

CHANGING MINDS

Feminism in Contemporary
Orthodox Jewish Life

Sylvia Barack Fishman

THE WILLIAM PETSCHKE NATIONAL JEWISH FAMILY CENTER
OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

The American Jewish Committee protects the rights and freedoms of Jews the world over; combats bigotry and anti-Semitism and promotes human rights for all; works for the security of Israel and deepened understanding between Americans and Israelis; advocates public policy positions rooted in American democratic values and the perspectives of the Jewish heritage; and enhances the creative vitality of the Jewish people. Founded in 1906, it is the pioneer human-relations agency in the United States.

CHANGING MINDS

Feminism in Contemporary
Orthodox Jewish Life

Sylvia Barack Fishman

Sylvia Barack Fishman, Ph.D., is co-director of the Hadassah International Research Institute on Jewish Women and a professor in the Near Eastern and Judaic Studies Department, both at Brandeis University. Her most recent book is *Jewish Life and American Culture* (2000).

Publication of this study was made possible in part by a grant from the Barbara and Saul Mirowitz Fund.

CONTENTS

Foreword	v
Acknowledgments	vii
Introduction	1
<i>Studying Feminism and Orthodox Jewish Life</i>	1
<i>Methodology</i>	5
<i>Women's Issues and the Halakhic Continuum</i>	8
1. The World of the Word	13
<i>Girls' and Women's Text Study</i>	13
<i>Women as Scholars and Credentialed Leaders</i>	21
<i>The Feminist Theological Challenge</i>	26
2. Transformations in Family Life	29
3. Women and Public Judaism	35
<i>Jewish Organizations</i>	35
<i>Women's Prayer Groups as Catalysts</i>	38
<i>Celebration of Women's Lives</i>	40
<i>The Symbolism of Women and Kaddish</i>	43
4. Problems and Divisions	46
<i>Neither Seen Nor Heard: Synagogue Architecture,</i> <i>Kol Isha, and the Silencing of Women</i>	46
<i>The Politicization of Women's Issues</i>	52
<i>Orthodox Women Who Reject Orthodox Feminism</i>	57
<i>Confronting Agunot, Abusive Spouses,</i> <i>and Social Problems</i>	60
<i>Motivations and Slippery Slopes</i>	65

5. Orthodox Feminism Bridging Boundaries	68
<i>Working Toward Coherence</i>	71
Appendix 1. Major Areas of Change	74
Appendix 2. Challenges and Concerns	76
Appendix 3. Goals to Implement in Orthodox Communities	78
Endnotes	80

FOREWORD

The victories and successes of the women's movement for equality within the past generation have been little short of remarkable. Few would have predicted a cultural sea change granting women full access to virtually every sector of American society within a single generation. Although not without problematical side effects, substantial progress in achieving sexual equality will doubtless rank as a critical moral victory of late twentieth-century America.

Not surprisingly, Jewish women have been among the leaders of the women's movement and have been transformed by it. Within the liberal Jewish religious movements, full equality prevails, including participation of women within the organized rabbinate. Although questions remain concerning the impact of feminism on the Jewish ideals of family and volunteerism, most observers rightly hail Jewish feminism for affording greater access to Jewish heritage and communal involvement to historically unprecedented numbers of women.

Has Jewish feminism produced similar effects within Orthodox Judaism? Once derided by Orthodox leaders as a passing fad irrelevant to Orthodox women, feminism today has made significant inroads within Orthodoxy, especially in the arenas of Judaic study and women's prayer groups. Economic determinists may, of course, point to the necessity for women to work to afford their children access to expensive Jewish day school education as the underlying cause for feminism within Orthodoxy. Others will point to the tragedy of *agunot*—women incapable of remarrying because they have not been granted a bill of divorce by recalcitrant husbands—as stimulus to Orthodox Jewish feminism.

Several effects already have become clear. The growth of Orthodox feminism has challenged rabbinical authorities with an historic and welcome phenomenon—women who demand greater access to and involvement in Jewish heritage and community rather than freedom from

the claims of tradition. At a time of increased assimilation, Jewish feminism signals the voice of those who wish to renew their lives Jewishly. That Orthodox leaders have at least partially heeded this call is evident from the enormous growth of women's study programs in recent years, suggesting that older taboos concerning women studying Talmud have lost their force.

What, then, of the future? Perhaps the most interesting irony of Orthodox Jewish feminism is its growth precisely at a time when Modern Orthodoxy itself has receded. Sociologists and social commentators have spoken of an ultra-Orthodox or *haredi* ascendancy at the expense of Modern Orthodox voices both here and in Israel. Partly in reaction, partly stimulated by feminism generally, the voices of Orthodox Jewish feminists have begun to be heard. For example, it was no accident that two conferences on Orthodox feminism attracting over 2,000 participants preceded and laid the groundwork for the founding conference of Edah, a grassroots organization dedicated to revitalizing Modern Orthodoxy.

The implications for the community are profound. As Modern Orthodox voices recede, the community forfeits a vital bridge between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews, further polarizing an already fragmented Jewish community. As the power of rabbinic authority waxes within Orthodoxy, the greater grows the degree of Orthodox isolation from the larger and surrounding Jewish polity.

Dedicated to the advancement of women within Judaism, Orthodox feminism may help reverse these currents. To do so it will have to ally with broader forces dissatisfied with the current direction of Orthodox leadership. Whether the women's movement will pursue a more narrowly focused agenda aimed at women's rights exclusively or will be willing to join in a larger coalition to strengthen the Modern Orthodox generally remains to be seen.

To explore where Orthodox feminism is currently, the William Petschek National Jewish Family Center commissioned Dr. Sylvia Barack Fishman, Brandeis University, to conduct a study of the inroads of feminism within Orthodoxy. Her work not only maps out the accomplishments of feminism but also charts possible directions for the future.

Steven Bayme, Ph.D.
National Director,
Jewish Communal Affairs Department
American Jewish Committee

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Looking back on the evolution of this study, it is my pleasure to acknowledge the assistance of many. First, I wish to thank the women and men who shared their ideas and experiences through interviews, electronic communications, and their written works. Their honesty and generosity helped me understand both the broader parameters and the depth of the phenomena I describe and analyze. Their voices, sometimes attributed to them (with their permission), and more often incorporated into the text anonymously, lend this study its vitality.

This work would not have been possible without the intellectual and material support of Steven Bayme and the Petschek Family Center of the American Jewish Committee, ably chaired by Blu Greenberg. The ongoing dialogue we enjoyed was thought provoking and helpful in every way, and I am proud to have this monograph published under their auspices.

My work was aided and encouraged within the energizing environment of the Hadassah Research Institute on Jewish Women at Brandeis University, by Shulamit Reinharz, founding director, and HRIJW faculty Susan Kahn, Amy Sales, and Helene Greenberg. HRIJW research assistant Tova Neugut, and interns Michelle Sternthal, Ali Feldman, and Chanel Dubovsky facilitated in numerous ways. Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies director Len Saxe, who oversees the HRIJW's survey research efforts, served as a thoughtful guide.

I owe much as well to the scholarly discourse of my colleagues in the Near Eastern and Judaic Studies Department, especially to Professor Jonathan Sarna, department chair, for his wisdom, good humor, and simultaneous devotion to people and ideas.

Not least, I want to thank my family partners for their support and inspiration: my husband, Phil, who taught his children by example that men and women work together to create Orthodox feminist households;

my married children, Lisi and Josh, and Eli and Suzanne, who live out the complexities of contemporary Jewish family life as they raise a new generation; and my youngest, Joseph, just entering the extraordinary Jewish and secular educational opportunities of American universities today.

During the two years that I wrote this monograph, I lost my parents, Rabbi Nathan and Lillian Barack, who lived devotion without end for Judaism and each other. Long before society put a name to it, my parents encouraged their daughters to participate in sacred study and prayer, and transmitted to us the family traditions of their own active praying and studying. This research is dedicated to their memory and their heritage.

Ordinarily, I enjoy tying up the last loose ends and closing each book. This study, however, tells a story that is still unfinished. As I have incorporated each new revision, more data have come to hand: another incident to describe, another conversation to record. Finally, I have had to simply declare this project finished—for now. Like many of my informants, I will watch, wait, and work for positive developments.

S.B.F.

INTRODUCTION

Studying Feminism and Orthodox Jewish Life

This study explores the transformation of public and private Orthodox Jewish life by feminism and other social movements. An examination of these social changes is significant to the American Jewish community as a whole for several reasons. First, although this study focuses on a struggle within Orthodoxy, it illuminates the broader intersection of Jewish traditionalism, Western humanistic values, and feminist critiques of society. Second, Orthodox feminists often serve as a bridge between Orthodox and non-Orthodox social groups. Third, and perhaps most significant, as American Jews agonize over issues of continuity and renaissance, Orthodox feminists provide potential models for other American Jews: Jews in every wing of Judaism may choose to find their own way to productively combine meaningful, dynamic Jewish connections, including committed religious praxis and Torah study, along with the freedoms and opportunities presented by American lifestyles, including high levels of secular education and occupational achievement.

The confrontation between what is often called "modern" Orthodox Judaism and the contemporary women's movement brings together two complex historical phenomena. Jews in preemancipation Jewish societies, prior to the contemporary divisions called Jewish denominations or movements, participated in complex cultural milieus. Historically, Jews shared common distinctive languages; highly prescriptive religious laws; communal Sabbath, holiday, and life-cycle celebrations; communal models of male study and worship, in which the female auxiliary role was societally reinforced; restrictive dietary laws; and, to a greater or lesser extent, communal governing bodies.

German Jewish Reform thinkers, responding to promises of the political and social emancipation of the Jews—provided that the Jews di-

vested their faith of putatively backward, "Oriental" practices and attitudes—revised and Westernized synagogue services and ritual observances in incremental steps over the course of the nineteenth century. Reacting to these dramatic reforms, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch and his Neo-Orthodox colleagues proposed an innovative vision of Westernized traditionalism. They agreed that Jews should Westernize their dress, language, and cultivated behavior, facilitating economic progress and the entry of Jews into German educational, occupational, and social institutions, and, like the German reformers, they adopted a rhetoric that emphasized the universal aspects of Jewish ethical teachings. However, Neo-Orthodox thinkers insisted that Jews could still maintain traditional Jewish erudition and piety. Describing this approach, Hirsch used the phrase *Torah im derech erez*, loosely translated as Torah-traditionalism with modern, civilized behavior—an expression that gained and maintained popularity as the slogan of an adaptive goal that American Jews would call synthesis.¹

Synthesis, the bringing together of the most excellent aspects of Judaic and Western civilizations, has often been invoked as the guiding philosophy of modern Orthodox Jewish life. Promoting university education, modern Orthodox Jews value Western science, culture, and the arts. They approach American and Jewish aspects of life—whether consciously or unconsciously—by combining and attempting to harmonize traditional Jewish and Western individualistic values and behaviors.

