded by unreal expectations and demands for immediate and unfilled personal gratification. Capacity to live with frustration has been dangerously weakened. The skyrocketing divorce rate can be explained, in part, by the extreme of the women's movement which attempts to deny the undeniable: that successful marriages and parent-child relationships take time, energy, a measure of sacrifice and generosity of soul—all the very opposites of instant gratification.

Similarly, charity and giving of oneself to others are being undercut in the light of self-actualization. Volunteerism is under heavy attack by hard-line feminists. Jewish charitable organizations, which rely on volunteer work, are suffering as a result. The slogan that "self-esteem comes from a paying job" or that "if it isn't paid for, it's not taken seriously"—is a half-truth. Not everyone can afford or wish to work without pay—but volunteerism, *tzedakah*, certainly should remain a respected option. Those who find satisfaction in giving of themselves to others should be praised, not scorned.

MEN

We must check the excesses of those feminists who are hostile to men. Jewish women do not need to hate men to liberate themselves; nor should Jewish men be seen simply as crude oppressors of women throughout history. For most of our history, both Jewish men and women suffered from outside persecution and hostility, and their mutual solidarity carried them through. Instead of polarizing, we must try to liberate men so that they will not continue to be slaves to the ratrace, but also strive for a sense of dignity and self-worth. "Making it in a man's world" isn't all that easy for men either. We must also liberate men Jewishly so that they, too, can come to understand and grow in their tradition.

Finally, we must reject the notion that equality means sameness. From the perspective of Judaism, there can be separate clear-cut roles in which men and women function as equals without losing their separate identities. Male and female are, admittedly, difficult concepts to define, but we must be aware in every instance whether we are dealing with the dignity of equality, which is an essential value in Judaism, or identicalness of male and female, which is not.

Those Jewish women who have identified with many of the feminist goals have an added measure of responsibility, for we are in a better position to influence and be heard by both sides. It is no mean task to walk the fine line between old and new, status quo and avant-garde. God's commandments and the emerging needs of society. But one reason Judaism has survived against all odds, and even managed to contribute greatly to world civilization, is that in each era it managed to do exactly that. To keep the fine tension and balance between these opposing forces is probably harder now—the forces are stronger, tension is higher, and society is more open. But our faith in Judaism and the Jewish people gives us the strength to demand and expect the same achievement in our time. It is a task worth the effort.

Notes

1. Emanuel Rackman, "Equality in Judaism," in J. Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman, eds., *Equality* (New York: T. Lieber, 1967).
2. The Jewish legal system enjoins that one is not to be favored in court either because one is the poorer or the wealthier litigant.
3. The laws of sabbatical and jubilee years insured that capital and land would revert to the masses of the population and could not be indefinitely accumulated in ever-enlarged aggregates by a wealthy landowner.
4. Such as freeing the Hebrew slaves in the sabbatical year.
5. See, for example, Rachel Adler, "The Jew Who Wasn't There: Halacha and the Jewish Woman," *Da'at*, Summer 1971; Blu Greenberg, "Coming of Age in the Jewish Community," *Tradition*, Spring 1976; Judith Hauptman, "Images of Women in the Talmud," in Rosemary Raftery, ed., *Religion and Sexism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974).
6. Saul Berman, "The Status of Women in Halachic Judaism," *Tradition* 14(2), 1973: 5-28. An abbreviated version is reprinted in this volume, pp. 142-151.
7. Within Reform and Conservative ritual as well, counting women in a *minyan* and calling them to the Torah will ensure concrete refinements unless these developments are integrated into a total campaign for developing women's capacities and roles in prayer.
8. See, for example, the articles in the "Life Cycle and New Rituals" section.
9. Eliezer Berkovitz, *Tenai Benisurin* (Oxford: Ben-Zion Press, 1966).
10. For example, the development of the *Leibish*, allowing the testimony of one witness to free a woman from *agunah* status, the polygamy ban of Rabbenu Gershom and his requirement that no divorce be given against the wife's will, etc.

Unit I: The Jewish Woman and Her Identity

Session 3: Impact of Jewish Values on the Jewish Woman: Education and Marriage

- Goals: -- to note how the traditional Jewish value of education affects our identity as Jewish women.
- to view how the traditional Jewish value of marriage affects our identity as Jewish women.
- to observe the double message Judaism has given the Jewish woman and its results.

Question #1: How has the traditionally held value of education affected us in our lives, and shaped who we are?

Motivation: A) Read and React

- 1) Have one of the group members read aloud the story "The Clever Girl" (found in the appendix to this session) while everyone else follows along with their own copy.

B) Discuss

- 1) What are your reactions to this story?
- 2) Could you identify with it at all?

C) Read and React

- 1) Dear Editor,

Since I do not want my conscience to bother me, I ask you to decide whether a married woman has the right to go to school two evenings a week. My husband thinks I have no right to do this.

I admit that I am not satisfied to be just a wife and mother. I am still young and I want to learn and enjoy life. My children and my house are not neglected, but I go to evening high school twice a week. My husband is not pleased and when I come home at night and ring the bell, he lets me stand outside a long time intentionally and does not hurry to open the door.

Now he has announced a new decision. Because I send out laundry to be done, it seems to him that I have too much time for myself, even enough to go to school.

So from now on he will count out every penny for anything I have to buy for the house, so I will not be able to send out the laundry anymore. And when I have to do the work myself there will not be any time left for such "foolishness" as going to school. I told him that I am willing to do my washing but that I would still be able to find time for study.

When I am alone with my thoughts, I feel that I may not be right. Perhaps I should not go to school. I want to say that my husband is an intelligent man and he wanted to marry a woman who was educated. The fact that he is intelligent makes me more annoyed with him. He is in favor of the emancipation of women, yet in real life he acts contrary to his beliefs.

Awaiting your opinion on this, I remain,

Your reader,

The Discontented Wife¹⁸

- 2) ... Jewish women, particularly those between the ages of twenty-five and forty, are those for whom the call to freedom might have the greatest intellectual appeal. They are well educated. They are well read. They were encouraged throughout their academic careers, prior to their marriages, to compete with males and, probably to a greater extent than any group of females in history, to develop themselves as individuals. How much more abrupt, then, must be their encounter with the realities of suburban life? How much more difficult must be their acceptance of the relative anonymity of being a housewife? Certainly this is true of women who, typical of the pattern in this country in the fifties and early sixties, got married either while in college or immediately thereafter and then embarked on careers, ostensibly to support the family while the husbands prepared for a profession. For a brief period in these women's lives, they were the ones with the careers, while their husbands confronted the sometimes degrading anonymity of graduate and professional school. Surely, such a woman must have suffered some loss of self-esteem when once and for all she found herself Mrs. David Goldberg and no longer Alice Schwartz, B. A. magna cum laude, teacher of creative arts.¹⁹

D) Discuss

- 1) What are your reactions to these articles? Do they ex-

press a frustration of yours?

- 2) What has been your educational background, both Judaically and secularly?
- 3) An education is a strong Jewish tradition, and yet it seems to have a certain cut-off point for women. Do you feel we are receiving a double-message? How? Have you experienced this?

Observation: Jewish women have been receiving a double message. Judaism, on the one hand, speaks of the importance of education, yet Jewish women experience this differently. This distinction has affected our identity as Jewish women, our feelings about ourselves and about our communities.

Question #2: How has the traditionally held value of marriage affected our lives and identities as Jewish women?

Motivation: A) Read and React

- 1) ... The old traditional Jewish conception of woman implies always the married woman, since the oriental notions of womanhood, which so largely influenced Jewish legislation, did not embrace the idea of the female as an individuality who might develop freely on her own lines without the sexual complement of the male. Woman is the bearer, the guardian, and preserver of the nation, and only in so far as she carries out this, her primary function -- on which depends the welfare and continued existence of the people Israel -- does she come into her own domain. The ordinances which enjoin the purity and holiness of marriage, the regulated intercourse: between the sexes with a view to rearing a numerous progeny -- these gave woman, in the eyes of the Law, a conscious value in ethical matters and in the national economy, similar to that which she holds in the scientific and practical sociology of today.²⁰
- 2) For a long time it did not occur to me to abandon my Jewishness. There was something mystical and extraordinary about being Jewish if Israel would rise, phoenix-like, from the ashes of six million dead. Pogroms and

persecution could not snuff out my ancestors' faith. But finally I gave up my Jewish identity when I realized that I had no place among the chosen people unless a Jewish man were to choose me.

If there are no traditional rites of passage to mark a Jewish female's birth and puberty, a woman cannot miss the moment she comes of marriageable age: it is the first time she goes to a wedding and her relatives tell her "M'em shen bu de" (It should happen to you). At home my family prayed for health, peace, prosperity, and a chossen (bridegroom) for me. Whenever we sat down to a holiday meal, instead of "Next year in Jerusalem," it was "Next year with a chossen."

Rabbit-foot key charms were snickered at in my house but no Jewish superstition was overlooked in the hope that Providence would grant me a husband. I ate the goigle (neck of the chicken) from the Seder plate, opened the door for Elijah during the Seder, and "fasted well" on Yom Kippur.

I fasted so well on Yom Kippur that in synagogue when the rabbi blew the shofar (ram's horn), I half expected the Ark to open and a patriarchal figure bearing a handsome young man (with perhaps a stethoscope sticking out of his pocket) to emerge in a flaming chariot and say: "Here, Audrey, you were a good girl, you ate the goigle, you opened the door for Elijah, you fasted well on Yom Kippur. Here's your chossen."²¹

(* As an alternative to #2, in the appendix to this session see: "Sunset, Sunset: The Life of Jewish Singles" by Naomi Bluestone. It is an excellent article.)

B) Discuss

- 1) What are your reactions to these articles?
- 2) What were your experiences relating to marriage? In what ways did the choice of marriage or singleness shape your identity as a Jewish woman?

Observation: The Jewish community's emphasis on marriage and the pressures our community exerts have also shaped our identities as women and as Jews.

General Conclusion: We as Jewish women are shaped by our families and

life experiences. However, we've also been deeply affected, consciously or unconsciously, by traditional values of our Jewish communities. Two significant values, education and marriage have specifically had their affects upon us. It was important to be educated, but marriage, not education, was considered "success" for Jewish women. It seemed at times as if our lives as individuals, with our individual needs, were swallowed up in the pressure exerted upon us to find Jewish mates, and to live a more conventional lifestyle. It is time to step aside and see just what those pressures have been to understand our reactions to them, and to study how they have affected our self-images as women and as Jews.

Appendix to Session 3

The Clever Girl

A certain rich merchant was wont to divide his time between his business and the study of the Law with his companions. He engaged a teacher in the Law for his brilliant daughter, arranging that she should be given lessons for three years only, as he was not desirous that her education should be extensive in this field. At the end of the first year, the father observed that his daughter had learned in that year what he had expected her to acquire in three, so he dismissed the teacher. His daughter, who had hoped that her father, noticing the progress she had made, might allow her to continue her studies, was angered, but the conventions of the time prevented her from remonstrating with him.

She conceived the plan of arranging her work room next to the study room of her father and his companions. Taking advantage of an open window which connected the two rooms, she was enabled, unknown to her father, to follow him and his friends in their various studies, till, in time, she obtained a full mastery of all the sciences. - One day a man appeared, begging for alms. As was customary, he was hospitably received, and invited to dine. Upon being asked his name by the master of the house, the stranger replied: 'Hayim Hayim ben Shalom.' The former was rather puzzled by his peculiar repetition of the first name; he believed him to mean that he was called Hayim, the son of Hayim, the son of Shalom. His daughter, who was also sitting at the table, watching carefully what was going on, smiled at the answer of the man, for she understood its meaning, and saw that he was a scholar. The father then asked him: 'Whence do you come, where is your dwelling-place?' He answered: 'I come from the same place as you.' Again the master looked somewhat puzzled, for he did not remember his name. Then he asked after some of his acquaintances, and the guest replied: 'Look behind the pomegranates.' The master could not make this out, either.

Before his guest, whom he assumed to be an ignorant man, departed, the father asked him what he wanted, and the man replied: 'A gift.' He instructed his daughter to go into the inner chamber and take from his purse a silver coin and give it to the man, but under no consideration to give him the gold coin which lay there, as an ignorant man did not deserve a rich gift. The daughter who knew better the worth of the visitor, went to the room, and, opening the purse, extracted from it the gold coin, which she gave the man, who thanked her warmly and departed.

A short time afterwards, the father, needing money, sent for the purse and opened it, expecting to find the gold piece in it. To his great astonishment, it was missing. Thinking that his daughter had made a mistake, he called her and said sharply: 'If you had been a boy you would have preserved the house, but now by your carelessness you are destroying it. How can you mistake a gold piece for a silver piece? Did I not tell you to give the man a silver piece, as he was ignorant and did not deserve more?' She replied: 'If I had been a boy I would have built not one but ten houses. I have not made a mistake; I knew the man was a great scholar.' Her father asked her: 'How did you know?' 'From his answers.' The father, who understood nothing in the answers of his guest, wondered at his daughter and asked her what she meant. She explained: 'When you asked him his name he replied twice *'Hayim'* which meant *Hayim Hayim*, as the numerical value of *Hayim* (חַיִּים) and *Hayim* (חַיִּים) is the same - sixty-eight. When you asked him from what country he came, he replied, 'From the same place as you.' As you are in the dwelling of the *Torah*, he meant that he also dwelt there, that he, too, was a student. And when you asked him about your townspeople, and he said, 'Look behind the pomegranates,' it was a play upon *'tapuah*,' the Hebrew word for apple, for it so happened that the dish of apples stood behind the pomegranates; by this he meant to convey to you the information that the people after whom you had asked had died.' The father marvelled at her cleverness, and asked her what she meant when she said if she had been a boy she would have built ten houses. She replied: 'If I had been a boy I would not have been secluded in the house, doing nothing. I would have gone out into the market-place and would have earned enough not only to maintain this house but to build ten houses.' Then her father inquired: 'Where have you learned all that you know? How have you become so clever?' 'Oh,' she said, 'the window has taught me.' Her father continued: 'How could the window teach you?' 'Well,' she replied, 'I sat daily near the window of your study and listened to your discourse, and thus I have been able to learn all that I know.' From this time her father placed great confidence in her judgment in all important matters. ²²

Sunset, sunset: the life
of Jewish singles

One evening last spring I climbed into my muddy BMW and drove out to suburban Long Island to speak to a group of "mature," single Jewish adults. It was an unlikely audience. Although my job occasionally requires me to talk to as many as a thousand people on a day's notice, the subject is always professional in nature and never intrudes into my personal substance or position. But now I was being asked to talk about "being single," and that meant talking about myself. If you want to know the truth, I was nervous.

I have always hated mixers, no less now than twenty years ago, when all the Jewish kids in town used to go down to the "Y" on Wednesday nights and preen in front of heterosexual mirrors. Back in the 'Fifties, when Philip Roth's duck-assed Jewish jocks were *grobbling* under the sweaters in the back seat, I was a hoe-carrying Zionist youth. By us, the mixers were something our parents locked us out of the house to go to. . . .

Arriving early, I climbed over the bodies in the smoke-filled hall of the Methodist Church, and mixed with two women at the cooler. One, solidly within the age range of 35-55, expressed the hope that the speaker would be a good one. I agreed, fervently. The second one told me that she had given up a game of tennis to come, which knocked me out. How could anyone give up a *game of tennis* to go to a mixer?! I eased away, and faced well over a hundred seats . . . all full.

I introduced myself to the audience. "I am a successful, professional woman," I said. "39 years old. I am currently Assistant Commissioner of Health for the City of New York. I have an apartment in Brooklyn Heights, an antique farmhouse on a lake in New Hampshire, and I drive a German car. I write, read, explore, follow interests and talents, and live in a universe of exciting thoughts and ideas." My audience warmed perceptibly. Everybody loves a winner. Especially a forthright winner. So then I hit them with it. "I am also an old maid," I said clearly. As I spoke, my unconscious presented me with a long forgotten image of the 53rd card in a child's pack, an ugly old hag with a sawtooth. "No one has ever asked to marry me," I said. "In the world's eyes and my own, I am a failure, a leftover. I will keep indefinitely in Saran Wrap in the fridge. . . ."

"No one?" came a disbelieving query from the audience. So I reminisced about a fifth-generation Yemenite from Jerusalem, who once sat next to me on a long flight home from Israel. He taught me *Erev Shel Shoshanim*, then newly popular, and apparently developed an attachment which lasted through months of letters from Winnipeg, where he went to be a teacher. He contrived to visit me, after some time, and reiterated the proposal made at 36,000 feet, but my mother, the same mother who, like Podhoretz's, believed that all Negroes were either Marian Anderson or Paul Robeson, hissed at me behind kitchen doors, "*Hu shachor!*" ("He's black!"), and I concluded that our lives were too divergent. Actually, I'd completely repressed the memory of another fellow who committed himself to me until he discovered, during a dinner at which I was unable to serve him butter, that I had a religious flaw. Devout atheist that he was, he nearly had a psychotic break on my living room sofa.

"Do you really feel you're a failure?" asked another skeptic, who insisted that being single to him meant unlimited opportunity and freedom to grow. I gently rejected this party line, and elected to continue giving the other face of being single.

I went on to discuss the bewildering profusion of feelings I had been experiencing as a result of the social changes which had passively transformed me from a rebellious, intellectual wallflower, a too choosy, too romantic, too aggressive, too individualized, unmarriageable "older girl" into a reluctant role model for an army of other single women, women who had made it once but lost it, and who now seemed to envy me my "successful" position in life. Although grateful to these divorcées and young career women for the welcome camouflage, my identification with them appeared less than complete.

Well, my audience ate it up. Never before have I been so able to hear a pin drop in one of my lectures; never before have I felt such empathic rustlings across the bridge chairs. So I milked it for all I could get.

I told them about the times the Jewish girls were rounded up on Friday nights and taken down to the naval station in Bainbridge to make an Oneg Shabbat for the young sailors so far from home. Prize livestock for auction with ribbons around our necks and ruffles on our behinds, we were carted off to give the boys a dance. After kiddush. . . .

And I told them about the struggles over the car. "Can I take the car down to the 'Y' on Wednesday?" "What do you need a car for? Let some fellow take you home!" "And if no one asks to take me home? Do you want me to walk up those two blocks to Market Street in that neighborhood?" "But if they know you have the car, they won't want to take you home!" "So I won't tell them I have the car . . . I'll let them take me home, and then I'll go back down on the bus and pick up the car and drive it back after. . . ." A fine audience. They laughed.

So then I told them about my maiden aunt, the nicest of the bunch, an intelligent, lively woman with hangups no worse than the rest of us, and how people were still trying to fix her up at 68. That got another laugh.

Then I told them about how I wanted to go to medical school and my mother said, "Who would want to marry a doctor?" And I said, "Nonsense, where's a better place to meet men than in a medical school?" And how I was rejected by seven medical schools and accepted at the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania. . . . I will never understand how my tears always produce such laughter.

And then I told them about my admission interview, where that nice Dr. Mickleberg asked me what I would do if the man I loved didn't approve of woman doctors, and how I answered in my youthful pride, "Why, I just can't imagine myself ever falling in love with anyone who didn't approve of woman doctors!"

