

TOWARD A COURSE OF STUDY FOR REFORM HIGH
SCHOOL YOUTH DEALING WITH THE HISTORIC
AND CHANGING ROLE OF THE JEWISH WOMAN

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DIGEST

This thesis is an attempt to create a course for Jewish high school students concerning the historic and changing role of the Jewish woman. The motivating force behind the development of such a course is explained in the introduction. Also discussed in the introductory remarks are the manner in which the work is presented, the rationale behind aiming the course at the 11th-12th grade level, and the specific goals of the material. A note to the teacher follows the introduction and provides a list of required texts as well as the names of forty women from which each student shall choose one as a special project.

The body of the thesis consists of twenty-four lesson plans. The first lesson is an introductory lesson meant to stimulate interest in the course. It discusses the Jewish mother stereotype which is so familiar to many. It is followed by four lessons discussing the biblical concept of womanhood. Next come four lessons concerning rabbinic and traditional views of women. Then the changes wrought by Reform Judaism are presented in the next two lessons followed by two lessons concerning the changing status of women in the State of Israel. Four lessons come next which portray the involvement of the Jewish woman in organizational life, specifically in the National

Council of Jewish Women, the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, Hadassah, and B'nai B'rith Women. Then the emphasis turns to ways in which we can increase participation by women in religious affairs, most specifically through changes in liturgical customs and ceremonies. These two lessons are followed by a discussion of ways in which we perpetuate the stereotyped image of the Jewish woman. This leads to a discussion of two literary works, Herman Wouk's Marjorie Morningstar and Philip Roth's Portnoy's Complaint. The two concluding lessons stress the need for continued consciousness-raising among people and give the students an opportunity to summarize what they have learned and to evaluate the course.

Each lesson plan contains the following: a title for the lesson; the goals of the lesson, the procedure which is to be followed, a summary of the major points of the lesson, the assignment for the next session, things to do, and appropriate footnotes which provide the teacher with the necessary source material. A complete bibliography concludes the thesis.

TO
THE MEMORY OF
MY FATHER, IRVING T. PRIESAND,
AND
MY TEACHER, NELSON GLUECK

To Rabbi Sylvan Schwartzman
with deep appreciation
for your patience and
understanding!
Sally Priesand

PREFACE

One night, not too many months ago, a slightly hysterical rabbinic student decided to change her thesis topic. The need for a religious school course concerning the historic and changing role of the Jewish woman had become apparent to her largely through the efforts of her roommate. And now that the framework for such a course has been developed this rabbinic student would like to thank that roommate. Words cannot really express my gratitude to Sherry Levy for her constant efforts to raise my consciousness and for her ability to endure the pressures which developed because she was living with a "first."

I also extend my sincere appreciation and thanks to Rabbi Sylvan Schwartzman for his patient understanding and helpful suggestions. And finally, my love and deepest appreciation go to my mother who, instead of pushing me into marriage, created an atmosphere in which I was encouraged to develop my talents and skills in my own unique way.

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INTRODUCTION

The position of the Jewish woman can really be understood only in terms of the corresponding position of women in general during any specific period in which she lived. In earliest times, a man's daughter was regarded as his possession and his was the power to sell her into marriage. When he exercised this power, he was reimbursed for the economic loss he sustained, and the girl's husband became the new owner. She was subject to his authority just as she had been forced to obey her father. Such attitudes are clearly reflected in the Bible. As Scripture developed, however, there is evidence that the position of woman in the Judaic tradition progressed as well. She was no longer considered a mere possession. She was recognized as a personality in her own right. Her children were commanded to respect her even as they obeyed their father. She was honored and respected and at no time was she subject to the vicious practices of prostitution that existed among other nations.

Throughout the rabbinic period, her position continued to improve. The ketubah, or marriage document, developed to protect her and to provide for her in the case of her husband's death or divorce. While the power of divorce remained solely with her husband, it became

more and more difficult to exercise that power. Wife-beating, so common in other cultures, was forbidden. Honor and praise were heaped upon her as is evident in a whole panoply of Talmudic sayings.

At the same time, sayings which degrade and humiliate women can also be found. What must be remembered is that these sayings reflect the attitudes of individual men, and who can tell what marital mishap or romantic disappointment may have influenced their thoughts. It is more important to know that such negative statements were opposed by many rabbis who exalted the women of Israel and acclaimed accomplishments.

Men and women were equal, but they were given separate realms. A man bore the obligation of religious observance, and a woman was concerned with the duties of her household and the upbringing of her children. While a man prayed three times a day, his wife prepared the way for the future by instilling within her children the quest for knowledge which is so uniquely Jewish. The women, perhaps more than the men, have been responsible, then, for the survival of the Jewish people.

Reform Judaism brought changes. Equality between the sexes was affirmed and the separate realms abolished. Both men and women were now responsible for the performance of religious obligations. Men and women could sit together and pray together. Women could participate in

the service. They could serve on congregational boards. They could be ordained rabbis in Israel. The changes came first on paper, and although many were implemented, others required a transformation of attitude. In some cases, we are still attempting to achieve that transformation.

Much has been accomplished in the State of Israel, though not in the religious realm. In the struggle to establish the Jewish homeland, women refused to be told that their place was in the kitchen and insisted on working side by side with men in all phases of work. As a result, working women became part of the organized labor movement. As their social status improved, the legal status of Israeli women improved as well. Laws were passed granting equal rights to women, requiring military service of them, and raising the marriage age from fifteen to seventeen. All the needed reforms have not yet been made, but progress is clearly visible.

Because Jewish women have not been allowed full participation in religious life, their contributions to the survival of a people were made in other realms. Not only did they devote their time to their children, the hope of the future, but they helped their fellow human beings as well. Not only did they work side by side with men in the establishment of the State of Israel, but they also made certain that necessary health and social welfare programs were established and maintained.

All this they did through their organizational affiliations. Whether it be through the National Council of Jewish Women or Hadassah or the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods or B'nai B'rith Women, women have made invaluable contributions to the community, to the congregation, and to the country of Israel.

The position of the Jewish woman and her contributions to the history of her people virtually have been ignored as has been the role played by women in general history. It is disgraceful that the religious school curriculae of the Reform movement does not contain a course on the Jewish woman. Her many contributions to the survival of the Jewish people, her invaluable involvement in the history of humanity can no longer be ignored. This need for recognition has been the motivating force behind this thesis.

The material is organized in the form of a teacher's manual. It is not to be used as a textbook nor considered by any means a finished product. Rather it is a beginning, an attempt to fill a void too long empty. It presents documentary material which will aid the teacher in preparing various lessons, but it requires the initiative and the creative effort of the teacher to make the material live for the students.

Basically the material has been presented historically. Following an introductory lesson concerning the typical

Jewish mother stereotype, the biblical concept of womanhood is discussed. The rabbinic and traditional views precede a discussion of the changes brought by Reform Judaism. This is followed by reference to the changing status of women in the State of Israel. The next unit backtracks somewhat to present the Jewish women's involvement in organizational life. A discussion of liturgical customs and ceremonies leads to an explanation of the ways in which we perpetuate the stereotyped image of the Jewish mother, and a brief analysis of two literary works precedes the final lessons which are meant to deal with the frustration one feels at a time when the movement toward liberation within society is so strong, as well as to emphasize the need for constant efforts toward consciousness-raising among people. To supplement the course and acquaint the class with the accomplishments of several Jewish women, each student should be assigned the life of a female personality as a term project.

The material was prepared for the eleventh-twelfth grade level to meet the needs of students who are struggling with their identity and preparing to accept the responsibilities of adult life. It has been suggested that the course would be more effective in the ninth or tenth grade because many students leave religious school following confirmation. It is the author's opinion, however, that confirmation should be

moved from the tenth grade to the twelfth grade, and it is in this context that the course is presented for the eleventh-twelfth grade level. The fact that this material represents only a beginning must again be emphasized. Hopefully, the time will soon come when a course concerning Jewish women will be presented in the primary grades as well so that students will not have to wait until the end of their formal religious education to realize the great pride they can take in the invaluable contributions of the Jewish woman as well as in the fact that Jewish attitudes toward women have constantly been changing and improving.

In summary, then, the goals of this thesis have been to present a historical view of the position of the Jewish woman, to emphasize that Jewish tradition has been far more sensitive to the needs and feelings of women than have other cultures, to suggest ways in which Jewish tradition can continue to be flexible to the changing role of women in our society, to raise the consciousness of the students, to acquaint the class with the lives and accomplishments of several Jewish women, to create a framework out of which can grow and develop a meaningful and vibrant course for Jewish high school students, and primarily to fill a void which has too long been empty.

NOTE TO THE TEACHER

To supplement the course, each student should be required to report on the life and accomplishments of a particular Jewish woman. The assignments should be made as early as possible so that students can present their reports to the class during the appropriate lessons. Let each student choose the personality whose life he or she wishes to research. The following is a suggested list from which the students may choose:

1. Bella Abzug, United States Congresswoman from New York
2. Grace Aguilar, English writer primarily concerned with Jewish history
3. Mary Antin, author of The Promised Land, noted for her description of immigrant life
4. Gertrude Berg, actress whose best known role was that of Molly Goldberg
5. Fanny Brice, star of the Ziegfeld Follies
6. Jane Evans, Executive Director, National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods
7. Edna Ferber, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for her novel, So Big
8. Anne Frank, young girl famous for her diary describing a life of hiding from the Nazis
9. Ray Frank, student at the Hebrew Union College in 1892 who was known for her preaching ability; called a "female Messiah"

10. Betty Friedan, leader of the feminist movement in America
11. Gluckel of Hameln, 17th century German Jewess known for her memoirs
12. Emma Goldman, stormy figure in the anarchist movement who was deported to Russia in 1919
13. Rebecca Gratz, founded the first Sunday School in Philadelphia; well-known for her letters
14. Peggy Guggenheim, owner of one of the most comprehensive collections of modern art
15. Lillian Hellman, foremost American playwright
16. Bel Kaufman, author of Up the Down Staircase
17. Gerda Klein, survivor of Nazi Germany
18. Rebecca Kohut, dynamic leader of National Council of Jewish Women
19. Emma Lazarus, author of "The New Colossus" which is inscribed on the Statue of Liberty
20. Ada Maimon, outstanding leader of woman's labor movement in Israel
21. Golda Meir, prime minister of Israel
22. Judge Lenore Underwood Mills, first president of B'nai B'rith Women's Supreme Council
23. Honorable Lily Monatgu, one of the founders of the Liberal Jewish Movement in England
24. Bertha Pappenheim, Freud's "Anna O." known especially for her work in the women's movement in Germany
25. Roberta Peters, Metropolitan Opera star

26. Molly Picon, star of Yiddish theater
 27. Sally Priesand, to be ordained as first American woman rabbi on June 3, 1972
 28. Ernestine Rose, leader of the women's suffrage movement in America
 29. Nelly Sachs, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature
 30. Jessie Sampter, author and noted teacher of the Yemenites in Palestine
 31. Hannah Senesh, parachutist executed as a spy in 1944
 32. Hannah G. Solomon, founder of the National Council of Jewish Women
 33. Henrietta Szold, founder of Hadassah
 34. Gloria Steinem, journalist and leader of the feminist movement
 35. Lillian Wald, pioneer social worker who founded Henry Street Settlement in New York
 36. Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, scholar and editor of The Jewish Spectator
 37. Pauline Wengeroff, Russian Jewess whose memoirs tell of the effect of assimilation in the nineteenth century
 38. Penina Moise, poetess known for her hymns
 39. Fannie Hurst, well-known short story writer
 40. Dorothy Parker, American drama critic and humorist
- If your students have difficulty in finding material about any of these women, suggest that they write to either the Hebrew Union College Library or the American Jewish Archives, 3101 Clifton Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45220.

In addition to the source material provided for you in the lesson plans, you will want your students to have access to the following:

1. The Holy Scriptures
2. Jewish Family Life: The Duty of the Woman by Rabbi Sidney B. Hoenig(New York, 1963)
3. "Women's Lib and Judaism" by Rabbi Roland B. Gittelsohn in Midstream(October, 1971)
4. Correspondence concerning Women and Judaism, Midstream (March, 1972)
5. The Hadassah Idea by Gloria Goldreich Horowitz (New York, 1966)
6. Mary Gendler's contribution to "The Response Symposium" in Response, A Contemporary Jewish Review(Winter, 1970-1971)
7. Marjorie Morningstar by Herman Wouk(New York, 1955)
8. Portnoy's Complaint by Philip Roth(New York, 1967)

Throughout the course, it will be important for you to emphasize two basic thoughts. The first is that it is impossible to view the position of the Jewish woman during any given period without being aware of its relationship to the larger context of general history. No matter how bad things were for the Jewish woman they were generally worse for women of other cultures. The second thought is that Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Judaism do differ in their attitudes toward women. Be sure to make clear distinctions between their respective views and practices. Otherwise the students are apt to be confused as well as totally turned off by Judaism.

Lesson 1: What's a Jewish mother?

- Goals:
- 1) to stimulate interest in the course by beginning with a topic everyone knows something about;
 - 2) to see how the students view a Jewish mother;
 - 3) to show the positive aspects of a negative stereotype

Procedure: 1) Ask the members of the class to jot down the characteristics which they attribute to a Jewish mother. Collect the papers and read them aloud, having one student record the answers on the blackboard. Chances are those characteristics mentioned most frequently will include: talkative, overprotective, educationally-minded, always concerned about feeding someone, constantly nagging.

- 2) Discuss each of the above characteristics separately. Give an example of each and ask the students what positive aspects can be drawn from each example.

3) Talkative

Negative example: conversation between
mother and daughter

'I want to tell you something very important.'

'What?'

'I have tried to be a good mother to you. I suppose I have failed.'

'Oh God.'

'God knows how I've suffered to bring you up properly, to teach you to take proper care of yourself, to stand up straight - don't slouch when I'm talking to you - to give you nice clothes to wear, to give you a decent education. What do I ask in return - gratitude? Listen, gratitude I can do without, and I wouldn't get it anyway, you know it and so do I.'

'Ma, for God's-'

'O.K., O.K., I'm not complaining. All I'm saying is this: I'm not getting any younger. I would like to know before I die that you are married and happy and not alone in the world. I would, believe me, go into the coffin with a smile on my face to have seen and held on my lap a couple of grandchildren.'

'What am I supposed to-'

'All right, look. I know you've tried. I'm not saying that. The thing is, maybe I've been too critical of the young men you've gone out with. (TO CEILING): Is it a sin to want only the best for your children? (TO DAUGHTER): What I am saying is this: Maybe it's not so important you should marry only a professional man. Your father, after all, was in ladies' buttons. So keep looking around, and if you should come across a nice young fellow and you should fall in love with him, and if he should also be in love with you, and if - may the good Lord not burn out my tongue from my mouth for saying this - if this young man should not be a college graduate...all right, I say all right, go ahead and marry him! (PAUSE SOFTLY): By that time your father and I will probably both be dead anyway.'¹

Positive application:

Another stimulus to intellectual aptitude was the talkativeness of the Jewish home. It is now recognized that exposure to this factor in their early formative years increases the learning readiness of children, and it has long been known that verbal skill is an important component of I.Q. and achievement test performance. That Yiddishe Mamehs, in particular, were talkative, any Jewish male will ruefully confirm, but it is not generally recognized that this notorious attribute of theirs

gave their children a head start in learning. Whatever Yiddishe Mamehs did for their children - and they did a great deal - was accompanied by a flow of language, consisting of rich, colorful, expressive words and phrases. Their vocabulary of endearments alone could fill a modest sized paperback, but they also had a superb store of admonishments, curses, imprecations, explanations, songs and folksayings that they effortlessly invoked as they went about ministering to the needs of their children and their husbands. The freedom that they exhibited with the spoken word invited a similar response from their children and it carried over into school despite the fact that Yiddish, and not English, was their mother tongue. This helps account for the fact that learning aptitude was demonstrated not only by Jewish children whose fathers had extensive religious learning but also by those from homes where learning and cultivation were largely absent.²

4) Overprotective

Negative example:

As soon as possible after the child has moved into his new apartment, pay him a visit and do the following:

(1) Bring food. He probably does not know where to buy any in a strange city and is starving. Tell him how thin he looks.

(2) Take everything off his shelves and out of his drawers and line them with oilcloth.

(3) Wash his floor.

(4) Rearrange his furniture and buy plastic slipcovers for everything.

(5) Go out and get him a warm sweater, a pair of galoshes, a pair of gloves, a hat, and (if the temperature there ever falls below 50° Fahrenheit) earmuffs.

(6) If he has plastic dinner plates, say he needs something more substantial and buy him china ones. If he has china ones, say he needs something more functional and buy him plastic ones.

After you have returned home, you

may call up his professor or his employer, introduce yourself, tell him how tired your son looked to you when you saw him and suggest that he not be made to work so hard.)

Positive application:

The determined struggle of Jewish mothers to delay the emotional emancipation of their children is well known and often criticized but it was nevertheless a significant factor in the high educational attainment of second generation Jews in America. It is to their credit, I think, that they recognized that the basic conditions required to fashion a talmudic scholar are very much the same as those needed to achieve any other career requiring a high order of intellectual skill. In both cases, a prolonged period of time and arduous work must be spent in acquiring a complex body of knowledge, during which time the child must be provided encouragement and emotional support as well as protection from outside influence which might lure him into abandoning long-run plans for more immediate pleasures and rewards. Yiddishe Mamehs achieved this by denying the legitimacy of their children's declarations of independence. Mainst as du bist shoin a ganzer mensch (You only think you are a responsible human being), was their stock retort to youthful emancipation proclamations. They employed every stratagem to remain as indispensable to their children in later childhood and adolescence as they had been earlier in life. The concept of early independence training was foreign to their thinking. According to thier view a child was a child whether he was five or fifteen and required much the same order of care, devotion and protection in adolescence as in childhood. With respect to learning and intellectual matters generally they encouraged the development of self-reliance and autonomy, but they were reluctant to grant their children other forms of independence or to impose any serious responsibility on them until

they had completed their education and were ready to assume the obligations of marriage and a career.⁴

5) Educationally-minded

Negative example: conversation between mother and son

'Marvin?'

'Yeah?'

'Your father and I have been talking.'

'Yeah?'

'We have come to a very important decision.'

'Yeah?'

'We have decided that you are no longer a baby. I mean, after all, you're graduating high school and pretty soon now you will have to decide what you want to do in life.'

'Yeah?'

'I just wanted to tell you that your father and I have decided not to interfere. We have decided to let you do whatever you want to do, if you really want to do it. Whatever you want to do will be perfectly all right with us, so long as it makes you happy. You could be even a blacksmith, if that is what would make you happy. The only important thing, after all, is that you should do what makes you happy.'

'O.K.'

'Your father and I think, though, that you would be happiest if you would become a doctor, a lawyer, or a C.P.A.'⁵

Positive application:

Jewish immigrants were no better off economically when they settled in America than other immigrants; they lived in the same squalid neighborhoods; their children attended the same schools and learned from the same teachers but, as a rule, they exhibited a greater aptitude for learning and a greater will to learn than non-Jewish children. Learning, of course, has traditionally commanded respect even among the Jewish masses who, as a rule, had only a meagre amount of

secular or religious education. Every indication of intellectual curiosity and verbal precocity in their children was received with pleasure and delight by Jewish parents and long before their formal schooling began Jewish youngsters understood that there was no more effective way to win approval and praise from adults. Even an impudent question or a naughty remark, if clever, was received with amused tolerance by parents and proudly relayed to friends and relatives as evidence of chochma, which is the Hebrew word for wisdom, but also is used colloquially to denote brightness, cleverness or wit.⁶

6) Always concerned about feeding someone

Negative example:

Just as Mother Nature abhors a vacuum, the Jewish Mother abhors an empty mouth. It shall therefore be your purpose as a Jewish Mother to fill every mouth you can reach with nourishing food.

At mealtimes, be sure there is a continuous flow of food from stove to serving platter to plate to mouth. If anyone should be foolish enough to decline a particular dish (e.g. potatoes), proceed as follows:

(1) Find out whether the man has any rational objections:

'What do you mean no potatoes, Irving - you think I'm trying to poison you?'

(2) Suggest that he take only a small amount as a compromise:

'Take only a sliver of the potatoes, then.'

'All right. But remember, only a sliver.'

(3) You may now proceed to fill his plate with potatoes. The instant that he has crammed down the last one, you must be ready to:

(4) Offer him a second helping:

'There, I told you you'd like it once you tasted it. All right now, you're ready for seconds?'

'God, no.'

Here you must really be on your toes.

Between your question and his answer, little more than one microsecond will elapse. Within that microsecond, you must scoop all the rest of the potatoes out onto his plate, and make the turn back to the kitchen.⁷

Positive application:

Teaching of the basic precepts of Judaism began virtually in infancy for Jewish children whether they were brought up in religious or in secular homes. The kind of appeal that Yiddishe Mamehs employed to motivate their children to eat, for example, was often couched in normative terms. They didn't simply impress on their children that eating was an act of self-interest - that by doing so they would grow up big and strong - but they also invested this mundane activity with moral significance and transformed it into an act of altruism by urging the child to eat for others - for mama, for poppa, for other members of the family, and inevitably, the appeal was made to eat for the 'poor, starving children in Europe.⁸

7) Constantly nagging

Negative example:

'Marvin, how about a little treat?
Have a mint, or maybe a slice of salami.'
'Not now, Ma.'
'Have a grape or a nice watermelon.
You want me to slice you a watermelon?'
'I said not now, Ma!'
'Listen how he talks to me. You'd
think I was trying to do a terrible
thing to him, to slice him a watermelon.
Do you see how skinny he is? A scarecrow.
Look at him - you'd think I never gave
him a decent meal in his life. Tuberculosis
- that's what he'll get. Then he'll
eat. They'll feed him through a tube.'
'Aw, for crynoutloud, give me the
watermelon already.'
'Here. Enjoy it. You'll learn how
to eat some day, but by then - God forbid -
it will be too late.'⁹

Positive application:

Yiddishe Mamehs seemed singularly unconcerned with 'discipline' and 'independence training.' They allowed their children a greater degree of liberty at home than was customary among Gentiles, and readily acknowledged that their children were zelosen, that is, pampered, demanding, spoiled, not well-behaved the way Gentile children seemed to be in the presence of their mothers. The Anglo-Saxon code of stoic endurance and suppressed emotion was alien to the Eastern European Jew. Of course, Yiddishe Mamehs had their boiling point, which varied a good deal depending on their individual temperment, but generally they preferred controlling their children mit guten, that is, by explanation, reasoning, distraction, and admonishment. As a rule, they were naggers or screamers rather than disciplinarians. They gained compliance by entreaties repeated so often that finally the child would comply voluntarily, albeit wearily, to their requests. The Yiddishe Mameh avoided methods of control that aroused fear of herself in the child, and regarded such methods as morally wrong as well as inexpedient for cultivating inner controls in her children.¹⁰

Summary:

A widespread belief in America shared by Jews as well as non-Jews is that Jews are 'smart but neurotic.' The Jew's intellectual aptitudes are usually attributed to the cultural values transmitted by Jewish fathers for whom learning and study were traditionally a religious obligation. As for the neurosis, that of course is blamed on the Jewish mother.

That Jews are 'smart' is confirmed by the available empirical evidence. Whatever indices have been employed to measure achievement - I.Q. scores, school grades, years of schooling, occupational level, and social mobility - Jews, on the average, exhibit higher levels of performance than the non-Jews to whom they have been compared. But the proposition that neurosis is significantly more widespread among Jews

than among non-Jews is not supported by the admittedly limited empirical studies of the subject. A study comparing the prevalence of emotional disorder among Protestants, Catholics, and Jews - based on a sample of 1660 respondents in midtown Manhattan - found that neurotic symptoms were common in all three groups: respondents rated as 'well' constituted only 20.2% of Protestants tested, 17.4% of the Catholics, and 14.5% of the Jews. And when the authors classified people according to the severity of their symptoms and the degree to which these interfered with their ability to carry on normal activities, they discovered that impairing forms of emotional disorder were significantly lower among Jews (17.2%) than among either Protestants (23.5%) or Catholics (24.7%). Further, Jews were concentrated in the mental health category of 'mild symptom formation,' exhibiting far fewer cases of incapacitating disorder than Protestants and Catholics. Interestingly, the Jewish immunity from psychological impairment was most pronounced among respondents from working-class families, where mental illness is generally most prevalent.

If Jewish mothers are to be blamed for their children's psychological problems, should they not also receive some credit for their relative strengths? Indeed this article will suggest that the child-rearing practices of immigrant Jewish mothers contributed significantly to the remarkable educational and occupational attainments of second generation Jews, and could provide an important model for scientific study and emulation.¹¹

Assignment: Read Genesis 21:1-21; 27-28:6; 30:25-31

Things to do: 1) Read What's a Jewish Girl? by Lyn

Tornabene (New York, 1966). Are Jewish girls really raised to be balabostas?

2) Listen to "The Jewish American Princess"

by Bob Booker and George Foster (Bell Records. 6063). Are Jewish girls pampered and spoiled? Did your parents spoil you?

Footnotes:

¹Dan Greenburg, How to be a Jewish Mother(Los Angeles, 1964), pp. 85-87.

²Zena Smith Blau, "In Defense of the Jewish Mother," Midstream, February, 1967, p. 47.

³Greenburg, pp. 61-62.

⁴Blau, p. 47.

⁵Greenburg, pp. 58-59.

⁶Blau, pp. 46-47.

⁷Greenburg, pp. 18-20.

⁸Blau, p. 45.

⁹Greenburg, p. 25.

¹⁰Blau, p. 44.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 42-43.

Lesson 2: Where do Jewish mothers come from?

- Goals: 1) to show that the Jewish mother concept began with the matriarchs;
- 2) to introduce the biblical concept of womanhood

Procedure: 1) The matriarchs, the first Jewish mothers are honored and respected by our tradition. A father blesses his daughter: "May you be like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah." One may wonder, however, exactly what he means when he recites this blessing, for a close look at the matriarchs reveals that they are guilty of actions which we might well consider unfavorable and dishonest.