Today, Orthodox Jews as a group comprise fewer than 10 percent of American Jews, and only 11 percent of Orthodox Jews were raised outside the movement, according to data from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey. As Lazerwitz et al. point out in their recent study of American Jewish denominationalism, Orthodoxy is "the most fragmented" of Jewish religious movements organizationally, "embracing the ultra-Orthodox sects ... as well as the modern Orthodox."² Characteristically, modern Orthodox Jews look American, and live and work in American middle- and upper-middle-class settings. Nevertheless, modern Orthodox Jews differ from the vast majority of American Jews primarily because they more or less rigorously adhere to a complex network of religious rituals. They tend to have rich Jewish cultural and intellectual involvements. In this sense, there is far less difference between Orthodox clergy and the lay Orthodox population than there is between professional Jews and the laity of other American Jewish religious movements. In addition, higher percentages of Orthodox laity, especially younger practitioners, have re-

ceived relatively extensive Jewish education than among Conservative and Reform Jews.

Modern Orthodox Jews also differ from their coreligionists to the right, sometimes called “ultra-Orthodox,” “right-wing,” or *haredi* Jews, because *haredi* Jews claim to have no philosophical regard for non-Jewish culture. They tolerate the study of medicine, science, law, and a broad spectrum of technological vocations since such skills are necessary for life in the modern world, but these studies are presumed to have no impact on their belief or behavior system. *Haredi* Jews foster dress codes derived from European models. Some maintain Yiddish as the spoken language of the home. With the exception of movements such as Lubavich/Chabad, which are devoted to winning less observant Jews over to more intensive forms of Jewish ritual, most *haredi* Jewish societies carefully maintain the boundaries between themselves and the non-*haredi* world. Some *haredi* spokespersons caricature modern Orthodoxy as a hollow or fraudulent version of the faith.

Like Orthodoxy, modern feminism is a phenomenon with a complex history, which can here be only very briefly outlined. Modern American feminism is often described in terms of “first wave” and “second wave” movements. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Jewish women were involved in the first wave of the women’s movement, which worked to give women “political, legal, and social equality with man,” according to the first national woman’s rights convention. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were joined by Ernestine Rose, the Polish-born daughter of a rabbi, in the establishment of the American Equal Rights Association (1866), later changed to the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA). Maud Nathan, descendant of a leading Sephardi-American family, became a leading suffrage movement leader in the next generation, and served as vice president of New York’s Equal Suffrage League. Voting records show that Jewish neighborhoods in 1915 provided the strongest voting support for the cause, and Clara Lemlich Shavelson, well known for her activism in the garment workers’ union, cofounded the Wage Earners’ League for Woman Suffrage; suffrage was finally passed in 1920. Despite overwhelming support by Jewish women, both in leadership positions (e.g., Rose Schneiderman, Pauline Newman, Theresa Malkiel, and Lillian Wald) and grassroots approval, this first wave of the American women’s movement was marred by both overt and covert antisemitism,³ a problem it shared with second-wave feminism decades later.

Second-wave feminism began to gather popular force following the establishment of John F. Kennedy's Commission on the Status of Women in 1962 and the publication of Betty Freidan's critique of *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963.⁴ Friedan's book became an early bible of the movement, read by many Jewish women although it focused on neither the Jewish nature of its author nor of its readership. Freidan's book faulted the American dream, which suggested that every woman's ideal fulfillment came in the form of a nuclear family in the suburbs. Deprived of occupational skills and confidence in their ability to live independently, Friedan suggested, women evaluated themselves primarily in terms of their physical beauty and their housekeeping and hostessing skills, utilizing a standard of perfection that made them feel perennially inadequate. Women were urged to acquire occupational skills and to work for economic and social equality.

As the feminist message spread and entered the mainstream, often articulated by leaders with Jewish names, such as Shulamit Firestone and Gloria Steinem, a wide variety of organizational subgroups formed, with the purpose of translating feminist insights into social change. The National Organization for Women (NOW) evolved into the largest and most centrist feminist group. Initially, such groups and their supporters concentrated on economic issues, such as promoting legislation to prevent discrimination against women in the marketplace through the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). As time passed, more specialized forms of feminism found organizational homes, including groups for women with radical feminist goals, and groups formed by women with distinctive ethnic and religious heritages who felt their voices were not heard in the larger feminist arena. At a series of international conferences, it became evident that anti-Zionist and anti-Jewish feeling was strong in certain segments of the women's movement. This unexpected development prompted some theretofore secular activists to seek out more extensive information about and connections to their Jewish heritage.

Many Jewish women came to Jewish feminism through positive rather than negative stimuli. In an American milieu that promoted the reclamation of ethnic and religious "roots," Jewishly focused feminism emerged among Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative activist women's groups in the early 1970s.⁵ In the early 1970s, the first Orthodox women's *tefillah* groups were initiated in St. Louis, Missouri, and Cambridge, Massachusetts, as well as better known groups in Riverdale, New York, Baltimore, Maryland, and elsewhere. Thus from the beginning Or-

thodox Jewish women were influenced by the broader feminist social movements described above as well as by revolutions in the more liberal Jewish denominations.

Methodology

This study places the sociological transformation of modern Orthodox Jewish life into several overlapping contexts. It looks at the role of the women's movement in the lives of individual Orthodox women and men, and the impact of feminism on families, communities, synagogues, and organizations. In terms of Jewish intergroup relationships, it notes new developments in the symbiosis between American and Israeli Orthodox feminists. It discusses the bridges between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jewish feminists, and the ways the various streams of American Judaism have influenced each other. Additionally, when appropriate, it refers to parallel or contrasting changes in other American religious groups. Not least, it compares contemporary emancipated Orthodox life to *haredi* Orthodox milieus and attitudes, paying special attention to the symbolic significance of women's issues in Jewish life. For better and for worse, the social psychology of today's modern Orthodox Jews is conditioned by movement to the right by increasingly fervent Orthodox institutions and authorities once defined as "modern" but now sometimes referring to themselves as "centrist." The study asks how feminism affects relationships between differing Jewish subgroups, such as "modern" and "centrist" Orthodox rabbis and their communities of belief.

As yet, only a few serious studies have explored Orthodox feminism. Blu Greenberg's groundbreaking book of essays, *Women and Judaism: A View from Tradition*, discussed numerous topics of relevance to a "mild mannered yeshiva girl ... among the feminists,"⁶ and observant feminist speakers such as Norma Baumel Joseph and Nessa Rappaport, among others, have contributed thoughtful and provocative approaches to the subject. Important books dealing with particular aspects of rabbinic responses to women's issues include the recently published *Equality Lost* by Yehuda Henkin;⁷ a collection, *Jewish Legal Writings by Women*, edited by Micah Halpern and Chana Safrai;⁸ *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law*, edited by Rachel Wasserfall; the forthcoming volumes *Midrashic Women: Constructing the Female in Rabbinic Literature*, by Judith Baskin; *Eros and Ethics: Jewish Women and Rabbinic Law*, by

Rochelle Millen,⁹ and such established, influential works as Joel Wolowelsky's *Women, Jewish Law, and Modernity*,¹⁰ Eliezer Berkovits's *Jewish Women in Time and Torah*,¹¹ and Avraham Weiss's *Women at Prayer: A Halakhic Analysis of Women's Prayer Groups*.¹² Important but scattered information is available in a few qualitative sociological studies, relevant discussion groups in the electronic media, rabbinic response literature, articles by sociologists such as Aileen Nusbacher¹³ and others on members of women's *tefillah* prayer groups, and recent scholarship on traditionalist Jewish and non-Jewish American religious groups.

However, despite these useful resources, the larger impact of the women's movement on contemporary Orthodox life has received little sustained systematic sociological analysis until recently. Observers both inside and outside contemporary Orthodox communities have claimed that Orthodox Jews are insulated from many adaptive trends that characterize other American Jews. Consequently, most studies of social change in the American Jewish community have focused on Conservative, Reform, and secular/unaffiliated Jews. Ethnographies of the Orthodox world have primarily centered on men's activities and lives, with the noteworthy exception of Debra Kaufman's and Lynn Davidman's studies of newly Orthodox Jewish women. Even these studies of *ba'alot teshuva* have been interested in the women themselves rather than in their impact on larger segments of the Orthodox community.¹⁴

This study incorporates selected materials from the 1997 and 1998 Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA)-sponsored International Conferences on Feminism and Orthodoxy. The International Conferences on Feminism and Orthodoxy, held in Manhattan in February of 1997 and 1998 (with another scheduled for spring 2000), ended the isolation of Orthodox feminists and brought a critical spotlight to women's issues in the Orthodox world. The first conference attracted over 1,000 participants and, according to press reports, the second over 2,000. Both conferences included dozens of scholarly lectures and study sessions on a broad spectrum of women's issues in Orthodox Jewish life today. The conferences also served as an important bridge between Orthodox and non-Orthodox feminists and facilitated dialogue in general between Orthodox practitioners and those in other wings of Judaism.

New research conducted for this study includes a series of more than fifty structured interviews and focus-group discussions with modern Orthodox women, rabbis, and scholars. In interviews and focus-group discussions conducted with forty modern Orthodox women (ages 18 to 60)

with diverse attitudes toward feminist initiatives, and twelve men who fell into the sometimes overlapping categories of rabbi, scholar, and/or activist, we followed a rather broad script of questions:

1. What do you consider the five greatest changes in Orthodox Jewish life caused or affected by the women's movement and related social trends?

2. What do you consider the five greatest problems in Orthodox Jewish life today, related to the women's movement?

3. If you could change five things about Orthodox Jewish women's lives, what would those changes be?

4. Many rabbis writing on women's issues refer to a concern about women's "motivations." Do you find this concern a useful consideration when talking about halakhic change?

5. What questions didn't I ask you that I should have asked?

This broad script allowed each informant to define her or his own terms, without coaching. Question 1, for example, elicited responses as different as discussions of the exponential increase in women's text study, positive transformations in the way younger Orthodox husbands and wives encounter each other, a recent trend toward "backsliding" into woman-unfriendly synagogue architecture, and attacks on the putative divisiveness of Orthodox feminism, accusing it of creating a schism in the observant community. Thus, these broad questions proved to be a very useful research strategy in eliciting underlying attitudes.