The large audience was palpably interested in what I was leading up to, if unsure what it might be. So I moved on to the subsequent years of disillusionment, when I discovered that most men really were *not* interested in women doctors, and that all the fine young men I was delivering babies with, and sharing terror and death in the night with, were marrying dumb, phony, padded, bleached, insensate broads with political schemes for future domination that far exceeded my capacity to understand or even imagine. I simply could not get it through my head that men could waste themselves in such a frightful fashion.

I was sufficiently upset about the intellectual and emotional mismatching of these elite young Jews to write about it for the Journal of the American Medical Women's Association in 1965. Although I lived to recant a good bit of the bitterness, and to accept personal responsibility for much of what I had projected from myself onto the real world, I believe I was correct at that time in challenging the prevailing notion (at least in the medical circles in which I moved, if not in the open society) that *any* woman physician could combine home, husband, career and family if only she were clever enough. I had discovered this to be a myth for many women who were not *überfrauen* and I felt that if a woman was going to seriously jeopardize her chances for marriage by taking such a difficult road, she should at least enter into it with her eyes open.

At this point, one of my audience, a man, asked me why I had not dropped out of my medical training when I realized that it was going to complicate my life and endanger my marital expectations. "Why the hell should I have?" I replied deliberately, and the boulder was soundly hissed by a sea of women who recoiled from him as if he were an excreting bug.

What an audience! The waves of expressive faces, utterly rapt in what I had thought was my isolated personal experience, gave me the impression that it was a common dimension, with echoes in each person's life. So close did I feel to them that I was ready to share not only the problems of the exceptional single woman, but also the problems of the single *Jewish* woman. And I decided to include a word specifically about the plight of the Jewish *traditionalist*, for whom the updated ritual and open synagogue is as unfamiliar as the swinging scene and the open marriage. But I must confess that the relationship of the organized Jewish community to the "problem" of the unmarried was approached with some trepidation. Singles are not noted for their strong religious connections, nor have they been that articulate in demanding a role for themselves as a distinct subgroup of the *kahal*.

I shared with my listeners that back in the late 1960's I had written an article dealing with the experiences of a single Jewish woman in New York, which was rejected for publication by the editor of the *Jewish Spectator*, who felt that it was "too negative." In the tradition of that shy Jewish heroine, Emily Dickinson, I returned it to the drawer until the burgeoning woman's movement enabled me to pull it out a few years later. In 1974, Naomi Levine, now the dynamic Executive Director of the American Jewish Congress, pounced upon it and persuaded me to let her publish it under my own name, (rather than the graphic pseudonym I preferred, *Asher Yirah*).

To summarize briefly, and not to rewrite the article, my thesis was that there seemed to be no place for a single woman over the age of 25 in Judaism such as we know it today. I recounted the long years of fighting social customs, with a diminishing faith

and shrinking participation in the customs and ceremonies of the religion. I described the emptiness of lighting candles alone on a Friday night, of making chicken soup and freezing all but one bowl. I discussed the difficulties of dating as a kosher woman in a city with the best restaurants in the world, and the careworn ploys I had been using to conceal my adherent status. I talked about my discomfort appearing alone at holiday services, of my complete alienation from the men's club, the sisterhood, the Onegei Shabbat, the kindergarten, and the *minyan*. I even gleefully recounted the story of how, when I applied for synagogue membership, the old men were so baffled they compromised by letting me join but denied me voting rights or membership on the board. I mentioned that I was surely the only woman in the United States never tapped by the good ladies of Hadasah, and asked if they got their membership lists from the bridal columns. Finally, I discussed my sole linkages to peoplehood, through charity, bond drives and social action organizations. And the sense of rage and betrayal I felt.

Although once again the article had been written from the perspective of an isolate, it engendered a flood of letters, many from rabbis sadly acknowledging the truth of the observations, and equally sadly confessing that they had no solution to the problem. I was aware that many female self-help groups had arisen since this article and others like it were published. However, they all seemed to be more concerned with providing a revisionist role for women and altering discriminatory customs and ceremonies than with addressing the problem of the *single* person, male or female. While I appreciated the effort, I felt that it was not dealing with issues critical to those of us who were less concerned with "me too" demands than with dissolutions of societal phobias (*Baruch Atah Adonai*. . . . "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, Who has Not Kept me Single! . . .")

"Try the Reconstructionists!" cried an enthusiastic fellow in the rear of the auditorium, who was laughing and slapping his knee.

"I did," said I. The audience was now on the edge of its chair. Our Jews! Even if they are unitary (how I hate that word "single"!), they are still Jews!

The visit to the Reconstructionists was fascinating. At an open membership meeting, the rabbi himself came to sit in a semicircle with potential members, give them coffee and cake, and present them with copies of his book. Visitors were encouraged to express their concerns and say why they had come. Aware of the non-sexist position of the Society for the Advancement of Judaism, I asked him about *single* people.

He nodded sympathetically. "Traditional Judaism holds no truck with single people," he said pleasantly. "Jews are supposed to marry. The Rabbis said it is better to quarrel with a spouse and be miserable than to be single." (My audience strangled.) I waited for him to go on and present the Reconstructionist approach to this pseudo-Paulist dilemma. But instead he said, "I'm also having a problem with the gays. They want their own Seder. I don't know if it is better to do it their way or insist that they integrate with the rest of the congregation." I pondered that until I suddenly realized that like three little *chazerim* going to market, he had us all lumped together . . . singles, lesbians and homosexuals . . . three deviant groups to be managed with decency and compassion.

Reactively, I asked two questions that were utterly beneath me. First, I asked him why a single membership should cost \$180 and a family membership (spouses, dependent in-laws, unlimited kids) \$350. All that got me was a treatise on the support of Jewish education with which of course I concur. Then I stooped to inquire by what logic the S.A.J. singles group was sponsoring a "Learn to Hustle" night. This is a Jewish occupation, *auf der Hustle*? What could the poor man do? He blushed. Anyway, I went home and read his book. It was brilliant, revelatory. I guess none of us is perfect.

Hands now popped up like little dandelions on my front lawn. The first one I acknowledged belonged to a clear malcontent. "Aren't all rabbis bums?" he asked. "I think they are the most self-involved, insincere, unsympathetic bunch of bastards I ever met." He sat down, relieved. The next remark came from a young woman who assured me that she belonged to a new synagogue that gave her *ali-yot*, and more important, policy-making authority. Would I like to join? A second woman will be best remembered for the simple commentary she made privately after the presentation. She and a friend had called a meeting of the members of her congregation and its surrounding neighborhood to see if they could develop a voice for single persons. Two people showed up.

In general, I was startled that a group of people so beyond the pale of organized religion could respond so vehemently or be so sensitive in their observations. In fact, when the evening closed, it was about Jewish values that they were most concerned, and to Jewish subjects that they addressed their remarks. Perhaps people drop away not because they are uncaring, but because they are, and are driven away by the pack that tolerates no deviation.

Time and voice were beginning to give out. I had already run on like a washerless faucet a full hour beyond my time, or I would surely have brought up the subject of Israel. Although a high school chum bagged a fine Israeli specimen and brought him over to captivity in America, it is apparent that Israel as a place to hunt men becomes less attractive as years pass. In fact, stories brought back by friends who are "looking" assure me that Israeli society is clearly anti-single, and single people have enough trouble without being punished for it.

Time also failed to permit a reference to the major Jewish organizations and their understandable preoccupation with our mass spiritual onanism. Jews are so swept away by increasing intermarriage and decreasing bovine fecundity that they seem to see unmarried coreligionists as a threat or a desertion. Why do they permit Jewish singles to be Lysoled away like

aberrant fungi, or left to shift for themselves like strays? Why have modern Jews retained communal *mitzvot* such as the giving of *tz'dakah* and the visitation of the sick, but abandoned the unmarried, who are delivered wholesale to psychology run wild, or alphabetized religions led by bearded gurus whose fathers give to the J.N.F.?

My impression is that the major organizations display an agenda of social intervention that would do credit to any progressive outfit. They promote abortion, clean air, busing, civil rights, peace in the Middle East, integrated housing, anti-discrimination, Soviet Jews, equal opportunities, truth in advertising, separation of church and state, and prevention of cruelty to furry creatures. So why can't they address with a little more awareness and originality the issue of the considerable number of decent people who married inappropriately, as well as those who individuated late and never married at all?

My discussion with these former- and never-marrieds was almost a religious experience for me. If my time hadn't run out, I'd probably be yakking still. For example, I happen to know for a fact that there are still matrimonial agencies functioning in our community, because my mother once confessed to me that she consulted one on my behalf. During the earlier years of my spinsterhood, she traveled into New York with what must have been supreme courage and a most desperate state of mind, to "enrol" me. When she discovered that it was possible for people to be "fixed up" without their knowledge, and that some couples had been married for years believing that their first meeting was volitional, she was so horrified at the implications that she fled home, and only revealed her sordid secret years later. How hard this must have been for her! And what a reflection upon the ethics of our *shadchanim*! The very term "fix up" implies a human broken.

I have never been so proud as to represent having friends and relatives maintain an eagle eye for an eligible spouse, and only regretted that the choices of my many aunts and uncles

were so poor. I was well past 30 before I put my foot down and refused to date one more real estate agent or accountant, not because they were not good people, but because we had so pathetically little in common. I even remember one "fix up" with a man whose wife was nine days dead of cancer; my cousin wanted to make sure I got in early on the kill.

The United Synagogue has recently decided to go the computer route. Now for the first time, we have the choice of checking off not only "Do you smoke? Do you mind if your date smokes?" but also, "Do you keep kosher? Do you mind if your date keeps kosher?" Unfortunately, we are to be spared little else. We must still decide if we prefer to spend our evenings eating, drinking, walking or seeing a ball game. And we still have to run down the exhaustive list of adjectives that describe our ideal spouse. (I used to check off "sensitive," "articulate," "creative," and "has a sense of humor" until I discovered that every other woman in the City of New York did the same.) And by now I've learned to squelch my egalitarian instincts. I no longer say that I will go out with "no education necessary" or "prefers machines to people" . . . these are the kisses of death. The computer has other flaws.

Through a prank, the name of a prominent, married rabbi (then unknown to me) once appeared on my "list." I called him up and asked him out . . . instant bilateral horror show. Nevertheless, the computer as *shadchan* is one approach to space age relationships. At least somebody Jewish is doing something for singles—if only to keep them from marrying out of the faith.

I'm happy I went to this mixer, at least once, and wish I were more of a relationship groupie. Single Jews, like other disconnects, also must seek companionship in bars, mixers, paid-entry parties, lectures (ugh, the worst!), and special interest groups, such as the Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever Climbing Club, or the Reformed Liberals Political Committee. Or, in New York City, at least, they can join the social organization of St. Bartholomew's Church. I have been

referred to St. Bart's by a number of independent friends, who assure me that "they get a good crowd" and are nonsectarian. Nonsectarian, my foot. They're probably all Jews.

Epilogue

Well, some guy called me. He said he'd heard my talk and liked intelligent women, and could we have coffee? He apologized for being 14 years older than me and asked did it matter, and I said, "Hey, look, all you did was ask me out for coffee, it's all right." So then he said, "Let's make it lunch." Now this is a good sign. (Usually a man asks you out for coffee to see if you're worth having lunch with, or he asks you out for lunch to see if you're worth having dinner with.)

So he came. He was a chemical engineer. I could tell from the mail on the front seat of his car that I'd gotten the name wrong over the phone. Only the first name matched. We got to talking. He said he was a "closet single." He said he'd been married for 18 years and felt so bad about his divorce, his friends and associates at work didn't know he was single. He said he'd given me an assumed name. He said his phone was unlisted because women he met were always calling him. He said they even called his ex-wife in the middle of the night.

We walked over to Montague Street, to the new patisserie. We got jasmine tea, and he got an apple strudel, and I got some chocolate glop with glazed peaches on it. Then I showed him how to get back on to the northbound ramp of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway.

Unit I: The Jewish woman and Her Identity

Session 4: The Jewish American Princess and Jewish Mother

Goals: -- to examine the stereotypes of the Jewish American Princess and the Jewish Mother, and to view our relationships to these stereotypes.

Advanced Preparation:

Materials needed: two large sheets of posterboard, magic markers.

Assignments: -- the facilitator or other, to sketch onto the posterboard a woman's figure (see appendix to this session) before the session begins.

Question #1: What are the stereotypes of the Jewish American Princess and the Jewish Mother?

Motivation: A) Exercise

- 1) The group facilitator for this day will have prepared two large pieces of posterboard, on each of which she will have drawn the outline of a woman. (See the appendix to this session for an example) Two magic markers should also be available.
- 2) Divide into two groups. Group A will deal with the "Jewish Mother." Group B will deal with the "American Jewish Princess."
- 3) Each group should develop their stereotype by:
 - a) drawing in the woman's features and dress, by the consensus of the group.
 - b) printing words which describe her personal qualities and characteristics, around her picture.
 - c) naming her and writing her name above her picture.
 - d) writing a paragraph of introduction to your character, telling her name, and describing her qualities to be shared with the other group.

(This should take about 30 minutes.)

- 4) Reconvene as a group, and have the two spokespersons introduce their character and picture to the whole group.
- 5) Share your comments on each with one another.

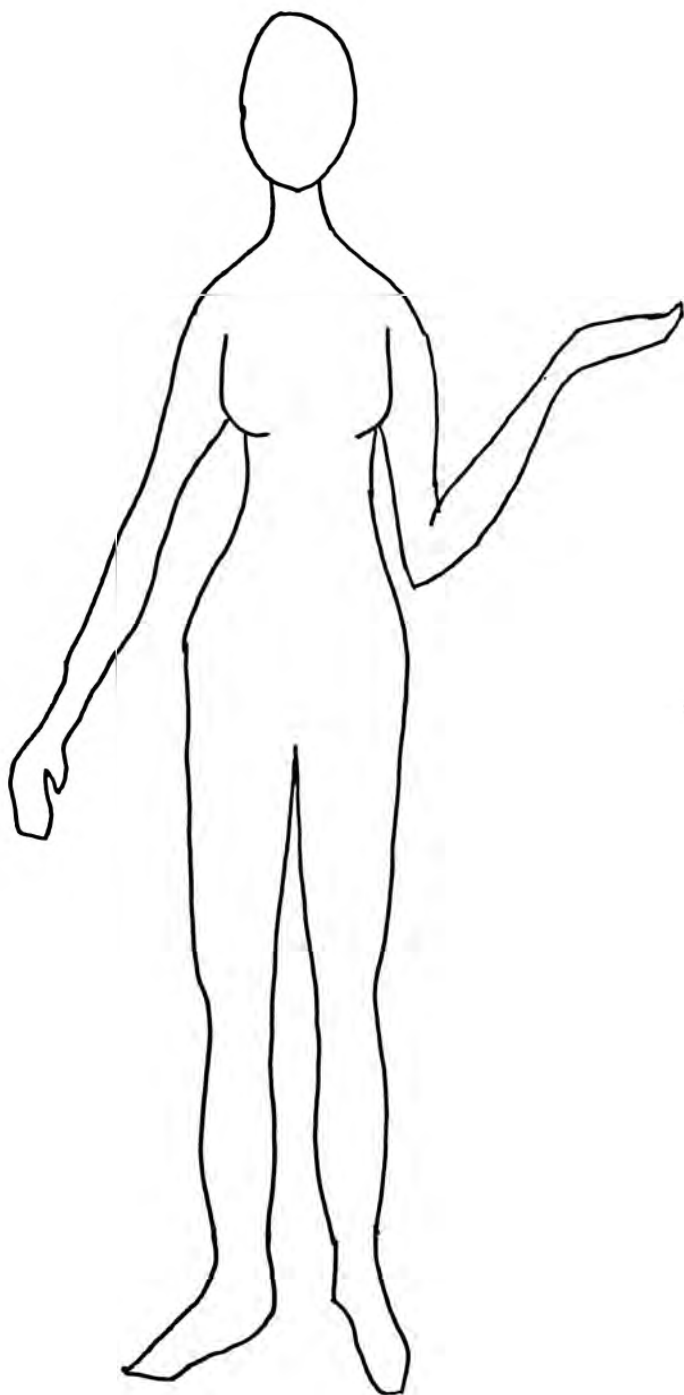
B) Discuss

- 1) Do you identify yourselves with the "Jewish American Princess" stereotype? In what ways? What qualities do you have in common? Which qualities do we admire? reject?
- 2) (Repeat questions re: the Jewish Mother.)
- 3) How does the "Jewish Mother" shape us? In what positive and negative ways? How has her qualities influenced our lives?
- 4) (Repeat questions re: Jewish American Princess.)

Observation: Both of the stereotypes, the "Jewish American Princess" and the "Jewish Mother," have influenced our lives in a deep way. We have adopted some of their qualities, both positive and negative. And the attitudes towards these stereotypes have had an impact upon our identities as Jewish women.

General Conclusion: Two of the most powerful stereotypes of Jewish women are the "Jewish Mother" and the "Jewish American Princess." Jewish mothers and daughters have had a whole mystique built up around them, a mystique that contains both nostalgia and bitterness. We need to examine the full implications of these stereotypes. We need to evaluate whether or to what degree, we do or do not actually embody them. This is an essential process in order for us to be able to create and expand upon our own self-definitions as Jewish women, as both mothers and daughters.

Appendix to Session 4



Unit I: The Jewish Woman and Her Identity

Session 5: New Relationships: Jewish Mothers and Daughters

Goals: -- to examine more closely the stereotype of the Jewish Mother, and the resultant stereotype of the Jewish American Princess, and to refute and/or clarify aspects of these stereotypes.

-- to uncover more of the real relationships between mothers and daughters.

Advanced Preparation:

Materials needed: Bring the posterboard pictures to this session.

Question #1: When did the stereotype of the Jewish Mother come about?
How does this affect us?

Motivation: A) Read aloud

The woman had to maintain a Jewish home. She had to carry out all the laws of Kashrut in minute detail. She had to socialize the daughters who learned by observing their mother at work. The sons went, from the age of three, to cheder, where they were partially socialized by the community. In addition, the woman had to do everything to facilitate the man's ability to study, which generally meant managing the family finances, often running a business or shop.

The mother's love is probably one element that makes people romanticize the shtetl. Her love was unconditional and enduring, and was expressed in feeding ("Ess, ess, main kindt"). When there wasn't enough food to go around and the woman was starving herself in order to feed her children, this was really an expression of love. Her solicitude extended over every aspect of the child's well being. In the shtetl, when life was insecure, this was a healthy expression of the woman's justified anxiety. The child, in return, was expected to provide nachas by making the parents proud. Childhood was not prolonged. If a son had no inclination for study or the family was too poor, he was apprenticed to a trade. Women were married before 18, sometimes having been engaged since childhood. Men were expected to marry at about 18. Children were expected to grow up quickly.

The shtetl socio-economic patterns differed considerably from classical patriarchy. In the shtetl, the man did not necessarily support his family. Also, women were not seen

as sex objects; their beauty was not their primary attraction. What was admired in a woman was her ability to manage well, to be strong and realistic. The shtetl economic system affected male-female relationships as well. If you want to marry a strong, realistic woman who will support the family while you study, you can't expect her to be passive and docile at home. While the man may have been the titular boss, the woman really ran the household...²⁴

B) Stimulus

- 1) Show the slide show and tape "The World of Our Grandmothers" (20 min.) (available through the author).