- 2) Read Genesis 21:1-21.

Question: What quality did Sarah possess that is most evident in this passage?

Answer: It was Sarah's envy that was responsible for the banishment of Hagar and Ishmael. When did jealousy become an admirable quality?

- 3) Read Genesis 27-28:6.

Question: What quality did Rebecca possess that is most evident in this passage?

Answer: It was Rebecca's love of Jacob that led to his acquisition of the birth-right and his journey to Haran in

in search of a wife. Is favoritism a quality to be emulated by Jewish parents?

4) Raed Genesis 30:25-31.

Question: What quality did Rachel possess that is most evident in this passage?

Answer: It was Rachel's theft of Laban's idols that eventually led to his treaty with Jacob. Is robbery an action to be praised?

5) That the matriarchs were guilty of jealousy, favoritism, and robbery is evident in the above-mentioned Scriptural passages. One might ask, then, why would a father hope that his daughter be like these women?

The answer lies not with their faults but rather with the reasons which led to these actions. The matriarchs acted in order to protect Israel. It was they who perceived the immediate dangers which threatened Israel's destiny. It was they who pushed their sometimes blind husbands into action, and it was their preservation of the present which paved the way for the fulfillment of the future. They saved Israel and without their decisive actions, there would be no tradition.¹

Summary: The matriarchs, then, were portrayed as over-protective mothers just as the stereotyped Jewish mother of today is portrayed as such. They were concerned with the preservation of a

people, and as instruments through which that people would survive, they did anything and everything that was required of them - even if that sometimes meant acting dishonestly. They were devoted and decisive. But above all else, they were mothers, and that fact would be impressed upon the mind of every Jewish girl whose father blessed her on Shabbat, for whatever else the traditional Jewish blessing may have meant, it most certainly expressed the wish that the young lady would marry and have children.

Assignment: See if you can discover what position the biblical woman held in relation to the family. Was she treated as a human being or as property? Did she have a choice as to whom she wanted to marry?

Things to do: 1) Not all biblical women were mothers.

Can you name some who were not? Did they also contribute to the preservation of a people?

2) "The Lord make the woman that is come into thy house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel," (Ruth 4:11). When the people expressed this wish to Boaz, what were they really saying?

Footnotes:

¹Sally Priesand, "They Did Build the House of Israel,"
Dimensions, Winter, 1971, p. 27.

Lesson 3: "More in common with the slave than with the master"

- Goals: 1) to explain the biblical concept of family structure;
- 2) to show that the biblical woman had the same status as a slave in relation to her husband but was on an equal level with him when demanding respect from their children

Procedure: 1) In the Bible, family organization is of the type called patronymic. Marriage represented ownership, and the husband (ba'al) owned his wife just as he owned his slaves.¹ The wife was purchased by the groom's family, and payment of the purchase price, or mohar, reimbursed the bride's father for the loss he sustained when she got married. In other words, marriage was a business transaction; the groom's family gained someone who would tend the flock, draw water from the well and assist with household tasks, while the bride's father lost a valuable and useful member of the family for whom he was paid. The minimum purchase price in biblical times seems to have been fifty shekels.²

- 2) As a rule the parents, or more precisely,

the fathers, arranged the match. The girl was consulted, but the 'calling of the damsel and inquiring at her mouth' after the conclusion of all negotiations was merely a matter of formality. The girl certainly could not help giving her consent after her father and her whole family had agreed to the match (Gen. 24).³

- 3) Read Exodus 22:15-16; Deuteronomy 22:28-29;
Deuteronomy 22:13-19.

Question: How is woman regarded in these passages?

Answer:

In fact, it might be fair to say that, from these passages, one might conclude that the girl is regarded as little more than an economic quantity whose market value (to her father) rises and falls on the basis of the experiences to which she is subjected and the resultant usefulness of her capacities.⁴

- 4) A woman's husband ruled over her (Genesis 3:16).
Her actions depended upon his approval or, should she be single, that of her father (Numbers 30:3-9).
- 5) The only area in which there seemed to be any inkling of equality was that of the respect which children were to afford their parents.
Read Exodus 20:12; Leviticus 19:3; Exodus 21:17.
If charges were to be brought against a rebellious child, both parents had to bring them together.

Read Deuteronomy 21:18-19.

That a woman commanded such respect is most significant for

If the mother was so considered in her home, woman could not have had a servile position in relation to her husband. He of course was the recognized master of the house, but had she been treated as a creature of his will she could not have so sustained the respect of her children.⁵

Summary: The biblical woman was little more than an economic asset. She was controlled by her father until her marriage and then by her husband. She had almost nothing to say about any decisions which directly affected her life. For all practical purposes, she was on the same level as the slave. Her children, however, were commanded to give her the same respect due their father. This accounts for the fact that, although she bowed to her husband's authority, the biblical woman - and her descendant, the Jewish mother - held an honored position in the eyes of her children.

Assignment: See what you can find out about the Sotah ritual.

Things to do: 1) Read chapter 7 of The Jewish Wife by Gwen Gibson Schwartz and Barbara Wyden (New York, 1969). Do you think that today's Jewish woman seeks approval

from her husband before making decisions?

- 2) What can you discover about the practice of polygamy in biblical times? Was it condoned? Read Exodus 21:9; Deuteronomy 21:15; Leviticus 18:18.

Note:

All evidence of monogamy in the Bible, according to this view, represents a superimposed morality on a polygamous foundation. The monogamous tendency grew with the progress of Hebrew history under the influence of the law-giver and preacher. The law-giver, finding polygamy at the root of Hebrew life did not or could not eradicate it by outright prohibition, but sought to eliminate it gradually by such laws as the required purification after contact with a woman, or the command to treat all wives alike, or the prohibition against castration. The preacher taught monogamy by the story of creation, by the censure he offered Solomon for his plural marriages, by prophetic utterances in favor of monogamy, and by subtle apologies for the polygamy of some prominent biblical personalities.⁶

Footnotes:

¹Louis M. Epstein, Marriage Laws in the Bible and the Talmud(Cambridge, 1942), p. 7.

²Louis M. Epstein, The Jewish Marriage Contract(New York, 1927), p. 60.

³Hayyim Schauss, The Lifetime of a Jew(New York, 1950), p. 126.

⁴Roger C. Klein, The Power of Women: Toward an Understanding of the Jewish Response(Cincinnati, 1971), p. 86.

⁵Elizabeth Mary MacDonald, The Position of Women as Reflected in Semitic Codes of Law(Toronto, 1931), p.63.

⁶Epstein, Marriage Laws, pp. 5-6.

Lesson 4: Things could have been worse!

- Goals: 1) to examine those passages in Scripture which portray woman as temptress and betrayer;
- 2) to show that the status of the biblical woman was not as low as that of the women in other cultures;
- 3) to emphasize that there was a change in attitude through which the status of woman constantly improved

Procedure: 1) Read Genesis 30:1; Judges 11:34 & 37;
I Samuel 1:8.

Question: What view do these passages reflect?

Answer: Marriage and motherhood were the biblical woman's reasons for living.

2) Read Leviticus 12:2-5; I Samuel 4:20;
Leviticus 27:2-7.

Question: According to these passages, was a female child as desirable as a male child?

Answer: Not only did the biblical woman yearn for a child but it would appear that a male child was preferred over a female child and that a man was considered of greater value than a woman.

- 3) The biblical woman was often portrayed as one who either tempted her husband or betrayed him.

Read Genesis 3:12; Job 2:9-10; I Kings 21:25; Ecclesiastes 7: 26-28; Judges 14:18.

Question: What effect do you think this view had on later attitudes toward women?

- 4) When a woman was suspected of adultery, she was forced to undergo an unbelievably degrading and disgusting ordeal, as related in Numbers 5:11-31. This ordeal was based on the premise that if the woman were innocent she would suffer no ill-effects. But if she were guilty, her guilt would be made obvious through the physical effects she would suffer. One wonders, however, how any woman, or for that matter any person, could go through such a humiliating experience without becoming physically ill!

- 5) While the biblical woman was clearly insubordinate to her husband, a new moral attitude toward women did develop. For example, in Exodus 21:1-11 only the male servant was freed after six years of service. The deuteronomic code, however,

commanded that the female servant should also be set free(Deuteronomy 15:12-17).¹

Hayyim Schauss points out the following change as well:

This same evolution in attitude towards women can be traced in the two versions of the tenth commandment of the Decalogue. One version, apparently, the older one (Exod. 20), says: 'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's.' The wife of the neighbor is set on the same level as the other possessions. Only the house of the neighbor is here in a separate category. One's own house was regarded as too precious to be put on the same plane as other property. In a second, apparently a later version(Deut. 5), the commandment reads: 'Neither shalt thou covet thy neighbor's wife; neither shalt thou desire thy neighbor's house, his field, or his man-servant or his maid-servant, his ox or his ass, or anything that is thy neighbor's.' In this version, the wife, not the house, is in a separate category.²

- 5) Another area in which Hebrew morality was clearly superior was that of prostitution. Israelite women were never exposed to the vicious practices of other nations.

Among the ancient nations of the East, with the exception of the Jews, prostitution appears to have been connected with religious worship, and to have been not merely tolerated but encouraged. The code of sexual morality laid down in the Book of Leviticus is prefaced by the injunction not to do after the doings of the land of Egypt, and after the doings of the land of

Canaan, where all the abominations forbidden to the Jews were practised; and whenever all the Israelites lapsed from their faith and 'went a-whoring after strange gods the transgression was always associated with licentious conduct. In Egypt, Phoenicia, Assyria, Chaldea, Canaan and Persia, the worship of Isis, Moloch, Baal, Astarte, Mylitta and other deities consisted of the most extravagant sensual orgies, and the temples were merely centres of vice. In Babylon some degree of prostitution appears to have been even compulsory and imposed upon all women in honour of the goddess Mylitta. In India the ancient connection between religion and prostitution still survives; but that is not the case in China, a most licentious country and, considering the antiquity of its civilization, and its conservatism, we may perhaps conclude that it formed an exception in this respect among the ancient nations.

Among the Jews, who stood apart from the surrounding peoples, the object of the Mosaic law was clearly to preserve the purity of the race and the religion. Prostitution in itself was not forbidden, but it was to be confined to foreign women. Jewish fathers were forbidden to turn their daughters into prostitutes (Lev. xix. 29), and the daughters of Israel were forbidden to become prostitutes (Deut. xxiii. 17), but no penalty was attached to disobedience, except in the case of a priest's daughter, who was to be burnt (Lev. xxi. 9). This distinction is significant of the attitude of Moses, because the heathen 'priestesses' were nothing but prostitutes. Similarly, he forbade groves, a common adjunct of heathen temples and a convenient cover for debauchery. Again, his purpose is shown by the severe penalties imposed on adultery (death) and on unchastity in a betrothed damsel (death by stoning), as contrasted with the mild prohibition of prostitution. So long as it did not touch the race or the religion he

tolerated it; and even this degree of disapproval was not maintained, for Jephthah was the son of a harlot (Judges xi. 1). There is abundant evidence in the Old Testament that prostitution prevailed extensively in Palestine, even in the earlier and more puritan days. The women were forbidden Jerusalem and places of worship; they infested the waysides, and there is some evidence of a distinctive dress or bearing, which was a marked feature of the trade among the Greeks and Romans. In the later period of aggrandizement that increase of licentious indulgence which Moses had foreseen took place, associated with infidelity. The remarkable series of ordinances laid down by Moses in the interest of public health contains unmistakable recognition of venereal disease and its contagious character(Lev. xv.).³

Summary: Numerous examples portraying the low status of woman may be found in the Bible. Genesis 3:16 clearly states that man was the master. He possessed all the rights and there was little concern shown for the woman's feelings. Her primary responsibility was to produce children, preferably male children. Husbands expected absolute fidelity from their wives, but wives were not permitted the same expectation. Women were regarded as mere property. As years passed, however, there was some change in attitude. Women were beginning to be regarded as personalities in their own right; even if they were inferior to men, their identity as people rather than property was at least being acknowledged. In

In any case, one must remember first of all that Hebrew women were the most exalted of ancient women, and secondly that

conjectures on the basis of data furnished by law codes can be only relatively true. Legal regulations are one thing, actual practice another. Woman's legal status is one thing, her actual position another. Love, hatred, greed, ambition, and personal excellence have ever been powerful formative influences in individual lives and in human society. Life is never wholly determined by the letter of the law. If in some instances the lot of the Semitic woman was even less bearable than the codes indicate, it is no doubt equally true that there were many instances in which personal factors and the human element enabled her to rise to a higher position in society than is indicated in the codes.⁴

Assignment: Read the Book of Ruth.

- Things to do: 1) What view of woman is portrayed in the Book of Esther? What was Vashti's crime? Whose idea was it that Mordecai be hanged?
- 2) In what other ways was the position of Jewish women superior to that of women in other civilizations?

Footnotes:

¹Hayyim Schauss, The Lifetime of a Jew(New York, 1950), p. 138.

²Ibid., p. 315.

³"Prostitution," Encyclopedia Britannica, XVIII(Chicago, 1943), pp. 596-597.

⁴Elizabeth Mary MacDonald, The Position of Women as Reflected in Semitic Codes of Law(Toronto, 1931), p. 73.

Lesson 5: The ceremony of taking off the shoe

- Goals: 1) to understand the ceremony of chalitsah;
2) to show how that ceremony reflects the biblical attitude that women are property

Procedure: 1) As we have seen, in primitive times, the groom's family paid for the bride and she became the property of the family. When her husband died, she was still owned by the family, and the head of the family controlled her, just as he had control over all family possessions. It was customary that all valuable and productive property be used, and since the widow was certainly capable of being a wife and mother, she could not be neglected. This gave rise to the custom of levirate marriage in which a member of the deceased's family was required to marry the widow. The motive behind this custom was to preserve the family's property right in the widow. In the case of the childless marriage, a second motive became apparent: to insure that the deceased would have a child to bear his name. This did not require marriage, but merely cohabitation between the widow and a member of her husband's family. The child born of such a union

would be considered a child of the deceased husband, and in this way raising up seed for the deceased brother would be accomplished. A third motive was added as primitive life developed - that is, to protect the widow. Insisting upon levirate marriage meant that the widow would retain a place in the family. She would be cared for, sheltered, and sustained by her husband's kin.¹

- 2) How is the concept of levirate marriage revealed in the Book of Ruth?
- 3) From the time of her husband's death until the occurrence of the levirate marriage, a woman remains in the state of zikhah. This rabbinic term means "being chained," and a woman can be released from this state only through the acceptance of levirate marriage or through the ceremony of chalitsah in which the obligation of levirate marriage is refused.²

Read Ruth 4 and Deuteronomy 25:5-10.

Question: What differences can be seen in the ceremony of chalitsah?

Answer: In deuteronomic times, it was considered disgraceful for a brother to refuse to marry his widowed sister-in-law. This is

evident in Deuteronomy 25 (the widow was required to spit in her brother-in-law's face). In rabbinic times, however, the ceremony of chalitsah was considered the proper thing for the brother-in-law to do in order to free the widow and make it possible for her to marry the man of her choice. Ruth 4 clearly portrays a symbolic ceremony with no blame placed on the next of kin.³

- 4) The chalitsah ceremony is performed by the oldest brother. If he refuses, then the obligation falls to the other brothers in order of age. If they all refuse, then the oldest brother must either marry the widow or perform chalitsah. The widow has no choice. Even if she prefers to remain single for the rest of her life, she is forced to undergo chalitsah in order to release her brothers-in-law from their obligation.⁴
- 5) Chalitsah is described in the Bible as a public ceremony; therefore, a full court is necessary. The proceedings are as follows:

The judges sit and the levir (the brother-in-law) and widow stand before them. The court ascertains that they are of age and that three months have passed since the husband's death, and they call witnesses to testify to the identity of the levir and the widow. The levir is asked whether he consents to the halizah rite, and on his answer in the affirmative, he is placed in position for the removal of his shoe, leaning against the wall or an indoor post. The shoe is of a special ceremonial kind, made all of leather, even seams and strings. The levir's right foot is washed before the ceremonial shoe is put on; the shoe is donned, laced up, and tied below the knee. When thus ready with the ceremonial shoe, he presses his foot on the floor. The woman, facing the levir, audibly recites in Hebrew, prompted by the head of the court, the biblical phrase: 'My husband's brother refuseth to raise up unto his brother a name in Israel; he will not perform the levirate duty unto me.' The levir also replies audibly in Hebrew, reciting after the head of the court the biblical phrase: 'I do not wish to take her.' Then the woman, bending down, loosens the strings of the shoe with her right hand; thereafter, holding up his foot with her left hand, she pulls off the shoe with her right hand and throws it on the ground. She straightens up and spits upon the ground before the levir's face in sight of the court, and exclaims in Hebrew as prompted by the head of the court: 'So shall it be done to the man that doth not build up his brother's house, and his name shall be called in Israel, the house of him that had his shoe loosed.' Those present at the ceremony all exclaim together in Hebrew, Haluz hana'al! (he that hath his shoe loosed) three times.⁵

Summary: The concept of levirate marriage developed as an attempt to preserve the family's property right

in the widow, to insure the presence of a child to inherit the deceased man's name and share of the estate, and to protect the widow. Following her husband's death, the widow was chained to her husband's family. She could not escape this situation until a member of the family, usually the oldest brother, either married her or performed the ceremony of chalitsah. The widow had no choice in the matter; she was forced to do as the family pleased. If her brother-in-law wished to marry her, she was forced to marry him even if she preferred to remain alone for the rest of her life. If he did not wish to marry her, she was compelled to participate in the chalitsah ceremony by removing his shoe and spitting in his face. Either way, her freedom of choice as an individual capable of making those decisions which affected her personally was ignored and her position as a woman and as a human being degraded.

Assignment: Make a list of those items which you would include in a marriage contract.

Things to do: 1) What is the status of the chalitsah ceremony in Reform Judaism? See the resolution passed by the Jewish Synod held at Augsberg, 1871, and that passed

by the Central Conference of American
Rabbis in Philadelphia in 1869.

- 2) Find out if the Orthodox and Conservative
communities of your city still abide
by the laws of chalitsah.

Footnotes:

¹Louis M. Epstein, Marriage Laws in the Bible and the
Talmud (Cambridge, 1942), pp. 77-80.

²Ibid., p. 104.

³Ibid., p. 122.

⁴Ibid., p. 126.

⁵Ibid., pp. 127-128.

Lesson 6: Jackie Onassis isn't the only one who has
a marriage contract;

Goals: 1) to introduce the concept of ketubah by first
discussing the students' views of the modern
idea of a marriage contract;
2) to discuss the concept of ketubah

Procedure: 1) The Shulmans' Marriage Agreement:

I. Principles

We reject the notion that the work which brings in more money is more valuable. The ability to earn more money is a privilege which must not be compounded by enabling the larger earner to buy out of his/her duties and put the burden on the partner who earns less or on another person hired from outside.

We believe that each partner has an equal right to his/her own time, work, values, choices. As long as all duties are performed, each of us may use his/her extra time any way he/she chooses. If he/she wants to use it making money, fine. If he/she wants to spend it with spouse, fine.

As parents we believe we must share all responsibility for taking care of our children and home - and not only the work but also the responsibility. At least during the first year of this agreement, sharing responsibility shall mean dividing the jobs and dividing the time.

II. Job Breakdown and Schedule

(A) Children

1. Mornings: Waking children; getting their clothes out; making their lunches; seeing that they have notes, homework, money, bus passes, books; brushing their hair; giving them breakfast(making coffee for us). Every other week each parent does all.

2. Transportation: Getting children to and from lessons, doctors, dentists

(including making appointments), friends' houses, etc. Parts occurring between 3 and 6 P.M. fall to wife. She must be compensated by extra work from husband (see 10 below). Husband does all weekend transportation and pick-ups after 6.

3. Help: Helping with homework, personal questions; explaining things. Parts occurring between 3 and 6 P.M. fall to wife. After 6 P.M. husband does Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday; wife does Monday, Wednesday and Saturday. Friday is free for whoever has done extra work during the week.

4. Nighttime (after 6 P.M.): Getting children to take baths, brush their teeth, put away their toys and clothes, go to bed; reading with them; tucking them in and having nighttime talks; handling if they wake in the night. Husband does Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. Wife does Monday, Wednesday and Saturday. Friday is split according to who has done extra work.

5. Baby sitters: Baby sitters must be called by the parent the sitter is to replace. If no sitter turns up, that parent must stay home.

6. Sick care: Calling doctors; checking symptoms; getting prescriptions filled; remembering to give medicine; taking days off to stay home with sick child, providing special activities. This must still be worked out equally, since now wife seems to do it all. In any case, wife must be compensated (see 10 below).

7. Weekends: All usual child care, plus special activities (beach, park, zoo). Split equally. Husband is free all Saturday, wife is free all Sunday.

(B) Housework

8. Cooking: Breakfasts during the week are divided equally; husband does all weekend breakfasts (including shopping for them and dishes). Wife does all dinners except Sunday nights. Husband does Sunday dinner and any other dinners on his nights of responsibility if wife isn't home. Whoever invites guests does shopping, cooking and dishes; if both invite them, split the work.

9. Shopping: Food for all meals, housewares, clothing and supplies for children. Divide by convenience. Generally wife does daily food shopping; husband does special shopping.
10. Cleaning: Husband does dishes Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. Wife does Monday, Wednesday and Saturday. Friday is split according to who has done extra work during week. Husband does all the housecleaning in exchange for wife's extra child care (3 to 6 daily) and sick care.
11. Laundry: Home laundry, making beds, dry cleaning (take and pick up). Wife does home laundry. Husband does dry-cleaning delivery and pick-up. Wife strips beds, husband remakes them.¹

Question: What do you think of this marriage contract?

Question: How useful is such a marriage contract?

Answer:

As Barbara Koltuv says, 'Part of the reason for thinking out a contract is to find out what your problems are; it forces you to take charge of your life. Once you have the contract, you don't have to refer back to it. The process is what's important.'

Whether these contracts are legally enforceable or not, just drawing them up may be of great service to many couples. What we are really doing in thrashing out a contract is finding where we stand on issues, clearing up all the murky, unexamined areas of conflict, and unflinchingly facing up to our differences.²

- 2) The traditional Jewish marriage contract, or ketubah, is a "legal document embodying the essential points agreed upon by the parties and sanctioned by the law as to the manner of their living together as husband and as wife."³ According to Louis Epstein, the rabbinic

ketubah contains twelve items:

1. The marriage clause, with the Jewish formula.
2. A promise to pay the mohar and mattan.
3. Enumeration of the dowry, its value.
4. The clauses of succession.
5. Conditions of divorce and the disposition of the property of the pair.
6. Mistreatment or expulsion-not a ketubah clause, but a statute.
7. Limitations to and fines for polygamy.
8. A promise to give the wife food, clothing, medicine, ransom, burial, and marital satisfaction.
9. A promise to pay her debts-not definitely a ketubah clause.
10. An order to support the wife and the minor daughters out of the estate after his death.
11. A lien on his property for the fulfillment of the ketubah terms.
12. Special clauses.⁴

Marriage clause,⁵

The marriage clause was the formula which concluded the marriage. The original marriage declaration was: "She is my wife and I am her husband from this day and forever." It was later changed to: "Be thou my wife according to the law of Moses and Israel."⁵

Mohar,⁶

The mohar, or purchase price, represented the essence of the ketubah, and the importance placed upon it tells us that marriage was a business transaction. A virgin was worth 200 zuzim and a non-virgin 100 zuzim. The mohar was paid by the groom to the bride's father for his daughter's hand. As years passed, important changes in the institution of the

mohar took place:

At the very beginning, the Talmudic tradition relates, the payment of the two hundred zuzim which was recorded in the ketubah was a cash payment to the bride's father, who pocketed it for his own use. That made marriage quite a burden on young men, with the result that marriage was delayed. An inducement was offered the young man, that the father would hold that money merely as a trustee for the bride. It meant a good deal to the groom to know that what he paid down went to his wife and not to his father-in-law. Ultimately, it meant, either he or his children would get it back as heirs. That, however, did not remedy the situation completely. After all, the young man had to part with the two hundred zuzim. Another inducement was offered, that he, the groom himself, be the trustee of the money for his bride. It was not to be expected, though, that for very long the custom would persist in demanding a husband in moderate circumstances to keep two hundred zuzim idle as a trust for his wife. It had to yield to the next stage, of permitting the husband to buy with the money household articles, which were kept intact as embodying the wife's two hundred zuzim. But all told, it still meant that the young groom had to have two hundred zuzim in his possession before he proposed marriage, and after marriage he had to submit to a luxury of expensive household goods, when he needed more important things. Then came Simeon b. Shetah with his enactment that the wife lend the money to her husband and he be permitted to use it in his business, on the condition that he guarantee the payment of it by all the property he might possess. In other words, the mohar was no longer paid but promised, and the promise substantiated by a lien clause in the ketubah.⁷

Mattan:⁸

Mattan refers to the voluntary gifts which the groom gives to the bride. It was given

in addition to the mohar and was recorded separately("I have voluntarily added...to the two hundred zuzim"). The amount of the mattan depended upon the social standing of the couple. As a result a sense of social distinction developed concerning an extravagant mattan. Eventually, local standards were established for the mattan. The standard represented the minimum but in no way prohibited the groom from giving a higher mattan if he so desired. Neither was the standard legally binding; the bride was permitted to consent to its reduction. As with the mohar, the mattan was originally given in cash and only later became a promised sum to be paid in the event of divorce.