The voices of women and men actively involved in women's issues in the Orthodox world have been accessed via the electronic media, especially the ongoing Women's Tefillah Network List conversation (wtn@shamash.org). This study draws on the dozens of entries each week that explore diverse issues. Recent WTN conversations, for example, discussed: methods to celebrate the birth of a daughter or a bat mitzvah; strategies to enhance women's access to Torah scrolls in various synagogues; ways of dealing with male-centered liturgical passages or male-exclusive sacred utterance; men's and women's differing styles of expressing disagreement; the use of social ostracism and marginalization by communities attempting to stifle feminist dialogue; and honorific titles appropriate to acknowledge the expertise of Orthodox female Torah scholars. Some of the issues discussed affect only the small coterie of an Orthodox feminist inner circle, but many more have implications for the broader Orthodox and Jewish communities.

The WTN conversations provide ongoing illustrations of the realities of the postfeminist Orthodox world. In some ways, the WTN List is a case of "the medium is the message." The same fast-moving world that has changed Jewish Orthodox women's roles also allows men and women to have an international conversation about these changing roles across the continents.

Women's Issues and the Halakhic Continuum

Over the past quarter century, Orthodox Jewish women, like comparable groups of non-Orthodox and non-Jewish women, have seen dramatic changes in their life experiences and expectations. Some of these changes are strikingly similar in the Orthodox and non-Orthodox societies; others affect Orthodox women in particular and sometimes unique ways. For example, opportunities for study have been created in a broad spectrum of venues, and Orthodox women have directed serious, thoughtful attention to prayer, life-cycle celebrations, and other spiritual expressions. In these and other areas, Orthodox women have often found common cause with their non-Orthodox sisters and have developed meaningful dialogues and bridges between the various wings of Judaism. In contrast, observers have noted an increasingly troubled dynamic between Orthodox Jews who are committed to preserving a more traditional status quo and those women, men, and rabbis who want to expand women's spiritual expression.

Orthodox women's experiences seem to be most unique where Orthodoxy itself is most particularistic. Orthodox Jews are now "faced with the astonishingly new concept that the possibility exists to consider women as something other than lesser than men," a woman from a vibrant Jewish community in New Jersey wrote to the e-mail Women's Tefillah Network in April 1999. Urging dialogue about "one of the most challenging and potentially damaging questions in the next few centuries," she expressed her vision of the exciting but painful quandary of Orthodox feminists:

As Orthodox women we wish to *layn* [read Torah], lead davening [be prayer leaders for the worshiping congregation], and chant the *haftorah*. We are all very guilty of wanting to have our cake and eat it too. As Orthodox women, we choose to live our lives within a very definite set of boundaries, i.e. halakhah, which we believe in and feel ourselves bound by

with our whole hearts. Yet we have very real emotional, intellectual, and other needs to participate more actively in Jewish ritual than Orthodox women have ever done before.

We must never forget, during the course of our struggle to resolve this perplexing and enormous conflict within ourselves and our communities, that we are teetering extremely close to the edge of accepted halakhah. In some cases, because of our very real needs to participate ... and have access to certain parts of *yahadut* [Judaism], we overstep these bounds without meaning to (Women's Tefillah Network communication, hereafter referred to as WTN, Apr. 29, 1999).*

Within the trajectory of the history of Jewish law, the questions this e-mail correspondent articulates reflect radically innovative approaches. Orthodox women, both those who think of themselves as feminists and those who do not, face special conflicts between modernity and tradition. First, Orthodox Jews have levels of praxis that differ dramatically from those of the non-Orthodox community. Many of them feel responsible even for laws about which they are lax. This feeling of responsibility for observance can be summed up in the phrase *ol malkhut shamayim*, the yoke of the kingdom of heaven. Unlike non-Orthodox Americans, whose primary orienting ideology may be life, liberty, and the free pursuit of personal happiness, Orthodox Jews are oriented by an ideology of religious commandedness to a network of laws that they may experience as being in direct conflict with personal freedom.

Second, Orthodox Jews are presumed to feel allegiance to some interpretation of the traditional concept of divine revelation of Jewish law, *torah mi sinai*, a belief that the complex, prescriptive codes of rabbinic law derive from God's articulated instructions to the Jewish people. A very broad interpretive gamut is reflected as Orthodox Jews of various shades and stripes formulate what *torah mi sinai* means to them. However, no matter how liberal an individual Orthodox person's interpretation of divine revelation, daily life is influenced by a group of observances that are precisely dictated by written texts.

As a result, religious texts have a level of concreteness, of solidity, especially to well-educated younger Orthodox Jews, that sometimes makes them seem more real than lived experience itself. In the Orthodox

* The sources of data generated from interviews and electronic discussion materials are cited parenthetically. Published materials are cited in the endnotes.

map of meaning, rabbinic texts emanate from and reflect an ideal halakhah that has a kind of Platonic truthfulness. Even Orthodox laypersons try repeatedly to upgrade their religious behavior, attempting to come close to ideal halakhah through study and observance of rabbinic law. Thus, as indicated in the words of some respondents who struggle with a perceived conflict between feminism and rabbinic prescriptions, the Orthodox individual's sociologically analyzable, empirical experience may seem subordinate to the "reality" of the rabbinic page.

Orthodox conviction that halakhah comprises a superior reality can make commonsense approaches to religious social problems seem heretical. For example, the much-quoted and frequently controversial statement of Orthodox feminist groundbreaker Blu Greenberg, "Where there's a rabbinic will, there's a halakhic way," offends some Orthodox practitioners—including younger Orthodox feminists—because it implies that practical considerations can influence rabbis to take an instrumental approach to Jewish law. For those who would like to believe that halakhah exists on a different plane, such statements can be seen as undermining rabbinic authority. Feminists who bring up pragmatic considerations are also frequently charged with being "political"—and thus lacking in proper respect for the putatively nonpolitical halakhic process.

As one example of this response, when women complain about rabbinic intransigence or lethargy in regard to troubling issues, some rabbinic authorities assert that these women's protests are destructive to Orthodox life. This *ad hominem* response is not limited to the right wing of Orthodoxy. Younger Orthodox feminists, including some who are Jewish professionals, have tended to distance themselves from the forthrightness of Orthodox feminist pioneers. As one young professional woman declared, "We take a more respectful approach to halakhah" (New York, Aug. 3, 1999).

In contrast, some contemporary rabbis and scholars who have long struggled with the complexities of Jewish law interfacing with lived experience speak eloquently about the sociological parameters of the halakhic system. For example, Rabbi Saul Berman, professor of Talmud at Stern College and spiritual leader of the Edah modern Orthodox organization, notes that popular misperception often portrays rabbinically permitted and prohibited activities as separated into two clearly demarcated categories, like the red and green lights at a traffic intersection. As Rabbi Berman explains the protocols of rabbinic determination of religious obligation, while halakhah (rabbinic law) clearly defines some actions to be *khiyyuv*

(obligatory) for particular classes of people, and other actions to be *issur* (prohibited) for them, obligatory and prohibited actions do not exist simply as two oppositional compartments. Instead, a continuum of actions that rabbinic law considers to be *mutar*—permissible—stretches between actions that are prescribed and those that are proscribed (Manhattan, June 2, 1999).

Brooklyn College professor and chair of the Orthodox Forum David Berger articulates this attitude by stating firmly, “not every action which is permissible is desirable” (New York, Apr. 19, 1999). Professor Berger and other Orthodox rabbinic authorities regard the continuum of nonobligatory but permitted behavior rather like the yellow light at that same imaginary intersection—to be approached with caution. The following model illustrates these categories:

<i>Khiyyuv</i>	<i>Heter</i>	<i>Issur</i>
Obligatory behavior	Permitted behavior	Forbidden behavior

Many areas of proposed feminist change concern behaviors that fall into the category of permissibility but indeterminate desirability. To some extent, these behaviors have come to seem controversial precisely because human judgment is such an important factor in how they are viewed: whether or not a given behavior is judged to be desirable depends on the evaluation of individual rabbinic *poskim*. Some examples of activities that rabbinic law neither obligates nor prohibits to women, but which instead fall on the permissible continuum, include: making the blessing over the lulav and etrog on Sukkot; eating in a Sukkah; reading the scroll of the Book of Esther, *Megillat Esther*, for other women; and studying Torah. In Orthodox communities in the United States, for example, women’s Sukkot observance and Torah study have long been normative, while women reading the *Megillat Esther* scroll under Orthodox congregational auspices is still relatively rare.

Bar-Ilan professor of philosophy Tamar Ross writes that her own feelings toward expanding women’s opportunities for spiritual and religious expression have been transformed as “the realm of untraditional but halakhically permissible activity that I would condone has expanded.” Because of her deep grounding in traditional life, she is not entirely comfort-

able with all the changes, but she is no longer comfortable with rejecting them either:

To this day, kiddush and *zimmun* don't naturally roll off my tongue, but my husband and children occasionally insist upon my performing these. I personally have no particular desire to participate in women's *tfila* groups, but I would certainly fight for women's right to have them, and I would not miss my daughter's organized private megillah reading for the world.¹⁵

Brilliant scholar that she is, Ross feels that her daughters have achievements superior to hers—"as a sign of the times"—when it comes to "mining the primary sources for themselves, whereas I rely almost completely upon work that has been capably done by others."¹⁶ The extensive Jewish education of younger Orthodox women represents a "change of mind" in the sense that individual women's intelligences are being cultivated differently now than ever before in Jewish history. The ubiquitousness of this behavior also represents a societal "change of mind." Women's advanced Torah study, in many ways the most controversial activity in terms of classical rabbinic law, has become widespread, in what a recent article in the *Jerusalem Post* calls "A Quiet Revolution."¹⁷

1. THE WORLD OF THE WORD

Girls' and Women's Text Study

"When we were newlyweds," remembers Sharon Haselkorn, who participated as a student in a women's *tefillah* group in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1973, "Orthodox women who studied Jewish texts were often afraid to look into a Gemara. In that sense the Talmud was inaccessible—women felt it was not-to-be-accessed." Today, study participants universally cited high levels of Jewish education for women as one of the most sweeping feminist-influenced transformations in Orthodox Jewish life. As Chaviva Levine, a Jewish educator in her twenties, puts it, "*Torah she b'al peh* [the study of Talmud and other texts that present behavioral prescriptions based on rabbinic interpretations of the Hebrew Bible] is the coin of the realm." She elaborates:

Changes will never happen unless women as a group become scholars and acquire higher learning. We are in a transitional period now: assumptions about how the community should train Orthodox girls have changed. Even in communities which don't teach women *torah she b'al peh*, girls receive much more thorough Jewish education than they did before. Still, we now have some impressive female scholars, but the Orthodox community doesn't know what to do with them (Manhattan, Mar. 15, 1999).