C) Discuss

- 1) What images were projected of the Jewish woman during this time of immigration?
- 2) Look at (give name) (the picture drawn of the Jewish Mother). What happened between the time of the immigrant woman and our picture of our stereotypical Jewish Mother?

D) Read one or more.

- 1) Learning to relish the privileges of suffering, the Jewish mother could become absurdly, outrageously protective. From that condition, especially if linked, as it well might be, with contempt for her husband, she could decline into a brassy courage, with her grating bark or soul-destroying whine, silver-blue hair, and unfocused aggression. Nor was it unusual for her to employ ingenuity in order to keep her brood in a state of prolonged dependence, as she grew expert at groaning, cajoling, intimidating. Daughters paled, sons fled.

Yet even behind the most insufferable ways of the Jewish mother there was always a hard-earned perception of reality. Did she overfeed? Her mind was haunted by memories of a hungry childhood. Did she fuss about health? Infant mortality had been a plague in the old country and the horror of diphtheria overwhelming in this country. Did she dominate everyone within reach? A disarranged family structure endowed her with powers she had never known before, and burdens too; it was to be expected that she would abuse the powers and find advantage in the burdens. The weight of centuries bore

down. In her bones, the Jewish mother knew that she and hers, simply by being Jewish, had always to live with a sense of precariousness. When she worried about her little boy going to play, it was not merely the dangers of Rivington or Cherry St. that she saw -- though there were dangers on such streets; it was the streets of Kishinev and Bialystok and other towns in which the blood of Jewish children had been spilled. Later, such memories would fade among those she had meant to shield and it would become customary to regard her as a grotesque figure of excess.²⁵

- 2) Over the past two generations, the position of the Jewish woman in America has changed. The daughters of the first generation Eastern European immigrants, who came to America from 1880 to 1914, are today's "contemptible" Jewish mothers. They have gone from veneration to vituperation. Their role changed, too, from that of provider to that of housewife and from that of partner to that of dependent. As Jewish men succeeded in America and the women's economic contribution was no longer needed, raising children and keeping house did become their only functions. And their children no longer respected their labor. Jewish women internalized their children's values. They went from "Maybe I'm too good" to "What have I done wrong?" Those women who had admired their mothers' strength, determination, energy and strong opinions, absorbed their sons' complaints that they were overprotective, castrating and manipulative.²⁶

- 3) The Stereotypical Jewish Mother overdoes her job. We are told that she hovers over her children, preventing them from achieving autonomy by interfering, cajoling, advising, and manipulating. Whether she is actually holding the spoon and urging them to take "just one more bite," or operating through guilt -- that most exquisite instrument of remote control -- she is seen as ubiquitous and eternal, from the first diaper change through the last word on the doctoral thesis. Her children's achievements belong to her, for she has lived her life for -- and through -- her children. They succeed not to please themselves but to satisfy her, the fear of her displeasure intensifying their own anxieties about failing. Her domination extends over her husband as well; indeed, she seems to possess unlimited strength and boldness. There are no matters on which she does not presume

expertise, no affair in which she does not claim the prerogative to meddle...

The Jewish Mother has become both a comic and literary convention. She is usually a woman of the second generation, portrayed by certain novelists and comedians, most often male (who are ambivalent about their Jewish background), of the third generation. Although there are scattered references to the particular style of Jewish mothering over the entire range of American Jewish literature, the full-blown negative stereotype does not appear until the sixties, when authors began creating maternal figures who were not only distinctive and laughable, but targets for the bitterest forms of denunciation and vituperation.²⁷

E) Discuss

- 1) What are our reactions to this (these) quote(s)?
- 2) If this stereotype, as some intimate, came about due to the ambivalence or hostile feelings of her Jewish sons, how does that affect the nature of the impact of the stereotypes upon us?

Observation: When we examine the origins of the Jewish Mother stereotype, we begin to question how and why it came about. It is a powerful image, and one which can and has been used to put down Jewish women. We need to recognize the equivocalness of this image, and separate its historical origins from its development as a stereotype. In doing so, we can uncover the reality behind the stereotype and build on that reality.

Question #2: How does the stereotype of the Jewish American Princess fit in with what we have spoken about regarding the Jewish Mother?

Motivation: A) Read and React

While the Jewish Mother is known for her unwelcome devotion to others, the stereotypical Jewish American Princess cares for no one but herself. First described by second-generation authors looking at third-generation women --

Herman Wouk in Marjorie Morningstar (1955) -- and then by male third-generation authors observing their female contemporaries, the Princess is spoiled and materialistic, self-centered and assertive.

There is a countercurrent in literature that deals with sons, who, interestingly enough, when they write about their favored position in the family and the benefices bestowed on them, turn this situation into an attack on their mothers. Their heroism lies in the damage inflicted on them by the domineering mother and their struggle to overcome it. The blame for their problems rests outside of themselves.

But the Jewish daughter is given no such hedge. She has been shaped, to be sure, by her overwhelming mother and her doting father, but she is nevertheless held fully accountable for herself. What we have, then, is a picture of a young woman who manipulates the world for her own selfish ends. She belongs, through the perspective of those who wrote about her, to nouveau riche middle-class parents. (Either the Jewish poor had ceased to exist, or they had ceased having children, to judge by the dominance in this sort of literature of the Princess model.) Accustomed to being treated like royalty in her family, she expects the same sort of consideration from the world at large. She is condemned as being sexually exploitative, but probably her most offensive characteristic is her refusal to defer easily to male authority, an unforgiveable sin in the American pantheon of feminine virtues. The stereotype of the Jewish American Princess is intrinsically critical: it regards her as demanding everything and giving nothing; her assertiveness is viewed as an instrument of emasculation. Further, the stereotype is circular: the Jewish Mother desperately wants her daughter to marry and marry well; the daughter expects the "right" man to fall at her feet. Thus both mother and daughter are seen as exemplifying the most superficial and materialistic social values.²⁸

B) Discuss

- 1) Using some characteristics that describe the Jewish American Princess can you change those negative qualities into positive ones?

Observation: The Jewish American Princess, like the Jewish Mother, is a stereotype based on reality as well as falsehood. Though, like the stereotype of the Jewish Mother, the Jewish American

Princess carries a negative connotation, when she is seen from another angle, she indeed has certain positive qualities. We must uncover the reality behind the stereotype and realize how and why the stereotype came to be.

Question #3: As daughters, how do we relate to our real-life Jewish mothers?

Motivation: A) Read and React

- 1) "Matrophobia," as the poet Lynn Sukenwick has termed it, is the fear not of one's mother or of motherhood but of becoming one's mother. Thousands of daughters see their mothers as having taught a compromise and self-hatred they are struggling to win free of, the one through whom the restrictions and degradations of a female existence were perforce transmitted. Easier by far to hate and reject another outright than to see beyond her to the forces acting upon her. But where a mother is hated to the point of matrophobia there may also be a deep underlying pull towards her, a dread that if one relaxes one's guard one will identify with her completely...

While, in Grace Paley's words, "her son the doctor and her son the novelist" blame and ridicule the "Jewish Mother," Jewish daughters are left with all the panic, guilt, ambivalence, and self-hatred of the woman from whom they came and the woman they may become...

"My mother would kill me if I didn't marry." "It would kill my mother if I didn't marry." In the absence of other absorbing and valued uses for her energy, the full-time "home-maker" has often sunk, yes, into the overinvolvement, the martyrdom, the possessive control, the chronic worry over her children, caricatured in fiction through the "Jewish Mother." But the "Jewish Mother" is only one creation of the enforced withdrawal of nineteenth and twentieth-century women from all roles except one.

Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers' bondage, to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr. Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap with our mothers' and in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins,

we perform radical surgery....²⁹

- 2) ... There was, is, in most of us, a girl-child still longing for a woman's nurture, tenderness, and approval, a woman's power exerted in our defense, a woman's smell and touch and voice, a woman's strong arms around us in moments of fear and pain.... It was not enough to understand our mothers; more than ever, in the effort to touch our own strength as women, we needed them. The cry of that female child in us need not be shameful or regressive, it is the germ of our desire to create a world in which strong mothers and strong daughters will be a matter of course.

We need to understand this double vision or we shall never understand ourselves. Many of us were mothered in ways we cannot yet even perceive; we only know that our mothers were in some incalculable way on our side....³⁰

B) Discuss

- 1) Could you identify with Rich's concept of our need for our mothers, as well as with the concept of matrophobia?
- 2) How much are we a part of our mothers?
- 3) How much are our mothers part of us?
- 4) What are your experiences?

C) Read and React

As daughters we need mothers who want their own freedom and ours. We need not to be the vessels of another woman's self-denial and frustration. The quality of the mother's life -- however embattled and unprotected -- is her primary bequest to her daughter, because a woman who can believe in herself, who is a fighter, and who continues to struggle to create livable space around her, is demonstrating to her daughter that these possibilities exist.³¹

D) Discuss

- 1) Is this a real possibility?
- 2) Do you feel that if there had been Jewish women like this while you were growing up that this would have affected both your own life and your identity as a Jewish woman?

- 3) If you have experienced a model like this, share your experiences with the group.

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Unit II: The Jewish Woman and Her Sexuality

Session 6: Our Sexuality: Stereotypes and Reality

- Goals: -- to examine both our society's and traditional Judaism's stereotype of the Jewish woman, and the impact of this stereotype upon our concept of our sexuality.
- to explore how we personally view our bodies and to trace where our feelings come from.

Advanced Preparation:

Materials needed: overhead projector, pens.

Question #1: How do traditional Judaism and our general society view the Jewish woman?

Motivation: A) Read and React

1) General Society

- a)... Whether courtesan or archeologist, mistress of a king or a devout nun, the literary Jewess remains throughout a sexual symbol par excellence even if not portrayed with her instinctive sexuality exposed the way it is in Thomas Wolfe's Jewish women who:

"Were as old as nature, and as round as the earth: they had a curve in them. They had gone to the wailing walls of death and love for seven thousand years, the strong convulsive faces of the Jews... ripe with grief and wisdom, and the curve of the soul of the Jewish women was still unbroken. Female, fertile, yolky, fruitful as the earth, and ready for the plow, they offered to the famished wanderer, the alien, the exile, the baffled and infuriated man, escape and surcease of the handsome barren women, the hard varnished sawdust dolls, the arrogant and sterile women, false in look and promise as a hot-house peach, who walked the streets and had no curves or fruitfulness in them. The Jewish women waited with rich yolky cries for him, and the news they brought him, the wisdom that they gave to him was that he need not strangle like a mad dog in a barren dark, nor perish famished, unassuaged, within the wilderness beside a rusted lance -- but there was still good

earth for the plow to cleave and furrow, deep cellars for the grain, a sheath for the shining sword, rich pockets of spiced fertility for all the maddened lunges of desire."¹

b) Dr. Phylis Chesler, a psychologist

I had found that non-Jewish men treated me the way white men treat black women -- as more "sensual," earthy, sexually accessible; as Rebecca of Ivanhoe. I experienced the same treatment from feminists, when I was singled out by some comrades as somehow fleshier, earthier, sexier, pushier, more verbal: "Jewish."²

2) Traditional Judaism

a) Ecclesiastes Rabba

Were it not for the fact that it is written "her hands are as bands" (derived from Genesis 3:16: "Yet your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you."), she would take hold of a man in the street and say to him, "Come and be intimate with me." She may be likened to a biting bitch which its owner holds by a chain, and although it is tied up, it seizes a man by his garments in the street. Similarly were it not for the fact that it is written, "Her hands are bound," a woman would snatch at a man in the street.³

b) b. Berakot 24 a-b

... R. Isaac said: A handbreadth (exposed) in a (married) woman constitutes sexual incitement... But has not R. Shesheth (already) said: Why did Scripture enumerate the ornaments worn outside the clothes with those worn inside? To tell you that if one gazes at the little finger of a woman, it is as if he gazed at her secret place!... R. Hisda said: a woman's leg is a sexual incitement, as it says, "Uncover the leg, pass through the rivers," and it says afterwards, "Thy nakedness shall be uncovered, yea, thy shame shall be seen." Samuel said: a woman's voice is a sexual incitement, as it says, "For sweet is thy voice and thy countenance is comely." R. Shesheth said: A woman's hair is a sexual incite-

ment, as it says, "Thy hair is a flock of goats."⁴

c) b. Avodah Zarah 20 a-b

"Thou shalt keep thee from every evil thing" (implies) that one should not look intently at a beautiful woman, even if she be unmarried, or at a married woman even if she be ugly, nor at a woman's gaudy garments....⁵

B) Discuss

- 1) Have you ever encountered this stereotype? Where and when?
- 2) What are your reactions to this stereotype?
- 3) Does this stereotype correspond to your own view of your sexuality? Of your body image?

Observation: In our general culture, as well as subtly in traditional Judaism, Jewish women are viewed as sensual, earthy, and seductive. We need to consider the influence of this stereotype upon our self-concepts, for this stereotype and our reactions to it, have shaped our concepts of our bodies and of ourselves as sexual people.

Question #2: How do we feel about our bodies?

Motivation: A) Stimulus

Project the cartoon "Cellulite" on an overhead projector. (See appendix to this session.)

B) Discuss

- 1) What are your reactions to this cartoon?
- 2) Have you ever/never/often felt this way about your body?

C) Exercise

(See "Geography of the Self" in the appendix to this session.)

D) Discuss

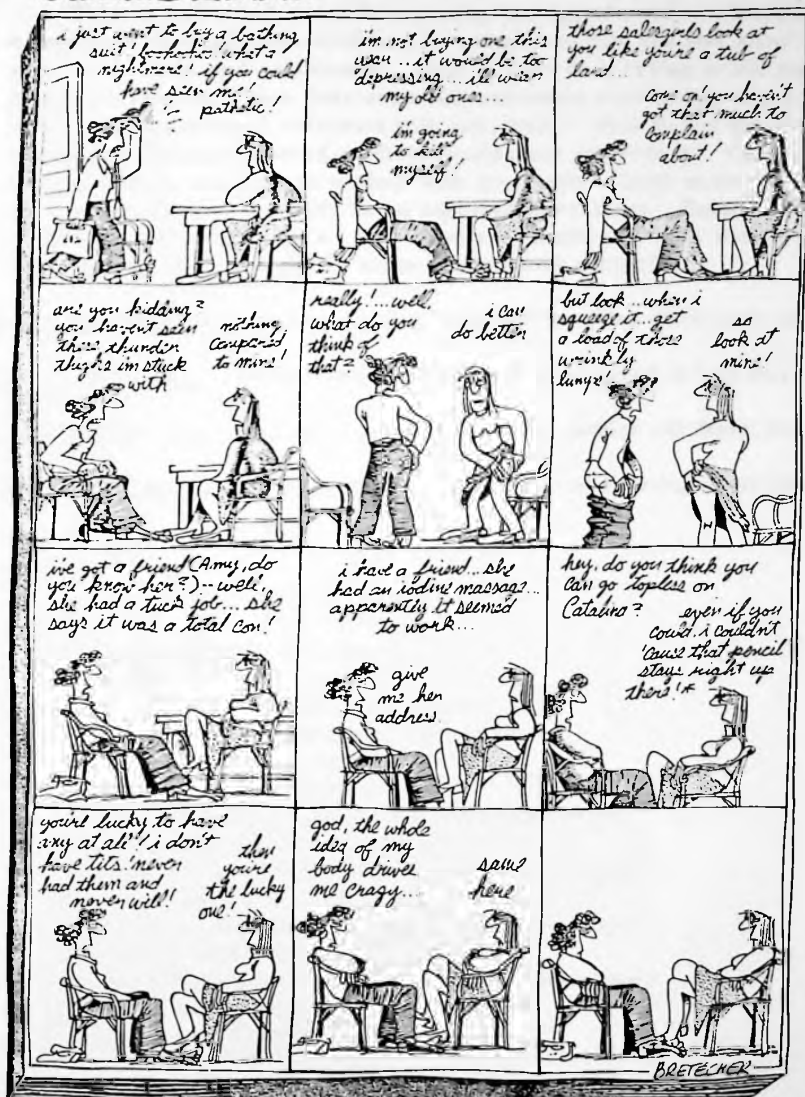
- 1) Have you ever spoken with others about the feelings you have about your body? About your sexuality? Why not?
- 2) What messages about our bodies and sexuality do we get from our society? How?
- 3) What messages about our bodies and sexuality do we get from our religious community? How?

Observation: We all have very mixed feelings about our bodies and sexuality. We need to begin to examine these feelings about our bodies and ourselves.

General conclusion: We seem to be caught up in a dichotomy. On the one hand, society and traditional Judaism view us stereotypically as deeply sexual and earthy. They also assume that we are comfortable with, and have pride and self-confidence in, our bodies. On the other hand, we ourselves tend to feel uncomfortable about our bodies and our sexuality. At times we are self-deprecating. We look at these stereotypes and feel worlds apart from this super-sensual Jewish woman. It is important to recognize this stereotype and to see the role it played in shaping both the positive and negative self-attitudes we hold. It is equally important, however, for us to move away from these stereotypes, and to determine our own self-image.

Appendix to Session 6

CELLULITE



* PENCIL TEST: PLACE A PENCIL HORIZONTALLY UNDER THE BREAST. IF IT STAYS THERE, TOO BAD. (FOR THE UNINITIATED)

"Geography of the Self" Exercise

This is not a unit on anatomy in the biological sense -- but an expedition through your body and its relation to how you feel about you, your body and self image. What is your body trying to tell you? Learn to read it. How does your body influence your image of yourself? What are your relations with your body? How do you get along together? How connected or disconnected are you with it? Can you find new ways to come in contact with your body? Look at your body as a stranger or your body as an unplayed instrument. Expand your body's sensory capacities. How have you taught your body nonsense? What chinks have you put in some of your body armor?⁷

This is an exercise to give you some "time off" to think about your body and your sexuality. The following questions are designed to help you formulate your own reactions to yourself, and to rethink out those reactions. This is for your use only, so if you feel like jotting down ideas, or notes, or pictures, please do.

1) Pretend that your body is a country.

Where would you live or not live?
What are the climates? seasons?
Which parts of the body are slippery?
What are the capitals of the self and why?
What are the major products?
What are your wars and conflicts?
Where are the colonies? Who owns parts of you?
Where are the tension (trouble) spots?
What about the "iron curtain" and how it emerged?
Where would you rest or play?
Where are the uncharted regions -- the frontiers?
How many rulers are in your country?
Is your country a satellite or an independent state?
Ever had any revolutions?
Would you like to leave your country?
How would you do it?
What percentage of your budget would you spend on defense?
Where are the slums of your body? What percent of budget would you spend on improving these?
What music does your body speak and what are the instruments?⁸

2) What are the beautiful parts of your body? the ugliest? Where did

you get your notions of beauty?⁹

- 3) How have your feelings about your body affected your concept of sexuality?

Unit II: The Jewish Woman and Her Sexuality

Session 7: Niddah: A Tool of Affirmation?