Dowry;⁹

The dowry represented a daughter's share of her father's estate. The sons inherited the family fortune while the daughters received dowries as a substitute for the right of succession. The dowry belonged to the daughter; it was her private possession. In later times, the dowry became a parental obligation meant to attract suitors. It was a wedding gift to the groom.under terms of tenancy:

Title to it rests with the bride;

possession of it is given to the groom. He receives it under stipulated value, receipts it in the ketubah, manages it as tenant, uses it for his needs, guarantees its return to the bride, at the dissolution of the marriage, and is liable for its loss or destruction to the amount of its stipulated value. He cannot sell it because title to it is held by the wife; she cannot sell it because of the husband's right of tenancy in it.¹⁰

As a result of constant pressure, the husband's tenancy rights were eventually transformed into practical ownership, and by the second century the husband, and not the wife, was clearly the owner of the dowry:

With title to the dowry thus vested with the husband, the wife's sale of her dowry is naturally void. All she can sell is her claim to her dowry, which is of no value unless she be divorced or survive her husband. Yet the fact that genetically and historically the dowry is really hers is not altogether ignored by the law. The husband is not permitted to sell any of her dowry articles and his sale of dowry realty is void unless there is positive proof of her consent to the sale. At divorce, she can demand the return of her dowry, as much of it as is left, even if the husband would rather give her its cash value. In Talmudic times this law operated entirely to her advantage, for she was paid for depreciation even as she had to pay her husband for appreciation. But a geonic enactment declared that the husband need not pay for depreciation of dowry if he returns the original dowry article, so long as they retain some of their original usefulness.¹¹

At first, there was no standard amount for the dowry, and fathers gave what they could. Later, a dowry of fifty zuzim was made compulsory; an orphan received the money from her

father's estate and a girl whose father was too poor to pay the minimum dowry received the money from the charity fund. The tannaim set no upper limit, but the amoraim placed restrictions upon the father:

To the amoraim, however, it appeared that excessive dowries deprive the sons of their rightful inheritance and, therefore, they ruled that the father himself be not permitted to give his daughter a dowry exceeding ten per cent of his possessions.¹²

Succession:¹³

Biblical law establishes the order of succession as follows: son, daughter, father. Mother and wife inherit nothing. Through a series of legal changes, rabbinic law granted the husband priority in matters of succession first over the father, then over the daughter, and finally over the son. The Jewish court retains the power to modify the order of succession.

Conditions of divorce:¹⁴

The power of divorce lies with the husband alone:

The woman cannot divorce her husband according to Jewish law. This arises from two historical foundations. Divorce in its original form was driving out of the house. The husband is the owner of the house; it is he who brings his wife to his home, it is therefore he who drives her out of his house. The wife cannot drive the husband from the house which is not hers but his.

Even when divorce became a social formality by decree or writ it was still impossible to give the wife the power or right to give her husband a bill of divorcement. For one reason because of the more ancient tradition, and for another reason because the bill of divorcement was primarily intended to free one who was divorced to marry another. Since only the woman is restricted against marrying another before she is freed from her husband, she is the only one who can be divorced. The husband, according to Biblical law, can have a number of wives.¹⁵

While a woman could not divorce her husband, she could institute divorce proceedings, asking the court to force her husband to grant her a bill of divorce. The husband, on the other hand, had full freedom to divorce his wife without cause. If she committed adultery or if she burned his food or if she simply found no favor in his eyes, he could send her away. One of the main purposes of the ketubah, however, was to discourage divorce, for the ketubah came to represent the divorce price for which the husband was responsible. It meant that he had to pay the mohar and the mattan, forfeiting all gifts that he had given her. It also meant the return of the dowry in a sum equal to its value at the time of the marriage and the return of the mulug (the wife's private estate) according to its value at the time of divorce. These conditions tended to discourage divorce.

Mistreatment or expulsion:

This became "a statute rather than a ketubah clause because it had to provide for different possibilities of mistreatment which the ketubah probably could not enumerate."¹⁶

Polygamy,¹⁷

While both biblical and rabbinic law permit polygamy, there is a general aversion to it. In the tenth century, Rabbi Gershom enacted a prohibition against it. (This applied only to European Jews and not Oriental Jews.) Before this time, however, the wife usually demanded the insertion of a clause obligating her husband to take no other wife: "That he may not marry or take, during the wife's lifetime and while she is with him, another wife, wife-slave, or concubine except with her consent; and if he does..., he shall from this moment be obligated to pay her the ketubah in full and give her a bill of divorcement by which she shall be free to remarry."¹⁸

Provision for food:

The amount of maintenance which a husband owes his wife is determined, in general, by the husband's means, provided she gets her necessities according to the standards to which she is accustomed. In the most modest circumstances, he must give her a weekly ration of two kabin of wheat or four of barley, half a kab of

peas or beans, half a loeg of oil, a kab of dates or figs or other fruit of corresponding portion, wine for cooking and an extra portion of it for the nursing mother. This ration provides fifteen to sixteen meals for the week, two meals a day for herself and two extra meals for company. A third meal for the Sabbath is not included in the budget, because she eats the first Sabbath meal at his table, regardless of what provision he has made for her for the weekdays. In richer families, the wife is also provided with wine for beverage purposes, provided the husband is in a position to watch her conduct, for wine encourages levity.¹⁹

Provision for clothing:

A husband's obligation to provide clothing for his wife is considered separate from his obligation to provide food:

The obligation on the husband to give his wife raiment may be treated as part of his alimentation obligation, but the Bible mentions it specifically and, therefore, it is accounted by the rabbis as a distinct Biblical obligation. Her clothing included a head cover, a girdle, a pair of shoes at the approach of every holiday season, and fifty zuzim worth of dresses - the kind that will become her age and stature - at the beginning of the winter season. If his wealth or her station warrant greater demands, he must meet either of these standards, even to the point of buying her silks and perfumes. In certain localities, the husband was expected to spend on his wife's perfume ten dinnars for every maneh of dowry that he received. Of household articles, he must give her a rug or a mat, a bed and mattress - in richer families, even a pillow - a cup, a jar, a pot, a flask, a candle, and a wick lamp. And, in addition to all these luxuries, he must give her in cash a silver maneh per week for spending money.²⁰

Provision for medicine,²¹

Medicine and medical service are promised to the wife in case of illness. The law permits a husband to divorce his wife at will, but the rabbis declared that it was morally wrong to divorce a wife while she was sick even if she was chronically ill and her illness is causing his economic ruin.

Provision for ransom,²²

The ransom clause is one of the oldest clauses of the ketubah. It requires the husband to redeem his wife should she be taken captive under such circumstances as piracy, highway robbery, bedouin attacks, or warfare. The clause read as follows: "If thou be made captive I shall redeem thee and take thee back to me as wife." Today, with the disappearance of the ransom problem, the clause is never used.

Provision for burial:

The husband's obligation to provide burial for his wife is rarely expressed in the ketubah so as not to mention such a gloomy subject at the time of the couple's joy.

The obligation is clearly recognized, however:

Under the provision of the burial clause, the husband is required to prepare burial

for his wife in accordance with local custom and as befits his position or her position - giving her the advantage of the social station of either. The poorest husband, however, must provide a grave and a funeral procession, which shall include two flutes and two wailing women.²³

Provision for marital satisfaction:

One of the basic obligations of marriage is sexual intercourse between husband and wife. It became the husband's duty to see that this obligation was fulfilled:

The frequency of intercourse, as prescribed by the rabbis, depends upon the husband's vocation, ranging from daily contact to once in six months. The husband's absence from home deprives his wife of her due attention, and therefore, without the wife's consent, laborers may be absent only for one full week, students for one month. Later halakah permitted students to be away from their wives for two and three years at a time. Since the average husband gives his wife sexual satisfaction once a week, the rabbis advise that even under polygamy, no one shall marry more than four wives, so that he can be with every wife at least once a month. Inability to fulfill the sexual obligation constitutes a ground for divorce; his wilful neglect of that obligation constitutes 'rebellion' (מִרְיָא), and is punishable by a fine of three dinnarim - according to another view, three trepekin - per week, which is added to the wife's ketubah.

The wife's refusal to have conjugal union with her husband is also 'rebellion' (מִרְיָא), punishable by a severer fine of seven dinnarim - according to another view, seven trepekin - per week, deducted from her ketubah until the ketubah is cancelled; and then she is divorced. This was the older practice. Later tannaim instituted the following

procedure. For a period of four weeks, announcement in the synagogue is made on every Sabbath of her rebellion against her husband, and at the end of that period a court messenger warns her that if she does not yield she will be divorced and forfeit her ketubah. If she persists, she is given a year's separation from her husband without support, and thereafter she is divorced with the total loss of her ketubah, taking with her of her dowry only what she can get possession of. The gaonim of the seventh century modified the procedure, out of fear that the woman might institute proceedings in a Gentile court. They did away with the year's separation, and ordered her to be divorced immediately with the forfeiture of her mohar and mattan. 24

A promise to pay her debts; 25

No ketubah containing such a clause has been found. Halakah teaches that the husband is not responsible for any debts his wife incurred prior to their marriage. Neither must he pay her debts incurred after their marriage unless she was forced to borrow money because he failed to support her.

Provision for the widow and orphaned daughters:
The following ketubah clause provided for the widow: "Thou shalt dwell in my house and be supported out of my estate as long as thou shalt dwell in widowhood in my house...and when thou marriest another thou shalt take all that is provided for thee in thy ketubah and go." 26 The widow's right to a dwelling and maintenance was insured:

In normal conditions the widow continues to live as she had lived during the lifetime of her husband, uses the gold and silver vessels and the male and female slaves of the household, as though her husband were not dead but sojourning in a distant land. She also eats and drinks according to her portion during the life of her husband; even her portion of wine is not diminished. Neither can the widow force the heirs to alter this arrangement, nor can the heirs force her to submit to another arrangement. Should she, therefore, desire to live with her parents and to receive her alimony in cash from the heirs, they may restrain her, unless she offers the plea that because she is a young woman and the heirs young men it is not proper for her to live with them. Likewise, the heirs cannot force her to live with her own family at the expense of the estate. The heirs cannot sell the house occupied by the widow, and should they do so, the sale is void. If the house is out of repair, they are not obliged to repair it. If uninhabitable, the loss is hers. She cannot even repair it at her own expense, for so long as the terms of the clause cannot be fulfilled by what was left by her husband, the provision for a house is automatically cancelled. In like manner if the dwelling contained in the estate is no more than a hovel and cannot be called a 'house' as specified in the clause, the widow has no claim on the estate for living quarters. In such cases she finds her own living quarters and is supported by the heirs.²⁷

Since daughters did not share the inheritance of their father's estate, provisions were made for them as well until they came of age (twelve years and one day):

The problem of the support of the orphan girl arises from the newer legislation, which declares the woman under certain circumstances independent of any master.

Originally, the woman belonged to one master or another, but never to herself. Unmarried, she belonged to her father; after his death, to his heirs. or her brothers; married, she belonged to her husband; widowed, if without issue by her husband, she went back to her father; with issue, she belonged to her own children. By a series of changes in the law, the woman step by step gained her independence.

The decision which Moses rendered in the case of the daughters of Zelaphchad, because of the absence of male issue, that they succeed their father, establishes the first instance of the woman's independence. The supposition in this case is that she is dependent upon her father and upon her brothers, whether she be of age or a minor, but she is her own master when she has neither father nor brothers. In rabbinic legislation we find that when she is of age she is completely independent, even though she has both father and brothers. The rabbis rule also that if she is orphaned of her father, she is independent of her brothers, even if she is still a minor....Thus the orphan girl is by this final legislation an independent personality, and with her independence rises the question of her maintenance.

The solution was found in the formulation of an agreement between husband and wife to support the orphan girl out of the estate after her father's death, which agreement was set down in the ketubah in a clause designated as ketubat benan nukban, (KBN), which specified: 'The female children which thou shalt beget by me shall dwell in my house and be supported out of my estate (and be clothed at my expense) until they are married.'²⁸

By the terms of the KBN clause, the minor unmarried daughters are entitled, out of the estate of their father, to food, clothing, and domicile. They are also granted a marriage portion at their marriage, termed parnasah, but the latter is not part of the benan nukban clause. It represents rather a continuation in the estate of the father's

obligation to give his daughter a dowry. The amount of parnasah was originally gauged by the dowry which the married daughters got from their father. But Rabbi standardized it at ten percent of the total of the estate. If a smaller dowry was given her, she may after marriage claim the rest that is due her. While the KBN obligation terminates with the daughters' coming of age, the parnasah obligation never terminates; the difference between the major and minor in respect to parnasah is only that whereas the minor cannot give a legally valid consent to a smaller parnasah than is due her, the major can.

Because parnasah is not included in the KBN, the father can leave instructions whether or not and how much to give to his daughters, in the same manner as he can will a house of widowhood to his daughter or a nuptial house to his son or a gift to a stranger. But he has no power to alter the alimentary obligation to his minor unmarried daughters, because this is their right by virtue of a contract between him and their mother.²⁹

Lien clause,³⁰

The ketubah is viewed as a loan with the wife as creditor and the husband as debtor.

The lien clause protects the wife, for it stipulates that all the husband's property will serve as security for the ketubah.

It is payable upon divorce or upon the husband's death. Several precautions were added to guard the validity of the lien clause, and the following formula resulted:

And as for the security of the ketubah, dowry, and mattan, I have assumed for myself and for my heirs after me that they be paid of the choicest of the property and possessions that I have under the sky, both what I did acquire and

what I shall acquire, immovables and movables, the movable by way of the immovable property...during my life and after my death, and even out of the cloak on my back, from this day and forevermore. And we (witnesses) have carried out a legal conveyance with an object fit for that purpose, to confirm all that is herein above entered and specified, that it be effective from this moment, that it be not as a promise based on speculation nor a mere form blank, but as though executed before a recognized court and having the power and validity of all the ketubot executed in accordance with the Jewish custom and prescription of the sages of blessed memory, voiding all declarations of annulment and discrediting the testimony of witnesses thereto.³¹

The clause developed in an effort to provide sufficient security for the wife.

Special clauses,³²

Other provisions meant to protect the wife were made in special clauses added to the ketubah. For example, if the husband dies without children, the wife needs chalitsah in order to remarry:

Hence some ketubot record that the brother or brothers have taken an oath and obligated themselves to free her by Halizah without demands or claims upon her; others provide also, for that purpose, that the husband shall give her a conditional divorce, to become effective a moment before his death in case he falls seriously ill.³³

The following passages are examples of special clauses:

If (God forbid) the bride shall die without issue during the lifetime of the groom, he shall return to the bride's heirs half of the dowry which she brought him...but if issue remain, then

shall all go to the groom according to the law of the Torah, - namely, the husband succeeds his wife. If (God forbid) the groom die during the lifetime of the above named bride without issue, she shall receive the full payment of her mohar, mattan, and dowry. Should issue remain, it shall be left to them or their guardian to choose either to pay her the ketubah in full or to divide the estate with her.³⁴

...that he shall not compel her to move from one territory to another against her will, and if he do compel her to move from one territory to another against her will he shall pay her all that he has obligated himself and free her immediately by a legally valid bill of divorcement.³⁵

That he shall not sell or surrender as a pledge any article of her belongings except with her consent.³⁶

That he has taken it upon himself to watch her dowry as he does his own belongings and he shall alter them in no way without the knowledge and consent of his wife.³⁷

Summary: The Ketubah, or marriage contract, listed the agreements made by husband and wife as they entered upon marriage. The marriage thrust of the document, however, was to protect the wife, to grant her security, and to insure that she would be provided for in the event of divorce or death. The development of the document shows a significant change in the attitude toward women, a change which showed not only concern for a woman as a human being but sensitivity toward her feelings as well. There are still

Jews who write a ketubah at the time of marriage, but the ketubah of today contains a minimum of clauses and is written mainly to perpetuate an ancient tradition.³⁸

Assignment: See what you can find out about Jewish divorce proceedings.

Things to do: 1) See if a ketubah exists in your family.

Perhaps your parents have the one which belonged to your grandparents or great-grandparents.

2) Design a ketubah.

Footnotes:

Footnotes:

¹Susan Edmiston, "How to Write Your Own Marriage Contract," Ms., Spring/72, p. 72.

²Ibid.

³Louis Epstein, The Jewish Marriage Contract (New York, 1927), p. 2.

⁴Ibid., pp. 53-54.

⁵Ibid., pp. 54-58.

⁶Ibid., pp. 58-77.

⁷Ibid., pp. 22-23.

⁸Ibid., pp. 78-88.

⁹Ibid., pp. 89-106.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 94.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 99-100.

¹²Ibid., p. 102.

¹³Ibid., pp. 121-143.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 193-206.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 200.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 54.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 123.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 272.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 151-152.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 152-153.

²¹Ibid., pp. 162-163.

²²Ibid., pp. 164-168.

²³Ibid., p. 169.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 144-147.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 170-174.

²⁶Ibid., p. 177.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 181-182.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 185-186.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 189-190.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 236-254.

³¹Ibid., pp. 253-254.

³²Ibid., pp. 269-283.

³³Ibid., pp. 271-272.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 270-271.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 273.

³⁶Ibid., p. 277.

³⁷Ibid.,

³⁸Ibid., p. 5.

Lesson 7: Who divorces whom?

- Goals: 1) to discuss the procedure followed in granting a divorce;
- 2) to stress the changes which were made to benefit the wife;
- 3) to introduce the concept of agunah

- Procedure: 1) Pass out copies of a get (bill of divorce).
You may obtain one from the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion by asking for a copy of Hebrew and Aramaic Documents compiled by Dr. Alexander Guttman.
Ask the students to examine the document.
Every get has a distinguishing mark (i.e. one letter is larger than the rest) used for identification purposes. See if the students can find it. Explain that this mark is used to authenticate the get when it is delivered by messenger rather than by the husband personally. According to Jewish law, the get must be handed directly to the wife by the husband or by his agent. Delivery by an agent is preferable when the husband and wife are living in different cities or when they simply do not wish to see each other.
- 2) The divorce proceedings are as follows:
the husband and wife appear before the rabbi in the presence of two witnesses, one scribe,

and a Beth Din made up of three rabbis. The scribe brings the necessary utensils for the writing of the get and the husband purchases them because the get must be written on paper which the husband owns. The scribe writes from one to one hundred divorce documents until the Beth Din accepts one of them. Both the husband and the wife are asked if they agree to the divorce without compulsion. All vows and promises which would make the get invalid are annulled. The two witnesses sign the get and the husband then gives it to his wife. This is done by folding it and dropping it into his wife's hands. The wife gives it to the Beth Din and they read it to make certain that it is correct. The document is then cut with a knife and deposited with the rabbi who keeps it permanently. The husband and wife receive a note from the rabbi attesting to the divorce.¹

- 3) As we learned in the lesson dealing with the ketubah, the power of divorce lies with the husband alone. Several changes were made, however, to protect the welfare of women. For example, the institution of ketubah developed in such a way as to make it difficult for a man to divorce his wife (see page 49).

In summary, then:

After he had already paid the mohar to the father-in-law and had nothing to lose or to gain, as in the first stage, he could easily send his wife away, if he began to dislike her. It was not so easy to seek a divorce, when, as in the second stage, she had her own two hundred zuzim which he would lose by divorcing her. It was still harder to give up that two hundred zuzim when he himself was trustee of it, as in the third stage. When household articles were bought, as in the fourth stage, divorce would mean giving up beautiful and costly things. Finally, with Simeon b. Shetah's enactment, divorce would mean paying a mohar of two hundred zuzim, which without divorce he might possibly never have to pay. And with this last stage mohar becomes actually a divorce penalty upon the husband and very effective in checking divorces.²

In addition, the rabbis formulated the following two principles:

- (1) The woman has the right to demand in certain contingencies a divorce from her husband, and the Beth Din is obliged to compel the husband to grant her request. Under no circumstances, however, can the wife give a bill of divorcement to her husband. Josephus, nevertheless, records the case of Salome, Herod's sister, who sent a bill of divorcement to her husband.
- (2) The Rabbis have the right to annul any marriage whether directly or retroactively. This last principle was based upon the formula of the marriage declaration. The bridegroom declared that he took his bride into holy matrimony 'in accordance with the law of Moses and Israel.' The Rabbis interpreted the words 'and Israel' to mean 'the sanction of the Rabbis.' Hence they had the prerogative to annul the marriage retroactively since the bridegroom declared that his marriage was dependent on their sanction.³

Rabbenu Gershom decreed excommunication
for the husband who divorced his wife
against her will:

A great step forward in the improvement of the status of woman is the enactment of Rabbi Gershom (called 'Rabbenu Gershom, The Light of the Diaspora') in the eleventh century that abolished the long-standing right of the husband forcibly to set aside his wife. Although forcible divorcement was condemned by the sages of the Talmud, who declared that 'even God's altar sheds tears for one who divorces the wife of his youth,' yet no court had the right to restrain a husband who, unmoved by such sentimental consideration, was intent on divorcing his wife. With the enactment of Rabbi Gershom, however, the husband's power in this respect was considerably curtailed. Such an enactment, in addition to other rights which women secured..., produced a veritable revolution in the relations of husband and wife. No longer was the wife placed at the mercy of the husband through fear that she might incur his displeasure and suffer divorcement. She was protected even in cases where, in accordance with Talmudic law, she deserved to be set aside. The question of change of abode is a case in point. According to Talmudic law, while the husband could not compel his wife to move to an inferior abode, the woman had no right to offer any resistance when it was his desire to move to the Holy Land. Should she, in such a case, refuse to join her husband, he could threaten her with divorcement and forfeiture of her marriage settlement. But, with the enactment of Rabbi Gershom, this Talmudic law became obsolete. A man was deprived of the right to divorce his wife against her will, even if she stood in the way of the fulfillment of his pious wish to settle in Palestine.⁴

- 4) Although changes made it more difficult for the husband to obtain a divorce, he still did not revert to some of the common practices

which other peoples had for putting the wife in her place. For example:

Nothing is more revolting to the Jewish spirit than wife-beating. It is a noteworthy fact that not a single case of wife-beating is recorded in the Bible. In the Book of Proverbs, there are repeatedly depicted, in lurid colors, the woes and misery of the husband whose wife is of a quarrelsome disposition. The Apocrypha and the Talmud dwell on the same theme also, the former urging that a divorce be given to the shrew, and the latter suggesting that a second wife be taken to curb the temper of the first wife, but wife-beating as a remedy is not mentioned anywhere, although this crude means of wife-taming was the general order of the time with all other nations, prevailing not only among the lower but also among the higher classes.

The English law explicitly stated that for certain misdemeanors the husband could give his wife a severe beating with whips and clubs, and for others, only a moderate chastisement. According to the common law, a man had the right to beat his wife with a stick as thick as his thumb. It seems strange that the Talmud did not deal with the legal aspect of wife-beating. It is true, as we have said, that wife-beating was of even the remotest of eventualities, even with impossibilities, and wife-beating was surely a possible occurrence even among Jews.

The explanation of this omission is to be found in the fact that the Rabbis averred that he who beat a fellow Jew was guilty of violating a negative Biblical law, and was liable to the penalty of stripes. Therefore, there was no reason to make a separate case of wife-beating, for it was included in this law, since the wife was a fellow Jewess.

It seems that in the Thirteenth Century, some Jews in Germany, influenced in the treatment of their wives by their rude German neighbors, occasionally beat their wives. The German Rabbis of this period lost no time in eradicating this

evil before it took root among the German Jews. Rabbi Meir of Rottenburg, a martyred Rabbi of the Thirteenth Century, in his Responsa recorded an edict issued by a Conference of Rabbis against wife-beating. He states that as the Jews were adopting the evil custom of their gentile neighbors, beating their wives, a special conference of the Rabbis was called to stop the evil and an edict was issued by them ordering that wife-beating be punished with lashing and excommunication. 'Wife-beating,' they declared, 'is the custom of the gentiles, but God forbid that a Jew should act in such an outrageous manner.' The Beth Joseph quotes Rabbi Simon as stating, 'I have it as a tradition that we must punish the husband who beats his wife more severely than one who beats his neighbor...we must excommunicate him, chastise him with all kinds of punishment, even cut his hand off.'⁵

- 5) Changes to protect the woman did occur, but the problem of the deserted wife, or agunah, still remains:

Agunah may, therefore, be defined as a lawfully married woman who cannot obtain a bill of divorcement from her absent husband because his whereabouts are not known to her, and she has no proofs whether he (husband) is living or dead. Her status as a wife remains unchanged. She cannot be freed from the bonds of matrimony. She is unfortunately placed in the anomalous position of being a wife and widow at the same time. Her remarriage, according to the Jewish law, is not permissible unless she obtains a bill of divorcement, which needs the co-operation of the husband, or a certificate of the death of the long absent husband. Jewish law knows no procedure, analogous to the one in modern times, when in a woman's suit for divorce on the grounds of her husband's desertion, she is granted a judicial divorce in the absence of the husband and without his consent.⁶

Often a clause was entered into the ketubah which would ensure the wife's right to a divorce should the husband disappear:

That he shall not take a sea voyage or go to a distant land unless he leave her a bill of divorcement conditional upon a specified time for his return and maintenance, and that he shall not leave her as a result of a quarrel for longer than ten consecutive days.⁷

Summary: Although the power of divorce lies solely with the husband, the method of divorce has undergone changes throughout the centuries in order to protect the wife. It was not easy for the husband to obtain a divorce, and eventually he could only obtain one with the consent of his wife. The wife, then, was totally powerless, and there were certain circumstances under which the Beth Din, at the request of the wife, could force the husband to grant a divorce.

...according to Asheri, a great authority living in the fourteenth century, the wife could sue for divorce on the following eight grounds: (1) The husband's refusal of conjugal rights. (2) Impotence. (3) If the husband is smitten with some loathsome disease or leprosy, or is engaged in some malodorous business. (4) The husband's refusal to support her. (5) If he treats her cruelly or deprives her of her lawful liberty of person. (6) Wife beating. (7) The husband's apostasy. (8) The husband's licentiousness, especially marital infidelity.⁸

The question of the agunah remains unsolved. Without positive and concrete proof of the

husband's death, a divorce will not be granted. Conferences on this subject have been held, but rabbis generally agree that nothing can be done for the agunah. Solomon Zucrow suggested that the rabbis need only take advantage of their power to annul marriages retroactively.⁹ The major problem today, however, is that the Jewish court no longer has the power to enforce its dictates. Only Orthodoxy is affected by this lack of authority. Reform Judaism does not require a Jewish divorce nor does it seek the decision of the Beth Din regarding any matter.