Levine calls Talmud study the "coin of the realm" because many Orthodox Jews believe that only those who know Jewish texts well enough to read Talmud and the Hebrew Bible with rabbinic commentaries in their original languages can truly be said to "understand" the word and will of the Creator. Recognizing the extent to which a rigorous education in rabbinic texts has led to social power, the ability to make or influence decisions, and communal status in traditional Jewish societies is key to

understanding why contemporary Orthodox women's scholarship comprises a true revolution. Text study and religious education have historically been a critically important strategy for the preservation of social norms and religious life. Historical rabbinic Judaism, and Orthodox Judaism today, are partially organized around a hierarchy of authoritative scholarship.

Jewish emphasis on study and articulation as means of primarily male cultural transmission has deep historical roots. The ubiquitousness of the educational enterprise is expressed in the biblical *shema yisrael* (Hear, O Israel), adapted since ancient times as the central prayer of Jewish liturgy. In its powerful passages, worshipping Jews repeatedly voiced their commitment to provide their children with Jewish education, promising to speak about divine commandments when active or resting, residing at home or walking outside. The prayer presents Jewish education not primarily in an elite or formal classroom situation; rather, ordinary parents are enjoined to be involved in religious matters with passionate intensity, heart and soul, so that these subjects virtually never depart from their lips.

Rabbinical interpretation of these passages focused on the teaching of the oral law and defined the responsibility to teach as applying to fathers and sons. Additionally, assuming that many fathers might not feel themselves capable of fulfilling these educational injunctions, rabbinical law permitted delegation: fathers who cannot teach their sons themselves are expected to hire appropriate teachers. Nevertheless, the expectation was that much education would also take place in the home and other settings. Historically, Jewish societies took seriously the responsibility to provide Jewish education for boys and to encourage life-long Judaic study for men. Young boys began their formal education at three to six years of age, taught at home by private tutors or attending the community-sponsored heder. Boys were often initiated into study of talmudic texts long before their intellectual development or personal interest would have dictated. Male children were expected to stay in class at least until they passed bar mitzvah age, and many communities exerted pressure to keep boys in school through age fifteen, sixteen, or seventeen. Beyond these years, extensive study was the prerogative of those students who had demonstrated intellectual ability. The headmaster (*rosh yeshiva*) was often a personage of great spiritual significance and communal influence within the community as well as the school.

Participants in our study contrasted the contemporary ubiquitousness of Jewish education for girls with the historical fact that, working from the

biblical prescription that fathers should "teach their children/sons," most rabbinic commentaries interpreted "sons and not daughters." Indeed, some talmudic passages warn fathers who provide rigorous text study to their daughters that they may bring dishonor both to their daughters and to the texts they study.

Study participants noted that this exclusion of women had a powerful impact on the lives of women and the status of women as a class. In historical Jewish communities, the aura of talmudic learning hovered palpably over communal life. Judaism has been different from many other religious/ethnic identity construction modes because intellectualism defines male excellence. The legal decisions and text-based discussions of Jewish scholars had widespread influence on the normative behaviors of both male and female members of the community. Second, the world of scholarship in certain ways defined male aspirations from childhood onward. In historical communities and in many traditional communities today, intellectualism has defined masculinity and status and yielded concrete rewards. Historically, young scholars, as prized potential mates for the daughters of rich men, often enjoyed a healthier standard of living and a financial basis from which to begin married life.

Female Jews, in contrast, have until recently experienced the world of intensive Judaic study vicariously or at one remove. Girls were usually taught practical religious fundamentals at home by their mothers. Many girls were taught to read in their Jewish vernacular but not to read Hebrew; others were taught to read basic Hebrew liturgy in the prayer book. In some families knowledgeable fathers or mothers provided their daughters with text study opportunities or hired tutors for them, and in a few communities young girls also attended school. Shoshana Zolty and others have demonstrated that in every century a limited number of wives and daughters in elite families received impressive rabbinic text education at home from their fathers, brothers, or husbands, although the world of talmudic study was largely closed to females. Some of these women made names for themselves as scholars, and some are cited by name or by relationship in rabbinic literature. Moreover, in European communities women and less educated men commonly read Yiddish translations of biblical texts and rabbinic commentaries, and participated through these texts in the liturgical activity of ongoing education.¹⁸

Focusing on the dramatically different contemporary situation, Rabbi Adam Mintz, the dynamic young spiritual leader of the Lincoln Square Congregation in Manhattan, was one of several participants inter-

viewed who felt that the reason rabbinic text learning had become a cultural norm, while women's participation in synagogue worship services had not, could be found in Jewish history during the twentieth century (Manhattan, Mar. 3, 1998). He pointed out that women's new role in Jewish schooling can be traced back to the Bais Yaakov movement, begun a century ago by Sara Schnirer, a pious Eastern European woman, in a daring response to the challenges of secular modernity. Observing that in enlightened German communities Jewish women who lacked deep knowledge of Judaic texts might more easily drift away from Jewish lifestyles, in 1917 Schnirer opened a school with twenty-five girls; the school expanded rapidly and new branches were established. In 1937-38, 35,585 girls were enrolled in 248 Bais Yaakov schools in Poland alone. Although the original Bais Yaakov movement's vitality in Europe was brutally cut off during World War II, along with millions of lives and an irreplaceable, richly diverse cultural heritage, the basic assumptions underlying the formation of the Bais Yaakov schools revolutionized attitudes toward Jewish education for girls. Today, across the American Jewish day schools spectrum, providing girls with a Jewish education has become a communal norm.¹⁹

Rabbi Yosef Blau, spiritual supervisor (*mashgiach ruhani*) at Yeshiva University, notes that the development of educational opportunities for Orthodox girls and women in America has lagged behind those of Orthodox males by several decades, citing the opening of the Shulamis School in the 1930s, Central High School in Queens in 1945, and Stern College in 1954 as key dates. Despite this historical gap, he asserts that there is now an "astonishing," "radical" change in Orthodox women's educational experiences, affected by, but not entirely caused by the women's movement (Manhattan, Mar. 14, 1999).

With the support of Yeshiva University's Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Talmud studies for women were incorporated into the curricula at the Maimonides School in Brookline, Massachusetts, by the early 1960s. In addition, universal Torah education for women itself underwent a "radical reorientation" in the late 1970s, Rabbi Saul Berman emphasizes, when the Ramaz school in Manhattan and Flatbush Yeshiva in Brooklyn expanded Talmud studies for women within their curricula. This represented a "conceptual shift" that asserted and demonstrated the "affirmative value of women's study of *torah she b'al peh*, and even of women's relationship to God," says Berman. Coincidentally—but with enormous consequences—providing women with the intellectual tools to study Talmud

also "opened the way for a recognition of the need to eliminate unnecessary inequalities" from Orthodox Jewish life (Manhattan, June 2, 1999).

The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey data show that Orthodox girls as a group attend Jewish schools approximately the same number of hours and years as their brothers. The gender gap in length and intensity of Jewish education is lower among Orthodox Jewish youth than among any other group, although curricula vary by gender. This growing cadre of highly educated Jewish women was enhanced by the creation of women's yeshivot in Israel, accompanied by the expectation among American Jewish day school administrators that their female graduates, like their male graduates, will spend a year studying intensively in Israel before they proceed to college.

Haredi (right-wing Orthodox) schools, including Lubavitch schools, for example, do not teach talmudic texts to girls. Ironically, the late Lubavitcher rebbe stated that women should be taught the Gemara in order to preserve the quality of Jewish life, and in order that the tradition should be passed down from generation to generation. In a Hebrew article, he urged that women be taught the oral Torah so that they, who provide the most consistent presence in the home, can supervise and guide their children's religious studies. These study sessions are necessary, said Rabbi Schneerson, because without them women can easily be seduced by the charms of secular studies. Rabbi Schneerson asserted that women should study with their husbands subjects even including the "fine, dialectical" points of law that most previous rabbis posited as being inappropriate for women. He wrote: "It is human nature for male and female to delight in this kind of study. Through this there will develop in them [the women] the proper sensitivities and talents in the spirit of our Holy Torah."²⁰

In Judaism, with its scholarly hierarchy, religious education has and continues to occupy a uniquely privileged and important position. Only the most elite of initiates are considered erudite enough to interpret biblical and rabbinic law on a level commensurate with the ability to make halakhic decisions. Indeed, Yale Law School student Shoshana Gillers wonders if part of the resistance to women's gaining absolute competence in rabbinic law may be a "fear of expanding the base of people who can make decisions" (Newton, Mass., Aug. 19, 1998).

Within non-Jewish religious groups, in contrast, text study and cultural education may or may not be considered an important aspect of religious life. Even where texts, such as the Bible, are considered important, they may be perceived as being equally accessible to every thoughtful

reader. In such cases, one group of readers does not enjoy any particular authority, and a hierarchy of readers is not a significant factor in religious life. For example, in her ethnographic study *Godly Women: Fundamentalism and Female Power*, Brenda E. Brasher emphasizes the extent to which the biblical text is viewed in fundamentalist Protestant communities in the most egalitarian way as the supreme source, leveling status differences, equally available to all male and female believers. Brasher writes:

The soteriological ideas that undergird Julie's [one of the women in her study] attitudes toward religion—that the key salvific experience is open to both women and men, and that church experience is not mandatory for this experience to occur—are not exclusively held by women, but common among Christian fundamentalists in general. One important implication of these beliefs is that the salvific ideal of Christian fundamentalists can be interpreted in a surprisingly egalitarian way. To fundamentalists, the approved route to sustain and improve one's relationship with Christ is through biblical study, not through participation in any ritual or rite. ... And for fundamentalists, anyone can engage in Bible study. Gender is not a bar.²¹

Today, Orthodox girls and younger women display an impressive and historically unprecedented level of Judaic cultural literacy. Statistics on Jewish education for women gathered from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey document the fact that teenage girls have levels of education that are often very different from those of their mothers. As day schools have become more and more available in medium-sized communities across the United States, rather than only in the major metropolitan areas, a commitment to day school education has become a normative marker among Orthodox parents. Many mothers of Orthodox day school girls grew up in a different Jewish America, in which day schools were harder to find and were, in any case, looked down upon as "parochial" by most American Jews. Today the majority of Orthodox families, along with a growing core of committed Conservative and some Reform families, provide both daughters and sons with day school education, many of them continuing through the high school years.

Moreover, even where mothers and daughters have attended nominally the same day school, their education is not necessarily the same. Rather than learning in a primarily passive mode, girls today are more likely to be learning proactive text skills that enable them to pursue infor-

mation on their own, giving them a level of intellectual independence. Corroborating this fact, Rabbi Moshe Sokol, Touro College professor and pulpit rabbi, comments: "My wife went to Bais Yaakov and so did my daughters—but their education is very different" (Manhattan, Apr. 19, 1999).