Goals: -- to examine the concept of niddah, and its potential use as a tool to enhance our sexual identity as well as our Jewish identity.

Advanced Preparation:

Materials needed: overhead projector, newsprint, masking tape, magic markers.

Assignments: -- the facilitator before the session should print down on a piece of newsprint, the points listed under Motivation, question 2b.

-- two women to participate on a panel, see Motivation, question 2c.

Question #1: What is our attitude towards menstruation?

Motivation: A) Read Aloud

... I know no woman... for whom her body is not a fundamental problem: its clouded meaning, its fertility, its desire, .. its bloody speech, its silences, its changes... and ripenings.¹⁰

B) Stimulus

Project on an overhead projector the "First Tampon" cartoon. (See appendix to this session.)

C) Discuss

- 1) How did you learn about your menstrual cycle?
- 2) What were your first feelings about your period?
Have your feelings changed since that time?

D) Read and React

... It's a shame more women can't see the beauty of their menstrual cycles. How can a woman not want to learn what's going on in her body? The beauty of the ovaries, the fantastic performance of the Fallopian tube...¹¹

Observation: The menstrual period in our culture has been something hidden and undiscussed. We've lost our sense of wonder and awe of ourselves. However increasingly, we are beginning to examine our feelings and experiences regarding that cycle which plays such a significant role in our adult lives.

Question #2: What does niddah imply? What are its positive and negative aspects?

Motivation: A) Read

The practice of niddah is a Jewish ritual traditional woman observe during their menstrual cycles. The following is an explanation of niddah, written by an Orthodox Jewish woman.

... The Jewish attitude towards menstruation (about which there is wide misconception) is based on a specific biblical commandment. The husband and wife are told to separate from each other sexually -- no physical contact, separate beds and many other corollaries -- for the duration of the menstrual period plus seven days. Again, there is no one reason -- we do this because God commanded it. One thing is certain though: we are not unclean. ("Unclean" is a very poor attempt to translate niddah, a Hebrew word used only to designate a menstruating woman.) The woman is not kept out of the synagogue, nor is she forbidden to carry out most of her activities. Only the sexual relationship is forbidden.

After her period has ended and she has counted seven days without staining, she goes to a ritual bath called a mikveh. Mikvehs are clean, heated, well lighted, and comfortable. In my neighborhood mikveh, there is a waiting room with mirrors and hairdryers. When it is my turn, I go to one of several small rooms complete with bathtub, shower, and sink. If I haven't bathed and washed my hair at home, I can do so now. If I have, I just shower. Then -- into the mikveh, a small area of water about chest-deep, with the temperature of a luke-warm bath. I immerse three times and say two prayers. The purpose of this ritual is completely spiritual. As

you see, it hasn't anything to do with physical cleanliness, as we bathe and shower first. If menstrual blood suggests the death of the potential fetus, the mikveh waters suggest a life-giving element. Following the mikveh a woman is permitted to resume normal relations with her husband.¹²

B) Keynote

- 1) Have written on a piece of newsprint the following points and tape it to the wall.
- 2) The facilitator should answer any questions the group might have.

Niddah:

- Niddah is a term indicating a menstruating woman.
- Niddah implies the Jewish ritual of separating from one's spouse before, during, and after one's menses.
- This separation takes place from the time she expects her menses, until seven days on which no blood is seen after her menses.
- A minimum of five days was set for the menses itself, so that the shortest period of niddah would be twelve days.
- Throughout this time husband and wife were not only to have no sexual intercourse, but also no physical touching.
- On the evening of the seventh day without a sign of blood, the woman would go to a mikveh, and would go through the ritual ceremony of immersion. At that point, she could resume normal sexual relations with her spouse.

Motivation: A) Panel

- 1) Have two pre-assigned group members debate on the issue:

"The merits of niddah for the liberal Jewish woman."

(See appendix to this session for position papers both for and against the practice of niddah.)

Observation: The traditional practices of niddah have long been discounted

by liberal Jewish women because niddah was often viewed as archaic. However, niddah may in fact offer an enriching dimension to our sexual and spiritual lives. This is a beginning of a re-evaluation of this concept.

Question #3: Can niddah serve as a tool for our increased self-awareness as women? As Jews? Why? Why not?

Motivation: A) Discuss

- 1) What benefits can result from the observance of niddah?
- 2) What personal values can be derived from the observance of these laws?
- 3) What personal tensions may result from the observance of these laws?
- 4) Could you foresee any social tensions resulting? For example, explaining this belief practice to others, particularly the non-observant?

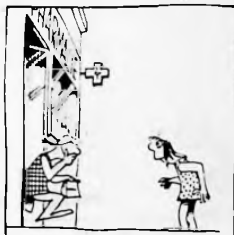
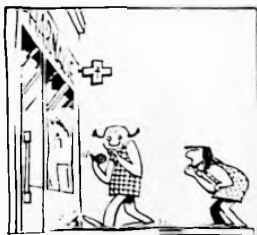
Observation: Niddah can be offered as an option to liberal Jewish women to observe. It can offer a heightened sense of ourselves as women and as Jews, simultaneously deepening our sexual and Jewish identities.

General conclusion: One natural cycle we have is that of menstruation -- a cycle symbolic of our potential reproductivity. However, we have inherited some negative stereotypes about menstruation from our culture, which have had an impact on the way we view our bodies and our sexuality. Some liberal Jewish women are beginning to re-examine the traditional practice of niddah, both as a way to mark their natural physical

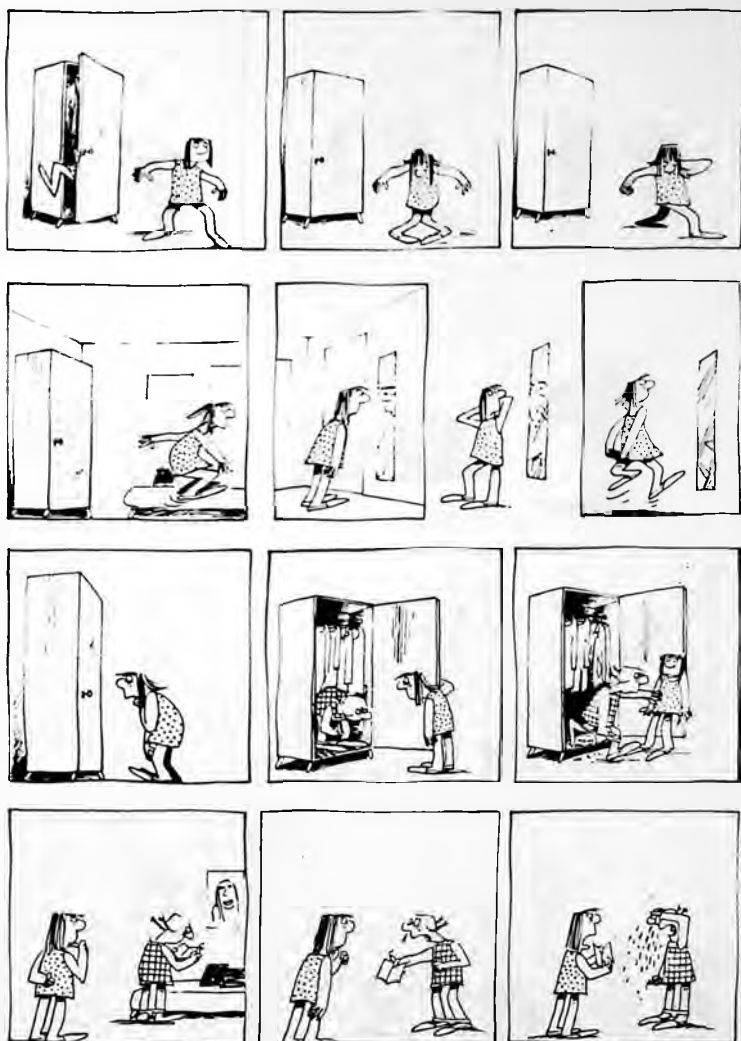
cycle, and also as a means of affirming their wholeness as physical and spiritual persons.

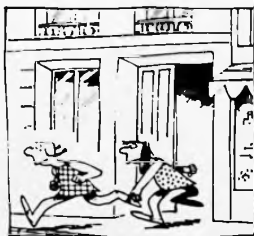
Appendix to Session 7

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Position Papers: Against the practice of Niddah

I The laws of niddah, which were written first by the (male) priestly writers of Leviticus and continually expanded by the (male) rabbis, must have contributed in the extreme to a sense of female inferiority and male superiority, at least on the unconscious level but probably most often on the conscious level. Rachel Adler makes the point clearly:

The state of niddah became a monthly exile from the human race, a punitive shunning of the menstruant. Women were taught disgust and shame for their bodies and for the fluid which came out of them, that good, rich, red stuff which nourished ungrateful men through nine fetal months. The mikvah, instead of being the primal sea in which all were made new, became the pool at which women were cleansed of their filth and thus became acceptable sexual partners once more. Nor did it help when rabbis informed offended women that their filth was spiritual rather than physical.¹⁴

II Since a menstruous woman was unclean and contaminated everything and everybody she came into contact with, even indirectly, she really was "banished," at least already in mishnaic times. No food was to be eaten with her... In fact she was excluded from her home and stayed in a special house, known as "a house of uncleanness," and remained there "all the days of her impurity." The tannaitic text of The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan again makes this, and other restrictions, quite clear:

What is the hedge which the Torah made about its words? Lo, it says, also thou shalt not approach unto a woman... as long as she is impure by her uncleanness (Leviticus 18:19). May her husband perhaps embrace her or kiss her or engage her in idle chatter? The verse says, thou shalt not approach. May she perhaps sleep with him in her clothes on the couch? The verse says, thou shalt not approach. May she wash her face perhaps and paint her eyes? The verse says, And of her that is sick with her impurity (Leviticus 15:33): all the days of her impurity let her be in isolation...¹⁵

III ... The attitude of the Jewish tradition to the menstruating woman -- despite the modern rationalizations that the laws of family purity serve to safeguard the woman's health, to prevent sexual desire from becoming sexual license, or to keep marriage a perpetual

honeymoon -- reflects a primitive blood taboo. According to halakhic prescriptions, the menstruating woman -- or niddah -- is to have no physical contact whatsoever with a man. Like the person suffering from a gonorrheal discharge, she is impure. Contact with her is permitted only after she has been free of her "discharge" for seven days and has undergone ritual purification in a mikveh. During her period of impurity, anything she touches becomes impure. While this state of impurity is a legal rather than a hygienic concept and, according to rabbinic authorities, does not imply that the niddah is physically unclean or repugnant, it is clear that simple Jewish men and women throughout the ages have not interpreted the laws of family purity in such a disinterested manner. Even the mere fact of legal impurity for two weeks of every month has involved many disabilities for women. And the psychological impact of the institution, especially in its strictest interpretations, upon a woman's self-esteem and attitude to her own body, would seem to be harmful.¹⁶

Position Papers: In support of the practice of Niddah

I In Jewish law a woman does not, by marriage contract, surrender control of her body... consent is essential, even in marriage. On the one hand, Judaism does not look down upon physical love. We are composed of body and soul, and it is natural, human, and legitimate that love expresses itself in both forms. On the other hand, Judaism teaches that physical love is justified only where back of it is not only affection, but respect for the partner and consideration for her abiding happiness.

... According to Jewish law, a husband must never take his wife for granted. He must obtain her consent even in marriage. He must never approach her without her agreement. Physical love is the normal crowning of unity of heart and mind, but a wife Jewishly speaking, should never become a means to the husband's ends... It implies at all times this assurance of her personal dignity and self-respect.

There is one great danger to marriage: that marital relations become a routine affair, like eating and drinking... It is essential for husband and wife to realize that marriage is more than physical love. It implies not only consideration, patience, and affection, but infinite trust and bottomless comradeship. During these twelve days where there is no physical approach, husband and wife become conscious of these other facets of married happiness. They recognize that sex is neither nothing nor everything. It is a powerful factor in marriage relations, but there are other drives and expressions that may greatly affect the happiness of the partners. During these twelve days, husband and wife learn to be exceedingly considerate of each other, and that attitude then projects itself upon the end of the separation when the love cycle is taken up again. There is no staleness, no excuse, no surfeit, but a restrained happy anticipation of complete love when husband and wife are both at ease emotionally, physically and spiritually.¹⁷

II The laws were designed to meet the needs of both man and woman. The latter is conceded to have a sex life of her own. That she is not a passive instrument and should never be treated as such seems to many to be a startling modern discovery. This truth is not only implicit in Jewish law that requires that consent be won before every union, but is explicit in Talmudic discussions.¹⁸

Evelyn Huttv'Dodd

III I first encountered the ritual *mikvah* (ritual immersion) as an adult at a Jewish Feminist Conference in the Midwest in 1973. If I had thought at all about *mikvah* and *niddah* (abstinence for a week during and a week after menstruation) before then, it was only in a derogatory sense, as a vehicle for oppressing women and fortunately relegated to the past...

It was 18 months before I decided to act on any of these thoughts. I was afraid that going to the *mikvah* would somehow co-opt my feminist self-concept; I was afraid (or didn't know how) to discuss the issue with my husband; I was uncertain how I felt about two weeks of sexual abstinence.

I'm still not sure how or to what extent I overcame my hesitations, but several things helped. I heard a rabbi in a class I was taking say the solution to the problem of rituals' losing their meaning was to reinvest old rituals with the *kavannah*, the intentions which arise out of our lives. I met more women who were strong, intelligent people "even though" they observed *mikvah*. These encouragements touched only the first, the feminist fear; the other two were more difficult and more personal.

My husband and I had been having sexual difficulties for most of our married life. The problem was that our urges rarely coincided and that because we chose to respect each other's "no," we ended up making love very infrequently. This was a constant source of tension even though we love each other very much. I expect that other couples, married or not, have this problem, too. Products of the "sexual revolution," we are reluctant to admit that there are times when we'd rather not be intimate; at the same time we try not to violate each other's privacy. The result is a tremendous awkwardness and tension which no amount of concern, sensitivity and talking it out (which we must have done hundreds of times) seems to help.

When finally I worked up the courage to broach the subject again with *mikvah* in mind, we agreed that perhaps the imposition of an external, religiously-sanctioned time frame might relieve the stress of a complicated decision every night. We agreed that though we would continue to share our double bed during the *niddah* period, my husband would not approach me for sexual gratification. Conversely, during the permissible times, I would wear my diaphragm each night and not refuse advances or hold back from making them unless one or both of us were really exhausted or under an extraordinary amount of stress from other parts of our life (work, school, family). At the end of our discussion we thought we had a good scheme, and felt the potential of relief from the guilt and frustration of pressuring, the guilt and depression of refusing.

Still, when I set off for the *mikvah* the first time, I was nervous and scared, and not at all sure I was doing the right thing...

Once at the *mikvah* I found a very clean and modern facility and a very kind *omedes* (*mikvah* attendant who watches your immersion). I'm sure she guessed immediately that I was new at this, but did not let me know that she knew, and was helpful without being patronizing. I also found complete and detailed instructions on how to prepare.

I enjoyed the preparation immensely and still do. Never in my daily life do I allow myself the luxury of a half hour in the shower and complete attention to my physical self from the top of my head to the soles of my feet. I'd given that up long ago as being pubescent, vain and a foolish waste of time. How wrong that was! How happy I was to rediscover myself! When I went into the *mikvah* the water was warm, friendly and accepting of my body. I

said the *bracha*, submerged myself a second time, and came out, feeling really renewed. The only shock was the chlorine in the water, a necessary (I guess) modern intrusion.

The ritual of going to the *mikvah* had the hoped-for effect on our marriage. We each have two weeks free from sexual pressures and demands. I find that during this time I feel closer to God, meditate more often, study more easily. The together time is really together, precious because it won't last forever, treasured by both of us. During that time, I feel closer to the material human world and seem to have more energy for all people—not only my husband. The result of the whole cycle is a de-emphasis of the sex-object aspect of the relationship between men and women.

It may be that we were only lucky that our personal rhythm coincides with the traditional one, but I think not. Like other rituals we have taken on (Shabbat, *kashrut*) the more we do them, the more we see that they are healthy patterns corresponding to rhythms of the universe (i.e. the moon) and the rhythms of personal need.

Moreover, the *mikvah-niddah* ritual should not be open only to married women. My daughter, if I have one, will start going to the *mikvah* when she begins menstruating. We will try to have her Bat Mitzvah occur near that time. The point is not to emphasize the reproductive and sexual aspects of woman's life, but to bring them fully into a whole Jewish life, in the same symbolic way that circumcision integrates a man's sexuality and reproductive life into his Jewish being. I would guess, too, that if we observed *mikvah* and *niddah* as single women, we would respect our own bodies much sooner and therefore respect ourselves, and out of self-respect, grow healthier relationships . . .

In sum, the ritual of *mikvah* provides for three needs unique to Jewish womanhood: it marks the passing of time and changing seasons, the life and death of our bodies. It celebrates our female beings in our preparations and in submerging our wombs in the fluid womb of the *mikvah*. Most important, it provides a framework for a time to be physically alone and a time to be physically together that we need to order our lives and bring them into concert with the natural, God-given flow of time.

Note to Unit II

1. Livia E. Bitton, "The Jewess as a Fictional Sex Symbol," Bucknell Review, Spring 1973, p. 85.
2. Aviva Cantor Zuckoff, "An Exclusive Interview with Dr. Phyllis Chesler," Lilith, Winter 76/77, p. 25.
3. Ecclesiastes Rabbah, transl. Rabbi Dr. H. Freedman, Midrash Rabbah, Vol. 8 (London: The Soncino Press, 1939), p. 209.
4. Talmud Bavli, Berakot 24 a-b.
5. Talmud Bavli, Avodah Zarah 20 a-b.
6. Valerie Marchant, ed. and trans., National Lampoon Presents Claire Bretécher (New York: National Lampoon Magazine, 1978), n.p.
7. Harold C. Lyon, Jr., Learning to Feel -- Feeling to Learn (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1976), p. 145.
8. Ibid., pp. 143-144.
9. Ibid., p. 144.
10. Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1976), p. 284.
11. Nancy Friday, My Mother, My Self (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1977), pp. 150-151.
12. Bracha Sachs, "Why I Chose Orthodoxy," Ms. Magazine, July 1974, p. 83.
13. Claire Bretécher, "The First Tampon," Ms. Magazine, January 1977, pp. 62-65.
14. Leonard Swidler, Women in Judaism (New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1976), pp. 138-139.
15. Ibid., pp. 137-138.
16. Paula Hyman, "The Other Half: Women in the Jewish Tradition," The Jewish Woman, New Perspectives (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), pp. 110-111.

17. Leo Jung, "The Rhythm of Life," The Jewish Library: Woman, Vol. 3 (New York: The Soncino Press, 1970), pp. 124-126.
18. Rivka Levi Jung, "Taharah -- A Way to Married Happiness," The Jewish Library: Woman, Vol. 3 (New York: The Soncino Press, 1970), p. 133.
19. Evelyn Huttv'Dodd, "Ten Women Tell... The Ways We Are," Lilith, Winter 76/77, p. 7-9.