Assignment: Read Jewish Family Life: The Duty of the Woman by Rabbi Sidney B. Hoenig (New York, 1963).

Things to do: 1) Write to the Minister for Religious Affairs in Israel and ask what is being done to improve the status of the agunah.
2) Invite an Orthodox rabbi to visit your class and discuss Jewish divorce proceedings with you.

Footnotes:

¹As explained by Dr. Alexander Guttman in Codes 501 at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, Ohio.

²Louis Epstein, The Jewish Marriage Contract (New York, 1927), 24.

³Solomon Zucrow, Women, Slaves and the Ignorant in Rabbinic Literature (Boston, 1932), p. 71.

⁴I. Epstein, "The Jewish Woman in the Responsa," in The Jewish Library, Third Series, ed. Rabbi Leo Jung (New York, 1934), pp. 135-136.

⁵Zucrow, pp. 62-64.

⁶Ezekiel Moses Ezekiel, "The Position of Woman in Rabbinical Literature," Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Vol. V, pp. 270-271.

⁷Epstein, p. 277.

⁸Joseph Strauss, "Woman's Position in Ancient and Modern Jewry," in Essays (New York, 1911), p. 229.

Lesson 8: The womanly duties

- Goals: 1) to explain why women are exempt from certain commandments;
- 2) to discuss the three commandments which pertain specifically to women

Procedure: 1) Kiddushin 1:7 states:

...the observance of all the positive ordinances that depend on the time of the year is incumbent on men but not on women, and the observance of all the positive ordinances that do not depend on the time of the year is incumbent both on men and on women. The observance of all the negative ordinances, whether they depend on the time of the year or not, is incumbent both on men and on women.¹

- 2) A woman was exempt from all positive time-bound commandments such as reciting the Shema and laying tefilin in order that she might have sufficient time to raise her family and care for her home. This did not mean that she was prohibited from performing them, but merely that she was not obligated to do so.
- 3) A woman was obligated with regard to the negative commandments:

'Speak unto the children of Israel: when a man or a woman shall commit any sin...then they shall confess their sin'(Numbers 5:6f.)...'a man or woman': this is intended to place woman on the same footing as man for all sins and restitutions of damages mentioned in the Torah.²

- 4) There are three duties which are specifically enjoined upon Jewish women. The first of these is the kindling of the Sabbath lights:

Men as well as women are obliged to light Sabbath candles. However, the fulfillment of this duty was left primarily to the woman, because she is always at home and attends to household duties. Another reason is that because the woman caused the fall of Adam and thereby extinguished the light of the world and darkened his soul which is called light, as it is written (Proverbs 20:27): 'The soul of man is the light of God;' therefore it is her duty to make amends by lighting the candles in honor of the Sabbath. If she is at home, she takes precedence in performing this precept. Nevertheless, the man should assist to prepare the candles and to singe them, thus making it easy to kindle them...³

If a woman has once neglected to light the Sabbath candles, she must light an extra candle every Friday as long as she lives. If she has neglected to light candles several times, she must add an extra candle for each time. This is done to impress upon her to be careful in the future; therefore, if she was prevented from lighting the candles by an accident, she need not light additional candles.⁴

- 5) The second duty is that of taking chalah:

Jewish law commands the tithing of one's earnings and produce. Thus the Bible sets forth: 'Of the first of your dough ye shall set apart a cake for a sacrifice....' (Numbers 15,10). In ancient days, when Jews still lived in their own country, this portion of the dough, called Hallah, was consecrated to the Priests. In our day, and ever since the destruction

of the Temple, the Hallah, a small piece of dough about the size of an egg, is taken off the bread dough and thrown into the fire or burnt in the oven, as a symbolical sacrifice, after the prescribed benediction has been said. The symbolical sacrifice of the Hallah offers convincing proof of the ethical and symbolical significance and meaning of the Jewish rites, which retain their validity also under changed conditions, for symbolisms never grow outdated, especially when they stand for such eternal truths and verities as the Jewish customs and ceremonies entrusted to the safe-keeping of the women.⁵

The precept concerning the separation of the hallah belongs to the mistress of the house. But if she is not at home and there is a likelihood that the dough may spoil, then the maid or any other person may separate the hallah.⁶

6) The third duty concerns the laws of nidah,
or separation:

Jewish law prohibits all sexual intimacies between husband and wife during the latter's menstrual period, and for seven days after it. It further provides that, at the close of the period of the seven days' purification, the wife immerse herself in the prescribed manner in a ritual bath, the Mikveh. Medical authorities of world renown have praised the Jewish laws of marriage hygiene as the best safeguards of the health of the married woman. The rare occurrence of cancer of the uterus in Jewish women adhering to the laws of purification has been explained by eminent cancer specialists as due to the Jewish laws ordering married life. The survival of the Jewish people in vigorous health has been explained by eugenists as the result of observance of the Jewish marriage laws. Finally, psychologists specializing in marriage problems

ascribe the happiness of Jewish family life to the salutary and refreshing effects of a complete physical separation of husband and wife for about twelve days every month....

The frequently heard criticisms of the institution of the Mikveh by younger Jewish women, who argue that modern sanitary facilities make the community ritual bath superfluous, are not really pertinent. The Mikveh is not a mere bathhouse; it is also a symbol of the sanctity and purity of Jewish family life, and as such it retains its importance and significance notwithstanding the availability of bathing facilities in the home.⁷

7) Shabbat 2:6 states:

For three transgressions do women die in childbirth: for heedlessness of the laws of the menstruant, the Dough-offering, and the lighting of the (Sabbath) lamp.⁸

8) Look at the pamphlet, Jewish Family Life:

The Duty of the Woman by Rabbi Sidney B. Hoenig (New York, 1963). Discuss student reactions to what is contained therein.

Summary: The Jewish woman is exempt from all positive time-bound commandments, the observance of which might hamper her ability to apply all her energies to the management of her household. She is not exempt from the ethical principles of the Torah and is on an equal footing with her husband with respect to the negative commandments. She does have three specific

duties: lighting the Sabbath candles, separating the dough, and observing the laws of ritual purity. Although these duties are enjoined upon the woman, even they are not totally and completely hers, for her husband acts as a watchdog and is cautioned to be certain that she fulfills them.

Assignment: Read Rabbi Roland B. Gittelsohn's article, "Women's Lib & Judaism," Midstream (October, 1971).

Things to do : 1) Visit a mikveh.

2) Comment upon the following:

Louis Ginzberg intimates that the religious commands addressed exclusively to women are connected with the history of Eve; Niddah, because of her transgression of the womb; Hallah, because Eve defiled Adam, the heave-offering of the world, necessitating her expiation; and the Sabbath lights, because woman extinguished the light of man's soul. Thus, it should be noted, all of these 'womanly duties' are considered to be connected with the sins of the prototypical woman; the origin of woman's special tasks lies in her 'sinful nature.' Seen in this way, the 'womanly duties' become yet another vehicle for the deprecation of woman; and by accepting this interpretation of her duties, the woman herself thus accepts her guilt and participates in her own enslavement.⁹

Footnotes:

¹Herbert Danby, trans, The Mishnah (London, 1933), p. 322.

²Judah J. Slotki, trans. Midrash Rabbah(London, 1939), p. 223.

³Hyman E. Goldin, trans. Solomon Ganzfried's Code of Jewish Law, Vol. II, 75:5(New York, 1961), p. 72.

⁴Ibid., Vol. II, 75:14, p. 74.

⁵Miriam Isaacs and Trude Weiss Rosmarin, What Every Jewish Woman Should Know(New York, 1941), pp. 71-71.

⁶Goldin, Vol. I, 35:8, p. 116.

⁷Isaacs and Rosmarin, pp. 69-71.

⁸Danby, p. 102.

⁹Roger C. Klein, The Power of Women: Toward an Understanding of the Jewish Response(Cincinnati, 1971), pp. 91-92.

Lesson 9: From vice into virtue?

- Goals: 1) to discuss a woman's opportunity to fulfill her own potential within the framework of Jewish tradition;
- 2) to become familiar with various rabbinic passages reflecting attitudes toward women

- Procedure: 1) Have the class summarize the basic points made by Rabbi Roland B. Gittelsohn in his article, "Women's Lib and Judaism," published in Midstream(October, 1971).
- 2) Pass out copies of Marcia Freedman's response to Gittelsohn's article in Midstream(March, 1972). Discuss student reactions. Are her points valid?
- 3) How does the following passage from the Iggeret Ha-Teshubah by Jonah ben Abraham Gerondi relate to Marcia Freedman's letter?

Thus we find that virtuous women beget love for the Torah and ~~for~~ fearing God. And that is why virtuous women can save the souls of their menfolk. When the men come home each from the work he performs, when they are exhausted and weary and do not remember to give some part of their labors and the thoughts of their hearts to the Torah, it is the duty of women to remind them to open the book, to busy themselves with the words of the Torah, and not to give their attention to idle matters. For the punishment for idling in regard to

the Torah is greater than for transgressing all the commandments in the Torah.

Let them also remind their menfolk to look into this epistle about turning to God that we have composed. Let them make known the words of this epistle both to their children and to their menfolk, and through these words they will become worthy of the life in the coming world.

A woman must see to it that there is peace between herself and her husband; she should be agreeable and kind to her husband.

A woman must see to it that she prays for her sons and her daughters, morning and evening, that they learn to fear heaven, and that her sons prosper in the study of the Torah and in doing the commandments. For the root of woman's worthiness in the coming world is that her children fear God's name, and do the will of God, blessed be he. And when in time she is in her eternal home, and her children live in the Torah and the fear of heaven, this is accredited to her as though she were alive, and she is on the upper steps leading to the coming world.¹

- 4) Pass out copies of Roland B. Gittelsohn's reply to Marcia Freedman's letter. Does he justify the point of his October article?
- 5) Give the students time to begin preparing for a debate to be held during the next class session. (Devote the entire session to the debate.) The topic should be: Resolved that the woman's position in Judaism has ever been an exalted one. This will give the class the opportunity

to review what they have learned thus far and to utilize it. You may want to pass out copies of the following collection of rabbinic passages to aid them in their preparation.

Solomon Zucrow cites the following:

Woe to the father whose children are girls (Kid. 82b).^{1a}

Women prefer a life of poverty with husbands that gratify their sexual cravings to a life of plenty and ease with a husband who is temperate in his sexual intercourse (Sot. 20a).²

The Talmud forbade a man to marry a woman whom he had never seen lest he find her repulsive and loathe her in violation of the Biblical command: 'Love thy neighbor as thyself.' A woman, however, could marry a man whom she had never seen, 'For,' said the Rabbis, 'no matter how ugly and repelling the husband may turn out to be, she will surely be satisfied since to be married to a man, be he ever so loathsome, is better than to remain a spinster (Kid. 41 a).'³

He who loveth his wife as himself, and honors her more than himself, has divine assurance of domestic peace.⁴

Be careful not to hurt your wife's feelings; women are sensitive and ready to shed tears; and the tears of the injured are sure to bring swift retribution to the tormentor.^{4a}

A certain woman who used to attend Rabbi Meir's lectures regularly at the expense of her household duties angered her husband so much that he threatened to divorce her unless she spat in the face of Rabbi Meir. On learning of this, the Rabbi sent for

the woman, and telling her that his eyes were sore and that the doctors advised that his only remedy was to have a woman spit on them, asked her to effect this cure. When the woman had done so, the Rabbi told her to inform her husband that she had spat in Rabbi Meir's face even more than once (Y. Sot. chap. 1).⁵

When a certain woman complained to Rabbi Judah of the beastly treatment to which her husband had subjected her in their nuptial relations, the Rabbi replied, 'Why are you different from a fish? You have no more right to complain against your husband's treatment than the fish has the right to object to the manner in which it has been cooked (Ned. 20b).⁶

But let not the testimony of women be admitted on account of their boldness and levity (Ant. Book VI, chap. 8).⁷

A woman can judge the character of a guest better than a man (Ber. 10b).⁸

He who breaks a vow causes the death of his wife (Sabb. 32b).⁹

There is no wisdom for women except at the distaff (Yoma 66b).¹⁰

Life is not worth living to a husband who has a domineering wife (Ber. 32b).¹¹

Women are compassionate (Meg. 14b).¹²

Whenever Rabbi Hiyya had an opportunity of buying something which would please his malicious wife, he would wrap it in his turban and bring it to her. To Rav's question, 'Is she not a shrew, continually annoying you?' he replied, 'Taking care of our children and saving us from sin is sufficient reason for us to be tender to our wives regardless of their dispositions.' (Yeb. 63a).¹³

When the farmer distributes tithes for the poor, let him give to the poor woman first, for it is not becoming for a woman to stand in line(Yeb. 100a).¹⁴

Through the merit of the pious women of their generation were the Israelites redeemed from Egypt(Sot. 11b).¹⁵

If your wife is a dwarf, then bend down to listen to her(B. Mets. 59a).¹⁶

The death of a first wife is as great a calamity to a husband as the destruction of the Temple is to Israel(B. Bath. 22a).¹⁷

A man should spend less than his means on food; according to his means on dress; and above his means on his wife and children(Hull. 84b).¹⁸

Woman is endowed with more understanding than man(Nidd. 45b).¹⁹

It is not good for a woman to be idle(Y. Keth, chap. 5, par. 6).²⁰

It is not unusual for a man to say, 'I will go naked, if only my wife can be well dressed.'(Y. Keth. chap. 6, par. 5).²¹

The fidelity of woman is greater than that of man. The men said, 'Let us make a captain and let us return into Egypt'; the women, 'Give unto us therefore a position among the brethren of our father.' In general, the women repaired the breaches made by the men.

When the molten calf was being made, Aaron told the people, 'Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters,' but the women refused to give their jewelry, as it is said, 'And all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears.' That is, in 'their ears,' but not in the ears of their wives and

daughters. The women did not take part in the sin of the spies either and for that reason the Divine decree 'Ye shall not come into the land,' did not apply to them(Sifre on Num. 27:4; Tanhe.).²²

A pious man divorced his sterile wife, married a wicked woman, and became wicked himself. The divorced woman took for her husband a wicked man who became righteous, thus proving that everything depends on the woman(Genesis Rabbah 17:7).²³

God reflected on which part of man would influence the natural propensities of woman for good. He mused, 'I shall not create her from the head of man lest she bear herself proudly; nor from the eyes, lest she be a coquette; nor from the ear, lest she be an eavesdropper; nor from the mouth, lest she be loquacious; nor from the heart, lest she be of a jealous disposition; nor from the hand, lest she be inclined to touch everything; nor from the foot, lest she be inclined to gad about. I will form her from a chaste part of man; from a part that is hidden even when he is nude,- the rib. As He formed woman, He murmured over every limb, 'Be chaste,' yet in spite of all this reflection and precaution woman possesses the very faults God sought to prevent (Genesis Rabbah 18:2).²⁴

One cannot adequately describe the praise due a good woman, nor the bale due a bad one(Midrash Tillim on Ps. 53:1).²⁵

Ezekiel Mosès Ezekiel cites the following:

If the first child be a girl, it is a good omen to the family; for, as some think, she raises up the next children, or, as others say, she stands between them and evil eye (Bath. 141a).²⁶

A daughter is for her father a vain treasure. Through his anxiety about her he cannot sleep in the night; during her minority lest she should be enticed; during her majority lest she should commit adultery; when she has ripened lest she should not marry; when she has married lest she should have no children; when she has grown old lest she should practice witchcraft(Sanh. 100b).²⁷

One who teaches his daughter Torah is as if he taught her frivolity (Sota 20a).²⁸

Of Imma Shalom we have an interesting story recorded in the Talmud(Sanh. 39a) illustrative of her ready wit. Once when a sceptic asked of her brother Gamiel II, 'Why is not your God strictly honest? Why should he have stolen a rib from sleeping Adam(Gen.II.21)? Imma, who was present, requested the sceptic to summon a police constable. 'What need hast thou of him?' asked the sceptic. 'We are robbed,' she said, 'last night of a silver cup; and the thief left instead a golden one.' - 'If that is all,' exclaimed the sceptic, 'I wish that thief would visit me every day.' - 'And still,' retorted Imma, 'thou objectest to the removal of the rib from sleeping Adam? Did he not receive in exchange a woman to wait upon him and to become a helpmate to him?' - 'I do not mean exactly the rib,' rejoined the sceptic, 'but I think the manner in which the rib was taken; the same could have been done while Adam was awake.' Thereupon she took a piece of raw meat, washed, salted, and roasted it in his presence; and invited him to partake of her preparation, which he declined saying that after witnessing the process of dressing his appetite was gone. 'Ah,' retorted she, 'had Adam seen the process of extracting the rib and forming the woman, he might not have liked to associate with her, as when he beheld her complete graced with feminine loveliness and charm(Sanh. 39a).²⁹

It is the custom for a man to court a woman, and not for a woman to court a man; as in the case of one losing a valuable article (alluding to the loss of Adam's rib) it is the loser who looks for the article and not the article for the loser(Kid. 2b).³⁰

A woman finds no true contentment but in the house of her husband (Ruth R., 2).³¹

The daughters of Israel are all beautiful by nature, only poverty disfigures them(Ned., 66a).³²

No home that is supported by the wife shall enjoy divine blessings (Pes., 50b., 83b).³³

The mother of Rabbi Tarphon(living in the period between the destruction of the temple and the fall of Bethar) was about to cross the court yard on a Sabbath in search of her slippers she had lost. R. Tarphon, on seeing her bare-footed, went and placed his two hands under the soles of her feet, so that she should walk on his hands until she reached her bed. Once he was ill, and the sages went to meet him. Thereupon his mother said to them: 'Pray for my son Tarphon, for he pays me unbounded respect.' They asked her; 'What does he do?' And she related the incident. Whereupon they replied: 'Even if he does so a million times, he could not pay you one half of the respect, due to a mother, as enjoined in the precepts of the Torah. (J. Kid., 61b).³⁴

Summary: Jewish tradition has not been perfect regarding its views toward women. It has often been better than other cultures, however. Jewish women have been in the background adding the inspiration and encouragement which pushed sons

and husbands to noble accomplishments. To implant within a daughter's mind the idea that she must suppress her own ambitions in order that her sons and husband might achieve is wrong. But the very fact that it was done is perhaps responsible for Jewish survival. After all, children are our future and what greater and more important job could there be than to raise them. Our child-raising methods of today, however, ought also to allow a daughter to develop her potential as a creative human being in any way she finds meaningful without placing emphasis on marriage and children.

Assignment: Prepare to debate the topic: Resolved that the woman's position in Judaism has ever been an exalted one.

Things to do: 1) What other passages can you find in rabbinic literature reflecting attitudes toward women?

2) What do you think accounts for the strong family ties in Judaism?

Footnotes:

¹Jonah ben Abraham Gerondi, "The Mission of Woman," in The Jewish Reader, ed. Nahum Glatzer (New York, 1961), pp. 124-125.

^{1a}Solomon Zucrow, Women, Slaves and the Ignorant in Rabbinic Literature (Boston, 1932), p. 34.

²Ibid., p. 43.

³Ibid., p. 44.

⁴Ibid.,

^{4a}Ibid., pp. 44-45.

⁵Ibid., pp. 47-48.

⁶Ibid., p. 49.

⁷Ibid., p. 81.

⁸Ibid., p. 107.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 110.

¹¹Ibid., p. 111.

¹²Ibid.,

¹³Ibid., p. 113.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 113-114.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 120.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 124.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 125.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 126.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 128.

²⁰Ibid. , p. 130.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., p. 132.

²³Ibid., p. 133.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 133-134.

²⁵Ibid., p. 136.

²⁶Ezekiel Moses Ezekiel, "The Position of Woman in Rabbinical Literature," Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Vol. VII, p. 164.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., p. 169.

29 Ibid., pp. 171-172.

30 Ibid., p. 175.

31 Ibid., Vol. V, p. 248.

32 Ibid., p. 249.

33 Ibid., p. 255.

34 Ibid., p. 265.

Lesson 10: Reform Judaism brings changes

- Goals:
- 1) to present the Reform Jewish view concerning the status of women;
 - 2) to show that Reform Judaism liberated the Jewish woman long ago

Procedure: 1) In Frankfort on the Main in July, 1845, the Conference of the Rabbis of Germany stated:

One of the marked achievements of the Reform movement has been the change in the status of women. According to the Talmud and the Rabbinic Code, woman can take no part in public religious functions but this Conference declares that woman has the same obligation as man to participate from youth up in the instruction of Judaism and in the public services and that the custom not to include women in the number of individuals necessary for the conducting of a public service (a minyan) is only a custom and has no religious basis.¹

- 2) The Breslau Conference in 1846 granted women total equality:

The halakhic position of women must undergo a change, and it is hoped that all the members will be unanimous on that subject. We may think of one reason or another for the position which Bible and Talmud assigned to woman; and specifically in the province of the Talmud, we may designate either the moving spirit of the Aggada or the rigid attitude of the Halakha as the prevailing one. So much is certain: the religious needs of the present cannot be satisfied with mere motive

power, but only with what this power generates.

From the religious viewpoint, it is the same with the dignity of women. A mere theoretical recognition, devoid of all legality, gives them as little satisfaction as, for instance, the Israelites are given in civic matters. They have received assurances of their capabilities for emancipation, without, however, being indeed permitted to become emancipated. It is useless to argue why the religious situation of women has become impaired, since one can neither deny its deterioration, nor find it compatible with present religious consciousness. To be sure, according to their viewpoint, the rabbis were absolutely right in systematically excluding the female sex from a significant part of religious duties and rights, and the poor woman could not complain about being denied exalted spiritual blessings, for it was believed that God Himself had pronounced the damning verdict over her. In the face of so many offending slights in civic life, she could not even complain about the fact that the house of God was as good as closed to her, that she had to beg the rabbi's permission for the daily expression of her Israelitish faith, as one begs for alms. She was permitted a share neither in religious instruction nor in certain sacred parental duties. The execution of sacred acts was now permitted, now forbidden to her; and finally, through the man's daily benediction for the good fortune of not having become a woman, she had to experience the most bitter offense in the very house of God. And yet, all this appears most mild when compared to the conferences of a Christian Council in the Middle Ages, debating whether a woman had a soul at all!

For our religious consciousness, which grants all humans an equal degree of natural holiness, and for which the pertaining differentiations in the Holy Scripture have only relative and

momentary validity, it is a sacred duty to express most emphatically the complete religious equality of the female sex. Life, which is stronger than all theory, has indeed achieved quite a bit in this regard; however, a great deal is still lacking for the achievement of absolute equality, and even the little that has occurred already is still devoid of all halakhic strength. It is thus our task to pronounce the equality of religious privileges and obligations of women in so far as this is possible. We have exactly the same right to do this as the synod under R. Gershom, 800 years ago, which also introduced new religious decrees in favor of the female sex. When in regard to the Mezuzah commandment the Talmud says: gavre bo'e hayye, nashe lo bo'e hayye, (Men need to live, but women don't?), we want to apply this principle in a far higher sense to all of religious life, thus supplying our religious community with a strength of which it has been deprived for all too long.

On the other hand, there shall no longer occur that religious preference on the part of woman which the Talmud grants the female sex (Nidda 45b, against the view of Rabbi Simon). Regarding the beginning of religious maturity, it is assumed that women mature earlier intellectually. For us, the religious coming of age shall begin for boys and girls alike, with the completion of the thirteenth year.

Esteemed gentlemen, the Committee herewith submits the following proposals for your examination:

1. The Rabbinical Conference shall declare the female sex as religiously equal with the male, in its obligations and rights, and pronounce accordingly as halakhic:

1. That women must observe all mitzvot, even though they pertain to a certain time, in so far as these mitzvot have any strength and vigor at all for our religious consciousness;
2. That the female sex has to fulfill

all obligations towards children in the same manner as the male;

3. That neither the husband nor the father has the right to absolve a religiously mature daughter or wife from her vow;
4. That from now on, the benediction shelo assani ishah (who has not made me a woman), which was the basis for the religious prejudice against women, shall be abolished;
5. That the female sex shall, from earliest youth, be obligated to participate in religious instruction and public worship, and in the latter respect also be counted in a minyan; and finally,
6. That the religious coming of age for both sexes begin with the age of thirteen.²

- 3) Isaac Mayer Wise stressed the necessity of allowing women to become members of the congregation:

In the early days of our activity in America, we admitted females to the choir. Then we confirmed boys and girls together, and we allowed girls to read the Torah on that occasion. Later on we introduced family pews into the Temple.

With the admission of mothers and daughters to a recognized place in public worship, came order and decorum. Abuses that had crept into the synagogue disappeared as soon as woman again took her proper place in the Temple. But we cannot stop here; the reform is not complete. You must enfranchise woman in your congregations, she must be a member, must have a voice and a vote in your assemblies. We need women in the congregational boards to bring heart and piety into them. We must have women in the boards for the sake of the principle. We must have women in the school-boards to visit the Sabbath-schools, and to make their influence felt. We must

have women in the choir committees, because they understand music better than men. But, all other considerations aside, the principle of justice, and the law of God inherent in every human being, demand that woman be admitted to membership in the congregation, and be given equal rights with man; that her religious feelings be allowed scope for the sacred cause of Israel.

We are ready to appear before any congregation in behalf of any woman wishing to become a member thereof, and to plead her cause. We will debate the question with anyone who will show us in what woman is less entitled to the privileges of the synagogue than the man, or where her faith is less important to her salvation than man's is to him. Till then, we maintain that women must become active members of the congregation for their own sake, and for the benefit of Israel's sacred cause.³

- 4) On July 10, 1892, the Central Conference of American Rabbis adopted the following resolution:

Whereas we have progressed beyond the idea of a secondary position of women in Jewish congregations, we recognize the importance of their hearty cooperation and active participation in congregational affairs; therefore be it resolved that women be eligible to full membership with all the privileges of voting and holding office in our congregation.⁴

- 5) The following chart presents the various views concerning the religious status of women:

Orthodox Practice

Women were seated in a separate synagogue section.

Women were not counted toward a minyon

or accepted as witnesses in ritual matters.

Women were not permitted to conduct any portion of the service.

Special burdensome duties were placed upon women.