Recent research reveals that formal Jewish education is the key differential in creating new generations of committed American Jews. However, when males and females sit together in a Jewish studies classroom, the texts they read and the issues they discuss may not be equally relevant to both genders. Unless the curriculum has been composed with a consciousness of gender equity, frequently most or all of the texts studied are androcentric in their focus; female students may be absorbing something beside a strong Jewish identity. In the worst case scenario, some say they "learn" that women do not really count in Jewish history, culture, or life. To deal with this and other issues in the religious day school context, Brandeis University's Women's Studies Program held a conference on "Gender in the Day Schools" (Waltham, Mass., February 1996) that has been expanded into an ongoing national initiative.

In addition to the now normative year of Israeli yeshiva study for girls between high school and college, women now have the opportunity to do serious text study throughout their adult lives. Women's text is offered in settings as diverse as the Orthodox Stern College for Women, an undergraduate school of Yeshiva University, and secular universities with strong Judaic studies programs, such as Brandeis, Columbia, University of Pennsylvania, and others. Some women endeavor to gain language and cultural skills necessary for the understanding of the Talmud and other rabbinic texts, in independent schools in Israel, such as Jerusalem's Pardes, or in the United States in schools such as New York's Drisha and Shalhevet and Boston's Ma'ayan. Some of these schools are for women only, and some are coeducational, but all share a fairly traditional religious orientation.

Some of these institutions are organized along a classical "girl's" model—that is, an instructor (often male) lectures, and the female students take notes. Other schools, however, extend to females the traditional yeshiva style of learning in the *chevruta* model: in *chevruta* learning, two study partners meet regularly in preparation for and in follow-up to lecture sessions, and the two partners wrestle with the text on their own terms. Working together in this way, the peer study *chevruta* develops a knowledge base and the confidence to move forward into new texts as well. Us-

ing the *chevruta* model for female study was until recently controversial; for example, when Jewish educator and founder of the Ma'ayanot High School for Girls Esther Krauss initiated the women's school Shalhevet in the 1980s, she received several angry phone calls because the school advertised that women would study using the *chevruta* model. At the time, detractors thought such a plan immodest and unseemly, as though women who tried to study this way would only do so in order to "copy men."

Over time, however, the notion that females can also study using the *chevruta* model has come to seem less startling to many. The mainstreaming of Jewish educational opportunities to adult women is a dynamically growing development in American Jewish life. As one example of the domestication of the concept of women learning on a regular basis, the religious Zionist women's organization, AMIT (formerly Mizrahi Women), introduced a program called Tanach Yomi, Daily Torah Study, at the organization's international convention in July 1999. Program developers distributed attractive, well-thought-out calendar-based study guidelines, drawing on the traditional biblical *sedra*, portion of the week. With no sense of suggesting anything controversial, the written guide urges AMIT women to study the Hebrew Bible daily with a *chevruta* partner:

Self-study at your own pace and time is fine, but the best way to learn is "chevruta," face to face with a partner. You can bounce ideas off each other and consider many different interpretations and analyses. So find a regular study partner if you can. You'll be amazed at some of the ideas you'll generate.

Moreover, the study guide assured readers that while "the facing page presents commentaries from rabbinic or contemporary sources," they should not feel intimidated because "as a rule there are no right or wrong answers." Such encouraging words reflect the postfeminist ethos of contemporary Orthodox Jewish life and the extent to which feminist principles have been mainstreamed and have lost the aroma of feminism.

On the other hand, it is significant that the study efforts of the AMIT women focus on the Bible, *torah she'bichtav*, and only tangentially refer to the realm of the "oral Torah," talmudic literature, *torah she'b'al peh*, given the traditional restrictions on women studying the Talmud and related texts. Devoutly observant women have frequently studied the Torah, at least in the vernacular; in that sense the Tanach Yomi program builds

on a traditional basis. Some AMIT women expressed the hope that Orthodox women's focus on Bible study may provide leadership to Orthodox men, encouraging them to place some of their own study focus on the Bible, which is sometimes neglected in male study circles. According to this opinion, by rejecting the idea that they ought to imitate the format of traditional male study, women may enrich male study options as well as their own.

Women as Scholars and Credentialed Leaders

Women's study of Judaic texts is taking place at both the grass roots and the most elite and esoteric levels. The expanding world of women's scholarship has given rise to a new generation of female notables. These "stars" of women's Torah learning, many of them Israelis, are having a great impact on the status of learning for Orthodox women in the United States. For decades, one of the few female Torah scholars who was sufficiently well known to be frequently quoted was the brilliant Nechama Leibowitz, whose insightful, accessible books discussing biblical portions of the week and their commentaries appealed to scholars and novices alike. Today, a group of dynamic Orthodox scholars and educators such as Rabbanit Chana Henkin, director of the Nishmat school for women, Malka Bina, director of the Matan school for women, and Dr. Aviva Zornberg, who lectures regularly in a variety of venues, are famous within and outside the Orthodox world, and travel frequently to the United States to lecture and raise funds for their institutions. In part because these scholars have refrained from identifying themselves as feminists, their activities have by and large avoided controversy.

Other celebrities traveling from Israel to speak in the United States include the articulate Orthodox political activist Leah Shakdiel, the first woman to be appointed to a religious council in Israel in her Negev development town of Yerucham, and English-born grandmother Alice Shalvi, outspoken founder of the Israel Women's Network and professor emerita of English literature at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Shalvi recently officially transferred her allegiance from Orthodoxy to Israel's Conservative Masorti movement, as a form of protest against perceived Orthodox unwillingness to change.

The leadership and scholarship of many of these prominent American and Israeli observant feminists was highlighted in the first two International Conferences on Feminism and Orthodoxy, sponsored by the Jew-

ish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA) and held in New York in February 1997 and 1998. JOFA's newsletters keep members abreast of new scholarship in the field, as well as developments on particular issues in Orthodox life. Organized Orthodox feminist scholarship and leadership has moved ahead forcefully in Israel as well, especially in a new organization of Israeli Orthodox Torah scholars called the Forum Nashim Datiot, the forum of Orthodox women. The Forum holds conferences and regularly publishes a Hebrew newsletter. At a scholarly conference on "Woman and Her Jewish Life" sponsored in Israel by the Forum in July 1999, a number of speakers utilized the honorific title *rabbanit*, which can be taken to mean either female scholar or rabbi's wife. In e-mail postings following the conference, Orthodox feminists discussed the advantages and disadvantages of an ambiguous title. Some felt that the very ambiguity shielded Orthodox feminists from unwanted attacks.

Orthodox Jewish life, like life outside Orthodox circles, is affected in many ways by the fact that Jewish women's scholarship has developed into a full-fledged field in colleges and universities across the United States and in Israel. A substantial number of researchers attracted to the study of women in Jewish texts and societies are themselves Orthodox men and women. As these Orthodox scholars negotiate between the dispassionate approach to their subject appropriate for the academy and whatever loyalties they feel toward Orthodox values, lifestyles, and institutions, they create innovative, hybrid Orthodox attitudes, in which intellectual freedom is a critical component. The intellectual integrity prized by Orthodox academics studying women's issues is then transmitted to their students, including Orthodox students, in the classroom, and to their coreligionists in other settings.

Some research on women takes place in institutions that have dedicated faculty positions to the study of Jewish women. At Brandeis University, for example, the Hadassah Research Institute on Jewish Women conducts research on Jewish women in diverse countries and historical periods, and a wide variety of undergraduate and graduate courses on Jewish women from the Bible through contemporary times are taught in the Near Eastern and Judaic Studies, American Studies, Sociology, and Women's Studies Departments. Similarly, some Orthodox women opt to take advantage of course offerings at the Jewish Theological Seminary, which include a broad spectrum of courses on Jewish women. Brandeis and JTS are unique in that they offer degree-granting graduate programs in Jewish women's studies.

In Israel, courses and then programs on Jewish women were developed first in secular environments at Haifa University, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and other universities, and in 1998 at the Orthodox-sponsored Bar-Ilan University. At Bar-Ilan, Professor Tova Cohen heads the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center for the Study of Women in Judaism, which has sponsored conferences on subjects such as "Challenges in the Education of Modern Orthodox Young Women" and "Women in Jerusalem: Gender, Religion, and Society." Many other colleges and universities offer individual courses dealing with Jewish women. Academic women are organized into a Women's Caucus at the Association for Jewish Studies conference, which enables them to more closely attend to each other's works and to share their experiences in the field. Their concerns are having an impact on Jewish education for women in general.

Scholars interested in analyzing the connections among gender, religion, social and historical change, and cultural milieu have explored the history of women in Jewish societies from the Bible onward, and have produced scores of pioneering works on Jewish women in the fields of Bible studies, rabbinics, history, literature, sociology, psychology, and popular culture. These scholarly works have had a significant impact on individual departments, on particular fields, and on Judaic studies as a whole. Thousands of students each year take college courses taught by feminist scholars that focus on women in Judaism. Moreover, not only college and university students have been affected by the ground-breaking writing of several generations of Jewish feminist scholars;²² the insights of female academics are slowly being incorporated into Jewish studies curriculums for children, teenagers, and adults as well.

Contemporary Jewish women's scholarship in the academy often focuses on extraordinary women from the past. This is particularly worthy because for most of Jewish history, women only occasionally held leadership positions public Jewish life. This may or may not have been a source of frustration to women with leadership capabilities; perhaps the fact that in the non-Jewish societies in which Jews made their homes women were also seldom leaders created a situation in which the nonleadership of females seemed to be a universal social norm. The scattered exceptions to this statement demonstrate that capable women existed in every generation, and some of them surmounted the norms of the Jewish communities in which they lived.²³ Knowing about Jewish women as individuals and as a group is changing the field of Judaic studies, and transforming the understanding of Jewish social history. This research makes it difficult for

reactionary elements within Jewish communities to be taken seriously when they claim that observant women lived in a kind of uncomplicated Jewish paradise before the rise of feminism.

Despite these impressive developments in professional scholarship, aside from women who become professors in academic institutions, celebrity lecturers, or headmistresses of their own schools, there are few career paths available to female Jewish scholars within the Orthodox world. Some committed women are willing to accept limited salaries and career trajectories and choose careers in Jewish education. But for those ambitious for leadership roles, career paths seem to lead away from, rather than into, Jewish scholarship. "A year or two of Drisha—and then they become investment bankers," comments Susan Aranoff of the New York Jewish scene (Manhattan, Mar. 15, 1999). She and others lament the loss to the creative Jewish intellectual arena.

In an attempt to remedy this lack, a few rabbis and institutions have created new credentialed positions for scholarly Jewish women. In several New York-area Jewish synagogues, young women have been appointed interns, serving the congregational community in numerous pararabbinic responsibilities. In Israel, Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, who left the pulpit of the Lincoln Square Synagogue to found and administer a variety of Jewish educational institutions for boys and girls, men and women, from his Israeli home in Efrat, has been training *toanot*, female pararabbinic lawyers who serve as advocates for women locked in difficult Israeli divorce situations.