Unit III: The Jewish Woman and Her Participation in Religious and Communal Life

Session 8: Spirituality and Worship

Goals: -- to examine our Jewish legal tradition with a view to its impact on:

- a) our concept of our spirituality
- b) our participation in worship and religious ceremonies

Advanced Preparation:

Materials needed: newsprint, magic markers, masking tape.

Question #1: What traditionally is our legal status in relation to observance of Jewish ritual?

Motivation: A) Keynote

- 1) Hand out the information sheets on halacha found in the appendix to this session and read aloud.
- 2) The facilitator should be prepared to answer questions, and to discuss the key concepts involved.

Observation: Jewish law traditionally dictates our religious responsibilities. For both liberal and traditional Jewish women, this legal system and its resultant culture has affected to some degree, our concepts of ourselves as spiritual people. It has also limited both our own and other's vision of ourselves as full participants in the realm of worship.

Question #2: What impact has our religious/legal tradition had upon our image of ourselves as spiritual people?

Motivation: A) Read

- 1) ... She is not counted in the minyan. She cannot officiate at a service or read the Torah. For that matter, she is not even permitted to sit among the men in the

synagogue. (It is as if the men were afraid that women would distract them from the more serious matters of prayer and the soul. This seems to say that they (women) were regarded solely as "body." Their removal to a balcony frees the men's spirits of the fleshly temptation and thus permits its expansion or purification. But what of the woman's soul? Why was it not considered? Why not seat the men in the balcony?) She has no special garments for prayer. Indeed, she is really not expected to pray, and is excused from it because of her "home responsibilities." And when she does come to the synagogue, she sits and gossips in the balcony, thus confirming the male's suspicion that she is not inclined towards prayer anyway. (But why not gossip? Hidden in a balcony, excluded from any real participation in the service, what meaning could it have for her? Her gossip was merely a confirmation of her alienation.) ... But what of the woman's spirit? When was she given the opportunity to soar and delve into the outer and inner spaces?¹

- 2) A man when he enters the synagogue has a full world opened up before him. He is immediately included in the community when it takes stock for a minyan, whereas I have so often felt excluded -- to sit and wait with nine men for a tenth is to feel humiliation, insignificance -- to whom in the congregation other than myself, does it make a difference that I have come to pray? A man when he enters the synagogue is made to feel at home, a part of the community, when he is called for an aliyah. While he reaffirms his closeness to and love of the Torah, I have felt unwanted, barred from the central source of my religion. When a man enters the synagogue regularly, he may be encouraged to serve as Schaliach Tzibor the representative of the congregation to God. He searches his whole being to find the strength and the purity to help others in their prayers. He strains to sense the mood and needs of each congregant and is unified with the group as they reach out to God. He is giving, ideally of the most tender, sacred parts of himself. I have sat, for years, selfishly sending the prayers of only one soul. I have taken and taken and taken; my gifts of prayer, if I possess any, are uncultivated, unwanted.

How a woman can help but feel this, whether consciously or unconsciously, I do not know. I do not un-

derstand how I sat silently for so long, feeling outside of and cut off from the congregation of which I was ostensibly a member. When my unhappiness and anger mounted to a crisis level, there were two options open to me. The first was simply to stop going, and this I did for about a year. How many women with consciousness raised, with pride and self-respect, have taken such a course, I can only guess at. Surely I was not alone. The second option, which I have pursued this year, was to help organize an "alternative minyan" at Hillel. There are several aspects of this minyan which make it different from a more traditional one, but for me, the most crucial one has been in the feeling of equality, of openness with the other men and women who come to daven. And the greatest gift this congregation gave me was when it enabled me to offer a gift of my own -- with terror and great doubts of my adequacy, I led this congregation in prayer. For the first time in years, I sensed that I had made some progress in my spiritual life. I had looked within myself and found something to give to others.²

B) Discuss

- 1) What impact have the Jewish legal tradition and Jewish social structures had on our spiritual life?
- 2) Have we ever thought about our spiritual life? If not, why not?
- 3) What spiritual needs do we have?

Observation: In our secular society, talk of seeking God and of developing one's spirituality is belittled and seldom discussed, yet at the same time it remains a very powerful subject. Although we are hesitant to speak of this subject (it is almost considered taboo) it is obvious that people do have spiritual needs, especially as illustrated by the presence of the many cults around today. It would seem that to be a whole person, one's physical, psychological, and spiritual needs must be

fulfilled. Our tradition has, over the centuries, shaped our religious concepts and spiritual needs. But in the case of women, our tradition has severely limited our participation in the realm of Jewish religious life. It is time to review the whole question of women's spirituality, and to begin to explore this dimension of ourselves.

Question #3: What has been our experience within the realms of the worship service and religious ceremonies?

Motivation: A) Exercise

- 1) On a piece of newsprint taped on a wall, list the various means of participating within religious services at Temple and at home.
- 2) With another color magic marker, tabulate how many group members have themselves participated in those practices listed.

For example:

- a) read Torah
- b) serve as Cantor
- c) act as Shaliach Tzibor (or lead the service)
- d) aliyah (being called up to the bimah to bless the Torah)
- e) light Shabbat candles
- f) Kiddush
- g) recite the kaddish
- h) lay tefillin
- i) wear talit
- j) wear kippah
- k) lead Birkat Hamazon
- l) read the megillah
- m) usher
- n) sit on the bimah
- o) read during the service
- p) bat mitzvah (at any age)
- q) chant Haftarah (or read)
- r) read Haftarah blessings
- s) lead home ceremonies for the holidays
- t) carry the Torah in Hakafot

B) Read

"But Can She Chant?" an article found in the appendix to this session.

C) Discuss

- 1) What have been your experiences regarding participation in the synagogue service?
- 2) What do you do and how do you participate in terms of home celebrations?

Observation: Outside of special services, lighting the Shabbat candles, or reading special prayers, most Jewish women have not consistently participated in synagogue worship. Increasingly we are beginning to look at, and to question, our limited or non-participatory roles.

General conclusion: For many Jews, prayer and religious observance cements a bond between themselves and their people. Yet for many Jewish women, this bond is a tenuous one since they have rejected their traditional role (that restricts their participation in religious life and worship) and consequently they feel alienated from, and/or rejected by their religious environments. In the Reform and Reconstructionist movements, some of this has changed. Both movements state the belief in the equality of women and men in Jewish life. In both movements women are beginning to officiate as rabbis and as cantors. However, even in these two movements, we have still yet to see on a consistent basis, adult

Jewish women participating to the same degree as do Jewish men. But even this situation is undergoing change as Jewish women become more knowledgeable Judaically and come to seek a more active and equal role in religious life.

Appendix to Session 8

General Introduction to Halacha

Jewish law consists of both positive and negative mitzvot, or commandments. Simply stated, positive mitzvot are acts which Jews should perform, and negative mitzvot are acts which should not be performed. For example, "Jews should light Shabbat candles on Friday evening," is an illustration of a positive mitzvah. "Jews should not work on Shabbat," illustrates a negative mitzvah. Jewish law is further subdivided into laws which are the time-bound and those which are not. That prayer should take place three times a day at specific times during the day is an example of a time-bound mitzvah.

We also find the use of two key Hebrew words in Jewish law, which are crucial to our discussion. These are א'ן and פ'ט. The word א'ן denotes that a person is obligated to perform an act, that one must do such an act. The word פ'ט connotes that a person is exempt from a certain practice. In fact, such a person may perform the act, but one does not have to. The person is exempt from the obligation. There is also the connotation that even if the person who is פ'ט performs an act from which she/he is exempt, it is not equal in value to the same act as observed by a person who is א'ן. The act of the person who is considered א'ן is the more important, and weightier in value.

One who is not formally obligated (in a specific matter) cannot discharge (for them) the obligation of those who are.³

The Woman's Status in Halacha

I Major Obligations

The three major mitzvot that Jewish women are specifically required to perform are:

- 1) Lighting Shabbat candles
- 2) Challah (the separation of a bit of dough in the preparation of the Shabbat loaves.)
- 3) Niddah (laws of family purity: more specifically, in relation to menstruation.)

II Regarding ritual practice:

... Women cannot be counted in a minyan, or prayer quorum. Consequently they cannot lead a service. Women cannot be called as witnesses before a Jewish court. In most cases women are not forbidden a ritual activity but merely exempted from it. They are exempt from hearing the shofar, or ram's horn, on Rosh Ha-Shanah, the Jewish New Year, from the commandments of sukkah and lulav on Sukkot, from putting on tallit (prayer shawl) and t'fillin (phylacteries), from all set prayer, from reciting the Sh'ma twice a day, and from studying Torah. In other words, women are excused from most of the positive acts of Jewish commitment, and numerous theories explain why this is so. The Mishnah suggests that women are exempt from positive commandments which are time-limited (Mishnah Kiddushin 1:7). A commandment to do an act at a particular time, such as hear the shofar on Rosh Ha-Shanah, is not addressed to women. On the other hand, women are responsible to recite the Haggadah and eat matzah at the Passover seder, both of which commandments are positive and time-limited.

To a concerned woman, the mechanisms determining that women are obligated or exempt appear to be applied in an utterly arbitrary manner, in what I call "the Halakhah Shell Game," a kind of guessing game in which the hand is proven to be quicker than the eye. Confronted with the laws concerning women, we are like the rube at the shell game: we can never guess whether it will be an inclusion or an exemption and why. From the passage "You shall teach them diligently to your children," the Talmud concludes "to your male children but not to your female children," thus exempting women from Torah study. On the other hand, the passage "You shall tell it to your son" is explained to require both men and women to participate in retelling the Passover

Haggadah. Women are exempt from hearing the Shofar on Rosh Ha-Shanah, but they are required to read M'gillat Esther on Purim.⁴

"But Can She Chant?"

"Look, a lady *chazan*!" It was the second day of Rosh Hashanah, and the elderly man was surprised to see a woman wearing a *kittel* in the hall of the synagogue. "Are you the *chazan*?" he wanted to know.

In the nonprofessional sense of the word, I was. Though I never had a bat mitzvah, I now lead services frequently. If anyone had predicted this six or seven years ago, I would have scoffed, and a majority of my Conservative congregation would have hit the ceiling.

Yet, by last fall, only some of the newcomers to our congregation were surprised by either my *kittel* or my *davening*. For both the curious and the eager, I offer the following rules for becoming a "lady *chazan*":

1. Set a limited goal—and forget to stick to it.

In June of 1972, I marked my thirty-sixth birthday by chanting my first *haftarah*. I had long wanted to do a *haftarah* portion, but that was the extent of my ambitions.

Or so I thought. In 1974, I led my first Rosh Hashanah *musaf*. Armed with hours of preparation and weakened by a month of insomnia, I stood before a congregation of 750 people. Many of them came only on the High Holidays and had never before heard a woman lead a service. But I was prepared.

So, presumably, was everyone else. My picture had appeared in the local Jewish paper, and I had even been mentioned in the gen-

eral press.

Nervous? I'll say! If I had anticipated any of this, I would never have opened my mouth for that first *haftarah*.

2. Start out with a solid core of insufficient knowledge. It will give you the courage you need to go ahead.

I began with several advantages. I had come to services regularly, I could read Hebrew fluently, and I remembered melodies easily.

I had even majored in music in college and, for a time, had been a professional musician. Unfortunately, I was a pianist. As a singer, I was strictly an amateur. Making the best of a bad bargain, I decided to use my musically trained ear to nudge and coax my untrained voice along.

This worked—to a point. Inevitably, at least once in each service I led, my voice would emerge thin, flat, and horrible.

I solved the problem by taking voice lessons. They have been tremendous. I not only sing better, I sleep better. No more late-summer insomnia.

3. Pick your congregation wisely.

I didn't. When my husband and I joined, our congregation allowed participation only by girls on the night of their bat mitzvah. However, in the spring of 1971, the issue of women in services surfaced full force.

There were numerous meetings and endless discussions. There were cries of "Now!" and cries of "Never!" Finally, in the fall, the congregation voted. Women would be allowed to open and close the ark and to tie and dress the Torah in preparation for its return to the ark. We could not yet do these on the High Holidays.

But that could come later. A crucial part of that first vote was a provision that the congregation would meet every six months to consider further action. Obviously, much depended on how the first step was implemented.

My husband was then *gabbai*, which meant that he was in charge of congregational participation in the service. Almost every Saturday morning, Howard would find one or two women willing to go up on the *bimah* to open the ark or tie the Torah. If no one else would do it, there was always me. Those first two months, I certainly did more than my share to help the congregation become used to seeing women on the *bimah*.

Gradually, more and more women were willing to appear on the *bimah*, and gradually, men became more and more used to seeing us there. Every six months, another step or two was added — Shabbat morning bat-mitzvah ceremonies, *aliyot* for special occasions, opening the ark on the High Holidays. At each step, opposition grew less.

Somewhere in the middle of this process, I chanted my first *haftarah*, the first adult woman in our congregation to chant one. I wondered how this would be looked upon by the "regulars." The older men who came to services every Shabbat morning.

Originally, these men had been very much opposed to increasing women's participation in services. They seemed to have accepted the Shabbat morning bat mitzvah. Were they ready to accept me?

I need not have worried. When I finished, several of the "regulars" rushed up to congratulate me.

One who did not was a man in his eighties who often led services and whose initial protests at the idea of women on the *bimah* had been quite vigorous. My husband told me of his reaction. It was "Give her a kiss for me." (He now gives me his own kisses.)

We now have complete equality for women in our services. We have lost surprisingly few members as a result of it. For the most part, we changed and grew and held together as a congregation. It seems that I chose my congregation wisely after all.

4. Have a thick skin.

Even in the most congenial of congregations, you may experience some negative reaction if you are breaking new ground for women. Probably none of it will come directly to you. I have had relayed to me second- and third-hand complaints about my voice, my hair, and my shoes. They make me wonder what I *haven't* heard about.

A woman leading services has to make some decisions that men do not face. For example, the Rosh Hashanah *musaf* begins with a very beautiful prayer, the *Hineni*. This is the one prayer where the leader prays not on behalf of the congregation, but on his, or in my case her, own behalf.

It is unquestionably a personal prayer. I therefore use the feminine form of all the Hebrew nouns, verbs, and adjectives that apply to me. "One woman really liked that," a friend reported. "She thought it showed you really understood what you were praying about." Before I could become too pleased, my friend went on to report that the man next to her thought my changes were terrible.

I must admit some sympathy for those who feel I am tampering with the text. After many hours of practicing my version of the *Hineni*, I find it somewhat of a shock to hear it chanted as written.

A more general question is whether to wear a *kipah* and/or *talit*. If you decide to wear a *talit*, do you choose a wool one with black stripes, a silk one with blue stripes, or a crocheted one with apricot stripes? Here, too, whatever you find comfortable and reasonable will undoubtedly prove provoking to someone else.

5. Be prepared not to recognize yourself.

For me, the initial discussion on women's participation released a torrent of memories. I remembered the bat mitzvah I had not had and which I had tried to convince myself did not matter. ("You really should have one," the rabbi had said, "but the older men would never stand for it.")

I remembered two Simchat Torah services. The first occurred when I was twelve. That year, girls who were at least thirteen had been allowed to carry the Torah. I suppose the older men had objected to this also. For the following Simchat Torah, when I was thirteen, only boys and men could carry the scrolls.

Prodded by my memories, I suddenly discovered that I was a Jewish feminist. But it was an abstract, theoretical sort of feminism. I had by then adjusted to my status as a Jewish woman. I no more wanted to catch up on missed Jewish opportunities than I wanted to make up for not having learned to roller skate.

Yet, thanks to my new-found commitment, my interest in chanting *haftarah* portions, and an encouraging husband, I began doing more and more on the *bi-*

mah. I had thought myself immune to *bimah* fever. I found my resistance as low as anybody's.

I enjoy leading services. I consider it not so much a performance as a special way of praying *with* the rest of the congregation.

Both the demands and rewards of participation are particularly great on the High Holidays. I find that my intensive preparation for leading one Rosh Hashanah service carries over into a better understanding of the entire High Holiday liturgy. For me it is a key that unlocks new meaning each Rosh Hashanah.

6. Find out what you don't know that you don't know.

If you plan to lead services for the first time, you need to learn more than the melodies. Get someone knowledgeable to show you when to come in, when to read silently, when to face this way, when to walk that way. Even if you attend services regularly, you will be surprised at what you have never noticed.

One minor area you may want to know more about is the handshake. After you have performed any honor, whether it is opening the ark or leading a service, anywhere from one to 200 people will shake your hand. The more traditional among them may say, "*Yasher koach*," which means "May your strength increase." The normal response is, "Thank you," not "*Yasher koach*."

One final word. Don't feel you have to make it all the way to "lady *chazan*." The rewards of participation are there, whatever you do. I often think of one older woman who was helped down the steps of the *bimah* by my husband. She had just opened the ark for the first time in her life, and her eyes shone with tears. ★ ⁵

Unit III: The Jewish Woman and Her Participation in Religious and Communal Life

Session 9: God, Language, and Liturgy

- Goals: -- to underscore the impact language has upon us.
- to consider how language can reflect our needs as women.
 - to examine the language traditionally used in prayer and to recognize how it reflects certain images and values.
 - to explore our mental image of God.
 - to review the language which we use to describe God.

Advanced Preparation:

Materials needed: newsprint, masking tape, magic markers, pens, copies of the worksheet in the appendix to this session.

Question #1: What impact does language have upon us?

Motivation: A) Read and React

- 1) From the time of the Genesis Story, human beings have been aware of the power involved in being able to name something or someone. If anything, men and women have become even more aware of the importance of language in the creation of their world, externally as well as internally, with the advent of modern linguistic analysis. Every significant human movement, social, political, economic -- and religious -- develops its own special language which helps form its adherents and projects an influential image of itself to outsiders...

One of the most significant human movements of our day is feminism, i. e., the movement to acquire justice for women equally with men. One result of this movement is a growing awareness of sexism in our language, which most often takes the form of assuming that the male is the true human ideal. Such male dominance in language can be called linguistic sexism.⁶

- 2) Language and social structures are reciprocal

in relationship. Language not only shapes given concepts of reality and ways of acting, it is also shaped by changes in concepts and social behavior. Generally, the ruling group of a given society tends to impose its value system through the connotations of language usage. Powerless groups usually have little part in the formation of standard language and tend to internalize the social structures mirrored in that language.

Therefore, if a powerless group becomes conscious of its subordinate relationship to the ruling group and is in the process of self-liberation, it is necessary for newly created relationships to find expression in new language and imagery. Without a conscious change in expressions, the desired process of change in oppressive social structures is slowed down.⁷

- 3) ... Dr. Richard P. Goldwater, a psychotherapist, goes to the heart of the matter when he asks, "If we take on its merits (the) assertion that man in its deepest origin of meaning stands for both sexes of our race, then how did it come to mean male? Did we males appropriate man for ourselves at the expense of the self-esteem of our sisters? Did what we now call 'sexism' alter the flow of language through us?"