Why Reforms Were Needed

The traditional attitude toward women's religious rights originated in the Orient; women in the Western world enjoyed religious equality.

The special duties required of Jewish women were outmoded in the modern world which was moving toward the general emancipation of women.

European Reform

Equal religious education was demanded for girls as well as boys.

Women were permitted to serve as witnesses in Jewish ritual matters.

American Reform

Women enjoy complete religious equality.

Men and women are seated together in family pews.

Women may participate in conducting the service.

Women are counted toward the minyon.

Women may be elected as members of temple boards. 5

6)

Some 80 years ago, American Reform Judaism completed the task of granting full religious equality to Jewish women. Some 50 years ago, the American Reform rabbinate declared the principle that a woman cannot be denied the privilege of ordination. How have these resolutions been translated into reality?

As of March, 1972, one woman rabbinical student at the HUC-JIR, Cincinnati, is preparing for ordination in June, 1972; two other women are in the rabbinical study program at the HUC-JIR campuses in New York and in Jerusalem. Two women are preparing to become cantors in the HUC-JIR School of Sacred Music, New York.

Reform women voiced strong demands for greater participation by women in the decision-making process of Reform Judaism at the 28th convention of the National

Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, held in November, 1971. Mrs. David M. Levitt, president, estimated that there are 250,000 women among the one million members of Reform Judaism. 'We are not being utilized commensurate with our talents or strength,' she said.

Of the 180 members of the Board of Trustees of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (of which the NFTS is an affiliate), 7 are women. As of May, 1971, a survey of Reform congregations showed 5 women presidents and 31 vice presidents (approximately 700 congregations belong to the UAHC).⁶

Questions:

Why, then, are there so few women with voting privileges on congregational boards? Why are there so few women members on the Board of Governors of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion? Why are there so few women on the national board of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations? Why are there so few women rabbinical candidates?

Answer:

First, no matter how loud the cry for female equality, nothing will be accomplished if there are no women who want to serve on congregational boards or become rabbis or share in the decision-making of religious institutions. The loudest voice is not always the most sincere, and those who spend all their time screaming have no energy left for working. Accomplishments bring respect, and respect leads to acceptance.

Secondly, individual members are responsible for any inequality which may occur. If women are to be fully accepted, then there must be a change in attitudes and that change must begin within ourselves. The time has come to conquer our own psychological and emotional objections and to regard every congregational member, male and female, as a human being, a real

person, with talents and skills and with the option of making a contribution to the betterment of the congregation in any way he or she finds meaningful and significant. And those who are unwilling to accept this should return to the fold of Orthodoxy, for in all good conscience they cannot consider themselves Reform.⁸

Summary: Reform Judaism, then, granted complete equality to women, and there can be no doubt that this type of flexibility has contributed greatly to the survival of Judaism. Time after time, Jewish tradition has adapted itself to the particular moods of the age. For those who prefer the traditional Jewish way of life with the women in the balcony, Orthodox Judaism is alive and well. But for those women whose talent and skills demand active participation in the Jewish community and in congregational life American Reform Jewry opened the doors in 1892 with the aforementioned resolution by the Central Conference of American Rabbis.⁹

Assignment: See if you can find any current articles on the subject of women rabbis.

Things to do: 1) What role do women play in your congregation? Are they involved in the decision-making process?

2) See if you can discover any relationship between the changing attitudes toward Jewish women and the changing attitudes of society toward women in general.

Read about Bertha Pappenheim, a leader of the early feminist movement.

Footnotes:

¹"Report of Committee on Ordination of Women," CCAR Yearbook, Volume 66(Philadelphia, 1956), p. 91.

²W. Gunther Plaut, The Rise of Reform Judaism (New York, 1963), pp. 253-255.

³W. Gunther Plaut, The Growth of Reform Judaism (New York, 1965), pp. 339-340.

⁴CCAR Yearbook, 1956, p. 90.

⁵Sylvan Schwartzman, Reform Judaism in the Making (New York, 1951), p. 183.

⁶"How Far, How Fast?;" Keeping Posted(April, 1972), p. 19.

⁷Sally Priesand, "They Did Build the House of Israel," Dimensions(Winter, 1971), p. 29.

⁸Ibid., p. 29 & p. 62.

⁹Ibid., p. 29.

Lesson 11: A woman rabbi?

- Goals: 1) to show the Reform Jewish view concerning the ordination of women;
- 2) to understand the concept of the ordination of women through the words of those who have been involved in making it a reality;
- 3) to discover how the students would react to a woman rabbi

Procedure: 1) In 1922, the Central Conference of American Rabbis adopted the following statement:

The ordination of woman as rabbi is a modern issue, due to the evolution in her status in our day. The Central Conference of American Rabbis has repeatedly made pronouncement urging the fullest measure of self-expression for woman, as well as the fullest utilization of her gifts in the service of the Most High, and gratefully acknowledges the enrichment and enlargement of congregational life which has resulted therefrom.

Whatever may have been the specific legal status of Jewish woman regarding certain religious functions, her general position in Jewish religious life has ever been an exalted one. She has been the priestess in the home, and our sages recognized her as the preserver of Israel. In view of these Jewish teachings and in keeping with the spirit of our age and the traditions of our Conference, we declare that woman cannot justly be denied the privilege of ordination.¹

- 2) At the convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis in 1956, a committee formed to consider the ordination of women made the following statement:

...this Committee recommends to this Conference that it endorse the admission into the HUC-JIR of educationally and spiritually qualified female rabbinical students. We further recommend that, when a woman shall have satisfactorily completed the course of study leading to ordination as a rabbi, as prescribed by the faculty, the CCAR shall endorse her ordination as a rabbi in Israel. Lastly, we recommend that the CCAR welcome into its ranks any woman who has been ordained as a rabbi, who may apply for membership in this professional association.²

- 3) Martha Neumark was the first woman rabbinical candidate at the Hebrew Union College. In 1925, The Jewish Tribune published some of her thoughts:

I have always wondered why I was imbued with the idea of becoming a rabbi. The first distinct recollection I have of a definite feeling toward communal work is connected with my confirmation service. I was one of those who read from the Torah in Hebrew, and the recitation of those ancient words crystallized a vague restlessness of mine into a desire to serve my people. The easiest way to enter that field was to enter the Hebrew Union College and become a rabbi! My youthful impetuosity was not concerned with the difficulties of such an undertaking. The doubt never

entered my mind as to whether I, a girl, would be ordained. I wanted to serve Judaism and Jews. What other requisite was necessary for admission to the rabbinate?³

- 4) While rabbis were in favor of the ordination of women, laymen apparently were not:

The Board of Governors, however, decided otherwise. At the meeting where this decision was arrived at, there were two rabbis present and six laymen, who voted unanimously and respectively Aye and Naye. This illustrates, in general, the attitude of rabbis and laymen toward the admission of women to the rabbinate. The rabbis, who know the duties, functions, and handicaps of their profession assert that women can enter the ministry; whereas laymen, for the most part unacquainted with the ministerial technique, aver that the duties of the office are too burdensome on a woman. The irony of fate.⁴

- 5) Martha Neumark left the Hebrew Union College and her rabbinical studies in the middle of her junior year after almost eight years of study. She felt, nonetheless, that women were better fitted for the rabbinate than men:

Surely a woman rabbi is more adapted to the needs of the Reform synagogue as it exists at present than is a man. Our services have become haunts mostly for women, and no one can doubt that the spiritual struggles which a woman has had will be more vitally interesting to these women parishoners than those of the man. At least, their paths of

spiritual storm will coincide more.

But why be restricted to the question: Should a man or a woman be the rabbi? Those who phrase the problem thus, misunderstand or misstate it. Many congregations have two rabbis. In fact, this practice is becoming more general all the time, due to the fact that one man is fitted for a certain type of work, the next for another. One is adapted to pastoral work; one is brilliantly gifted as an orator. One is interested in social service; the other has powers as a religious teacher. Why could there not be a division of labor between the man and the woman rabbi? The division of their work would be entirely dependent upon their capacities; the same standards would hold as in the division of labor when there are two men rabbis. There are many, very many problems which members of the community, men and women, have, with which they feel they cannot go to the man rabbi, because of the delicacy of the matter, or their sensitiveness. Men and women compose the congregation; a man and a woman should serve the congregation's needs.

The present attitude of some of the laity is to be regretted, in view of the fact that women rabbis will benefit them incalculably. Women can aid in the solution of the problem by devoting themselves to Jewish study, by fitting themselves for ordination. The general community can help by showing a willingness to accept women as their spiritual leaders.⁵

- 6) In 1922, Dr. Jacob Z. Lauterbach presented a paper at the convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis concerning the ordination of women. He was opposed to such a step:

We should, therefore, not jeopardize the hitherto indisputable authoritative character of our ordination. We should

Not make our ordination entirely different in character from the traditional ordination, and thereby give the larger group of Jewry, following traditional Judaism, good reason to question our authority and to doubt whether we are rabbis in the sense in which this honored title was always understood.

Nor is there, to my mind, any actual need for making such a radical departure from this established Jewish law and time honored practice. The supposed lack of a sufficient number of rabbis will not be made up by this radical innovation. There are other and better means of meeting this emergency and that is, by the rabbis following the advice of the Men of the Great Synagog, to raise many disciples and thus encourage more men to enter the ministry. And the standard of the rabbinate in America, while no doubt it could be improved in many directions, is certainly not so low as to need a new and refining influence such as women presumably would bring to any profession they enter. Neither could women, with all due respect to their talents and abilities, raise the standard of the rabbinate. Nay, all things being equal, women could not even rise to the high standard reached by men in this particular calling. If there is any calling which requires a whole-hearted devotion to the exclusion of all other things and the determination to make it one's whole life work, it is the rabbinate. It is not to be considered merely as a livelihood. Nor is it to be entered upon as a temporary occupation...One must choose it for his lifework and be prepared to give to it all his energies and to devote to it all the years of his life, constantly learning and improving and thus growing in it. It has been rightly said that the woman who enters a profession, must make her choice between following her chosen profession or the calling of mother and home-maker. She cannot do both well at the same time. This certainly would hold true in the case of the

rabbinical profession. The woman who naturally and rightly looks forward to the opportunity of meeting the right kind of man, of marrying him and of having children and a home of her own, cannot give to the rabbinate that whole-hearted devotion which comes from the determination to make it one's lifework. For in all likelihood she could not continue it as a married woman. For, one holding the rabbinical office must teach by precept and example, and must give an example of Jewish family and home life where all the traditional Jewish virtues are cultivated. The rabbi can do so all the better when he is married and has a home and a family of his own. The wife whom God has made as a helpmate to him can be, and in most cases is, of great assistance to him in making his home a Jewish home, a model for the congregation to follow.

In this important activity of the rabbi, exercising a wholesome influence upon the congregation, the woman rabbi would be deficient. The woman in the rabbinical office could not expect the man to whom she is married to be merely a helpmate to her, assisting her in her rabbinical activities. And even if she could find such a man, willing to take a subordinate position in the family, the influence upon the families in the congregation of such an arrangement in the home and in the family life of the rabbi would not be very wholesome. Not to mention the fact that if she is to be a mother she could not go on with her regular activities in the congregation.

And there is, to my mind, no injustice done to woman by excluding her from this office. There are many avenues open to her if she chooses to do religious or educational work. I can see no reason why we should make this radical departure from traditional practice except the specious argument that we are modern men and, as such, we recognize the full equality of women

to men, hence we should be thoroughly consistent. But I would not class the rabbis with those people whose main characteristic is consistency.⁶

- 7) At that same convention, Professor David Neumark, father of Martha Neumark, disagreed with his colleague;

As to the practical question of the advisability to ordain women at the Hebrew Union College, I do not believe that the orthodox will have any additional reason to object. They themselves employ women in their schools as teachers and readers, and more than this our woman rabbi will not do. In fact the entire question reduces itself to this: Women are already doing most of the work that the ordained woman rabbi is expected to do. But they do it without preparation and without authority. I consider it rather a duty of the authorities to put an end to the prevailing anarchy by giving women a chance to acquire adequate education and an authoritative standing in all branches of religious work. The practical difficulties cannot be denied. But they will work out the same way as in other professions, especially in the teaching profession, from the kindergarten to post-graduate schools. Lydia Rabbinowitz raised a family of three children and kept up a full measure of family life while being a professor of bacteriology. The woman rabbi who will remain single will not be more, in fact less, of a problem than the bachelor rabbi. If she marries and chooses to remain a rabbi, and God blesses her, she will retire for a few months and provide a substitute, as rabbis generally do when they are sick or meet with an automobile accident. When she comes back, she will be a better rabbi for the experience. The

rabbinate may help the women, and the woman rabbi may help the rabbinate. You cannot treat the reform rabbinate from the orthodox point of view. Orthodoxy is orthodoxy, and reform is reform. Our good relations with our orthodox brethren may still be improved by a clear and decided stand on this question. They want us either to be reform or to return to the fold of real genuine orthodox Judaism whence we came.⁷

- 8) Apparently, the first woman rabbi was ordained in Germany. She never held a congregation, however:

Regina Jonas finished her theological studies at the Berlin Academy for the Science of Judaism in the middle 1930's. Her thesis subject was: 'Can a Woman Become a Rabbi?' Of course she set out to prove the affirmative.

The faculty accepted her dissertation, but the professor of Talmud, the licensing authority, refused to ordain her.

The Rev. Max Dienemann, of Offenbach, however, did ordain her, and she practiced till 1940, primarily in homes for the elderly.

The Germans then dispatched her to the Theresienstadt Concentration Camp where she died of natural causes or was sent to the gas chambers.⁸

- 9) In his press release entitled "The First Woman Rabbi," Dr. Jacob R. Marcus, Director, American Jewish Archives, stated:

On Saturday, June 3(1972), the first woman rabbi will be ordained by a theological school, on the Cincinnati campus of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

On that date, Sally J. Priesand, now serving as student-rabbi at Wise

Temple, will be ordained by President Alfred Gottschalk....

Will Sally get a precedent for other women?

She already has. The New York School of the College-Institute has two female candidates for the rabbinate and two for the cantorate....

Will Rabbi Sally get a job, and will she be successful? It is certain there will be no trouble in placing her.

She is competent and unpretentious, a good speaker and a fine human being? The congregation will admire and respect her; the children will love her.⁹

- 10) Sally Priesand made the following comment
in Dimensions:

When I first came to the University of Cincinnati and HUC-JIR six years ago, most people considered my rabbinical desires a passing fancy and assumed that I had come for a husband. Women liberationists would consider this attitude an insult, but I just ignored it. Much to their dismay, I did not come to Cincinnati to champion women's rights, but merely because of a deep belief in Judaism and a firm conviction that I might have something to offer. There were obstacles and problems. But progress takes time and work. As the years passed, members of the college community came to realize that my presence at HUC-JIR was sincere. They came to know me as an individual, a real person, not just some woman with a crazy idea. Although there are still those who oppose the idea of a woman rabbi, they do not resent my presence at the college, and I know that I at least have their respect if not their support.¹⁰

- 11) How would you react if your congregation
hired a female rabbi? What questions

would you ask a female rabbinic applicant? (Have a member of the class pose as a female rabbinic applicant. Ask the class to act as a rabbinical selection committee and question her.)

Summary: Reform Judaism has been in favor of the ordination of women since 1922 - at least on paper. If female rabbis are to be accepted, however, each of us must change his own attitudes. We must regard every rabbi, not as a male rabbi or as a female rabbi, but as an individual rabbi who possesses certain qualities and talents.

Assignment: See what you can discover about the legal status of women in the State of Israel.

Things to do: 1) Do you think it would be difficult for a female rabbi to raise a family? (Sally Priesand sees no difficulty. She has often said that in her temple there will be a nursery for her children next to her study.)

2) Read "Once There was a Female Chassidic Rabbi" by Charles Raddock (The Jewish Digest, December, 1967). Were the rabbis justified in excommunicating Hannah

Rachel Werbermacher?

- 3) Lily Montagu was a founder of the Liberal Jewish movement in England, and she led a congregation for many years. She was also a member of the Order of the British Empire. Write to the World Union for Progressive Judaism to find out more about her and report to the class.
- 4) Why would Orthodox Jews not be able to accept a woman rabbi? (What is the traditional role of the rabbi? Are women allowed to serve as judges or even as witnesses?)

Footnotes:

¹"Report of Committee on Ordination of Women," CCAR Yearbook, Volume 66 (Philadelphia, 1956), pp. 90-91.

²Ibid., p. 93.

³Martha Neumark, "The Woman Rabbi," The Jewish Tribune, April 10, 1925, p. 1.

⁴Ibid., April 17, 1925, p. 5.

⁵Ibid.,

⁶Jacob Z. Lauterbach, "Responsum on Question, 'Shall Women be Ordained Rabbis?,' CCAR Yearbook, Volume 32 (Richmond, 1922), pp. 161-162.

⁷David Neumark, Ibid., p. 177.

⁸Jacob R. Marcus, "The First Woman Rabbi," The American Israelite, March 9, 1972, p. 3.

⁹Ibid., p. 1 & 3.

¹⁰Sally Priesand, "They Did Build the House of Israel,"
Dimensions, Winter, 1971, p. 29.

Lesson 12: Women's Lib in Israel

- Goals: 1) to familiarize the student with the role that women have played in the creation of the State of Israel;
- 2) to portray the Israeli woman in her role as feminist pioneer

Procedure: 1) Jewish men and women who came to Palestine as pioneers brought with them a firm commitment to the re-establishment of the Jewish homeland. Persecuted Jews were at last to know freedom, and this meant freedom for all - men and women. Women, then, who had suffered the degradation of inferior status in every class and every society, had a right to suppose that they, too, would be liberated. They expected to work side by side with the men in all phases of labor, not to be told that a woman's place is in the kitchen. They faced stubborn opposition, however:

'We believed that the wall which divided man's work from woman's had fallen forever,' reproachfully cries Miriam Schlimovitch. 'I remembered,' says another chalutzah, 'that before setting out for Palestine I had worked everywhere in the chalutz organization-the preparatory schools for pioneers in Europe-on a footing of absolute equality with the men. In time, I used to think, we will establish the same equality in Palestine. But when I got here I could not stand the

amused irony, the patronizing superior attitude of the stronger toward the weaker....The whole struggle seemed to me a fantastic thing. I asked myself: Have the men forgotten the time - it was only yesterday - when they too were unskilled? And aren't there among men the strong and the weak, the efficient and the inefficient? Why the hostile attitude from the outset toward the woman worker?¹

- 2) The women pioneers realized that they would have to write their own chapter in Jewish history, for there were simply no modern working women in Palestine at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was not easy for women to find jobs, however. They were usually assigned to the kitchen, and when at one of the workers' conferences, it was suggested that girls be sought to increase the number of kitchen workers, Yael Gordon replied:

We women agree with you completely that we must try to bring more girls into our workers' groups; however, not because we need more hands in the kitchen, but because women must be partners in the revival of our people. It is true that only a few girls have so far tried to engage in heavy manual labor, but the reason for this is the scorn with which their efforts were greeted. This attitude is completely unjustified and will have to change. When it does, many girls will come to work in the fields and elsewhere. No man has the right to tell them beforehand that they will be restricted to the kitchen. They will find work for themselves of their own free choice.²

Training farms were established to train girls in the areas of vegetable growing, poultry raising, dairying, cooking, and household management. It was hoped that training on these farms would lead to improved work relations between men and women.

- 3) By 1914, women were formally organized in Palestine. Their aim was expressed by Yael Gordon:

We want full equality and real emancipation so that women may function effectively both as individuals and as members of the group! We look forward to achieving this in the new society now being created in the land of Israel out of our people's desire to preserve its individuality through work and creativity. The girls who have come here have done so as members of our people, dedicated to carrying out their national duties, but they wish also to find themselves, their individuality, as women and human beings. This small laboring society of ours is the best place on earth in which to discover the roots of one's soul....³

- 4) During World War I, at least four conferences were held for working women. With the rise of communal living, one of the questions raised was the care of children. Some mothers wanted to care for their own children; others contended that kvutza life demanded communal care. In speaking to the women,

Joseph Bussel of Degania summed up the situation:

I note that the subject of the kvutza keeps recurring in your discussions. That is understandable, for only in the kvutza will the liberation of women be fully realized. We are pioneers, sometimes even without wishing to be. The situation, the forced seclusion in which we are living, has placed us in the very front ranks of the effort to rejuvenate our people.

Much opposition has been expressed here to the idea of communal child care. The chief source of this opposition is the inclination to treat children as private property. We, who are so opposed to domination, favor it in relation to our children. In every other aspect of our kvutza existence we stress the collective principle. But if a child is private property, why is not a garden, why are not talents? What will we come to? Life will defeat us completely.

The theory of the kvutza is completely new. All our life is one incessant revolution. We have demonstrated that a Jew can sow and reap, thresh and stand guard. We have begun to create a new, common, social life, and to give women freedom. The children belong to the group and the group rears them. We have to climb a steep hill, and we must do it all at once - or else we shall fall and Degania will become Petah Tikva (i.e. a moshav, a small-holders' settlement).

The Working Women's Organization must not be satisfied with creating job opportunities for women - that is not enough. We need spirit and soul. The kvutza should not be a house in which you are shut up, but a place from which you survey the world, aware of your responsibilities, and go out toward the world not in boredom, but in understanding. Without genuine, creative content, the body is doomed. Work in girls' kvutzot can only be temporary; your real task is to work in the men's groups. Unless you join them, there will be no work for young women.⁴

- 5) Agriculture was not the only field in which women worked; they were involved in every phase of building up the country. The story of "Techiah," one of the early members of the Council of Working Women, is typical of the problems women faced:

For the first time...thousands of Jews had entered the building trade and had mastered it. And the Jewish woman worker began to batter at the doors of the trade. But it was not so easy to get in.

The men had quite a number of reasons for keeping us out. Some said the work was too strenuous for women. Others argued that if women were admitted into the building trade collectives... the output would decrease and the pay with it. The fight went on for quite a time, and finally the workers' council of Tel Aviv decided that every building trade collective had to admit two women.

I knew that I was being received not spontaneously, but under orders.... I wanted therefore to give up my right to enter the building collective, but friends of mine in the Council of Women Workers persuaded me to hold on. Just because the men looked at it as they did, it was my duty to go in, and to try and create a new relationship....

At five o'clock I reported. My place was with the cement workers. I stood by and poured on water while the men mixed. The mixture when ready was carried over to the building place in buckets and on planks.

They worked slowly at first, yesterday's weariness still being in their limbs. Gradually the work livened up. Gradually I too was caught up in the rhythm of it.... But in comparison with the tasks of the men, mine was a trifling one, and I felt the slight....

So I changed off with one of the men, and began to carry cement. The comrade

who loaded the cement on to the plank said, 'That's all right. Let her lift this a couple of times - she'll be asking for something easier.'

And I must confess that the load nearly made me stagger. But I called up all my will power and walked with steady steps, as if this was the most usual thing for me. I knew a dozen pairs of eyes were watching me slyly, and if I faltered once there would be a shout of laughter.

Later I noticed that the comrade who did the loading was putting more on my plank than on anyone else's. I understood and said nothing. After a while I stood still and looked at him with a smile. He became confused. The comrade who carried the plank with me kept complaining that it was too heavy. He wondered how on earth I could lift my end, and became angry with the loader. But I asked him to keep quiet and wait. I was right. The next time the load was considerably lighter, and the loader got his share of abuse from the others.

The same story was repeated when it came to filling in the foundations. And in this way a fight went on between me and a couple of them, all day long, until I forced them to give way. The next day they confessed that instead of getting a laugh at my expense, they had learned to respect me.

My reputation as a good worker was soon established...When the elections came around for the council of the building workers, my name was put up.

There isn't very much to this story.... I only tell it to help make clear the struggle which the women workers of Palestine had to wage when trying to break into a new field.⁵

- 6) By 1922, the country's largest contracting agency, Haboneh, had hired ten girls. When the girls were suddenly dismissed, they demanded an explanation from the director:

The director held a whispered conversation with his assistant and then answered haltingly: 'It's true that your work was quite all right. But is it your aim in life to be construction workers? Can we depend on you to stay? You are going to get married and stop working. The men are different. We hope to train them to be good masons. But we have no need for women here.....'

The girls were overwhelmed. They had never thought about what their 'aim' was. They had come to Palestine to work, quite simply, without any ulterior motives. And what business was it of the director's to worry about their futures?⁶

Again, this was a common situation which girls had to face in the fight for emancipation.

- 7) In periods of crisis and unemployment, problems arose in families where both the husband and wife were employed. It was recommended that one partner (preferably the wife) stop working. Those who favored women's rights vigorously opposed this suggestion as evidenced by David Ben-Gurion's comment:

Forbidding couples to work, as a blanket rule, will have a strong adverse affect on the right to work and the independence of women. A woman, even when she is married, has every right to be economically independent, i.e., to support herself, and not be dependent upon her husband.

Our movement is fighting for the rights of the permanently employed worker. It would not occur to anyone to make a ruling that upon his marriage,

a man be dismissed from his place of work. It is only the stereotyped thinking of society in which women are oppressed and without rights, that makes it possible for us to discriminate between working men and women with respect to tenure.

It is well known that job opportunities open to women are fewer than those open to men. If a law is passed stating that married women must leave their jobs, we will be undermining the very foundations of our movement. Employers will then have new reason to follow the trend, which is strong in any case, of preventing women from securing employment.

Differences in standards of living within the working public are not caused solely by the work of married couples. Individual laborers and white collar workers (and their female counterparts) do not receive equal salaries, and there are cases where the joint wages of a working couple are smaller than those of a single man working on his own....