Perhaps the most revolutionary development in this area has recently taken place in Israel. For years, a variety of American and Israeli individuals and institutions seriously discussed finding a way to credential women to function as *poskot*, rabbinic adjudicators who can answer religious ritual questions. In the fall of 1999, eight women who began a program at Rabbanit Chana Henkin's Nishmat school in Jerusalem two years earlier were credentialed to answer religious questions posed by other women about prescriptive behaviors connected to sexuality and reproduction, *hilkhot niddah*. While the program was deliberately launched quietly and discretely, Orthodox authorities and laypersons recognize the momentous nature of the change it represents. According to Michele Chabin's article in the *Jewish Week*, Yeshiva University president Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm praises the program, saying, "We're still at the beginning of the movement, a movement I hope will take root and flower." Rabbis Tzvi Warhaftig and Michael Rosen of the Yakar synagogue in Jerusalem were

similarly enthusiastic. More right-wing rabbis had reservations about the ability of women to function as genuine halakhic experts.²⁴

To avoid escalating controversy, the eight Israeli and American-born graduates who were picked from a group of sixty applicants will each be called not *posek/poseket* but *yoetzet halacha*, halakhic adviser or consultant ("Yoatzot Ka-Halakhah" in *Hatzofe*, Aug. 27, 1999, pp. 8-9). As Harriet Schimel insists, the subject of their expertise grew out of increasing frustration felt by many Orthodox women forced to turn to male rabbis with highly personal questions: "The study topic of *hilkhot niddah* was a choice of women in a women's institution, and not something imposed on women. Once women started studying this area in depth, they discovered a vast array of unmet needs that affect observant and nonobservant women." Moreover, says Schimel, these and related efforts have already affected wide segments of the Orthodox community, because "Nishmat has launched a very popular series of seminars for rabbis, teachers, mikvah attendants and others, to help bring the area of *hilkhot niddah* into the twentieth century." Often presented by women, they deal with menopause and other women's issues, as well as reproductive concerns (WTN, Oct. 7, 1999).

The landscape of women and Torah learning, and women's leadership options, has also been dramatically transformed by economic change. As Susan Aranoff points out, "much more wealth is now concentrated in the hands of women" (Manhattan, Mar. 15, 1999), especially in the hands of Orthodox women. Those women of means who are Orthodox feminists have used their economic clout to create new opportunities for female Orthodox learning and leadership. One woman who has been especially resourceful in this regard is Belda Lindenbaum, an articulate West Side New Yorker and active member of the JOFA board, who helped to found Michlelet Lindenbaum, an Israeli women's learning institution frequented by many American girls, and who has influenced important feminist changes at the Ramaz day school on the East Side of Manhattan.

Such changes require responsive partnering, in the form of forward-thinking Orthodox rabbis who are willing to search within the halakhic framework for creative, prowoman approaches. Rabbi Haskel Lookstein, principle of the Ramaz school and rabbi of the prestigious East Side New York congregation Kehillat Jershurun, has been one of several American religious leaders who have braved collegial disapproval to support the expansion of Orthodox spiritual expression for women. His leadership in this area has included his participation as a keynote speaker at an International

Conference on Feminism and Orthodoxy, having a women's *tefillah* prayer group meeting in Kehillat Jeshurun for selected Saturday morning services, and adapting activities at Ramaz to incorporate greater sensitivity to female students. Another pioneer, Rabbi Avraham Weiss has shown signal leadership in the area of women and prayer. His congregation, Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, was one of the first to incorporate a women's *tefillah* group on its premises. Rabbi Weiss's much-reprinted book, appropriately entitled *Women and Prayer*, has served as a sourcebook for many start-up Orthodox women's prayer groups, especially in more isolated communities.²⁵

From the standpoint of social history, it is clear that Orthodox and non-Orthodox American Jews have deeply influenced each other. From within the world of Orthodoxy has come a new awareness of the excitement possible through adult text study. Eloquent testimony to this influence is borne out not only in the great variety of adult Jewish educational opportunities burgeoning in communities across the United States, but also in the fact that the Reform movement has named one of its adult educational initiatives a *kollel*, traditionally a right-wing Orthodox setting for men to devote themselves to full-time Talmud study, often supported by their wives and fathers-in-law.

Outside Orthodoxy, the presence of female rabbis in other American Jewish movements has surely had an impact on Orthodox women's expectations that they should be able to pursue leadership roles within Orthodox scholarly realms. However, in each of these Orthodox career paths, the word "rabbi" is scrupulously avoided, and some of "interns" recoil from the suggestion that there is any link between their activities and those of Conservative, Reform, or Reconstructionist women rabbis. Like the headmistresses of many Orthodox schools for women in Israel, young cryptorabbinic interns seem to feel that they will be far more securely ensconced within mainstream Orthodox life if they eschew what some wryly refer to as "the f-word—feminism," the stigma of not only non-Orthodox feminists but middle-aged Orthodox feminist trailblazers as well.

The Feminist Theological Challenge

While many devout Orthodox feminists have skirted controversy by avoiding the "feminist" label, intrepid Bar-Ilan professor of philosophy Tamar Ross has persistently articulated a feminist theological challenge. Stringently Orthodox, a modestly dressed mother of grown children, Ross

is a woman of dazzling and fearless intelligence. Ross grew up in Canada, was active as a youth in the B'nai Akiva religious Labor Zionist movement, and moved to Israel on her own when she was sixteen years old. For the past several years, she has been speaking and writing about her approach to *torah mi sinai*, which she bases on the thoughts of Rabbi Isaac Kook, one of the revered icons of the Religious Zionist movement.²⁶

Ross's theory builds on a rabbinic principle often used to explain away incongruities in biblical literature: *Diberah torah b'leshon b'nai adam*, God speaks to human beings in human language.²⁷ Because God speaks in the language of man, God's words include anthropomorphisms that reflect human limitations rather than divine essence. In addition to using human words to communicate to human beings, says Ross, God also situates prescriptions in a social context that humans can understand. But social contexts change over time. Ross suggests that the Creator is revealed to human beings in serial fashion, and that human beings must continually readapt their understanding of what God wants, as social psychology changes over the centuries. She quotes Kook to the effect that no human being can ever truly know what God wants, and that all religions are an imperfect attempt to come close to God's design for human behavior. Judaism is pictured as coming closer than any other religion, but even rabbinic Judaism is seen as only an imperfect template, needing constant correction to draw closer to the divine paradigm.

When viewed in this way, changes in the understanding of divine will become sacralized as "a timely gift from God":

Of course revelation is influenced by history and the evolution of ideas, but history and the evolution of ideas themselves are the tools of revelation ... according to this view, the revolution in the status of women with which halakhah is now being confronted may be regarded as a new manifestation of Divine providence, or as a gradual unfolding of the Divine being. The newly evolving appreciation of the importance, integrity and value of women's spirituality and perspectives in our time is not a threat, but a rare religious privilege, the basis for a new revelation.²⁸

To some, Ross's insistence on serial revelation sounds dangerously close to the Conservative movement's concept of organic change and development within historical rabbinic law. Because the Conservative movement has been demonized by many Orthodox rabbinic leaders, any idea that seems to echo Conservative approaches can provoke strong re-

sponses. Two years ago, Ross presented these ideas in New York at Yeshiva University's Orthodox Forum, an annual scholarly exchange. Although she had repeatedly expressed her ideas in other settings in Israel and the United States without negative incident, her presentation at the Orthodox Forum precipitated personal attacks on her that she and others in attendance perceived as lacking in scholarly dispassion and the free exchange of ideas. Despite subsequent peacemaking efforts by some of the more moderate rabbis in attendance, Ross remains shaken by what seems to her the American Orthodox intellectual establishment's fearful unwillingness to enter into intellectual dialogue.

Ross's articulation of the feminist challenge to traditional cosmology can be viewed as a fulcrum for exploring what it means to be Orthodox in the modern era. Just as she urges Orthodox intellectuals to consider the implications of the apparent Torah-embedded immorality of the subordination of women, one might inquire whether Orthodox Jews can generally admit moral judgment outside of halakhah.

Indeed, Rabbi Saul Berman suggests that a widespread unwillingness to deal with the profound intellectual challenges of modernity is the underlying problem within modern Orthodoxy. He says that Orthodox Judaism has yet to create an "adequate theological framework" that comes to terms with the galvanizing negative and positive events—"the Holocaust and the birth of Israel"—that have changed the face of contemporary Jewish life. The facts on the ground under Jewish life have been utterly transformed, but Orthodoxy ignores the changes, producing what Berman calls a "fundamental theological malaise" in the Orthodox community. This malaise, he believes, is one of the main reasons that the right-wing rabbinic establishment attacks the practical details of the Orthodox feminist agenda. By concentrating on sociological retreat and resealing boundaries, by emphasizing hyperbolic praxis and scapegoating women's issues, Orthodox rabbinic thinkers can avoid and deflect attention from the truly difficult issues of modernity (Manhattan, June 2, 1999).

2. TRANSFORMATIONS IN FAMILY LIFE

The most basic changes in the lives of Orthodox women are variations on changes in the lives of non-Orthodox (and of many non-Jewish) women in family dynamics and lifestyles. Rabbi Benjamin Samuels of Congregation Shaarei Tefillah of Newton, Massachusetts, himself a highly involved thirtyish father of two young sons with an active professional-teacher wife, reflected on what he sees as a serious reformulation of spousal and family dynamics. He said that individual couples, as well as larger social groups, are grappling to find a "comfort level" that accommodates their lifestyles but still retains the positive aspects of "continuity and the traditions of Jewish patriarchy and matriarchy." On one hand, he noted, he feels a strong sense of "cognitive dissonance" when he reads certain traditional Jewish descriptions of and prescriptions for women. On the other hand, the "Torah works against the sameness of genders, and we don't want an androgynous society" (Newton, Aug. 26, 1998).

Most of the study participants described transformations in spousal relationships in very positive terms. Nursing instructor Peri Rosenfeld noted that today observant women are proud to be working mothers and spouses. She remembers that although her own mother coped successfully with working as a bookkeeper while mothering her family, she was careful to think of it as a way to earn a paycheck rather than as a career (Manhattan, July 15, 1998). Jewish high school teacher Chaviva Levine, herself a young wife juggling roles, says that Orthodox couples in her generation "share the burden. Husbands take on greater household and child care roles." She emphasizes that these role changes are accompanied by "greater economic parity. Women don't have to account for spending their husbands' money" (Manhattan, Mar. 15, 1999).