"Those who have grown up with a language that tells them they are at the same time men and not men are faced with ambivalence -- not about their sex, but about their status as human beings..."⁸

- 4) The question underlines the essential absurdity of using the same linguistic symbols for the human race in one breath and for only half of it in the next. Alma Graham, a lexiographer, draws these contrasts: "If a woman is swept off a ship into the water, the cry is 'Man overboard!' If she is killed by a hit-and-run driver, the charge is 'manslaughter.' If she is injured on the job, the coverage is 'workmen's compensation.' But if she arrives at a threshold marked 'men only,' she knows the admonition is not intended to bar animals or plants or inanimate objects. It is meant for her."⁹

- 5) Admittedly, "he or she" is clumsy, and the reasonable argument that it should be alternated with

"she or he" makes it still clumsier. Also, by the time any consideration of the pronoun problem gets to this stage, there is usually a large body of opinion to the effect that the whole issue is trivial. Observing that men more often take this view than women, the syndicated columnist Gena Corea has come up with a possible solution. "All right," she suggests, "if women think it's important and men don't... let's use a pronoun that pleases women. Men don't care what it is as long as it's not clumsy so, from now on, let's use 'she' to refer to the standard human being. The word 'she' includes 'he' so that would be fair. Anyways, we've used 'he' for the past several thousand years and we'll use 'she' for the next few thousand; we're just taking turns."¹⁰

B) Discuss

- 1) Does language have an impact on us? Give examples.
- 2) Has language usage ever bothered you? Have you ever felt excluded by a person's use of language?

Observation: Everyday we communicate with words, both orally and in print. Words are the medium of our modern world. Yet usually we use our language without being aware of how it transmits a certain set of values and expectations. This is of particular concern for women because it is a significant tool of socialization.

Question #2: How does the language used in our liturgy affect us?

Motivation: A) Read and React

- 1) ... Although these groups are working on many issues, all of them reflect the growing consensus that the English usage of such words as "man," "men," "his," "mankind," "brotherhood" in the generic sense seems to reflect conscious or unconscious sexist structures and attitudes in church and society. Everyone is included by these words, but only in the sense that man is the norm for human and woman is simply

a less-than-human appendage of man. It is generic nonsense to say that women are included linguistically by such male terms when they are excluded both socially and linguistically from the male-oriented conduct of worship, styles of government, and religious life.¹¹

- 2) Sovereign of all worlds! Not because of our righteous acts do we lay our supplications before thee, but because of thine abundant mercies. What are we? What is our life? What is our piety? What is our righteousness? What our helpfulness? What our strength? What our might? What shall we say before thee, O Lord our God and God of our fathers? Are not all the mighty men as nought before thee, the men of renown as though they had not been, the wise as if without knowledge, and the men of understanding as if without discernment? For most of their works are void, and the days of their lives are vanity before thee, and the pre-eminence of man over the beast is nought: for all is vanity.¹²

- 3) ... The sense of being alienated follows me even when I go to pray in a place where women have "equal rights" of participation. The words to the prayers have not been altered; I hear women's voices but nothing of what women could say or have said through the centuries; if there is a discussion on the Torah portion, it is likely that the relationship between "God and man" will be touched on. Language is not neutral; as a woman, I am not included in that word-relationship...¹³

B) Discuss

- 1) What impact does language have upon us as we pray? Do we tend to get sidetracked from the intent of a given prayer by its language?
- 2) If use of gender does not necessarily point to the sex of a word, why is there such resistance to making language more inclusive?

Observation: Language generally, has an impact upon us, as does language used in religious worship. It is necessary to recognize the effect language has upon us in order to work for change.

Question #3: What is our God image?

Motivation: A) Exercise

- 1) Have the facilitator jot down on a piece of newsprint, key words of the group's response to the question:

"What is your image of God? What words come to mind which describe this image?"

B) Discuss

- 1) Where do we get these images of God?
- 2) Have you ever considered a female God-image? A God-image with feminine as well as masculine attributes?

C) Read and React

- 1) The introduction of female God-language in no way involves any dualism. We are not talking about a female deity beside a male deity, but about God-male-and-female. It is a mistake to think of male and female as completely distinct from one another. There is no definable, immutable essence of maleness and femaleness that separates the sexes. There is only humanity male-and-female; and in more subtle ways, individual humans male and female. Once we really know that, we must also talk of God-male-and-female, for humankind is understood to be created in the image of God.¹⁴
- 2) And God created man in His image, in this image of God He created him; male and female He created them.¹⁵

Genesis 1:27

Observation: We tend to think of God as an old man with a long white beard seated on a throne. Yet this image creates difficulties for women who are searching out and developing their own relationship with God, for this God-concept does not include any feminine attributes. We should begin to ex-

plore the possibility of a more inclusive God-image.

Question #4: What language can we use to describe our God-image?

Motivation: A) Exercise

- 1) Pass out copies of the worksheet found in the appendix to this session.
- 2) Fill them out and then put them aside.

B) Read and React

- 1) It is our obligation to praise the Lord of all, to proclaim the greatness of the Creator of the Beginning. She stretched forth the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth. She established Her Covenant with our foremothers and forefathers. She has carried us on eagle's wings and drawn us unto Her as a holy nation. And She has set a land for us, for our children and for our children's children.¹⁶
- 2) This linguistic convention entails the inconsistency that while "He" is used unthinkingly but doggedly, over and over again, no one would assert that "He" means that God is a male rather than a female. This is problematic, because in every other case, including the so-called generic masculine, "He" does have heavy connotations if not denotations of maleness, as opposed to femaleness. Yet, whatever other anthropomorphisms may be found within the Jewish tradition, they never included a sexed deity. In fact, one of the commonplaces of Jewish-Christian-Islamic apologetics is that God is beyond sexuality. That is part of His transcendence, part of His superiority over other deities. The use of "His" in the preceding sentence demonstrates that the label "He" really tells us nothing about God. In that respect, it is like all other words used to talk about God. But it is more problematic and self-contradictory than other designations such as "One" or "Loving." These latter designations are merely inadequate pointers that do not exhaust or express the fullness of "oneness" or "love." But the designation "He," because of its inevitable sex and gender connotations, actually points in the wrong direction. Thus it is not merely inadequate but false -- and there is a great difference between the two.

What conclusions then may be drawn from the fact that despite its theological inconsistency, the use of exclusively masculine pronouns and imagery has not been criticized? What may be drawn from the fact that the language of "God--He" is so automatic that it is not questioned even by those who question all other statements about God, nor even by the non-religious who deny His existence altogether? Or from the fact that most people respond to "God--She" with hilarity or hostility, even though they know that God is not a male?¹⁷

- 3) Of all the additions and modifications made in their new prayerbook, the most controversial by far is the use of the female pronoun to refer to God. Hearing God called "She" infuriates some people and amuses others. It even jars some of the women in the prayer group. Naomi and Maggie purposely decided to use "She" instead of a neuter pronoun or a made-up word, they say, because they wanted to make the point that "there are distinctly female aspects of God that women and men should consider." The pronoun can be a drawback, however, they admit, because "we don't think God is female any more than God is male."

A few of the women in the group who are uncomfortable with "She" feel that it makes God even "more sexed" than the traditional pronoun. People are so used to referring to God as "He," they argue, that they have learned to ignore the anthropomorphic imagery. Others object to it because they say it brings in "secular" or "polemic" issues which interfere with the primary purpose of the service -- the religious experience. "Sometimes I find that what's in my head is not the service," says Laura Weis '75. "I'm thinking, 'Hmmm, She, that sounds really funny -- Why does it sound funny?' and all of a sudden I'm not thinking about God. My mind is diverted and I don't like that."

But others feel the female imagery enhances rather than detracts from their appreciation of the service. "I find that being able to incorporate my sense of being a woman into the service opens up a hundred new ways of relating to God," says Maggie. "I can put all the associations I have about my own life -- a lot of which have to do with growing up a girl and being a woman -- into the service, and that suddenly makes the service integral to my whole life."

Using "She" brings out people's "real biases,"

according to Naomi, who has shown the prayerbook to a number of her friends, male and female. "People read 'She is powerful and destroys her enemies' and they freak out," she says, "because they don't usually think of women in those terms." Critics of the prayerbook have charged them with being overly concerned with language rather than with more important reforms. "They say language doesn't mean anything," says Naomi, "but when you change language, boy, does it mean something. If language really didn't mean anything, it wouldn't matter if we used 'She'. Most people don't like the 'new' pronoun the first time they read it," she explains, "because it takes time to get used to it. Can you imagine the number of times people have said the prayers the other way?" she asks.¹⁸

C) Discuss

- 1) What do you think about the application of the feminine gender ("She") to God? Give your rationale.

D) Read Aloud

Feminists are rediscovering the natural world and our own bodies as a vast dictionary whose lexicon is endless... In all of the theological treatises which have been written since, there has been nothing to equal the symbolization of the mustard seed, the "salt of the earth," the lily of the field, or the seed sown in fertile ground.

With women beginning to do theology, we find not only general symbols drawn from nature being put to use to describe the human condition, but also symbolizations which are unique to the feminine experience -- the symbol of childbirth, for example. Many women have begun to describe their awakening to life, love, power, and liberation as an experience of giving birth to themselves. Others have discovered that the Old Testament God is often described as a mother, nurturing and feeding her children. Such an image is not only apt but is also needed to counterbalance the excessively masculine images of God with which we have become imbued. Still others symbolize God as a midwife -- as the one who calls forth from us new life and evokes the gifts within us.¹⁹

E) Exercise

- 1) Take the sheets we filled out at the beginning of this section (Question 4a). Go around the room and jot down on a piece of newsprint people's keywords used to describe God.
- 2) Tabulate these words and see how many words people shared in common.
- 3) Share reactions to this exercise.

Observation: We seldom explore our concepts of God, much less the language we use to speak to, or to describe God. Yet when we do take this step, all of a sudden, we realize how much we have simply accepted unquestioningly from others without shaping our own concepts. This marks a beginning of our attempt to confront the issue of God-language, and of our attempt to create new expressions to meet our needs in this area.

General conclusion: As we Jewish women become increasingly involved in the realm of worship, we will immediately need to confront the fact that our religious language, God-image, and language used to describe God, have been molded and shaped by centuries of Jewish men. Our task is to creatively and sensitively interpret each issue from our perspective, and to add the feminine to the masculine, thereby creating a truly inclusive liturgy and theology.

Appendix to Session 9

Worksheet

Circle the words below that for you describe your own concept of God.
If the words listed below are insufficient or inadequate, note as well the words you would prefer.

friend	protector	Holy One
He	loving	tender
harsh	challenging	She
merciful	kind	wise
still voice	father	King
gentle	nurturing	Master
Mistress	demanding	caring
Judge	Mother	loud
giver	earth	all-encompassing
amorphous	Eternal	mountain
helpful	midwife	threatening
incomprehensible	all knowing	mighty
angry	intimate	spirit
omnipresent	distant	Lord
heaven	thunder	earthquake
fire	swallow	faithful
inaccessible	fury	mysterious
exciting	dependable	warrior

Unit III: The Jewish Woman and Her Participation in Religious and Communal Life

Session 10: Our Participation in Jewish Communal and Synagogal Life

Goals: -- to examine the current status of Jewish women in communal and synagogal life.

-- to conclude this course with a look towards our future.

Advanced Preparation:

Materials needed: newsprint, masking tape, magic markers, paper, pens.

Assignments:-- Two women to participate in role play, under Motivation, question 1a.

-- Class participation in exercise, under Motivation, question 1c.

-- Five women to participate in a skit, under Motivation, question 1f.

Question #1: What is the status of Jewish women within our communal and synagogal structures?

Motivation: A) Role play

- 1) Assign these two roles a session in advance.
- 2) Both group members should refer to the two articles that appear in the appendix to this session:

"Beyond the Valley of the Shmattes," by Doris Gold;
"Women in the Jewish Communal Structure," by Ann Wolfe.

- 3) Margie Cohen and Sue Levine have long been members of Hadassah. Margie has found her work quite fulfilling and is serving as the Vice President of her chapter. Sue, however, is thinking of dropping her affiliation. As a full time social worker, she has decided to join the board of a Jewish organization, and then attempt to enter a Jewish decision-making body. Margie and Sue decided to meet and go out one evening for coffee. Each one talks of her own choice of involvement in the Jewish community.

B) Discuss

- 1) How many of us are involved in Jewish women's organizations? Why? Why not?
- 2) How many of us are involved within the Jewish community structure, professionally or non-professionally? Why? Why not?
- 3) If you were to get involved Judaically today, where would you direct your energies? Why?
- 4) What do you see as the lay decision-making positions in the Jewish community?
- 5) To what extent are women in these decision-making roles in the Jewish community?
- 6) What influence do you think the woman's role in the halacha has had in relationship to some of the difficulties women are experiencing in their reach for decision-making roles in our community? What other factors may be responsible?

C) Exercise

- 1) A session before this, have each person choose a synagogue in town to contact, and hand out the following check-list to be filled out by the observer and shared with the group at the present session.

_____ congregation

Male Female

Rabbi
Cantor
Organist/guitarist
Principal of religious school
Temple Administrator
Youth Group Advisor
Secretaries
President of the Board
Vice Pres. " " "
Treasurer
Youth Group President
Religious school teachers

- 2) On a piece of newsprint, print out the above list, and tabulate how many men and how many women fill each position.

D) Read

The social structure of a religious institution also needs examination. Who is addressed by title (Father, Sister, Reverend, Mr., Ms.) and who is addressed by first name? Who is invited to serve? Who is paid to serve? Clothing is a communicator of social status... Men's and women's roles within a ritual are important. They can be described in terms of space. Where do people sit, kneel, or stand in relation to what is holy? Roles can be described in terms of participation. Who speaks, recites, reads, sings, blesses and listens?²¹

E) Discuss

- 1) Has anyone here held office on the executive board within the synagogue structure? Chaired a committee? If so, specify.
- 2) Are there women on the ritual/liturgy committee in your synagogue? On the pulpit selection committee? On the financial committee?
- 3) Looking at the chart, why do you think the representation is as it is?
- 4) Do you think Jewish custom has played a role in determining this representation? Why? Why not?

F) Skit

- 1) See appendix to this session for the script.
- 2) There are five roles.
- 3) Have each character wear name tags, as some women will play the parts of men.

G) Exercise

- 1) On a piece of newsprint, make a list why you would/would not hire a female rabbi, with no discussion of the points mentioned.

- 2) Then go back and discuss each point individually, looking carefully at the items. Which points do we know to be true? Which points are our own opinions?
- 3) The most important reality to keep in mind is that most (synagogues) have little or no experience on which to base negative opinions of women as (rabbis).²²

H) Read and React

I raise an issue which may seem old and overdone. The women involved in the Jewish women's movement, so vocal four or five years ago, did attain some forums of change and since, apparently, have retreated to continue with their work. At least fewer people scoff at women rabbis these days. At least the Conservative movement granted women the right to be counted in a minyan. At least women, in certain rings of the community, chant from the Torah on Shabbat morning. But I still feel dissatisfied. Sexism -- woman-hating -- is not the kind of thing that willingly disappears by simply granting to women equal rights, equal pay and work opportunities (though these are essential). Likewise the attitudes and conditions that prevail against women in Jewish culture are not uprooted by simply including women in synagogue ritual.²³

Observation: Whether due to the social attitude of the general society or to Jewish tradition and social custom, we are observing certain resistances to the participation of women (such as the lack of employment and promotion of women) in Jewish communal and synagogue structures. For us as Jewish women, our first step is to recognize the problem for what it is, and our second step is to work towards its solution.

Question #2: Where do we want to go from here?

Motivation: A) Read and React

- 1) "Notes Toward 'Continuing to Examine the Matter'" by

Cynthia Ozick, an article found in the appendix to this session.

(This article covers a wide range of issues, many of which we have discussed. Review these issues, and discuss her central thesis: the loss that the Jewish community suffers by the lack of input from half the community, from the female half of the community.)

B) Exercise

- 1) Hand out sheets of paper.
- 2) Have everyone mark an "x," that represents us now at this time, 19____. Mark another "x," that represents our death.
- 3) Spend a few minutes thinking about the following questions and jot down your responses on your page.
- 4) These questions should be printed out on newsprint and taped to the wall.
 - a) What would you like to do Judaically in these years?
 - b) What Jewish experiences would you like to have?
 - c) What Jewish skills would you like to learn?
 - d) If you have not achieved a Jewish lifestyle which you would call ideal, describe what that would mean for you.
 - e) As a Jewish woman, what changes would you like to see come about in those "x" amount of years?
 - f) How can you yourself facilitate those changes?
- 5) Spend a few minutes and then have the members of the group share their responses.²⁴

C) Conclusion

Go around the room, and have each person read a few lines of the story "Applesource," found in the appendix to this session.

Observation: Through the various sessions we have taken a close look at ourselves and at our identities as Jewish women. We have now reached a point where we must move beyond discussion. We need to evaluate our situation, set our goals, and strive to reach them. This evaluative process is essential for our continued growth and for the achievement of change.

General conclusion: We Jewish women are seeking out our niche in the Jewish world. We are seeking change in a world which does not necessarily want change. We Jewish women do not have power in our communities. The process of achieving genuine equality between Jewish men and women will take time, patience, and energy. The important thing is to recognize our need for change, and to attempt to achieve it in various ways. We need to verbalize our needs to our Jewish leaders and organizations. We need to involve ourselves in our communities and work for change in our organizations and synagogues. We need to set personal goals for ourselves. We need to learn more Judaically and gain more skills. We need to strive for a Jewish lifestyle that reflects our values and needs. We need to attempt to shape a Jewish life where women and men are indeed equals, where we can both live deeply and fully as Jews.

The most profound, intriguing and inviting of all Jewish theologies -- the Kabbalah -- teaches us that galut -- exile -- is the fundamental reality and pain of present existence. It teaches that one of the

causes of galut is the alienation of the masculine from the feminine in God, the alienation of God and the Shechinah. But it also teaches, especially in its Lurianic phases, that each of us can affect the turning of galut by dedicating all of our efforts to the reunification of God and the Shechinah. Now that the masculine and feminine have been torn asunder and the feminine dismembered and banished, both from the discourse about divinity and from the human community, such a tikkun -- reparation -- is obligatory (a mitzvah). When the masculine and feminine aspect of God have been reunited and the female half of humanity has been returned from exile, we will begin to have our tikkun. The world will be repaired.²⁵

Appendix to Session 10

90

BEYOND THE VALLEY OF THE SHMATTES

By Doris B. Gold

It's a truism that Jewish women believe in "organizations." For those over 35, it's a way of life, particularly outside the large urban centers. Over a million and a half of us belong to something (aside from our multi-memberships in general American organizations), at a rate of 45% compared with 30% for all American women. (See chart page 32.)

Yet no more than a passing glance is given Jewish women and their organizations in any work about American Jews. No course on Jewish women's organizations or their history is offered at any of our institutions of learning. We are so other-oriented that we seldom dare to take a look at how we are working and where we are heading in the 1980's, but such a look is necessary.

Is it "bad" to belong to such a high degree? While "belonging" reveals our dislike of individuation, if we can approve of it our organizations function to increase our personal growth, our communal efficiency, our Jewish vitality as a shrinking minority. But ought we not to begin to take a look at what we do in our organizations — their structure and functions, to see if they are suitable for our needs today?