- 8) Not only male attitudes had to be changed in the struggle for equality; it was necessary to raise the consciousness of women as well:

The Working Women's Council was particularly concerned with the level of the wages paid to women: these were always considerably lower than those paid to men in similar jobs. Raising the wage scale of women would, the Council felt, not only help them economically but increase their self-respect and make them feel that they were not 'second class' citizens. There were some very difficult psychological problems involved: it would have been much easier to achieve wage increases for women if they had been more persistent in their devotion to the occupations in which they managed to gain entry. In periods of unemployment they would go from one job to another and, after

the crisis passed, would show no inclination to return to their original job. Lack of persistence naturally led to lack of specialization and skill, and this in turn contributed to the lower wage scale. Similarly, many women did not understand the importance of belonging to a trade union, despite the fact that they were often obviously exploited and in need of protection. Much work still remained to be done to awaken their trade-union consciousness and organize them effectively.⁸

- 9) The need for consciousness-raising is also evident in the struggle to gain equal representation for women in the Histadrut (Federation of Labor). Women often feel incapable of running for public office, and as a result, very few women are elected as delegates to public conferences:

Perhaps the fault lies with the women themselves. They shrink from appearing on public platforms: they are always afraid that what they want to say may not be important or has already been said by someone else in one form or another. What is more, when a woman does get up in public and is somewhat inarticulate (just as scores of men are), her individual failure is at once held against women as a group. If, however, a woman discusses a subject cogently, the general reaction is that 'she is an exception to the rule.' For this reason women generally remain silent in public assemblies, the habit gradually becoming second nature. This self-imposed silence is bound to hamper their intellectual development, for the ability to think increases with the efforts to express ideas, whether orally or in writing. This being the case, special importance attaches to the meetings and conferences organized by

the working women which have always served them as an excellent training ground, helping them to attain self-confidence and become aware of their place in society. Our pioneering women understood this from the very inception of the movement.⁹

The women's movement, then, continues its efforts to convince women that they have the same rights as men to express their opinions.

Summary: Women worked side by side with men in the establishment of the Jewish homeland. They had to fight for the right to do so, however. They refused to accept the traditional feminine role as solely that of man's helpmate, and they insisted on being treated as equals. Rather than being automatically relegated to the kitchen, they fought for the right to be laborers.

In perhaps no other country do women play such an important role among their people as in Israel. In every sphere, women of intelligence and ability have proved themselves equal to men in laying the foundations of the new state. They have helped to found and consolidate the Jewish collectives and cooperatives, to develop cultural life, to expand industry, to promote social welfare and public services, to fight in time of war and to build in time of peace.

Women in Israel on the whole live more seriously than women in the United States; on the other hand their joys are deeper than mere pleasures, and they drink from the depths of life rather than from the light and frothy surface of fun. It could not be otherwise, drawn as they have been to

this land by the great forces of Jewish history, in which they all play a part by their very presence in Israel today.¹⁰

Assignment: See if you can discover what changes have been made in Israel during recent years concerning the legal status of women.

Things to do: 1) Stage a role play in which an Israeli woman who is applying for a job as a bricklayer presents her application to the foreman. Two men have also applied. Let the class decide who gets the job.

2) Make a list of the accomplishments of women who were involved in Israel's pioneer movement.

Footnotes:

¹Molly Lyons Bar-David, Women in Israel(New York, 1952), p. 8.

²Ada Maimon, Women Build a Land(New York, 1962), p. 26.

³Ibid., p. 37.

⁴Ibid., pp. 53-54.

⁵Bar-David, pp. 21-22.

⁶Maimon, p. 74.

⁷Ibid., p. 152.

⁸Ibid., p. 83.

⁹Ibid., p. 208.

¹⁰Bar-David, p. 2.

Lesson 13: Israeli women and the law

- Goals: 1) to familiarize the student with the legal status of women in Israel;
- 2) to show that progress is being made toward the establishment of equality under the law

Procedure: 1) In the State of Israel, Orthodox Jewish law prevails. As we have seen, this means that women are second-class citizens in certain respects. Ask the students to list examples:

For example, women are not permitted by Jewish law to own property. Whatever the wife earns after marriage, as well as the income derived from the dowry she brings him, belongs to her husband. If she dies during his lifetime he alone can inherit her. On the other hand if a man should die leaving no will, and there are both male and female heirs, the woman may not inherit equally with the male heirs. A woman's testimony is not acceptable in a court of law. A woman is not regarded as the 'natural' guardian of her children. In the event of the husband's death, custody of the children goes to his relatives....

In extenuation, it should be remembered that these laws date back to a time when the conception of the husband as absolute lord and master over the wife was universal. In many respects, the status of women in the Jewish civilization was superior to that of women in other ancient civilizations. In fact, as late as the end of the 16th century the Church was still discussing the question whether woman is a human being in the full sense of the term.¹

- 2) As the social status of Israeli women improved, cries were heard for legal equality as well. Jewish law was outmoded and humiliating in its attitude toward women. Changes were necessary, and they came, but not until women took the initiative in demanding such reforms:

Representatives of the feminist movement argued that, where economic matters were concerned, Jewish religious authorities have found ways to re-interpret the law in the light of changing conditions, but in matters pertaining to the family, and especially where women's rights were concerned, strict legalism has ever been the rule. In the final analysis, perhaps the Jewish women's passive acceptance of masculine rule was to blame for this situation. Now, however, women are demanding their rights and will no longer tolerate such treatment. Our new State needs the talents and energies of all its citizens - women included.

Pointing out another injustice, our representatives made mention of cases where men married to insane women obtained the signatures of one hundred rabbis and won permission to remarry without divorcing their first wives. However, no such privileges were ever granted to a woman married to an insane man.

At the close of the debate, one of the women delegates proclaimed from the rostrum: 'A rabbinate which seeks to uphold the integrity of Judaism ought to evolve necessary legal reforms instead of leaving the law in its petrified form which is humiliating for Jewish women.' Women in Israel ought to take the initiative in demanding such reforms, so that they may live in dignity according to the law. ²

The first major reform was the Child Marriage Act passes by the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) on June 6, 1951.

This law raised the minimum marriage age from fifteen to seventeen. It served most especially to protect young Oriental girls from being married off by their fathers before they were emotionally and mentally capable of marriage. Under terms of the law, parents, guardians, husbands, and rabbis are subject to up to two years' imprisonment plus a fine up to 600 Israeli pounds for violating the law. Even though the penalties are severe, the marriage itself remains in force under Israel's religious law unless the husband consents to a divorce. The real effectiveness of the law, then, is its power to protect child-brides rather than repair damage already done.³

3) A second major reform was the Women's Equal Rights Bill passed on July 17, 1951. It read in part:

1. A man and a woman shall have equal status with regard to any legal proceedings; any provision of law which discriminates, with regard to any legal proceeding, against women as women, shall be of no effect.

2. A married woman shall be fully competent to own and deal with property as if she were unmarried; her rights in property acquired before her marriage shall not be affected by her marriage.

3. (a) Both parents are the natural guardians of their children; where one parent dies, the survivor shall be the natural guardian.⁴

In addition, this law demanded consent of both husband and wife before a divorce could be granted.

According to traditional law, the husband alone has the power of divorce. It is true that the 11th century takkanah (amendment) instituted by Rabbi Gershom of Mayence required the wife's consent to the divorce. This reform, however, was never accepted by the Sephardic community. Moreover, the law could be circumvented simply by the husband's threat to abandon his wife, in which case the law of the agunah forbade her ever to remarry.

Under the terms of the new Women's Equal Rights Law, both parties must give their consent to the divorce. Men leaving their wives without mutual agreement or without the consent of the court are subject to imprisonment up to five years. Where the husband leaves the jurisdiction of the court, the court itself may issue the get or bill of divorcement.⁵

4) According to the Law of Military Service passed in 1949, every woman between the ages of 18 and 34 must enlist in the army for a period of two years. In 1953, a law of National Service was adopted which exempted four classes of women from military service: married women, women who have children, pregnant women, and women who claim religious beliefs as a basis for exemption. Those of the latter category may fulfill their national

obligation in one of three ways: 1) agricultural training in a religious settlement of their choice; 2) working for the army outside the military establishment, not in military uniform, but at army salaries; 3) engaging in work of national importance, such as taking care of new immigrants and their children, or school work, health work, etc., at army salaries. Passage of this law emphasizes the basic principle embraced by advocates of women's liberation: equal rights and duties.⁶

- 5) Prior to World War I, the Jewish Women's Equal Rights League was organized. It battled vigorously for the right of women to vote, to hold office, and to be given equal working conditions with men.⁷ Women delegates are active in the Knesset, taking full part in the debates and decisions which are made. They are also involved in the committees which draft legislation.⁸

Summary: The traditional role of woman as second-class citizen in the eyes of the law still exists in Israel. Although gains toward the establishment of full equality have been made, the struggle to bring about the necessary reforms goes on. Working women are helping to raise the conscious-

ness of those who have not yet realized the humiliating nature of their position, and hopefully the needed reforms will be made within the framework of the present law.⁹

Assignment: Find out how the National Council of Jewish Women was founded.

Things to do: 1) What effect do you think the election of Golda Meir as Prime Minister of Israel has had on the changing status of the Jewish woman?

2) Israeli women serve in the army. Do you think this will happen in America once the equal rights' amendment is passed?

Footnotes:

¹Molly Lyons Bar-David, Women in Israel(New York, 1952) p. 70.

²Ada Maimon, Women Build a Land(New York, 1962), p. 246.

³Bar-David, p. 75.

⁴Maimon, pp. 244-245.

⁵Bar-David, p. 75.

⁶Maimon, pp. 249-250.

⁷Bar-David, p. 71.

⁸Maimon, p. 251.

⁹Ibid., p. 249.

Lesson 14: National Council of Jewish Women: emphasis
on service to the community

Goals: 1) to show that women are more seriously involved
in organizations than men;
2) to discuss the history and contributions of
the National Council of Jewish Women

Procedure: 1) Ask the students to make a list of the
Jewish organizations to which their parents
belong. Chances are their mothers will
belong to more organizations than their
fathers.

Question: Why are women more prominent
than men in Jewish organizational
life?

Answer: Marshall Sklare made the following
comments in his study of the
Lakeville Jew:

The usual reasons cited for the
new prominence of the woman are:
(1) that the responsibilities of
the man in business and professional
life make it difficult for him
to be active in communal affairs,
(2) that the lack of such respon-
sibilities on the part of the
woman makes it easier for her to
be active, and (3) that since
the woman has a small family and
is not gainfully employed, she is
motivated to search for meaningful
activity in fields of endeavor
such as communal affairs. Are
these perspectives - particularly
the first and the second - valid?
It is true that men are less active

than women in all communal affairs, non-sectarian as well as Jewish. It is also obvious that involvement in organizations must find its place in the scarce leisure time available to the man. Furthermore, not only does the middle-class Jewish suburban woman have a more flexible schedule than the man (and presumably a greater amount of time) but to the extent that organizations are neighborhood- or community-based she is more strategically located; during the average day she has a greater opportunity to meet and confront her Jewish neighbors than does her spouse.

In reality, however, these are secondary considerations. For example, a significant proportion of Jewish men do not find occupational demands either so pressing or so engrossing as to prevent them from pursuing leisure-time interests. According to traditional norms, spare hours should be devoted both to religious study and to the assumption of communal responsibility, since such activities involve the performance of mitzvot. In Lakeville, however, men spend their leisure time, as least as often as do women, in a variety of activities which are personal, non-philanthropic, and intended for amusement - orientations foreign to traditional Jewish culture and antithetical to the thrust of the Jewish sacred system. We are thus justified in concluding that changes in the area of values, rather than in the character of occupational life, are the strategic considerations.

Underlying the point about a value change is the finding that even when the Lakeville man becomes involved with a Jewish organization, he does not invariably turn to the affairs of the community either as an opportunity to perform mitzvot or as a relief

from personal pursuits. Rather, a substantial number of men appear to seek in Jewish life a focal point for leisurely and pleasant association and consequently are attracted to expressive organizations - groups that appeal to the more private interests of individuals. A greater proportion of women, on the other hand, appear to seek involvement in instrumental organizations - groups that give them an opportunity to affect the lives of others. The evidence indicates that women are more commonly attracted to organizations with concrete and tangible goals than to those that only stress conviviality.¹

- 2) The National Council of Jewish Women was the first organized Jewish women's group. It was founded in 1893 by Hannah G. Solomon. Its original purpose was to further the cause of religious education and philanthropy, but it soon became active in all causes that affect humanity. Social reform and human betterment became its guiding principles.
- 3) The history of the National Council of Jewish Women is closely connected with the history of the United States. For example, the dawning of the twentieth century saw a serious problem developing in America - the difficulties imposed by increased immigration - and the government asked Council to help. Council responded with the development of the Port and Dock

Department which helped to decrease the threat of white slavery, exploitation, and sweatshop labor that faced the penniless immigrant women who arrived in America. Council women met all incoming boats and cared for the immigrants, feeding them, clothing them, and helping them to find relatives. Between 1905 and 1908, Council's largest expenditure, more than \$7,000, was spent on immigrant aid.

- 4) By 1911, Council had developed a complete program in the area of social legislation.

It

championed the elimination of child labor and the provision of adequate housing for low-income groups. It concerned itself also with health opportunities, mothers' pensions, slum clearance, food and drug regulations, wage and hour laws for women, purity of the press and movie censorship, uniform marriage and divorce laws, civil service for government employees, and the enactment of Federal anti-lynching laws - in short, all forms of legislation for the protection of children and women.²

- 5) During World War I, Council was a member of the Council of National Defense and contributed much to the alleviation of distress caused by the war. Mrs. Leo H. Herz, Executive Director, summed up Council's involvement in the community at the triennial convention in Denver in 1920:

The most important work done by the Sections, according to their own opinion, gives insight into the diversity of work undertaken. Sixty-seven Sections report war work as their most important work between 1917 and 1920. Activities mentioned by other Sections as first in importance were: education, philanthropy, child welfare, juvenile court, social centers, religion and religious schools, work for the blind, lecture courses, vacation homes, work for the deaf, scholarships, surveys, publications of bulletins, endowment of hospital beds, milk stations, Big Sister activities, civic work and music circles. Two Sections mention the banding together of Jewish women as their most important work.³

- 6) As World War II approached, Council grappled with the problem of anti-Semitism:

In order to stimulate interest in Jewish affairs, and to fortify Jewish women with a knowledge of Jewish history, tradition, and culture, so that they might combat the disintegrating forces of anti-Semitism and discrimination. Mrs. Arthur Brin, Mrs. Alexander Kohut, Mrs. Maurice L. Goldman, and Mrs. Mary G. Schonberg, Executive Director, met in New York in 1934 and laid plans for the organization of a Committee of One Thousand to assume leadership in these activities. In 1935 this temporary committee was expanded into the Department of Contemporary Jewish Affairs, which also included the work formerly done by the committees on religion and religious education. Its timely and widely distributed pamphlet, 'Anti-Semitism: A Study Outline,' stimulated one hundred and forty-five Sections to develop active study groups on the subject.

This pamphlet was one of the earliest attempts by any organization in America to meet logically and intelligently, with frank recognition of its import, this old and vital problem of Western civilization.

But the National Council of Jewish Women did not content itself with study alone. Just as it had pioneered in the 1890's in study circles and in direct social action, so again during the troubled 1930's it demonstrated its devotion to faith and humanity by giving prompt aid to Jewish refugee children from Germany. In 1934 it co-operated with other organizations and public-spirited citizens in forming the German Jewish Children's Aid, through whose efforts hundreds of Jewish children were rescued from Nazi oppression and placed in private homes in America, to be given the privilege of becoming citizens of the United States when they should reach the age of twenty-one.⁴

- 7) Peace, of course, was the greatest issue of the day, but there were other moral questions on which Council took a stand. Prominent among them was the question of birth control:

Several Sections were quite active in promoting birth control. In Brooklyn, the Council Section established a birth control clinic to advise married women whose health was at stake and to serve women of the submerged classes who were sent by social agencies.

The Tulsa Section joined with other groups to consider the sociological aspects of birth control.

The Milwaukee Section opposed a bill in the State Legislature prohibiting the dissemination of birth control methods.⁵

- 8) Invite a member of your local Section of the National Council of Jewish Women to discuss the development of this organization since 1945.

Ask her to place special emphasis on programs in which the Council is currently involved.

Summary: Sociological studies have shown that, for whatever reason, women are more apt to belong to organizations which strive to achieve human betterment. The National Council of Jewish Women was the first such organization for Jewish Women. Women from all branches of Judaism joined together to help the underprivileged, the refugee, the immigrant, the orphan, the soldier, and all who needed assistance. They grappled with the problems that faced their local communities as well as their nation. They were concerned with the problems that directly affected the Jewish community, but in effect, the special emphasis of this organization has always been placed on involvement in the total community. From the beginning, the passage of social legislation was one of its most basic aims, and social justice remains its most specific goal.

Assignment: Find out what programs your Temple sisterhood is involved in.

Things to do: 1) Trace the history of your local Section of the National Council of Jewish Women. The group probably has a historian who

can help

can help you, and perhaps a set of scrap-books recording its accomplishments has been kept.

- 2) Ask someone to report on the life of Hannah G. Solomon.

Footnotes:

¹Marshall Sklare and Joseph Greenblum, Jewish Identity on the Suburban Frontier(New York, 1967), pp. 257-258.

²National Council of Jewish Women, The First Fifty Years (1943), p. 35.

³Ibid., p. 35.

⁴Ibid., pp. 70-71.

⁵Paul Swerdlow, The American Jewess in the Second Quarter of the Twentieth Century(Cincinnati, 1964), p. 20.

Lesson 15: National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods;
emphasis on service to the temple

Goals: 1) to discuss the function of the temple sisterhood;
2) to suggest the ways in which the sisterhood can
most effectively serve the temple and its members

Procedure: 1) Pass around a Uniongram and ask the students
to identify it. If no one is able to,
explain that the Uniongram is like a telegram
which is sent by regular mail usually on
occasions of joy or sorrow and is sponsored
by the National Federation of Temple
sisterhoods. The money from the sale of
Uniongrams is used to support the YES (Youth,
Education, and Sisterhood) Fund. Through
these donations, the National Federation
of Temple Sisterhoods supports the National
Federation of Temple Youth and the Union of
American Hebrew Congregations by contributing
to the camp program and to the publication
of religious school textbooks. In addition
to furthering other sisterhood projects,
the fund specifically supports the training
of rabbinical students at the Hebrew Union
College-Jewish Institute of Religion through
the granting of financial aid and through
the maintenance of the Sisterhood Dormitory

which was originally the gift of the
National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods.

- 2) The National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods
is the women's branch of Reform Judaism.
It was organized in 1913 by the Union of
American Hebrew Congregations, and Mrs.
Abram Simon of Washington, D.C., was its
founder and first president.

Chronologically the local Sisterhoods come first; many of them are older than the National Federation. The National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods was born because Mrs. Abram Simon, the founder and first President, appreciated the lessons local Sisterhoods had to learn from each other and the effectiveness of united effort. As members of the National Federation, local needs still come first; however, actually, the National Federation is a projection of the individual Sisterhood unit. Today every Sisterhood, large or small, wherever it is situated, has a common purpose, which is to promote the welfare of its own particular congregation, to promote the welfare of every congregation in the Reform or Liberal or Progressive Jewish family, to help achieve a peaceful and happy world. Membership in NFTS is voluntary and in no way interferes with the autonomy of the local Sisterhood.

The objects of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, as set forth in its by-laws, are to bring all Sisterhoods into closer cooperation and association, to stimulate spiritual and educational activity, to advance Judaism and to serve Jewish and humanitarian causes, to cooperate with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, to espouse such religious causes as are particularly the work of Jewish women. This a very large and comprehensive program; no Sisterhood need go beyond the organization's own pattern to find vital work to undertake.¹

- 3) The local sisterhoods were established primarily as a means whereby women could actively participate in the temple. Although sisterhood members have always been encouraged to become involved in the community, their basic task is to serve the needs of the congregation. In keeping with this, their first concern has usually been maintenance of the religious school. It was often the sisterhood which paid teachers' salaries and furnished the school with supplies. And not only this, for the women served as room mothers as well, providing all the necessary trimmings for the proper celebration of the holidays - food for the model s'darim, candles for Chanukah, hamantaschen for Purim, honey and apples for Rosh Hashanah.
- 4) Adult education has also been a sisterhood concern. Funds were provided for lecture institutes and study groups. Correspondence courses in Jewish history, literature, and customs were begun for the benefit of isolated Jewish communities in the small towns. The Sisterhood Art Calendars introduced Biblical art and Jewish artists into Jewish homes across the country. And programs were begun to explain Judaism to the Christian

community.²

- 5) The sisterhood has also been involved in the field of worship, participating in services and providing the Oneg Shabbat which follows. While they participate weekly, mostly through lighting the candles, there is usually an annual Sisterhood Sabbath to honor the women of the sisterhood for their many contributions to the temple program. It has often been the sisterhood which has presented the temple with a new organ or financed the building of a chapel or remodelled the kitchen.
- 6) While the sisterhood's main goal is service to the temple, community projects have not been ignored. One of the most prominent and significant projects of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods has been its service to the blind. Sisterhood ladies spend many hours weekly recording material for the sightless, and with assistance of Rabbi Michael Aaronsohn who was blinded in World War I, the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods helped to create the Jewish Braille Institute of America. Through this Institute, possible largely through sisterhood activity and support,

the Jewish Braille Review is published and made available free of charge to both Jewish and non-Jewish blind persons.³

- 7) What is your local sisterhood doing and how do you think they can serve the temple more effectively? Has the time come for sisterhood to be more involved in community activities? (Examine sisterhood bulletins which have been published in the past few years.)
- 8) Do you think that the existence of a temple sisterhood tends to restrict the ways in which a woman can participate in the activities of the congregation? Is your temple sisterhood involved in the decision-making process of your congregation?

Summary: The National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods is a Reform Jewish organization which allows women to actively support the needs of the temple and participate in the various programs offered by the congregation. The National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods consists of local sisterhoods which are largely autonomous and self-supported. The fundamental task of each local sisterhood is to aid the fulfillment of its congregational program. Sisterhood ladies, then, in concentrating

on the temple rather than the community,
have been more concerned with meeting the
spiritual needs of the Jewish community
rather than its physical needs.

Assignment: Read The Hadassah Idea by Gloria Goldreich
Horowitz(New York, 1966).

Things to do: 1) Ask someone to report on the fascinating
life of Jane Evans, Executive Director,
National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods.
2) Find out if the Sisterhood organizations
of the Conservative and Orthodox movements
differ from that of the Reform movement.

Footnotes:

¹Ruth Jacobson, Manual for Sisterhoods(New York, 1954),
p. 28.

²Paul Swerdlow, The American Jewess in the Second Quarter
of the Twentieth Century(Cincinnati, 1964), pp. 61-62.

³Ibid., pp. 70-71.

Lesson 16: Hadassah: emphasis on service to Israel

Goals: 1) to understand the goals of Hadassah;
2) to familiarize the students with Hadassah's
contribution to the State of Israel

Procedure: 1) Pattern the class after the television
program "To Tell The Truth." Invite
three ladies from your local Hadassah
chapter to pose as Henrietta Szold. Ask
the class to act as the panel which will
question them. (Their questions should
be based on their reading of The Hadassah
Idea by Gloria Goldreich Horowitz which
should have been assigned the previous week.)

2) Begin with the following affidavit:
I, Henrietta Szold, visited Palestine
in 1909 and was appalled by the disease
and poverty so prevalent in the Holy Land.
As a result, I was instrumental in
organizing Hadassah in 1912, the major
contribution of which has been its medical
program. I was especially proud when I
myself handed diplomas to the first graduates
of the Henrietta Szold-Hadassah School of
Nursing in 1921. Since its inception,
Hadassah has met the medical needs of those
living in Palestine, battling such diseases

as malaria, trachoma, cholera, and tuberculosis. In 1939, the first patients were admitted to the Rothschild-Hadassah-University Hospital on Mt. Scopus and by 1949 fifty students were enrolled in the Hebrew University-Hadassah Medical School. Today, the Hadassah medical program is highly esteemed among the international medical community; healing, teaching, and research are its basic principles. Hadassah Hospital maintains 48 medical departments and clinics; Hadassah doctors travel around the world helping developing countries establish medical services;; Hadassah scientists publish over 400 research papers a year. To the deprived and the depressed, Hadassah represents promise and life, hope and fulfillment.¹ Hadassah supports other programs as well. I was the first director of the Aliyat HaNoar ("the ascent of youth"), an organization which developed in 1934 in answer to the threat of Nazism. It was dedicated to the rescue and transfer of Jewish children from Europe to Palestine, and today over 125,000 Youth Aliyah graduates are making valuable contributions to the State of Israel in every field from

agriculture to industry, from teaching to creative arts, from the defense forces to the diplomatic services.² Other key Hadassah projects are its program in the area of vocational education, its support of the Jewish National Fund, its volunteer service organization called Ya'A_l and its concern with Jewish education. In America, Hadassah's aim is the furthering of democratic ideals and the spread of knowledge and understanding. Official positions are issued in matters of significance which face the nation. Hadassah leaders are invited to attend briefing sessions sponsored by the government, and its members are kept informed on current issues. Representatives participate in local and national conferences, and Hadassah Magazine, which has over a million readers, presents articles by leading authorities in major fields.³ These are just some of the programs with which Hadassah is involved. With an eye on the future, progress continues to be a main concern of the thousands of dedicated women who give of their time and effort to make our organization a vital force in the history of the Jewish people. "In the life of the spirit, there is no ending that is not a beginning."⁴

- 3) Allow the students to question the three women. Then, have the entire class vote as to which woman represents Henrietta Szold.
- 4) If there is time, ask the women to explain some of the programs with which their chapter is currently involved.'

Summary: Hadassah is an organization which allows women from all branches of Judaism to translate their concern for the State of Israel into deeds. Its medical program, which is internationally acclaimed, has been its greatest contribution. It has not neglected, however, the areas of education, youth work, land reclamation, and Zionism. Without a doubt, its assistance in causing the dry bones of Israel to live and breathe again has been invaluable.'

Assignment: See if you can discover how and why and when B'nai B'rith Women evolved from B'nai B'rith.

- Things to do:
- 1) Take a survey among members of Hadassah and find out what the most common reasons for belonging to this organization are.
 - 2) See if you can obtain a film presentation concerning various programs in which Hadassah is involved.'