Touro College professor and rabbi Moshe Sokol talked about his son and daughter-in-law, "who have a rich relationship in a traditionalist Orthodox family, including studying together," an activity he is convinced "would have been unthinkable fifty years ago." Sokol noted an "increase

in women's professionalism across the Orthodox spectrum," even in the right-wing Orthodox world, saying that "most wives of *kollel* boys work, and it has even become desirable to marry educated women" (Manhattan, Apr. 19, 1999). Similarly, Rabbi Yosef Blau commented that his two married sons "watch their children two days a week while their wives work. Our sons accept it as a given that they will be involved in child care and cooking." Rabbi Blau stresses that this is more than a simple logistical change; it is a reflection of deep-seated social transformations:

In my children's generation there is a new assumption about equality and decision-making. When I was a younger man, and I moved for a job, my wife moved with me. Today, things are different. Many of these changes have taken place without a conscious decision to change. Society has evolved in certain ways, and people respond to those changes automatically (Manhattan, Mar. 14, 1999).

This renegotiating of the roles of young Orthodox husbands and wives reflects culture-wide changes in middle-class America. These changes are especially pronounced in comparison with the decades immediately following the Second World War, when American society placed strong emphasis on marriage and family life. At that time, highly traditional religious groups such as Catholics, Mormons, and observant Jews each experienced American middle-class culture as supportive of their particular religious-societal visions of "family values."²⁹ Like other religious-social groups, American Jews frequently viewed American society's emphasis on the family unit as specifically legitimating their own idealized visions of home and family and as reinforcing established Jewish values. Jewish men and women, many of whom were extensively Americanized by the middle of the twentieth century, often adopted both the external and the internal prescriptions of this American/Jewish domestic image. Following the American pattern, in 1946 more than half of American Jewish women were married by age twenty-two and over 80 percent were married by age twenty-five, and in 1953 almost two-thirds of Jewish women were married by age twenty-two and more than three-quarters were married by age twenty-five. In the 1950s and 1960s, American Jews were the most universally married of all American populations.

The postwar baby boom temporarily reversed what had been a century-long trend toward smaller Jewish families. However, even during this

family-hungry period, more than any other ethnic group, Jewish couples planned their families carefully, having their children a little later, providing space between siblings, and concluding their childbearing a little earlier than other women—with the result that their families were somewhat smaller. Thus the 1970 National Jewish Population Study revealed that married Jewish women had 2.8 children per family while the American non-Jewish average was 3.5.

American Jewish women are currently most likely to have their children during the fifteen-year period between ages 27 and 42; their mothers were most likely to have their children during the fifteen-year period between ages 20 and 35. For women currently aged 55-64, the average age of marriage was 22 and the average age of first childbirth was 24. In contrast, among married, fertile 1990 NJPS respondents aged 35-44, the average age of marriage was 25 and the average age of first childbirth was 27.³⁰ (Women who have not yet married and had children were excluded from these percentages.)

Today, while Orthodox women postpone marriage and childbearing less than other American Jewish women and have more children than any other group, they too are affected by changing American mores in regard to family formation. Studies indicate that the vast majority of Orthodox women engage in some form of family planning.³¹ Orthodox women are far more likely than other American Jewish women to marry in their early twenties and to begin their families by their midtwenties, and yet they are not less likely to attain advanced degrees and to pursue high status careers. They often accomplish their educational/professional goals while accommodating Orthodox marriage patterns by juggling roles earlier than non-Orthodox women. Their fertility rates are higher than those of their non-Orthodox sisters, with younger Orthodox women averaging three to four children while non-Orthodox women average fewer than two children per family—below replacement rate.

Despite the ubiquitousness of Jewish family planning, 1990 NJPS data show that the likelihood of a woman's having borne children and the number of children in her completed family are correlated with the strength of a woman's Jewish connections. Looking at fertility levels by years of Jewish education, for example, reveals that among women ages 30-49, having seven or more years of Jewish education was somewhat associated with having four or more children. In contrast, among women over age 50, no such association exists. This association between Jewish education and fertility does not indicate that Jewish education causes

higher fertility levels; it reflects, instead, the recent greatly increased likelihood that women from highly committed families will receive extended Jewish education. This explains differences by age as well: for older women, the family was often a more important source of enculturation than the classroom, whereas for younger women the classroom assumes increasing importance.

Today, within modern Orthodox as well as non-Orthodox communities, dual career Jewish households have become normative; well over half of American Jewish women with children under six are employed outside the home. The readiness of contemporary American Jewish women to pursue higher education and high-powered careers may be seen as an extremely complicated kind of coalescence, which is built on a rejection of earlier coalescence. In the 1950s, American Jewish women stayed home and took care of their families not because this was originally a Jewish value but because it was originally an American value. However, American Jewish women came to believe that they avoided work force participation because it was a Jewish value for married women to stay home. Indeed, when they left their homes to go to work, many felt that they were disobeying Jewish norms. Since the late 1960s, Jewish women have been at the forefront of feminist striving, almost universally acquiring higher education and pursuing career goals. Educational accomplishment for women became a coalesced American-Jewish value decades ago, and now occupational accomplishment for women is becoming a coalesced American-Jewish value as well.

Modern Orthodox Jews do not substantially differ from the educational patterns characteristic of other Jews in their cohort. Indeed, as Moshe and Harriet Hartman have painstakingly demonstrated in their recent monograph, "the more involved in formal and informal Jewish social circles, the collective celebration of Jewish identity, and the closer to Orthodox affiliation, the higher is the educational achievement." Not only does modern Orthodox affiliation indicate normative Jewish secular educational levels, but even within individual households, "contrary to popular opinion, Orthodoxy is not associated with more spousal inequality: educational differences are even smaller than among the Conservatives, Reforms, and Reconstructionists." When the narrowed gender gap and the positive relationship between secular education and Jewish connections are considered together, secular education for women emerges as associated with stronger, not weaker, Jewish bonds. As the Hartmans note, "the

relationship between Jewishness and education is slightly stronger for women than for men."³²

When comparing female roles in Orthodox Judaism with those in fundamentalist Christian communities, one striking area of difference is the educational dynamic between male and female spouses in the family setting. For Christian fundamentalists, aspirations to higher education and high-powered careers are often viewed as antithetical to God's law and human normalcy. As Brasher describes the fundamentalist antifeminist narrative: "In this story, disheveled gender expectations, fragmented marriages, economic instability, and widespread cultural malaise figure prominently, for fundamentalist women describe these societal factors as the cultural fuel that propelled them on a spiritual search."³³ While many Christian fundamentalist women do work outside the home, their employment is viewed as a regrettable economic necessity rather than a source of liberation or fulfillment. For Jews, including Orthodox Jews, however, women's secular education and career trajectories cause fewer ideological disturbances

Recent publications underscore the extent to which changes in the family dynamic have transformed American Jewish family life across denominational lines, including many segments of the "black hat" strictly Orthodox community. For example, a recent issue of the *Jewish Parent Connection*, a publication of the Orthodox Torah Umesorah National Society for Hebrew Day Schools, features articles such as "Babysitter or Day Care Center: That Is the Question"—making the assumption that "Due to today's high cost of living ... it is frequently necessary for both Jewish parents to pursue careers." The pediatrician/author considers the "pros and cons" of "nanny, au pair, babysitter, or day care center" without once trying to instill guilt in the working mother or assuming that she should remain at home until her children are in school all day long.³⁴ Two other articles consider ways for women with small children to find time for their spiritual lives. These articles suggest a proactive approach, including studying the High Holiday liturgy well before the holidays, determining which prayers are most meaningful and important, and hiring a babysitter or negotiating with family members who can facilitate participation during those parts of the service. During this process, the authors urge mothers to establish "channels for communication without recrimination" with the children's father, with the suggestion that he enable spiritual time for his wife.³⁵

Study participants suggested that women's advancement in the work world generates pressure to create new opportunities for women in public Orthodox Judaism. For example, Orthodox women in their thirties who participated in a focus group in Newton, Massachusetts, said that they felt a sense of "dissonance" between their work lives and their synagogue lives. At work, glass ceilings have gradually given way, and many Orthodox women successfully juggle the demands of executive placements, several children, husbands, and the intricacies of Orthodox lifestyles. When they find themselves in synagogues that give them little leeway for public spiritual expression or opportunities for leadership roles, they employ differing strategies to lessen the psychic discomfort. Some simply compartmentalize, living their secular and Jewish lives "on different pages." Others struggle to create change in their religious communities. Women who belonged to Orthodox congregations in which "women are visible and powerful" felt good about the changes they had helped to implement, and spoke sadly about synagogues in which "the differences between men and women are more pronounced than they have to be," citing as an example "synagogues that still won't allow women to serve as president" (Newton, Sept. 14, 1998).

3. WOMEN AND PUBLIC JUDAISM

Jewish Organizations

Like family life, organizational life in Jewish and Orthodox milieus has been transformed by changing American lifestyles. Older Orthodox women, like their non-Orthodox sisters, sometimes complain that women from "the younger generation" are less willing to volunteer time to work for Jewish organizations. Some see a relationship between younger Orthodox women's greater stress on learning and declining emphasis on working for Jewish causes. In the eyes of some older activists, women are learning instead of volunteering. However, contrary to this impression, and perhaps surprisingly for women with so many demands on their time, observant working mothers as a group do volunteer time for Jewish organizations but choose their volunteer activities very carefully. Orthodox women, like other participants in the National Commission on Jewish Women Focus Groups, said they demand clearly defined goals and they "can't just come and chit chat," preferring activities with "a beginning, a middle, and an end ... a specific task within a time frame." Almost universal was a preference for carefully orchestrated activities that make use of their particular talents. The causes that attracted Focus Group participants tended to be oriented around their children's schools, other children's activities, local disadvantaged persons, Jewish causes, or women's causes. More of them said they are willing to donate money than volunteer time.

This attitude reflects profound shifts in the expectations that women have for themselves and the way they spend their time. For much of the twentieth century, organizational activism provided American Jewish women arenas both for accomplishing Americanization and expressing their Jewishness, analogous in some ways to the public religious roles of Jewish men as a recognized group in the synagogue and parallel to the activism in prestigious church-related activities. For the rank and file of or-

ganizational membership—and for most women, including those who have sought out leadership roles, according to anecdotal reports—voluntarism for Jewish organizations has always served a social function in addition to whatever religious and communal ideals it reflected. Jewish organizational life was greatly enhanced by untold millions of hours of free labor and organizational ability. Women's Jewish organizations often developed a cultural ambience different from that of male-dominated philanthropies. If women aspired to leadership positions within their organizations, hard work and organizational ability were as important as the ability to donate money. This culture of earned progression up a leadership ladder was reportedly very fulfilling for many talented, energetic women.