Some questions: Have we exchanged the traditional women-behind-the-synagog curtain for a communal curtain, keeping our separate-but-equal organization status-quo?

Are we obsessed with raising money instead of giving or making money?

Do we look to "the men" to organize (exploit) us? Do our husbands exercise undue social control over us in their insistence on pedestalizing us — to make up, perhaps, for the historic "burdening" of the Jewish woman, once confined to the domestic and economic realities of home and family while men held synagog discourse? Have we basked in that psychic satisfaction of queenly dominance in family life while submitting to the codes of Establishment *balabattim* (male big givers/leaders) that we stay in the background — where we are "needed"?

Are we — the great reconcilers, the great peacemakers — suffering from traditional Jewish "modesty" — afraid that it's "not nice" to criticize the men or demand full partnership in decision-making?

Are we using the rationale of "belonging" to prop up duplicating Jewish Establishment structures that were founded to "take care of our own," when we are in an era of federal funding of minority social services?

Are we really a sisterhood with other American women?

As with most voluntary behavior, joining a Jewish women's organization has less to do with the activities offered than with other reasons: affirmation of Jewish social status and wealth, especially since we are relatively new to suburbia where most of us now live; the consequent need for instant Jewish identity without religiosity (often our organizations are a substitute for religious identification in the older mode e.g., as the "auxiliary" in the synagog); visibility of our life-style; and especially, the strong need we seem to have for group-think and taste-exchange. We obviously feel safer that way.

Additionally, the well-known guilt feeling of Jewish women resulting from admonitions to be "Jewish" by worried (male) rabbis and leaders, may be causing a virtual obsession with identity. At the least, the Jewish woman reasons, when she joins a Jewish women's organization, she has "stood up to be counted."

Louis Berman, in his insightful book *Jews and Inter-marriage*, speculated that "the Jewish ethos" (our dominant characteristic as expressed in our customs) encourages traits which advantage the Jewish male in our society over the Jewish female, resulting in the woman's "unequal aptitude for participation in gentile society."

This "unequal aptitude" may be sending us back to our surrogate parents, the Jewish women's organization. There the paternalism of the men under whose guidance we

function (with the exception of the "independents"; see chart) is familiar. The women's division is our mothering presence.

The Jewish "leadership," of course, has traditionally encouraged our togetherness in an enclave because it leads to maintaining the role differentiation we have always had in the family, particularly the division of labor we have agreed to. Most women's divisions were initiated by the men as a way of having their wives replicate in the community the family power structure.

Unadulterated recognition by Jewish leaders of the massive contribution by women's organizations, reaching beyond the Jewish home to "housekeep" the Jewish community, is hard to come by, however. In its stead is the suspicion that our efficacy and longevity outstrips that of more "powerful" men's groups.

DID YOUR ORGANIZATION SUPPORT THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT??

YES	CLAIMED U.S. MEMBERSHIP	NO STAND
B'NAI BRITH WOMEN	150,000	65,000 BRANDEIS NATIONAL WOMEN'S COMMITTEE
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JEWISH WOMEN	100,000	150,000 HADASSAH
NATIONAL FEDERATION OF TEMPLE SISTERHOODS	110,000	50,000 MIZRACHI WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION OF AMERICA
WOMEN'S AMERICAN ORT	115,000	50,000 PIONEER WOMEN
WOMEN'S LEAGUE FOR CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM	200,000	35,000 approx WOMEN'S BRANCH OF THE UNION OF ORTHODOX CONGREGATIONS

Aside from the obvious primary attention given Israel, its institutions, problems of diplomacy, Soviet Jewry, the UN, there is hardly a domestic issue that Jewish women's organizations haven't confronted. The smorgasbord is huge, from domestic issues like child care and juvenile justice to school integration and the Jewish single parent — all "up to date" sensors from membership are considered.

Some of this activity is unnecessary. A few years back, under Nixon, the National Council of Jewish Women financed a year-long study of the need for child care in the U.S., at the same time that the Administration did likewise. Recently, the NCJW sponsored its "Justice for Children" project during a period of judicial and legal ferment concerning this issue. It is well to study and learn, but it seems clear that Jewish women's organizations often duplicate the efforts of public agencies. Later they ritualize and structuralize these efforts, when they should instead become activists or, at a minimum, create coalitions with other Jewish women and non-Jewish pressure groups to effect change.

The rampant "me-too-ism" of competing women's groups involved in similar activities is a strategy for getting and keeping membership dollars and widening an organization's influence — all justified with hair-splitting "differences." Considering the "division of labor" within Jewish life — tasks assigned men and women, and also the supposed variables of the many women's organizations — such an oversupply is possible where the goal is only "membership" and self-perpetuation, not effective actions.

Overriding all programs for most organizations and, in fact, their *raison d'être* is the need for getting and giving money to U.J.A., Federations, specific Israel projects and so on. It's a troubling realization, this emphasis on money-getting schemes — different from earning it or giving of one's own wealth. The elevation of the big giver to a position of leadership since World War II, the creation of a Jewish "aristocracy" in our scattered communities, is responsible for this fixation.

Too much fund-raising, almost a Jewish female reflex, time-killing and trivializing, strengthens our historical image — to be bustling but unlearned Jewish women — getting and begetting things, while we wish to be known as "educated" and "affluent" as a "Jewish people."

Techniques ranging from local rummage and pre-Christmas bazaars of synagogues, and antique and arts auctions, to forums and tennis events, hotel and country-club catering — donor credit and quotes — the money mill grinds.

Consider the vulgarities of our seasonal bazaars featuring *shrimots* and "new merchandise" being sold to maintain the synagogue — conveniently attracting non-Jews at their holiday times. The materialism in American life is thus symbolized and hardly upholds "Jewish values." It also confuses our youth seeking new pride in the humanistic and spiritual goals of Judaism. Isn't it time we women refused to run merchandise circuses using our hard unpaid labor?

Too much of the work of women's groups involves manipulation by our brother and father figures, the rabbis and male Jewish "professionals" who need to control us — especially to increase income for the Jewish Establishment. Their clever sophistry in blending the techniques of fund-raising with no less than "total Jewish education," which they call "leadership development," is something to behold. "So this is *tzedeakah*?" we cry.... "And welcome to it!" is their smiling response...

So often Jewish women's organizations look to Jewish men for advice, leadership, comfort: the concept of the father, exemplified by the rabbi, who vests authority in the husband as the head, the "idea" man, has done its work, again reinforcing Jewish women's self-concept as doers, not thinkers. (Does this account for our lack of passion as a factor in our sexual relationships with our husbands and the friendly companion role we play — responsive, kindly, a shallow antagonist?)

We seem to need male approval even for the right to dissent. In 1972-1973, I counted five occasions on Long Island alone when Jewish women's organizations held programs on what they called "women's lib," each one addressed by a male professor of sociology or history, or by a rabbi.

How can we explain the commitment to "separate but equal" by Jewish women's organizations? Time was when spurious points like the need for daytime vs. nighttime meetings (with women at home and men at work) were offered to explain the separate divisions. The reasoning is more sophisticated now and the issue has been effectively buried. One male fund-raising leader told me: "You can't apply the separate/unequal tag so glibly in Jewish life. We are really different. In many ways, men think of the women's divisions as a privileged sanctuary (sic) and you won't find many women who consider it discriminatory."

Of course, one need only note that Jewish men fear their wives will stray into sexual adventures if too much opportunity is afforded them to mingle freely "in partnership" with other men. Unstated is the sense that the

women's division is a convenient corner for Jewish women.

In organizations which have considered combining men's and women's chapters, many women opted for the retention of the separate women's chapters because they felt inhibited at meetings with male members. Their feeling of being intellectually inferior was often privately expressed. Many women in combined chapters urge their husbands to speak for them.

Furthermore, women leaders know that if they forfeit the "separate" status, they will lose the opportunity to climb to the top leadership, for men rise first when organizations have both male and female members. The fund-raisers, of course, know that women's partnership with men means smaller giving.

The cold-blooded executive-suite style acquired by otherwise caring Jewish women when they fixate their roles as "organization women" is unpleasant to experience. Jewish women who work as volunteers for organizations often have no employment experience. However, more than non-Jewish women, the unanimous, no-dissent style of their organizations demands "togetherness" from employees. The volunteers become a middle-management cadre, unschooled in human relations techniques. Women's organization leaders must also begin to care about the position of Jewish working women in their midst, and to explore the conflicts between professional staff and volunteers.

Jewish women must also become more individually aggressive and force Jewish women's organizations to champion the right of Jewishly-educated women to work on every level and in every sphere of the large Jewish Establishment. It is appalling not to find statements by Jewish women's groups on or investigations into the subtle and overt exclusion of able Jewish women from paid positions of importance. Except for the women's organizations, there are only two female executive directors of national Jewish organizations (Naomi Levine of the American Jewish Congress and Rachel Jacobs of Americans for Progressive Israel).

The necessity of providing Jewish Establishment jobs for our Jewishly-educated men, including rabbis, has resulted in organizational ineptness and inefficiency and in their dread of competition from intelligent Jewish women. The profusion of politically conservative neo-Orthodox males in Jewish life, makes them unlikely contemporaries for a liberal view of the Jewish workplace and the needs of Jewish women. These Jewish male executives frequently opt for non-Jewish employees and blacks to make their "liberalism" apparent while excluding Jewish women from employment in top positions and from advancement.

There is a surprising lack of creative input into the Jewish scene by Jewish women's organizations. We who can produce Nobel prize-winners cannot project a comprehensive Jewish bookstore in New York or combine the half-dozen Jewish libraries in the same city in an accessible location; nor have we entered the no-woman's land of Judaica publishing. Our involvement in the neglected Jewish arts, music, theatre is at an all-time low.

It is obvious that the male agenda, with its emphasis on *gevaldige* "rescue" efforts to save Soviet Jewry and Israel, is still ours.

If we are to focus totally and obsessively on the need for money, then we ought to be creating a Jewish community chest of our own - Jewish women's organizations together, to set Jewish women's priorities on how our money should be spent. In addition to the Jewish arts, we should also address our expertise to Jewish child-care, Jewish education, care for poor elderly Jewish women and men (the Jewish agencies' denial and self-deception on this issue caused an absence of leadership in Government anti-poverty programs).

We need Jewish women heretical enough to suggest that the money they could save from too many membership organizations could be better applied to the provision of projects to consolidate our forces. It's time for tightening-up, for simplifying, as an antidote to the extreme territoriality of Jewish women's organizations. It's time, too, that Jewish women's organizations had their own Assembly.

The wasteland that is Jewish TV and radio ought to be quickly reclaimed. To watch the Sunday morning TV ghetto is to see rabbis and Jewish male leaders hold forth with rarely a Jewish female appearing. This is related to the minimal visibility of Jewish women's organizations, stifled as they are by "modesty" as a Jewish virtue women have been conditioned to maintain. They have not provided images in the news, radio or television of sophisticated Jewish women's activity, in tune with today's world, aside from advertisements and award-giving luncheons filled with gimmickry and dedicated to service.

One can find little or no stock-taking by Jewish women's organizations. One exception was the late '75 survey of Jewish women leadership in local USA Federations initiated by women at the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds. Even the Leadership Conference of Jewish Women's Organizations, an informal group of women leaders, issues no reports and keeps its traditional "modesty." A summing-up of women's organizations' "works and days" and an examination of our image and practices suggested here would be useful, necessary and is past due.

In this year of the Bicentennial, Jewish women's organizations are in some ways better than those of American women. One reads the history of suffragism—the first feminist wave—and wishes we could read the history of ourselves in it. We were then in the first blush of post-immigrant mobility and could not "risk" what we can today. We have a chance at participating in the second wave. Let's not stand on the shore. Let's swim out and meet it. 26

Women In The Jewish Communal Structure

by Ann G. Wolfe

It is a long, slow, very hard climb for women to top leadership in the Jewish communal structure; the more powerful the organization, the harder it is for them to move up to decision-making positions. Why? The reasons are not unlike the experience of other groups seeking equality:

- Men who are in power are often not eager to move over and share that power.
- Some women are uncomfortable being out front, fearing that leadership will be viewed as "unfeminine" or aggressive behavior.
- The restrictions on women's behavior embodied in Jewish religion and lore affect Jewish communal behavior.
- Some worry that the demand for equal rights for women will adversely affect the Jewish family.
- Although women's activity in Jewish communal endeavors is generally respected, it is seen as less significant on the whole than the activities of men.
- Women's interests, abilities and emotions make up a stereotype: they are seen as more "emotional" and less practical than men, more concerned with their sons and daughters than are the men; more interested in culture and the arts than in science, finance and technical matters, which are the province of men.

Out of 235 community federations making up the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, 55 communities responded in a 1976 survey (Where Women Are In Federation) as follows:

- Three communities out of the 55 have women presidents.
- Out of 152 vice presidents, 33 (22%) are women (many "ex-officio" because they represent all-women's organizations related to the federations).
- Two women are treasurers.
- 16½% of Executive Committee members are women.
- 13% of campaign cabinets (fund-raising) are women.

- 43% of secretaries are women.

Women are actively involved in the non-decision-making roles, in program and services, and do most of the leg work.

At the professional level, much also needs to be done. Only one national organization with both male and female membership has a woman executive director (American Jewish Congress). Out of 2,200 professional workers in 300 Jewish communal organizations, men and women divide as follows (May, 1977, survey conducted by the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service):

Executive Directors	Men 97%
	Women 3%
Assistant Directors	Men 84%
	Women 16%
Line Workers	Men 21%
(non-supervisors)	Women 79%

In response to this picture of unequal status, and reflecting a sense of greater assertiveness and unwillingness to accept the status quo, the movement for change is gaining 27 momentum.



Search Committee for a Rabbi

(Adapted from the Synod of Arizona Task Force on Women)

Persons: Jill Katz Seymour Kline
 Sam Cohen Rabbi
 Leo Ross

Sam: Where is this Jan Levine from anyway?

Leo: I believe it's the L. A. area -- it's in California somewhere.

Seymour: Does she have a pulpit? I mean, is she the rabbi?

Sam: Why do you suppose she is applying for the post of our synagogue -- if she's got a good thing going over there?

Leo: Maybe she was fired. Anyway, why would she want to be the rabbi of our synagogue?

Jill: Supposing she's married and has a family? Who would take care of her children and her husband while she's preparing a sermon, or visiting, or doing all the things rabbis do?

Leo: What concerns me is, suppose she's good looking and well put-together or wears mini skirts. No woman in our congregation will let her husband come to Temple anymore, although we might get more men. I hear she's only 30!

Sam: Wow!! That's too young.

Seymour: She's probably very liberal, too, or she wouldn't have dared to go into a man's field. I'll bet she goes for that women's lib stuff. I hope she's not one of those bra-burners!

Sam: What do you think her husband thinks about her being a rabbi? He must be a little strange.

Leo: Hey, can you imagine a 30-year-old gal counseling MEN?

Seymour: Well, now, that has possibilities. (laughs)

Sam: I wonder how much experience she's had.

Leo: What kind of question is that?

Sam: You know what I mean. How many synagogues did she serve,

where did she go to seminary, did she get all the right courses? In a field like this it seems to me a woman would need more education and training than a man.

Seymour: How do you think the women in our Temple would react to having a woman rabbi? (all look at Jill)

Jill: Hummmm. I don't know. She'd have to be awfully good.

Leo: Oh, I guess some of the "way-out" liberal ones would accept her, but I know one who won't -- my wife!

Sam: Yeah? Why not?

Leo: She says it just doesn't look right having a woman in the pulpit. It isn't dignified, and furthermore she says she likes to listen to a man's voice.

Jill: I agree. Most women have terrible voices!

Sam: One thing though. I'll bet we could save some money because if her husband has a job and she isn't too concerned about salary, we could get her for a lot less than a man.

Leo: Say, that's a thought! But we might not get the same service as we would from a man. I was just thinking there probably would be times during a month when she wouldn't be available, and would have to take time off.

Seymour: What for?

Leo: Come on now -- you know, all young women are notorious for that.

Seymour: Oh! And what would we do if she got pregnant?

Sam: We'd be out of luck.

Jill: Oh dear!

Leo: There goes the ball game!

A knock on the door is heard.

Seymour: Watch your language men!

All the men rise and look to the door. A man enters.

Rabbi: Hello there. I'm Jan Levine.²⁸

Notes Toward "Continuing to Examine the Matter" Cynthia Ozick

On Not Being a Jew in the Synagogue

Item: In the world at large I call myself, and am called, a Jew. But when, on the Sabbath, I sit among women in my traditional shul and the rabbi speaks the word "Jew," I can be sure that he is not referring to me. For him, "Jew" means "male Jew."

When the rabbi speaks of women, he uses the expression (a translation from a tender Yiddish phrase) "Jewish daughter." He means it tenderly.

"Jew" speaks for itself. "Jewish daughter" does not. A "Jewish daughter" is someone whose identity is linked to, and defined by, another's role. "Jew" defines a person seen in the light of a culture. "Daughter" defines a relationship that is above all biological. "Jew" signifies adult responsibility. "Daughter" evokes immaturity and a dependent and subordinate connection.

When my rabbi says, "A Jew is called to the Torah," he never means me or any other living Jewish woman.

My own synagogue is the only place in the world where I, a middle-aged adult, am defined exclusively by my being the female child of my parents.

My own synagogue is the only place in the world where I am not named Jew.

The Approach of "Simple Justice," and How It Is Thwarted

The feminist Letty Pogrebin: "A life of Torah is embodied in Hillel's injunction, 'Do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you.' Men would not like done unto them what is done unto women in the name of *halakhah*. For me, that is that."

Within the scheme of *halakhah*, however, that is not that, although *halakhah* is above all a system of jurisprudence founded on the ideal of the practical attainment of real, not seeming, justice. Developed over centuries by schools of

rabbin through precedent after precedent, *halakhah* evolved through application of general principles to urgent practical cases. *Halakhah* is deemed to be flexible, adaptive, attentive to need and actuality — the opposite of the dry bones of uncaring law. And why this should be clear — *halakhah* is founded on and incorporates Scriptural aspirations toward decency of daily conduct and the holiness of the ordinary. A deep *halakhic* premise is that the individual's well-being is enhanced, through reasoning compassion, by the communal good.

Juridical systems also pay attention to classes. Under *halakhah*, women *qua* women are seen as a subdivision of humanity, not as the main class itself. Now a subdivision is, by definition, not the fundamental rule, but rather a somewhat deviating instance of the fundamental rule, a step apart from the norm. Under *halakhah*, the male is the norm, and the female is a class apart. For instance, there is a Tractate entitled *Nashim*, Women; but there is no corresponding Tractate called Men — because clearly all that does not apply to women falls to men. Men are the rule, and women are the exceptions to the rule.

Nevertheless, the explicators of *halakhah* (one hesitates to use the term apologists) claim that the biblical "Male and female created He them" means, quite simply, equality of the sexes in the eye of the Creator; and so far, so good. It is only when we come to examine "equality" *halakhically* that we discover that it is meant to signify not equal, but complementary. Male and female are viewed as halves of a whole, goes the argument, and each half has its own separate rights and responsibilities; there are distinct roles for men and women, which overlap very little.