Footnotes:

¹Gloria Goldreich Horowitz, The Hadassah Idea
(New York, 1966), pp. 19-30.

²Ibid., pp. 31-34.

³Ibid., pp. 43-45.

⁴Ibid., p. 55

Lesson 17: B'nai B'rith Women: the fight to exist

- Goals: 1) to show how B'nai B'rith Women evolved from
B'nai B'rith;
2) to discuss the various programs in which B'nai
B'rith Women is involved

Procedure: 1) Begin by showing the audio-visual
presentation on the B'nai B'rith Women's
Children's Home in Israel. You can obtain
it from the B'nai Brith Women's District
Office in you area. This is an excellent
example of the humanitarian and philanthropic
work done by B'nai B'rith Women. The cost
of the home rose from \$100,000 to \$250,000;
the women pledged the entire amount and
undertook the maintenance of the building
as well.¹

- 2) B'nai B'rith is the oldest Jewish service
organization in America. It was founded
on October 13, 1843, for the "expressed
purpose of ending, or at least reducing, the
chaos and anarchy in Jewish life - or, as
one of the founders put it, 'of uniting and
elevating the Sons of Abraham.'"² Although
its specific task has always been the welfare
and creative survival of the Jewish people,
it has touched all humanity. It has been

in the forefront of the struggle for justice and equality, and its causes have been the causes of all people.

At the time of its beginning, B'nai B'rith was strictly a male organization. Beginning in 1859, however, proposals were raised periodically suggesting that women be admitted as members. These proposals failed to pass, and it was not until 1895 that permission was given to allow formation of women's auxiliaries. This was the first step in the development of B'nai B'rith Women:

The women did not wait long to take advantage of the new dispensation. The first auxiliary was formed in San Francisco on August 8, 1897, with Mrs. Herman Gutstadt as president. She was the wife of the incumbent president of District No. 4, and the mother of Richard E. Gutstadt who, forty years later, was to be the driving force in building the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League into American Jewry's leading defense and human-rights agency. Several other auxiliaries were founded in succeeding years, but the growth was very slow and spasmodic.

In 1959 the B'nai B'rith Women held as elaborate celebration of its fiftieth anniversary. A short history published at the time stated that the first few auxiliaries had all died out, and that the women's organization's real birthday was March 16, 1909, when San Francisco Auxiliary No. 1, as it was called, was installed. However, research for this volume revealed that at no time between 1897 and 1909 did all the auxiliaries disappear.

It is true that the original one

did, as well as most of the others. In fact, all the women's groups in District No. 4 had melted away by 1907, when the District No. 4 convention revised its Constitution to erase all mention of them. But they continued to function in other Districts. Before the ones in District No. 4 died out, others were started in Districts No. 1, 3, 5, and 6. Early in the twentieth century, Isaiah Ladies Auxiliary in New York City was an active group, and by 1910 the president of District No. 1 recommended, at the annual convention, that a 'Ladies League' be formed - presumably because there were enough groups in the District to form an association - although no such league was ever organized.

During the first decade of the century, the record spoke of 'several' auxiliaries in District No. 3, although the only one specifically named was the one in Braddock, Pennsylvania. It was chartered in 1905 and functioned continuously until 1931, when it was suspended. Actually, an auxiliary was organized in Madison, Wisconsin, early in 1909, and although the exact date is not recorded, it may well have been before March 16, when San Francisco Auxiliary No. 1 was born. Incidentally, in 1901 there were ten women's auxiliaries in Germany, which continued to exist until B'nai B'rith there was destroyed by the Nazis in 1937.'

In other words, there have been B'nai B'rith women's groups functioning uninterruptedly since 1897. Consequently, in 1959 the B'nai B'rith Women should have been celebrating its sixty-second anniversary instead of its fiftieth, and it will be seventy years old in 1967.³

For many years, however, the women's auxiliaries were few in number, and it was not until the 1930's that they began to grow rapidly. In 1938, women sought representation

at Supreme Lodge conventions, but they did not receive it. For the next triennial convention, each women's district was permitted one representative with voice but no vote, and she was to attend at her own District's expense.

Women wanted to become more active:

Consequently, in the autumn of 1940 the presidents of the six women's Districts (District No. 7 had no women's District organization yet) met in Washington and formed the B'nai B'rith Women's Supreme Council. The grandeur of the title belied reality, because it had practically no power or influence. Its purpose was to coordinate the activities of the auxiliaries, but for its first six years it had no professional national director, and its Executive Committee represented the six women's Districts, all of which were jealous of their autonomy. And everything was tightly under the control of the Order's Executive Committee, anyway.

Mrs. Lenore D. Underwood, San Francisco, was elected the Council's first president. At the time auxiliaries had some 35,000 members, and inspired by this national recognition, however hollow, they threw themselves into B'nai B'rith work with even more than their usual vigor.⁴

It was another ten years, however, before women were to receive representation.

The successful progress of the B'nai B'rith Women was recognized when they were given three seats on the Order's Executive Committee, with voice, vote, and expenses, and in addition all the officers of the Women's Supreme Council, and one member from each Women's District were granted full delegate status at Supreme Lodge conventions.⁵

It had taken a long time for women to be given their rightful place in the oldest Jewish service organization.

- 3) Ask members of the class to report on the various services and programs which B'nai B'rith Women supports, i.e. Belle-faire, Operation Stork, Hillel Foundation, Anti-Defamation League, B'nai B'rith Youth Organization, Adult Jewish Education, Leo N. Levi National Arthritis Hospital, B'nai B'rith Center at Rochester, Student Loan Fund of District Two, and the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Four Freedoms Library in Washington, D.C. Pamphlets are available to explain these various programs.
- 4) Discuss the B'nai B'rith Women Platform adopted at the International Triennial convention, February, 1971. It can be found in the March-April 1971 issue of Women's World published by B'nai B'rith Women. Of special interest should be the following statement on the status of women:

The status of women has steadily improved in recent years. In the majority of countries, women have the right to vote and to participate in the electoral process. They serve, though in proportionately limited numbers, in national parliaments, are members of congress, legislatures and the judiciary in many countries.

In their ranks are ambassadors, diplomats, mayors of cities, members of school boards, civil servants, lawyers, physicians and aquanauts.

Many laws, regulations and practices which once discriminated against women have been repealed or amended. Nevertheless, there are still many serious inequities affecting the status of women under law.

It is imperative that business and industry as well as the professions initiate and implement an open door policy for entry, placement, recognition and advancement of women.

Enlarging opportunities for women to hold political office and to participate equally in appointive posts on public advisory committees and commissions at all levels of government is long overdue. We urge that governments likewise place women in far greater numbers in positions of trust and responsibility.

B'nai B'rith Women advocates that business and industry equate relevant specific volunteer experience in relation to job entry.

High quality and adequate day care facilities for children of all working mothers must be provided through the initiative and support of both public and private sources.

Ratification, enforcement and enactment of U.N. Conventions will eliminate political discrimination as well as discrimination on the basis of sex. Therefore, B'nai B'rith Women advocates continued support of the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women and the various national Commissions.

B'nai B'rith Women urges the government of Israel to examine its legislation regarding the rights of widows. We urge the freeing of those women from their deceased husband's families, giving them the legal right to decide their own marital future.

How women exercise their prerogatives, carry out their responsibilities and work together to attain their full

rights and recognition will be the determining factor in attaining their birthright - true and equal status in the world society.⁶

Summary: It took many years for B'nai B'rith to recognize the talents and capabilities of women and to grant them the rights of full participation through the organization of B'nai B'rith Women. In contrast to the other major Jewish women's organizations, B'nai B'rith Women is relatively young. Its contributions to Jewish life and to humanity, however, have matched those of the other groups. Its concern has been to build a better world, and with that goal in mind, its members continue to give of themselves.

Assignment: See if you can find any prayers in the Union Prayerbook which you feel discriminate against women.

Things to do: 1) Ask a member of your local B'nai B'rith Women's chapter to present the Dolls for Democracy program.

2) Offer your services for the Operation Stork program organized in conjunction with the March of Dimes.

Footnotes:

¹Edward E. Grusd, B'nai B'rith: The Story of a Covenant (New York, 1966), p. 264.

²Ibid., p. 12.

³Ibid., pp. 115-116.

⁴Ibid., pp. 222-223.

⁵Ibid., p. 251.

⁶"B'nai B'rith Women Platform," Women's World,
March-April, 1971, p. 10.

Lesson 18: "...who has not made me a woman."

- Goals: 1) to discuss the apparent inequality found in Jewish liturgy;
- 2) to suggest a way in which liturgy can be made more meaningful to all those who are participating in it

Procedure: 1) The following blessing is contained in the traditional liturgy: "Praised are You, O Lord or God, King of the Universe, who has not created me a woman." By reciting this blessing, a man is merely thanking God for giving him the obligation to keep the commandments from which women are exempt:

...There is no need to deny that in origin these words may well have reflected an assumption of male superiority, perhaps even arrogance. What is important, however - in this, as with all religious customs and rituals - is not merely the pristine intent but what the developing tradition did with it. Subsequent generations of commentators made it unmistakably clear that the man who thanked God daily for making him male was no more downgrading womanhood than the cohayn who, in a parallel blessing, voiced gratitude for having been made a priest, meant to disparage others.

In both cases, the concept of mitzvah is involved. For the knowledgeable Jew, a mitzvah, while of course entailing additional responsibility, affords the individual the privilege of serving God in special ways. The priest expressed his gratitude

for the fact that he was permitted to perform mitzvot beyond those assigned to other Jews; this did not mean that he judged himself to be innately superior to them. Similarly, men were grateful for the fact that they had mitzvot to fulfill of which women were absolved because of other equally important responsibilities. It would be unrealistic to deny that there must have been men from time to time who misinterpreted this blessing into a justification for personal aggrandizement and Jews generally who distorted the meaning of chosenness to infer privilege rather than obligation. In all these cases, however, we must judge by the highest understanding of authentic spokesmen, not the self-serving interpretations of the ignorant.

At the point in the morning Service where male worshippers recite the foregoing blessing, women say the following: 'Baruch atah Adonai, elohaynu melech ha-olam, she-a-sanee kir-tzo-no - Praised be the Eternal our God, Ruling Spirit of the Universe, who has made me according to His will.' These words were inserted during the Middle Ages, when many women began for the first time to read the entire morning Service. If Judaism were as antagonistic to women and their rights as some current extremists would have us believe, either they would have been forbidden altogether from full participation in public worship or no attempt would have been made to provide alternate wording for them.¹

The accompanying blessing for a woman does not necessarily imply a concern for a woman's feelings. Rather, there are those who say that it seems to imply that a woman should be grateful for her position as a housewife and mother even if she desires fuller participation with regard to congregational life and ritual matters.² In this

sense, the blessing seems to instil a feeling of guilt within the woman who remains unsatisfied with housework and unfulfilled in being just a mother.

- 2) Traditionally, women are not counted in the minyan (the quorum necessary for public worship):

The minimum of ten is evidently a survival in the Synagogue from the much older institution in which ten heads of families made up the smallest political subdivision. In Ex. xviii. Moses, on the advice of Jethro, appoints chiefs of tens, as well as chiefs of fifties, of hundreds, and of thousands....

The Babylonian Talmud...finds the Scriptural authority for ten men constituting a congregation in the words (Num. xiv. 27): 'How long shall I bear with this evil congregation which murmur against Me?' which it refers to the scouts who were sent to spy out the land of Canaan, twelve in all, two of whom, Caleb and Joshua, were faithful, and only ten 'evil.'

All male Israelites of the proper age, unless they are under the ban, or have openly severed their connection with their brethren by professing a hostile creed, are counted among the needful ten though they are notorious and habitual sinners (Orah Hayyim, 55,12).³

- 3) When a woman came to public worship services (usually she came only on Shabbat), she was not permitted to sit with her husband. She sat either in the balcony or in the back of the room behind a partition. Some attribute this practice to Temple times,

when there was a separate Court of the Women. There appears to be no legal basis for it, however, either in the Talmud or in the Shulchan Aruch.⁴ Others say this separation of the sexes was a precaution against the kind of levity which could occur. A woman was worthy to take part in public worship, but her presence might arouse passion in men, thereby distracting them from the obligation to pray.⁵

- 4) According to the Talmud, a woman is permitted to read from the Torah: "All are qualified to to be among the seven (who read), even a minor and a woman, only the Sages said that a woman should not read in the Torah out of respect for the congregation (Megillah 23a)." In other words, if a woman were to read, it means there are no men in the congregation qualified to do so.
- Others say that a woman is not permitted to read from the Torah because she is ritually unclean during her menstrual period. Rather than embarrass her by asking if she is menstruating, it is better to say that she never can read from the

Torah. This view seems to contradict the following Talmudic statement, however: "It has been taught: R. Judah b. Bathyra used to say: words of Torah are not susceptible of uncleanness... as it says, 'Is not My word like as fire' (Jer. 23:29). Just as fire is not susceptible of uncleanness, so words of Torah are not susceptible of uncleanness' (Ber. 22a)."

- 5) Reform Judaism may have abolished many of the traditional liturgical phrases and customs which discriminated against women, but necessary changes have not been made in the Reform prayerbook. Included in the High Holiday liturgy, for example, is a special meditation for women. This prayer emphasizes the responsibilities of the woman as wife and mother. There is no special meditation for men. (See Union Prayerbook, Volume II, p. 217.)

The vocabulary of the liturgy is male-oriented. Consider the following examples:

Praised be Thou, O Lord, God of our fathers, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, great, mighty and exalted. Thou bestowest lovingkindness upon all Thy children. Thou rememberest the devotion of the fathers.... (UPB, Vol. I, p. 18).

Rock of Israel, Father of all men!
We are stirred by the sacred memories
of Thy wondrous help unto our fathers
in days of old. When violent men
rose up against them to desecrate
Thy sanctuary, to demolish its altar
and to extinguish the light of the
Torah, Thou didst reveal Thyself
as their protector and deliverer.
The weak faltered and knelt before
the idols. But men of valor roused
by Thy spirit fought for freedom of
conscience and the right to worship
God, (UPB, Vol. I, pp. 90-91).

May we never fail in gratitude to our
fathers for this blessed heritage
and for the martyrdom they suffered
in its defense, (UPB, Vol. I, p. 95).

Wherever men groan under the yoke of
servitude, hasten to deliver them.
Cleanse the hearts of men and their
rulers of the passions of hate and
strife...On that day, all men shall
come to know that they are brothers...
(UPB, Vol. I, p. 182).

Confirm our faith in Thy covenant
that we may continue to carry out
Thy message of brotherhood and
peace among all the children of men,
(UPB, Vol. I, p. 183).

Each year on this holy festival this
vow is renewed, when our sons and
daughters stand before Thee to enter
into Israel's eternal covenant. In
the same words which their fathers
spoke, they vow to do and to heed
and with the same devotion they pledge
themselves unto Thee. Be with them,
O God, as Thou wast with their fathers,
(UPB, Vol. I, p. 198).

On this Festival of Shavuot, we recall
the day when, at the mountain of
revelation, our fathers vowed to govern
their will by Thine and to accept those
ordinances by which man may nobly live,
(UPB, Vol. I, p. 212).

...Who maketh the barren woman to dwell as a joyful mother of children, (UPB, Vol. I, p. 244).

Words such as "fathers," "men," and "mankind" need to be changed to words like "ancestors," "human being," "individual," "person," "people," "humanity," and "human community."

Summary: Reform Judaism abolished the traditional blessing, "...who has not made me a woman," questioned the need for a minyan, allowed women to read from the Torah, and permitted mixed sitting. Discrimination still exists in the liturgy, however, and changes must be made to allow fuller and more meaningful participation by every congregant, whether male or female.

Assignment: What Jewish customs and ceremonies do you feel discriminate against women?

Things to do: 1) Are there other liturgical passages which women might find objectionable?
2) Rewrite some of the prayers which you find discriminatory in the UPB or else write an original prayer which you find appropriate for community worship.

Footnotes:

¹ Roland B. Gittelsohn, "Women's Lib and Judaism," Midstream (October, 1971), pp. 52-53.

² Rachael Goldman, "The Liberation of the Yiddisha Mama," The Village Voice, February 11, 1971, p. 27.

³ "Minyan," Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. 8 (New York, 1904), 603.

⁴ Sylvan Schwartzman, Reform Judaism in the Making (New York, 1951), p. 183.

⁵ Emily Solis-Cohen, Jr., Woman in Jewish Law and Life (Philadelphia, 1932), p. 50.

Lesson 19: "... and commanded us to bring our sons
into the covenant of Abraham our father."

Goals: 1) to show the distinction between sexes which
occurs in Jewish customs and ceremonies;
2) to discuss ways in which discrimination
against women can be eliminated

Procedure: 1) The idea of male superiority is implanted
within Jewish children from birth. On the
eighth day of his existence, the baby boy
is circumcised and named. This is not
a simple private ceremony, however;
relatives and friends gather together
for a joyous celebration usually at
the child's home. On the other hand,
baby girls are named in the synagogue.
Their fathers are given the honor of being
called to the Torah. There may be a
reception following the service (perhaps
the parents will give the Oneg Shabbat),
but there is rarely a home celebration
like the one given for the baby boy.
(Hayyim Schauss devotes pages and pages
in his The Lifetime of a Jew to a discussion
of circumcision feasts while the naming of
a girl receives only a few paragraphs.)
Question: How can we eliminate this
discriminatory practice while

at the same time retaining
the naming ceremony?

Answer: Let circumcision be a private ceremony with only the parents, doctor, and rabbi present, and let the joyous celebration which now takes place at the time of circumcision take place when the child, either boy or girl, is named. Write a naming ceremony like the following which would be suitable for either a boy or a girl:

ברוכים והוא שמ' ד'

Blessed are all who have come in
here on this happy occasion.

Generations ago, it was decreed
that from God's faithful servants,
Abraham and Sarah, there would arise
a multitude of nations. In keeping
with that promise, they were granted,
though advanced in years, the gift
of a new life, and the covenant of
our tradition was established with
them and with their descendants
through Isaac their son.

Once again, the gift of a new life
has graciously been granted. The

grateful parents, _____,
stand before the community of Israel
in thanksgiving and in joy at this
fulfillment of their love, but at
the same time mindful of the obli-
gations it places upon them. They
seek to raise their son/daughter
according to the precepts of our
heritage and the principles of
our tradition. We pray that they
might be granted the patience,
understanding, and wisdom necessary
in rearing a child.

ברוך אתה ה' אלֵהֵינוּ מֵעַתָּה וְעַד
שֶׁהָיִינוּ וְקִיַּמְנוּ וְנִשְׁמְרוּ לְפָנֶיךָ.
Blessed is God by whose eternal

power we have been kept alive,
sustained, and permitted to

celebrate this joyous occasion.
ברוך אתה ה' אלֵהֵינוּ מֵעַתָּה וְעַד
בִּרְאָא פְרִי עֵץ
Blessed is God by whose creative

power the human community brings
forth wine from the fruit of the
vine.

As wine warms the human heart, so
may the life of this child be warm
with happiness and peace. May he/

she be sustained in life and health
and may he/she be known in the
Household of Israel by the name

_____. May it
become a name honored and respected,
a credit to all humanity. May he/
she so grow and develop as to find
favor in the sight of God and his/
her fellow human beings, and may
he/she live a long and useful life,
a life of peace, that he/she might
bring blessing to his/her family,
to Israel, and to all humanity.

Parents' Prayer:

It is the way of parents to
care for their children. Yet
we would not protect you over-
much or overlong so that our
love becomes a prison from
which you must escape. It is
in this spirit that today we
declare to you: your existence
is your possession, not ours.
Out of our love and concern,
we intrude in your life for a
little while, to help you live
and grow. It is our hope and
prayer that we will know when
that time is done. For then,
with grace and respect, we
must return to you what has
been ours only in trust - that
which has always been rightfully
yours; yourself. Blessed are
you, our child, in the newness
of your existence; blessed are
we who have been enriched by
your life.¹

יגדכך ה' וישמך

May your life be filled with
blessing and with accomplishment.

יאר ה' כנין אל'ך ויאנך

May your life shine with dignity
and with freedom.

ישא ה' כנין אל'ך וישם כך שלום

May you always know the creative
harmony of peace. Amen.

- 2) In the late Middle Ages, Bar Mitzvah evolved as a ceremony in which a thirteen year old boy accepted upon himself the obligations of religious observance. Since women were exempt from many of the six hundred thirteen commandments, there was no need for a girl to participate in a similar ceremony and so, just as at the time of birth, the girl was again deprived of a celebration. But more importantly, her entrance into adult life was ignored, and she was not permitted to enjoy the sense of accomplishment her brother felt when he reached the age of thirteen. (We must remember, however, that girls were usually married at a much earlier age, i.e., age thirteen.)

Reform Judaism discarded Bar Mitzvah because the essential features of the ceremony - laying tefilin and being called up to the Torah as one of the seven men called every Sabbath - were no longer of prime importance. Instead, confirmation was instituted. Originally, this ceremony took place in religious school for boys only. Later, it was transferred to the synagogue and girls were included. It took place on a special Sabbath, such as the Sabbath during Passover or Chanukah, and only gradually became linked to Shavuoth.²

In recent years, many Reform congregations have re-instituted Bar Mitzvah, and for girls the ceremony of Bat Mitzvah has been introduced. Some congregations, however, have Bar Mitzvah for boys and a Night of Recognition for girls. This is perhaps a step in the right direction but still does not fulfill the need for equality. If we are to insure the right of every person to develop to its fullest his potential as a creative individual, then we must either abolish the ceremony of Bar Mitzvah altogether or else be

certain that girls have the same opportunity as boys to obtain recognition for the studies that they have completed through participating in Bat Mitzvah.

- 3) The traditional Shabbat family observance re-inforces the traditional male-female roles. The woman spends Friday preparing for the Sabbath - cleaning house, baking chalah, cooking all the meals for Shabbat since she is not permitted to cook on Saturday, scrubbing the kids, making sure dinner is ready when her husband returns from services. Her reward for all this work was lighting the candles, but by that time she was exhausted:

She had to work like hell for that little reward...Let me tell you, those women hustled. No balebosta would be shamed by not meeting that deadline. No time clock is as threatening as that sun falling. No sir!(man-boss).}

After the mother blessed the candles, the father said kiddush and blessed the children. As far as his daughters were concerned, his blessing reflected the hope that they would marry and have children. Then, the husband turned to his wife and recited Proverbs 31:10-31.

Rabbis point to the verses from Proverbs

customarily recited on the Sabbath by good Jewish husbands as evidence of the high esteem in which women were held. I would ask them to take a more analytical look at those verses. 'A good wife, who can find? She is far more precious than rubies... she is like a merchant-ship...she considers a field and buys it...she plants a vineyard...has strong arms... rises early and works late...spins and weaves...makes linen garments and sells them...and eats not of the bread of idleness.' Meanwhile her husband is 'known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.' The Jewish woman was not invited to 'sit in the gates,' nor was she valued for her wisdom, moral or spiritual strength, but she was valued quite simply for⁴ her economic utility to her husband.

Not only does the passage portray woman as an economic asset to her husband, but someone in the class may also suggest that it

exemplifies the application of scorn via the method of praise....though these verses soar to exalted heights in their apotheosis of the ideal woman, the key phrase is the first one. 'A good wife who can find?' It's as if the sage had said, 'Now I'm going to indicate the qualities of the ideal woman; but, unfortunately, and as you well know, she is nowhere to be found.' Hence, seen in the light of the opening phrase, the following verses of praise are to be construed, by contrast, as a derisive commentary on the 'real' woman.⁵

It is important to note that this view has no real scholarly basis. Roger Klein included the following comment in his thesis:

I have sought corroboration for the following interpretation of Proverbs 31:10 from Dr. Matitahu Tsevat, Professor of Bible at the Hebrew Union College.

Dr. Tsevat could not agree with my interpretation, primarily on the basis of the context of the passage, the nature of this kind of literature, and the length of the praise of the woman. Although I have the utmost respect for both the scholarship and interpretative skill of Dr. Tsevat, I must admit that I am not convinced by his arguments.⁶

Question: How can we make the Shabbat
ritual more meaningful?

Answer: Eliminate the reading of Proverbs 31
and the traditional blessing of the
children by the father. Include
instead the following reading after
which the parents together bless
their children:

The Rabbis tell us that he who loves
his wife like himself, and honors
her more than himself, and rears
his children in the proper way, will
have peace in his home; that woman
was not created from man's head, that
he should command her, nor from his
feet, that she should be his slave,
but rather from his side, that she
should be near his heart. In the
spirit of Sabbath joy and beauty,
then, let husbands and wives reaffirm
the bond of love which unites them,
giving meaning to their lives and

allowing dreams to become realities,
and together let them bless their
children, the fulfillment of their
love.

Fathers and mothers to their children:
As a human being filled with creativity
and goodness, may you be sustained
in life and health, and may your
actions be worthy of honor and
respect. May you live a long and
useful life, that you might bring
blessing to our family, to Israel,
and to the entire human community.

- 4) Although the woman ushered in the Sabbath,
she was not permitted full participation
in the ceremony ushering it out:

At the expiration of the sabbath, the ceremony is more elaborate. Known as Habdalah, or 'Separating,' it is performed by the master of the house after the evening prayers. The officiant takes a special candle made of two intertwining pieces of wax and yielding a double flame, a box of spices, and a glass filled to overflowing with wine or any other beverage. He then recites a formula which begins with a threefold invocation to the prophet Elijah bidding him come speedily 'with the Messiah, the scion of David,' continuing with a formula in which God is blessed for 'separating the holy from the profane, Israel from the heathen, and sabbath from weekdays,' and concluding with a separate benediction over each of the three

ritual objects. When he blesses the candle, he makes a point of curving his hand and looking intently at his fingernails, and when he blesses the wine or beverage, he cups his hands over it and gazes into it in the light of the twin flame. At the conclusion of the ceremony, the candle is extinguished in that portion of the liquid which has spilled over into the saucer or silver tray, while the cup is passed in turn to all the males and children in the company.. Women may not partake of it; indeed, a popular superstition asserts that if they do so, they will grow mustaches!?