When "complementary" is taken to be the relation between the norm and its deviation (or call it the rule and its exception), then the role of the norm will be understood to be superior to the role of the exception.

When "equal" is defined as "distinct," then simple justice is thwarted.

On Not Being a Juridical Adult

Though we read in Scripture that Deborah was a judge in Israel, under post-biblical *halakhic* rules a woman may not be a witness. In this debarment she is in a category with children and imbeciles.

In the *halakhic* view, a woman is not a juridical adult. She is exempted from liturgical and other responsibilities that are connected with observing a particular practice at a specific time. This, it is explained, is a compassionate and sensible ruling. What? Shall she be obliged to abandon the baby at her breast to run to join a prayer quorum meeting at a fixed hour?

The so-called compassionate and sensible ruling perceives a woman exclusively as a biological figure. Time-fixed communal responsibility is left exclusively to males — as if milk were the whole definition of parenthood, or as if, in fact, milk were the whole definition of a woman; or as if in each marriage there is to be only one reliably committed parent, the one with the milk; or as if a mother, always and without exception, is in charge of sucklings only.

If the context should change from functional to intrinsic, from the identity of relationship to the identity of essence,

from the ideal of extenuation to the ideal of inclusiveness — ah, then compassionate exemption is transmogrified to demeaning exclusion.

To exempt is to exclude

To exclude is to debar

To debar is to demote

To demote is to demean

Young girls, older women, and unmarried women do not have babies at their breasts. Where is the extenuating ideal for them? They are "exempted" — i.e., excluded, debarred — from public worship all the same.

The *halakhic* rationale for universal female exemption, however, is not based on compassion for harried mothers, nor is it, as some erroneously believe, related to any menstrual taboo. It rests on a single phrase — *laved ha-tisbur* — which can be rendered in English as "the honor [or self-respect] of the community." One infers that a woman's participation would degrade the community (of men).

I am not shocked by the use of this rationale. I am perhaps shocked at a *halakhic* scholar of my acquaintance who refers to the phrase "the honor of the community" as a "concept that seems to defy comprehension." Indeed, I welcome this phrase as wonderfully illuminating: it supports and lends total clarity to the idea that, for Judaism, the status of women is a social, not a sacred, question.

Social status is not sacred; it cannot be interpreted as divinely fixed: it can be repented of, and repaired.

Women, Debtors, and Thieves

The biblical practice of debtors' servitude — applied also to thieves — was unusually large-minded in that, when the debtor's or thief's term of work had expired, he was obligated to return to his former status as an ordinary citizen. A debtor or thief who refused independence after the expiration of his servant's term had a hole bored in his ear — a mark of contempt for one who declined to take on the responsibilities of a higher status.

Under *halakha*, as presently viewed, there is no way for a woman to achieve a change in status. Her present status (according to my *halakhi* scholar-acquaintance) "appears to defy emendation or modification within the *halakhi* context."

What the Jewish juridical genius could once do for a thief, it cannot now do for a woman!

On the Depth of the Loss and the Absence of Grief

Theorists of American Jewish sociology claim that the current women's agitation within the synagogue and in all parts of Jewish life is a response to the stimulus of the general women's movement. The traditional rabbinate tends to define feminist views as forms of selfishness, narcissism, and self-indulgence, all leading to what is always called "the breakdown of family life." It would be hard to deny the presence of selfishness, narcissism, and self-indulgence in a society much given over to these (and they are not confined to the women's movement); it would be hard also

to deny the effect of the women's movement in stimulating more women to examine their lives as Jews.

But the sources of Jewish women's claims are more profound than simple external impingement. It is true that some of these claims appear to coincide with popular influence, and undoubtedly some are directly derivative. Indeed, one wants to join with those rabbis who take unhappy note of rampant faddism and superficiality — because the protests and claims of Jewish women are too serious to be classed with any intellectual fashion, or even with any compelling current movement.

That these protests and claims are occurring in this generation and not in any earlier generation is not due to the parallel advent of a movement. The timing is significant: now and not forty years ago; but it is not the upsurge of secular feminism that has caused the upsurge of Jewish feminism.

The timing is significant because the present generation stands in a shockingly new relation to Jewish history. It is we who have come after the cataclysm. We, and all the generations to follow, are, and will continue to be into eternity, witness-generations to Jewish loss. What was lost in the European cataclysm was not only the Jewish past — the whole life of a civilization — but also a major share of the Jewish future. We will never be in possession of the novels Anne Frank did not live to write. It was not only the intellect of a people in its prime that was excised, but the treasure of a people in its potential.

We are the generation which knows more than any generation before us what mass loss means. It means, for one thing, the loss of a culture, and the deprivation of transmission of that culture. It means lost scholars of Torah — a lost Rashi; a lost Rambam; a lost Baal Shem Tov; a lost Vilna Gaon. The loss of thousands upon thousands of achieved thinkers and physicians, nourishing scientists and artists. The loss of those who would have grown into healers, discoverers, poets.

Now the moment we introduce the idea of mass cultural loss through excision, then the "timeliness" of the feminist movement, and even its very juxtaposition with Jewish aspiration, becomes frivolous.

But first let us agree on certain premises — obligatory premises, without which it is debasing to proceed. Let us agree, first, that the European cataclysm has no analogies, and that it is improper to draw any analogy from it. And then let us agree that the European cataclysm is not a metaphor for anything; it is not "like" anything else. And, further, let us agree that the European cataclysm is not to be "used," least of all for debating points. It is not to be used, but it is imperative that it should, as far as that is possible, be understood. It is also imperative that we derive particular lessons from it. The lessons are multitudinous and variegated, and we cannot yet clearly imagine even a fraction of them.

Yet we must dare to imagine.

Having said all that — that the European cataclysm is no analogy, no metaphor, no instrument — let us then begin to think about Jewish mentality in the wake of the cataclysm. We are not as we were. It is not unnatural that mass loss should generate not only lessons but legacies. An earthquake of immorality and mercilessness, atrocity on such a scale, cannot happen and then pass us by unaltered. The landscapes of our minds have shapes, hollows, illumina-

tions, mounds and shadows different from before. For us who live in the aftermath of the cataclysm, the total fact of the Nazi "selection" appears to affect, to continue to affect, all the regions of our ideas — even if some of those ideas at first glance look to be completely unrelated issues.

Indeed, it may be that for Jews like us, who come immediately after the Nazi period, there are no "unrelated issues." And surely there is a connection between, say, the whole pattern of impediments and distinctions which stop up Jewish passion in women, and the Jewish passions of Hannah Senesh and Anne Frank and the poet Gertrud Kolmar and all those young women (whose names are not so accessible as these) who fought in the Warsaw Ghetto. In the ragged battlements of the Warsaw Ghetto there was no *etrai nashim*, no women's gallery.

The connection I am about to make is not one we reflect on every day; yet it has infiltrated us, it is a legacy and a lesson, and its mournful language is as follows: *having lost so much and so many*.

To think in terms of *having lost so much and so many* is not to "use" the Holocaust, but to receive a share in its famously inescapable message: that after the Holocaust every Jew will be more a Jew than ever before — and not just superficially and generally, but in every path, taken or untaken, deliberate or haphazard, looked-for or come upon.

The consciousness that we are the first generation to stand after the time of mass loss is knowledge that spills inexorably — how could it not? — into every cell of the structure of our lives. What part of us is free of it, or can be free of it? Which regions of discourse or idea or system can we properly declare to be free of it? Who would risk supposing that the so-called "women's issue" can be free of it?

Put beside this view, how trivializing it is to speak of the "influence" of the women's movement — as if Jewish steadfastness could be so easily buffeted by secular winds of power and pressure and new opinion and new perception. The truth is that it would be a blinding mistake to think that the issue of Jewish women's access to every branch and parcel of Jewish expression is mainly a question of "discrimination" (which, if that were all, would justify it as a feminist issue). No. The point is not that Jewish women want equality as women with men, but as Jews with Jews. The point is the necessity — *having lost so much and so many* — to share Jewish history to the hilt.

This lamentation — *having lost so much and so many* — produces not an analogy or a metaphor, but a lesson, as follows:

Consider the primacy and priority of scholarship: scholarship as a major Jewish value; scholarship as a shorthand signifying immersion in Torah, thought, poetry, ethics, history — the complete life of a people's most energetic moral, intellectual, spiritual, lyrical yearnings and diggings.

Or look for a moment to Adin Steinsaltz's definition of that aspect of Torah called Talmud:

From the strictly historical point of view, the Talmud was never completed. . . . The final edition of the Talmud may be compared to the stages of maturity of a living organism: like a tree, it has reached a certain form that is not likely to change substantially, although it continues to live, grow, proliferate. Although the organism has taken on this final form, it

still produces new shoots that draw sustenance from the roots and continue to grow. . . . [The Talmud] is the collective endeavor of the entire Jewish people. Just as it has no one protagonist, no central figure who sums up all discussions and subjects, so it has continued throughout the centuries to be part of a constant creative process.

There is a single sentence in the foregoing description which is — eschewing critical or interpretive subtlety, playfulness, rhetorical chicanery — a plain whopping lie on the face of it. I will come back to put a finger on it very soon.

First, though, let us suppose — bringing to the supposition the vigilant Jewish mentality developed in the aftermath of mass loss — let us suppose that a group of Jewish scholars uncovers an egregious historical instance of wholesale Jewish excision. The historical instance is open, obvious, in everyone's plain sight, and has always been, but we have averted our eyes. The excision has barely been noticed, and among Jewish scholars and guardians of culture (whom the excision most affects) has not been noticed at all.

The nature of the excision is this: a great body of Jewish ethical thinkers, poets, juridical consciences — not merely one generation but many; in short, an entire intellectual and cultural organism — has been deported out of the community of Jewish culture, away from the creative center. Not "deported" in the Nazi sense of being taken away to perish, nor in the sense of being deprived of natural increase, but rather in the sense of isolation, confinement away from the main stage of Jewish communal achievement.

And this isolation, this confinement, this shunting off, is one of the cruellest events in Jewish history. It has excised an army of poets, thinkers, juridical figures; it has cut them off and erased them. It is as if they were born to have no ancestry and (despite natural increase) no progeny. They have been expunged as cleanly, as expertly, as the most thoroughgoing pogrom or Inquisition imaginable: an Inquisition designed to rid the Jewish people of a mass of its most vital and vitally contributing and participating minds. And all, it should be noted, sans bloodshed.

I began, you will have observed, with the words "let us suppose." But we need not suppose this melancholy history. It has already happened, generation after generation; and we know it, and have always known it (knowing is different from noticing); yet we, who weep at the loss of Jewish thinkers denied fulfillment through pogrom after pogrom, century after century — here, with regard to the one mass loss I speak of, we have always been stony-hearted. We are indifferent. We display nothing so much as an absence of grief at the loss. We have not even noticed it.

And there they are — rank after rank of lost Jewish minds: Jewish minds whose books were not burned; rather, they were never in possession of books to begin with.

When Adin Steinsaltz, the eminent contemporary scholar and interpreter of Talmud, writes that the Talmud "is the collective endeavor of the entire Jewish people," he is either telling an active and conscious falsehood; or he has forgotten the truth; or he has failed to notice the truth. The truth is that the Talmud is the collective endeavor not of the entire Jewish people, but only of its male half.

Jewish women have been omitted — by purposeful excision — from this "collective endeavor of the Jewish peo-

ple" which has "continued throughout the centuries to be part of a constant creative process."

A loss numerically greater than a hundred pogroms, yet Jewish literature and history report not one wail, not one tear.

A loss culturally and intellectually more debilitating than a century of autos-da-fé; than a thousand evil bonfires of holy books — because books can be duplicated and replaced when there are minds to duplicate and replace them, and minds cannot be duplicated and replaced, yet Jewish literature and history report not one wail, not one tear.

On Jewish Repair and Renewal

Although there has been a curious absence of grief over the mass loss of half the available Jewish minds, there begins now to be some nervous notice, some dry-hearted attempt at repair.

"We must encourage more women to enter fields of Jewish scholarship, where they will be able to assume positions of respect traditionally accorded to the scholar," my *halakthic* scholar-acquaintance writes. At last — although it is clear it is a "we" admitting a "they" to the "collective endeavor." It is not yet a genuinely collective "we." Nor could it be, at so early a stage of recognition of the need for repair.

But what — in traditional congregations — are some of the suggestions for repair? They are, among others, *women's Torah study groups*, *women's minyanim* (prayer quorums), *women's holiday celebrations*. Repair through traditional activities under continuing segregation. Isolation goes on, but scholarly air is let in. This is plainly an improvement over the centuries-old habit of deportation out of study.

The *halakthic* scholar who advises these improvements considers them to be advances under the sheltering boughs of "the Torah's spirit and truth, the Divine Truth of Torah." And these suggestions, he points out — segregated study, segregated *minyanim*, segregated celebrations — do not violate *halakhah* because they flow from the *halakthic* premise of separation, which in turn flows from the notion that, in his words, "different rights and responsibilities do not necessarily imply inferior value."

Is study by women, now to be "encouraged," equal to study by men, or is it of inferior value? If it is not of inferior value, why is it to be kept apart? The same questions logically apply to prayer and celebration. When women are discouraged and isolated from the centers of study, prayer, and celebration by virtue of certain categories of eligibility, then separation of the ineligible from the eligible makes, in its own frame, sense. (A circular kind of sense, however, since mostly it is the rule of separation itself which determines ineligibility.) But once eligibility for study is declared to be universal regardless of sex, then what rationale continues to impose isolation? It is a detriment to study when good minds are kept apart.

Return for a moment to Steinsaltz's discussion:

One of the great Talmudic commentators, the Maharsha, often ended his commentaries with the word *vedok* (continue to examine the matter). This exhortation is an explicit admission that the subject

has not been exhausted and that there is still room for additions and arguments on the question. To a certain extent the whole Talmud is rounded off by this *vedok*, the injunction to continue the search, to ask, to seek new aspects of familiar problems.

If recent history has made us vulnerable to grief over mass loss; if we consider how we ourselves have amputated from the Jewish cultural body so many philosophers, historians, poets, scholars; if we reflect on the excision of generation after generation of Jewish students (we who are so proud of our joy in study, of our reverence for holy study¹); if Jews in their full, not amputated, collectivity are drawn in awe to "the Torah's spirit and truth," then why do the sincerest scholars of Torah appear to offer Jewish women stopgap lactics, tinkering, placebos and sopor, all in the form of further separation and isolation?

These recommendations for study and prayer within a frame of continuing segregation fail to address the one idea that calls out to be addressed. They are not solutions arrived at by means attentive to the Maharsha's injunction toward *vedok*, toward continuing to examine the matter; they are, instead, obstacles to examining the matter; they are evasions of the matter. They are the very opposite of "a constant creative process," which can never proceed through evasion, but must endure a head-on wrestling with the sinew of the dispute.

The deepest sinew of the dispute concerns the premise that has, up to and including our time, deported women out of the houses of study: "Different rights and responsibilities do not necessarily imply inferior value."

It is that premise which needs search, examination, renewed scrutiny — because everything follows from it, and to tinker with its consequences is to evade the very essence of one of the most urgent Jewish issues of our generation: the loss of an army of Torah-scholars. If *halakhah* aids in suppressing the scholars who can grow to create it, that is a kind of self-decimation. If the Jewish communal conscience continues to amputate half its potential scholarship, that is akin to cultural self-destruction. When half the brain is idling, the other half is lame.

Until Jewish women are in the same relation to history and Torah as Jewish men are and have been, we should not allow ourselves ever again to indulge in the phrase "the Jewish genius." There is no collective Jewish genius. Since Deborah the Prophet we have not had a collective Jewish genius. What we have had is a Jewish half-genius. That is not enough for the people who choose to hear the Voice of the Lord of History. We have been listening with only half an ear, speaking with only half a tongue, and never understanding that we have made ourselves partly deaf and partly dumb.

Applesource

In the beginning, the Lord God formed Adam and Lilith from the dust of the ground and breathed into their nostrils the breath of life. Created from the same source, they were equal in all ways. Adam, being a man, didn't like this situation, and he looked for ways to change it. He said, "I'll have my figs now, Lilith," ordering her to wait on him, and he tried to leave to her the daily tasks of life in the garden. But Lilith wasn't one to take any nonsense; she picked herself up, uttered God's holy name, and flew away. "Well now, Lord," complained Adam, "that uppity woman you sent me has gone and deserted me." The Lord, inclined to be sympathetic, sent his messengers after Lilith, telling her to shape up and return to Adam or face dire punishment. She, however, preferring anything to living with Adam, decided to stay right where she was. And so God, after more careful consideration this time, caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and out of one of his ribs created for him a second companion, Eve.

For a time, Eve and Adam had quite a good thing going. Adam was happy now, and Eve, though she occasionally sensed capacities within herself which remained undeveloped, was basically satisfied with the role of Adam's wife and helper. The only thing that really disturbed her was the excluding closeness of the relationship between Adam and God. Adam and God just seemed to have more in common, both being men, and Adam came to identify with God more and more. After a while, that made God a bit uncomfortable too, and he started going over in his mind whether he may not have made a mistake letting Adam talk him into banishing Lilith and creating Eve, seeing the power that gave Adam.

Meanwhile Lilith, all alone, attempted from time to time to rejoin the human community in the garden. After her first fruitless attempt to breach its walls, Adam worked hard to build them stronger, even getting Eve to help him. He told her fearsome stories of the demon Lilith who threatens women in childbirth and steals children from their cradles in the middle of the night. The second time Lilith came, she stormed the garden's main gate, and a great battle between her and Adam ensued in which she was finally defeated. This time, however, before Lilith got away, Eve got a glimpse of her and saw she was a woman like herself.

After this encounter, seeds of curiosity and doubt began to grow in Eve's mind. Was Lilith indeed just another woman? Adam had said she was a demon. Another woman! The very idea attracted Eve. She

had never seen another creature like herself before. And how beautiful and strong Lilith had looked! How bravely she had fought! Slowly, slowly, Eve began to think about the limits of her own life within the garden.

One day, after many months of strange and disturbing thoughts, Eve, wandering around the edge of the garden, noticed a young apple tree she and Adam had planted and saw that one of its branches stretched over the garden wall. Spontaneously, she tried to climb it, and, struggling to the top, swung herself over the wall.

She did not wander long on the other side before she met the one she had come to find, for Lilith was waiting. At first sight of her, Eve remembered the tales of Adam and was frightened—but Lilith understood and greeted her kindly. "Who are you?" they asked each other. "What is your story?" And they sat and spoke together, of the past and then of the future. They talked for many hours, not once, but many times. They taught each other many things, and told each other stories, and laughed together, and cried, over and over, till the bond of sisterhood grew between them.

Meanwhile, back in the garden, Adam was puzzled by Eve's comings and goings and disturbed by what he sensed to be her new attitude toward him. He talked to God about it, and God, having his own problems with Adam and a somewhat broader perspective, was able to help him out a little—but he was confused too. Something had failed to go according to plan. As in the days of Abraham, he needed counsel from his children. "I am who I am," thought God, "but I must become who I will become."

And God and Adam were expectant and afraid the day Eve and Lilith returned to the garden, bursting with possibilities, ready to rebuild it together.

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