Since the theme of Havdalah is separation, the fact that women are prohibited from drinking the wine tends to place them in the same category as the profane, the heathen, and the weekdays.

- 5) On Simchat Torah, the ceremony of transmitting the Torah is totally male-oriented. Fathers and sons carry the Torah scrolls during the hakafot. Fathers and sons receive the rabbi's blessing:

Into our hands hast Thou placed Thy law to be handed from father to son and taught by one generation to another. Through all the ages, whatever befell them, our people remained steadfast in loyalty to Thy Torah. It was carried into exile in the arms of fathers that their sons might not lose their birth-right...May those who stand before Thee this day be symbols of all the fathers and sons in Israel...^o

As it stands now, we include only half the congregation in this ceremony. How much more meaningful it would be if we included

the entire congregation and allowed mothers and daughters to participate as well! (This is beginning to happen in some Reform congregations.)

Summary: There are several Jewish customs and ceremonies which openly discriminate against the female sex, thereby reinforcing the concept of male superiority. Continued support of such customs and ceremonies is an inauthentic response in light of the sweeping changes made by Reform Judaism, for Reform Judaism granted full equality to women. But if women are to be equal then changes must be made in practice to correspond to the equality granted women on paper. Ceremonies must be reshaped so that they are applicable to every person, customs must be re-evaluated, and liturgies rewritten. Only then can we speak of real equality for women.

Assignment: Reread one of the religious school textbooks you used in the primary grades. How does it portray the Jewish woman?

Things to do: 1) Make a list of the ways in which you feel your congregation discriminates against women in the area of customs and ceremonies and share it with your rabbi.

2) Write a service which you feel would be

appropriate for Sisterhood Sabbath.

Footnotes:

¹From a naming service prepared by David Fass

²Hayyim Schauss, The Lifetime of a Jew(New York, 1950), p. 120.

³Rachael Goldman, "The Liberation of the Yiddisha Mama," The Village Voice, February 11, 1971, p. 50.

⁴Ruth F. Brin, "Can a Woman be a Jew?," Reconstructionist, October 25, 1968, p. 9.

⁵Roger C. Klein, The Power of Women: Toward an Understanding of the Jewish Response(Cincinnati, 1971), pp. 3-4.

⁶Ibid., p. 4.

⁷Theodor H. Gaster, Festivals of the Jewish Year (New York, 1952), pp. 275-276.

⁸Union Prayerbook, Volume II(New York, 1940), p. 263.

Lesson 20: How we perpetuate the stereotyped image
of the Jewish woman

- Goals: 1) to make the students aware of the stereotyped
images presented in our textbooks;
2) to show how we can change these images

- Procedure: 1) Make a list of the names of women you
studied about during your years in
religious school. How many can you
remember?
- 2) The religious school curriculum has
almost totally ignored the Jewish woman,
although since 1957 Rabbi Sylvan Schwartzman,
Professor of Education, Hebrew Union College-
Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati,
has been urging that a course on Jewish
heroines be included. Books like Great
Jewish Women by Elma Ehrlich Levinger,
The Women of Israel by Grace Aguilar,
The Jewish Woman by Nahida Remy, and Her
Children Call Her Blessed by Franz Kobler
are rarely used. (These books need revising,
but they are better than nothing.) Courses
concerning Jewish leaders and heroes
seldom mention any women. Just glance
through the Table of Contents in works like
First Book of Bible Heroes by Dona Z. Meilach,

Jewish Heroes by Sadie Weilerstein,
and Leaders of our People by Joseph
H. Gumbiner. Whatever happened to the
heroines of our people? The Jewish People,
Book III by Deborah Pessin is described
in Outline of the Curriculum for the
Jewish Religious School by the Union of
American Hebrew Congregations as "a
beautifully written history which seeks
to give a proper balance between fact
and feeling, personality and people,"¹
yet it fails to mention even the old
favorites like Emma Lazarus and Rebecca
Gratz. Just as historical treatments in
general have ignored the contributions
of women, so too has our religious school
program clearly ignored the contributions
of the Jewish woman toward the survival
of our people.

- 3) Pass out copies of various textbooks used
in religious school. Ask the students to
read specific chapters and to evaluate the
portrayal of the characters found in them.
Particularly good for this exercise are
the following:

"Israel is Many Men," Bible Stories for Little
Children, Book Three, Betty R. Hollender
(New York, 1960), pp. 2-3.

Question: Did no women contribute to
Israel's survival as a people?

"In The Evening," Hillel's Happy Holidays,
Mamie G. Gamoran(Cincinnati, 1939), pp. 25-31.

Question: Does the Jewish woman ever
go to services or is she only
concerned with feeding her
family?

"Cinnamon Grass for Simchas Torah," G'dee,
Helen Fine(New York, 1958), pp. 44-53.

Question: Why can't mothers and
daughters be included in the
ceremony for transmitting
the Torah?

"A Crown Prince for the Sabbath," G'dee,
Helen Fine(New York, 1958), pp. 2-11.

Question: Why isn't Mother mentioned
in Debra's poem?

"Four Holidays in One," Days and Ways,
Mamie G. Gamoran(Cincinnati, 1941), pp. 51-67.

Question: Why can't women participate
in such events as building the
sukah and carrying the Torah
during the hakafot?

Overall question: How do stories like these
affect the thoughts and
attitudes of little girls
in their most formative
years?

- 4) What changes would you make if the Union of American Hebrew Congregations asked you to edit the revised editions of these textbooks? Try rewriting some of the above stories.
- 5) Not only do our textbooks perpetuate the familiar stereotype of the Jewish woman but so do the homemaking manuals which have been written for the Jewish woman. The following examples are from Across the Threshold, a publication of the Conservative movement. I include them because they are typical of the attitude of our society toward women in general, an attitude which must be changed.

On Shabbat morning, dressed in their 'holiday best,' the family should go to the synagogue services. Everyone should dress appropriately; women should remember to wear hats. No packages or gifts should be carried to the synagogue. You, as the housewife, may have to leave for the synagogue a little later than the others, but be sure to be on time for the Torah reading.²

Don't accept social or business engagements for the Sabbath. 'We always have dinner with the family on Shabbos is a good answer to such invitations.'³

It is the woman of the house who ushers in the Holy Days by kindling the festive candles on both evenings of Rosh Hashanah, reciting the two blessings special to the occasion....

The father and other members of the family should proceed to the synagogue for the evening service at sundown; the housewife may be too busy to attend this service. If she stays home, she should greet the returning worshippers with a cheerful 'leshanah tovah' ('May it be a good year!')⁴

...but Sukkot does provide a welcome change of mood. To be sure, you will have menus to think of, but they will be like those for any Sabbath or yom tov meals. As for the job of building the sukkah, that should be delegated to the menfolk, while the decoration of the sukkah is rightfully the children's job.⁵

Shavuot makes us keenly aware that it is principally in the home that the Ten Commandments must be stressed. By the emphasis on honoring Father and Mother, by the observance of a Day of Rest, by her social conduct, and finally through the inculcation of the love of God, the woman sets the moral example.. In the kitchen, in the living room, in the bedroom, her standard for ethical Jewish living influences the family.⁶

Your lu'ah will remind you of some occasions that may not be too familiar to you - the minor feasts and fasts.⁷

The average Jewish woman may not be as familiar as her husband is with the names and significance of many of the objects in the synagogue, or with the basic books of the Jewish heritage.⁸

It is possible for every child to receive a good Jewish education today. The important thing is that you enroll your child, boy or girl, for this education in his early years; that you encourage respect for learning, and see that study is continued, if at all possible, well beyond the elementary school level. This is as

true for the girl as it is for the boy. In her future role as wife and mother, the girl will be a forceful influence in the home.⁹

These passages clearly reflect the view that a woman's place is in the home.

Furthermore, they insult the modern Jewish woman's intelligence by implying that she knows little or nothing about various customs and ceremonies. How degrading to have an author suggest such a trite phrase for declining Shabbat invitations! How ridiculous to ignore the moral example a woman might set in the community or the influence which a father equally exerts upon his family through the way in which he lives his life.

Summary: Our educational process perpetuates the familiar stereotype of the Jewish woman. She is pictured as the perfect homemaker who has little to do with the temple. This image is implanted in the minds of our children and becomes so deeply entrenched that a little girl rarely thinks of becoming anything but a wife and mother and certainly not a rabbi or cantor. If we are to change this very common portrait, we must rewrite our textbooks and insist that our sons and daughters participate together, in an equal fashion, in all religious observances and events.

Assignment: Read Marjorie Morningstar by Herman Wouk.

- Things to do: 1) Discuss your religious school's curriculum with your rabbi and make suggestions as to how it can be changed to devote more time to the story of the Jewish woman.
- 2) Sally Priesand has often said that one of ~~the~~ most important effects of her ordination as a rabbi is the fact that little girls can now grow up knowing that the rabbinate is an option they can consider. Do you agree?

Footnotes:

¹p. 49.

²Shonie B. Levi and Sylvia R. Kaplan, Across the Threshold (New York, 1959), p. 69.

³Ibid., p. 75.

⁴Ibid., p. 86.

⁵Ibid., p. 97.

⁶Ibid., p. 115.

⁷Ibid., p. 139.

⁸Ibid., p. 160.

⁹Ibid., p. 165.

Lesson 21: Marjorie Morningstar

- Goals: 1) to examine Herman Wouk's portrayal of the Jewish woman;
- 2) to discuss a woman's right to choose a career over marriage or to combine both

Procedure: 1) Begin with the following quote:

'But that's neither here nor there. I was perfectly willing to do as he wished. I wanted to get some backbone and straighten out, if possible. I didn't much like being a loafer... I didn't understand myself at all then, So I dutifully began making the rounds of the West Side among the eligible girls. I must have had dates with nine tenths of them. That's how I became such a connoisseur of Shirley. I went out with Shirley after Shirley. It was uncanny. She was everywhere. I would hear about some wonderful new girl - Susan Fain, Helen Kaplan, Judy Morris, the name didn't matter. I'd telephone her, make a date go up to the apartment, she'd open the door - and there would stand Shirley. In a different dress, a different body, looking at me out of different eyes, but with that one unchanging look, the look of Shirley. The respectable girl, the mother of the next generation, all tricked out to appear gay and girlish and carefree, but with a terrible threatening solid dullness jutting through, like the gray rocks under the spring grass in Central Park. Behind her, half the time, would loom her mother, the frightful giveaway, with the same face as Helen's or Susan's, only coarsened, wrinkled, fattened, with the deceiving bloom of girlhood all stripped away, showing naked the grim horrid respectable determined dullness, oh God.' Noel stood and walked back and forth, his heels making the hollow dock boom. 'Oh God, Marjorie, the dullness of the

mothers! Smug self-righteousness mixed with climbing eagerness, and a district attorney's inquisitive suspicion - Judge Erhmann's oldest boy, they say he's brilliant but I don't know, not solid, wants to be a composer, something crazy like that, also I hear he's been mixed up with women, doesn't do his work at school - Marjorie, it's amazing, absolutely amazing, how the grapevine works among the mothers. I was feared. The word was out that I was a fascinating loafer. It was quite true. The peculiar thing was that I affected Shirley the way whiskey hits an Indian. She knew I was bad for her, but I drove her crazy. Marjorie, I have my conceit, but it doesn't extend to my romantic career on the West Side. I tell you soberly I was like a man with a cane walking down a lane of hyacinths, smashing flowers right and left. They all recovered, mind you. Shirley is indestructible. They're all married now - to dentists, doctors, woolen manufacturers, lawyers, whatever you please - but I assure you they remember Saul Ehrmann. And it wasn't always one-sided. I remember a couple of them. I've been ragingly in love with Shirley, you see. That's the worst tormentor of all.¹

How is Wouk's portrayal of Mrs. Morgenstern reflected in the above quote? Is she a typical Shirley's mother?

2) Contrast the following statement with the portrayal of Marjorie found in the last chapter: "Furthermore, I'm going to be an actress, not a fat dull housewife with a big engagement ring..."²

3) Are you satisfied with the way in which Wouk ended his novel? Do you feel that

Marjorie has betrayed herself?

4) How did Marjorie's loss of virginity affect her life?

5) 'Shirley doesn't play fair, you see. What she wants is what a woman should want, always has and always will - big diamond engagement ring, house in a good neighborhood, furniture, children, well-made clothes, furs - but she'll never say so. Because in our time those things are supposed to be stuffy and dull. She knows that. She reads novels. So, half believing what she says, she'll tell you the hell with that domestic dullness, never for her. She's going to paint, that's what - or be a social worker, or a psychiatrist, or an interior decorator, or an actress, always an actress if she's got any real looks - but the idea is she's going to be somebody. Not just a wife. Perish the thought! She's Lady Brett Ashley, with witty devil-may-care whimsey and shocking looseness all over the place. A dismal caricature, you understand, and nothing but talk. Shirley's a good girl, while Lady Brett was a very ready hand at taking her pants off. To simulate Lady Brett, however, as long as she's in fashion, Shirley talks free and necks on a rigidly graduated scale, which varies from Shirley to Shirley, but not such a hell of a lot -'

What makes it so difficult for people to believe that a woman might desire something more than just a husband and children, that she might need to fulfill her creative potential in some other way than running a household? How can we change traditional attitudes which insist that a woman's place

is in the home?

Summary: Mrs. Morgenstern as portrayed by Herman Wouk is the typical Jewish mother who wants to see her daughter married to a doctor or lawyer, while Marjorie prefers a career. Her desire to become an actress is never fulfilled, however, and as Mrs. Milton Schwartz, she joins the ranks of the stereotyped Yiddishe mama. That she chose housewifery to acting reflects the attitude that marriage is not only a necessity for a woman but the only thing she really wants. In Marjorie's case, the full enjoyment of her marriage is marred by her loss of virginity and she is in some way permanently maimed although Wouk has insisted on a bittersweet happy ending.⁴

This novel marked a literary milestone in that it portrayed the struggles of a Jewish girl passing from girlhood to womanhood. The stereotyped image of the Jewish mother, however, was triumphant in the end. We are still waiting for a literary work which will portray the inner conflicts and outer obstacles with which a woman must contend in her attempt to fulfill her potential in whatever way she finds most meaningful, be it marriage or career or both.

Assignment: Read Portnoy's Complaint by Philip Roth.

- Things to do: 1) Rent the film Marjorie Morningstar
and have a theater party for the class.
- 2) What literary works can you discover
which have portrayed Jewish women as
other than the stereotyped Jewish
mother?

Footnotes:

¹Herman Wouk, Marjorie Morningstar(New York, 1955),
pp. 171-172.

²Ibid., p. 173.

³Ibid., pp. 172-173.

⁴Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel
(New York, 1966), p. 255.

Lesson 22: Portnoy's Complaint

- Goals: 1) to discuss Philip Roth's portrayal of the Jewish mother;
- 2) to discuss whether or not you have to be Jewish to be a Jewish mother

Procedure: 1) Begin with the following statement: "Sophie, the mother, is not even a plausible type, let alone an individual."¹ Ask the students to comment.

(Here is the rest of Marie Syrkin's statement:

She is a synthetic production, an amalgam of cliches, with touches from the orthodox shtetl alternating with bits from middle-class suburbia. Mamma veers from a fixation on orthodox ritual, perhaps true of her mother, to a lack of decorum in her intimate behavior in the presence of her son which would be a travesty of grandma. Roth manages to endow the lady with both earlier taboos and later license, so offering the worst of both worlds. A collection of gags, recognizable in the more amiable creations of Sam Levenson or the blacker humor of Myron Cohen or Bruce Friedman, Sophie, by virtue of Roth's transforming malice, becomes a grotesque festooned with dirty toilet paper, the whole held together by a thick glue of elementary as well as alimentary Freud. Roth's chief contribution to the Jewish mother routine is the picture of mamma threatening her son with a long bread-knife to make him eat. To make sure that this maniacal bit is viewed as characteristic of the type rather than as an individual aberration, the Jewish ladies who come to play mahjongg applaud this technique in child care.

Since symbolic castration is too dime-a-dozen in the depiction of a mother-son relationship, Roth enlivens the scene by putting a literal knife in mamma's loving hand.²⁾

- 2) Was Sophie Portnoy's love for her son really so overpowering or did Portnoy possess an overpowering love for his mother?

Answer:

The tirade against his parents, especially his mother, is uninterrupted. A few times I indicated the wish to say something, but he only talked on the more furiously. It was like a satire on the complaints of most of my patients, and on the tenets of psychoanalysis: that of the dominating and castrating father, and of a mother too involved in herself and her own life, to pay much attention to her son. This extremely intelligent young Jew does not recognize that what he is trying to do, by reversing the Oedipal situation, is to make fun of me, as he does of everyone, thus asserting his superiority over me and psychoanalysis itself. His overpowering love for his mother is turned into a negative projection, so that what becomes overpowering is the mother's love for him. Overtly he complains that she could never let him alone, was all intrusive - behind which lies an incredible deep disappointment that she was not even more exclusively preoccupied with him. While consciously he experienced everything she did as destructive, behind it is an incredible wish for more, more, more; an insatiable orality which is denied and turned into the opposite by his continuous scream of its being much too much.

Even the most ordinary, everyday request, such as her reminding him to send a card on his father's 66th birthday, is experienced by him as the most unreasonable demand, forcing on him a life of guilt, of indebtedness to

his parents. Whatever the mother did for him was always too little; the smallest thing she requested was always asking too much.

Having to listen all day to the endless complaints of my patients about mothers who were never interested in whether they ate or did not eat, whether or not they derecated, whether or not they succeeded in school, it should have been refreshing to listen to an hour of complaints about a mother who did exactly that - but it was not. Because it was so obvious that he, too, felt cheated at not being given enough. No doubt, he is tortured by memories of his past, and by his present inability to be a man, to enjoy normal sex. But nowhere do I see any effort to free himself of this bondage to the past. He certainly makes the most of it. Obviously he expects my magic and that of psychoanalysis to do it for him.'

- 3) What effect did Ronald Nimkin's suicide have on Portnoy?

Answer:

Another crucial memory: A fifteen year old boy is pushed too hard by his ambitious mother to perform, and hangs himself. Pinned to his shirt is a message he took for his mother: that she is to take the mah-jongg rules along when she goes out that night. My patient can see in it only the boy's obedience, and not the lethal venom at his mother who dares to enjoy a game with her friends instead of doing nothing all day except cater to her son.'

- 4) How does Portnoy's desire to blame his mother for everything manifest itself in his relationship with the Israeli girl?

Answer:

In desperation he tries to seduce a kibbutz girl by reversing the methods he used with his gentile girls. Them

he had degraded and their debasement had made them extremely attractive to him, but also useless. Here instead, it is he who submits to debasement, particularly when the girl tells him what should long have been obvious: that his self-degradation is the more despicable because he is a man of such high intelligence. To her telling him how little she thinks of him, he reacts by inviting her to have intercourse with him. Blaming others as always, he tries to pin his impotence on his mother, claiming the kibbutz girl reminds him of her. He believes it to be Oedipal (but genital) attachment that makes him impotent, while it is really his oral attachment, his wish to remain the suckling infant forever.

The long-suffering Jewish mother who suffers herself to be blamed for everything, is willing to thus serve her son. Never will he have to feel guilty about anything he does because he can always blame it on her. And in a way he can; but not as he thinks. He can blame her for what she has led him to believe: That whatever he wants he must immediately be given. This, the central theme of his life, he screams out at the kibbutz girl: 'I HAVE TO HAVE.' It is she who finally tells him that this belief of his - that he has to have what he wants, whatever it may cost the other - is not valid.

In a fantasy of being judged for his crimes, he realizes, at least for a moment, that blaming his mother will not get him off, cannot justify his behavior to others.⁵

- 5) Although Roth's characters are certainly Jewish stereotypes, are their characteristics found only among Jews?

Answer:

But the overprotective, overloving

and overdemanding mother, as well as the schlimazeldiker and nebuchdiker failure of a father, are not necessarily Jewish types, even though they are Jewish stereotypes. Popular wisdom tells us that. 'You don't have to be Jewish to be a Jewish mother.' As I read the book, I reflected frequently on the thought that among that segment of the adult population that is sick, there are undoubtedly a proportionate number of sick people who were warped by Gentile fathers who were schlemiels, or by matriarchal Gentile mothers. Oedipus and Electra were not Jewish.⁶

Summary: Alexander Portnoy encounters a castrating mother, the typical stereotype of the Jewish mother. He despises her overprotectiveness. At the same time, however, he realizes that her inner strength sustains the family.⁷ He feels that she has enslaved him when in reality he has enslaved himself to her. This is evident in his numerous sexual encounters with non-Jewish girls. Through them, he is actually remaining faithful to his mother, as well as keeping from his parents what they so much want - grandchildren.⁸

The typical stereotype of the Jewish mother is almost always negative. As we have seen in our first lesson, however, there are positive aspects as well. Roth ignores them and in doing so has created an unreal character, for the characterization of the fat, noisy, anxious, bossy Jewish mother is no longer as true as it

once was. It has become obsolete, and what many have always considered liabilities have in fact become the Jewish woman's most valuable assets.

Assignment: Read Mary Gendler's contribution to "The Response Symposium" in Response, A Contemporary Jewish Review(Winter, 1970-1971).

Things to do: 1) How has Philip Roth portrayed his women in Goodbye, Columbus?

2) To see a more positive characterization of a Jewish woman, read Sir Walter Scott's Ivanhoe. Scott is said to have patterned his portrayal of Rebecca after the personality of Rebecca Gratz.

Footnotes:

¹Marie Syrkin, "The Fun of Self-Abuse," Midstream (April, 1969), p. 64.

²Ibid., pp. 64-65.

³Bruno Bettelheim, "Portnoy Psychoanalyzed," Midstream (June/July, 1969), pp. 4-5.

⁴Ibid., p. 7.

⁵Ibid., p. 9.

⁶Arthur J. Lelyveld, "Old Disease in New Form: Diagnosing Portnoy's Complaint," The Jewish Digest(June, 1969), p. 2.

⁷Bettelheim, p. 6.

⁸Ibid.

Lesson 23: To be a Jewish woman

- Goals:
- 1) to confront the frustrations one feels at a time when the movement toward liberation is so strong;
 - 2) to emphasize that Judaism has survived in part because of its ability to change and be flexible;
 - 3) to give the students an opportunity to summarize what they have learned throughout the course

- Procedure:
- 1) Discuss Mary Gendler's contribution to "The Response Symposium," Response, A Contemporary Jewish Review (Winter, 1970-1971).
 - 2) Ask the students to react to Ms. Gendler's remarks. Can they relate to her sense of frustration?
 - 3) Is Ms. Gendler's portrayal of the Jewish woman accurate or has she been overly negative? Cite examples.
 - 4) Has Ms. Gendler been fair to Reform Judaism?
 - 5) Is it really necessary to change Orthodox and Conservative Judaism when the option of Reform Judaism is available?
 - 6) How do you react to Ms. Gendler's suggestion that men and women share the responsibilities

of the home, thereby allowing each to develop his own creative potential to the fullest?

Summary: It is difficult for many who are deeply involved in the feminist movement to view the Jewish attitude toward women objectively. While the Jewish woman has not always been treated in the most admirable manner, she has always held a more exalted position than that of the women of other cultures which have existed simultaneously. In addition, her role has constantly been changing as is most clearly evident in Reform Judaism which has eliminated many of the problems, most specifically in the areas of divorce and liturgical participation, that plague Orthodox and Conservative Jewish women. The question is do we change Orthodox and Conservative Judaism in order to grant women the rights of full participation, or do we leave Orthodox and Conservative Judaism intact for those who are comfortable within their structure and concentrate our efforts in making Reform Judaism a viable alternative? The second course of action is perhaps the most realistic.

Assignment: Think about how you would evaluate this course.

- Things to do: 1) Invite an Orthodox and/or Conservative Jewish woman to discuss with you her attitudes toward the position of the Jewish woman. Does she feel discriminated against?
- 2) Invite a member of your local chapter of NOW(National Organization for Women) to discuss with you the changes this group hopes to make in the field of religion.

Lesson 24: Creating tomorrow's Jewish woman

- Goals: 1) to enable the students to summarize the suggestions which have been made that will grant fuller and more meaningful participation to the Jewish woman;
- 2) to emphasize the need for constant consciousness-raising among Jewish women;
- 3) to evaluate the course

Procedure: 1) Write the following statement on the board and ask the class to comment on it:

One of the most serious obstacles deterring those of us who are especially anxious to involve women with greater leadership roles has been the reluctance they themselves so often feel toward fulfilling our hopes. In my own congregation, by far the greater number of mothers who have been invited to appear on the pulpit or to participate in the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremonies of their children have respectfully declined. It is easy to say that they have been brainwashed into such diffidence by a male dominated culture. Without denying that this may be partially so, we must contend also with the inner resistance of women themselves to take advantage of the opportunities now being afforded them.¹

Questions: Why do women feel so reluctant?

What has caused their "inner resistance"?

- 2) Question: How can Reform Judaism best adapt itself to the needs of the individual, , thereby allowing the fullest and most

meaningful participation for all.

- 3) Spend most of this session evaluating the course. Did it meet the needs of the students? What were its strengths? What were its weaknesses? What other areas should have been covered? How can the course be improved?

Summary: Consciousness-raising is an important aspect of the movement which seeks to grant women equal rights in every area of life. This holds true for the Jewish woman as well, for in order to participate fully and actively in Jewish affairs, she must be aware of her ever-changing role. This has been the main purpose of the course - to show that the Jewish woman has played a significant role in the history of the Jewish people and to emphasize that she must be continually aware of her potential as an influential force in the survival of a people.

Things to do: 1) For those who are interested, continue to meet together to discuss ways in which you can act more effectively as Jewish women.

- 2) Write to Gloria Steinem, Betty Freidan, and Bella Abzug and ask them if their Jewish background has influenced their involvement in the feminist movement.

Footnotes:

¹Roland B. Gittelsohn, "Women's Lib and Judaism,"
Midstream, October, 1971, p. 58.

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