Today, persons with higher levels of Jewish education are the most likely to volunteer time for Jewish causes, according to data from the 1990 NJPS. Orthodox Jews volunteer more time than non-Orthodox Jews. Some volunteer primarily for Orthodox causes. However, Orthodox women partake fully of the American Jewish trend to “boutique” voluntarism, which reflects very personalized organizational activism. Several women mentioned the emergence of new Jewish organizations, such as the US/Israel Women's Network:

We raise money to support shelters for abused women, and our whole focus is on the needs of women. That happens to be one of the projects, which is fund-raising, but we also bring groups of Israeli women to the United States and show them around, and raise American Jewish consciousness about the situation of women in Israeli society.

Another woman talked about her “pet charity,” which supports Ethiopian Jews:

It is all right to do the fund-raising, but when I go to Israel I try to work with the Ethiopians because that's the overall goal. It is hard to organize. Anyone who works with Israeli-related charities has had that difficulty. There is also lobbying for them.

Many younger American Jewish women, including Orthodox women, insist that organizational activity should be focused on discernible and measurable achievement of goals. A desire to become involved in a hands-on way with people was common to many participants. Among

many examples, P'tach works to provide Jewish educational opportunities for children with developmental challenges and GET (Getting Equitable Treatment) deals with the issue of women who have difficulties obtaining a religious divorce. Jews with hearing disabilities have their own rabbinical seminary. Health issues have spawned numerous Jewish responses, with organizations focusing on Jewish genetic disposition toward certain congenital diseases, Jewish women's propensity to breast cancer, and the location of organ and bone marrow matches for Jewish victims of debilitating conditions.

Arguably the most striking American Orthodox institutional response to feminism is the formation of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Organization (JOFA), which transformed the situation of Orthodox feminists through the 1997 and 1998 International Conferences on Feminism and Orthodoxy. A third conference, scheduled for New York in February 2000, will focus on a sociological analysis of contemporary issues in Orthodox women's lives.

Continuing the work begun by the International Conferences, JOFA works to sustain and support change through a newsletter and a variety of community initiatives. One example of a successful JOFA-sponsored synagogue initiative is Shabbat Telamdeni, one weekend each year when synagogues are encouraged to bring female scholars into the synagogue framework where they give a variety of classes. In 1999 over forty synagogues across the country participated in Shabbat Telamdeni.

Just as JOFA is a new organization reflecting the concerns of modern Orthodox women who believe they can synthesize the values of feminism and historical Judaism, Edah is a new organization legitimating the concerns of modern Orthodox men and women who believe that modern Orthodoxy has lost confidence in its historical mission. Adopting as its slogan "the courage to be modern and Orthodox," Edah sponsored an international conference in February 1999 that explored the following questions: preserving modern Orthodoxy in our day schools; an Orthodox view of biblical criticism; Orthodox Jews in the American political arena; and frontiers of feminism in Orthodoxy, among other issues. Thus, under the spiritual guidance of Rabbi Saul Berman, women's issues are placed in the context of the challenges of modernity rather than being considered in isolation.

Phyllis Hammer, a well-educated mother of four who is among the philanthropic sponsors of Edah, believes that women's issues are best considered in a broader context. She says it is a mistake to think of Orthodox

feminism as a “women’s” issue, because aspects of Orthodox life that have a negative impact on women ultimately have a negative impact on the entire Orthodox community. “We must fight for the causes we believe in,” Hammer emphasizes, “because only through our efforts will women’s situation be improved. And when things get better for women, they will get better for everyone” (Newton, June 27, 1999).

Synagogues themselves provide fascinating examples of institutional change. On the more liberal edge of the Orthodox spectrum, many synagogues allow women to hold board positions or serve as officers, and some have female presidents. Many congregations now allow women opportunities to speak in a congregational setting: the more right-wing congregations limit women’s speaking to the social hall or lecture contexts that clearly are outside the setting of worship services, while more liberal Orthodox congregations have women speaking from the *bimah* (prayer lectern) after services are over but before worshipers disband.

Women’s Prayer Groups as Catalysts

Orthodox women began to organize women’s prayer meetings in the early 1970s. Today, the Women’s Tefillah Network umbrella organization has addresses for over forty prayer groups in the United States, with additional groups in Israel, England, Canada, and Australia (WTN, Sept. 14, 1999). Although they were perceived by many outsiders as being “feminist” in their behaviors and motivations, from their inception participants sought out rabbinic adjudicators (*poskim*) who would give them “permission” (*heter*) to pursue their group agendas by creating religious rulings in their favor. It has been typical of Orthodox women’s *tefillah* groups to ask a particular rabbi to be their group’s regular and official *posek* and to refer all ritual questions affecting the group to him. For those few groups that are allowed to meet within the synagogue itself, the congregational pulpit rabbi is almost always the automatic halakhic authority (*morah d’asrah*) for the group. This tension between feminist and Orthodox norms continues, although, in true coalescing style, it is often unrecognized. Among themselves, in decisions that are not halakhic in nature, women’s *tefillah* groups operate according to feminist principles of consensus building and egalitarian empowerment. Where halakhic decisions are concerned, however, they accept the normative hierarchies of Orthodox life.³⁶

Responding to the issue of women conducting their own Torah service, as well as to the perceived feminist influence in the evolution of

prayer groups, rabbis as individuals and in groups have issued statements prohibiting or permitting participation of Orthodox women in *tefillah* groups for over two decades.³⁷ Contemporary rabbinic prohibitions often have a sociological rather than a halakhic basis: prayer group participants have been accused of lacking appropriately pure motivation, of looking for power rather than for spiritual expression, of rejecting their foremothers or Jewish notions of femininity, and of having been influenced by the "licentiousness of feminism." Ironically, in contrast, rabbinic defenders of women's *tefillah* groups usually eschew ideological arguments and set forth the halakhic precedents for each element of the prayer groups' activities.

While early *tefillah* groups were never embraced by the mainstream Orthodox community, they did not initially attract too much critical fire because of their relative scarcity. Infinitely greater numbers of Orthodox girls and women, for example, were affected by the exponential growth of day schools during the last quarter of the twentieth century, with their educational opportunities for elementary and high school girls, as discussed earlier.

As the years passed, and women's *tefillah* groups spread and gathered strength, groups of Orthodox women began making demands in the areas of learning, leadership, and life-cycle-event ceremonies. In Israel, especially after the prayer and Torah-related activities of the Women of the Wall garnered virulent *haredi* opposition for over two decades, *tefillah* groups became more and more the symbol of Orthodox feminism and the target of antifeminist ire. Significantly, not a single one of the women, rabbis, and scholars interviewed for this study believes the *tefillah* groups to be the most important result of feminism and related social trends in the Orthodox community. Many women and men expressed the belief that the groups themselves were a transient or transitional phenomenon—although they differed strikingly in their opinions of what developments would follow the demise of the prayer groups.

The informants are certainly correct that women's prayer groups have directly affected a relatively small number of Orthodox women. Ironically, their visibility has been enhanced astonishingly by those who oppose and demonize them. However, there is no doubt that *tefillah* groups have played and continue to play an extremely significant role in initiating and fostering more widespread changes in other areas of Orthodox life.

Orthodox women who enjoy meeting together to pray and read the Torah often speak of the healing power of female bonding in these settings. Many female participants expressed their belief that the men who get up every morning at six to help "make" a men's minyan (prayer quorum of ten men) are motivated not only by their religious obligation to try to pray in a group and to enable others to pray in a group as well, but also because they enjoy a kind of male bonding, a "men's club." Women, on the other hand, are not officially part of the *kehillah*, the worshipping Orthodox congregation. While they are encouraged to hear the reading of the Torah, their presence at worship services is irrelevant to the official functioning of the congregation. Participants said that women's prayer groups afford them the opportunity to take responsibility for their own prayers, to depend upon themselves and each other, and thus to take an active role in creating a praying community.

Orthodox women are not alone in seeking out the comforts of a group dynamic. However, the hostility that Orthodox women's prayer groups encounter is quite distinctive. In contrast, within fundamentalist Christian groups, women's sacred study and worship group activities are not viewed as threatening. Brasher describes the host of women's activities attended by fundamentalist Christian women, with the full blessing of the male-dominated church:

There, the programs that contribute to the formation of the enclave include five women's Bible studies, a biannual women's retreat, a monthly women's outreach luncheon, an ongoing women's prison outreach ministry, a monthly women's breakfast, and various other special programs for women.... At each, the core women's ministry program is the women's Bible study.... At all women's ministry events, women are the speakers, table leaders, musicians, and film/tape crew as well as the attendees. During the Bible studies, detailed examination of biblical texts takes place in a small study/prayer cell cluster of eight to ten women.³⁸

Celebration of Women's Lives

Much Jewish feminist attention and effort has focused on providing vehicles for sacralizing major events in women's lives. Religious rituals and customs associated with major life-cycle events make individuals feel that events that are profoundly moving to them personally are also significant

to their friends and communities of faith, to God and Jewish history. As a result even Orthodox women who don't think of themselves as particularly feminist have, over the years, facilitated grassroots acceptance for events such as the *shalom bat*, welcoming an infant girl into the community and covenant of Israel, and the bat mitzvah, welcoming the pubescent girl into religious responsibility and ritual adulthood.

Several decades ago, when the bat mitzvah ceremony had become relatively commonplace in Conservative and Reform congregations, it was still unusual for Orthodox families and synagogues to mark a girl's turning twelve with anything more elaborate than a congregational announcement and gift (a book or Sabbath candlesticks) and a sweet-sixteen style party for female classmates. In recent years, however, the serious bat mitzvah event has become normative in most American centrist and modern Orthodox settings.

Bat mitzvahs take many forms, depending on congregational norms and a given family's leanings. In communities with an active Orthodox women's *tefillah* group, bat mitzvahs can be conducted as part of a women's prayer service, with the bat mitzvah girl, her female family and friends conducting the service and the Torah reading. In communities that do not feel comfortable with women's services, the bat mitzvah girl often "learns" a biblical or mishnaic text, sometimes conducting a class with her female classmates. Talks are often given for and by both male and female family members at a regular service or at a festive meal preceding or following the service or class. Bat mitzvah girls report that these ceremonies are meaningful to them because they show that the community is "paying attention" to the fact that they have attained a new religious status. Many talk about warm family involvement in the event.

Less ubiquitous, but still significant, is the proliferation of ceremonies celebrating the birth of Orthodox daughters. Such ceremonies are often built on earlier customs in Sephardi and German Jewish congregations, which also welcomed female infants in a ceremonial service with the recitation of psalms and other liturgical elements. Because the *shalom bat* is not prescribed by Jewish law as is the *brit milah* circumcision ceremony, parents, friends, and rabbis often work together to create personalized liturgies. While *shalom bat* ceremonies often struck Orthodox practitioners as "strange" thirty years ago, they have gradually lost their strangeness and have become accepted, while not necessarily *de rigueur* in Orthodox circles.

Women's roles have expanded even under the *chuppah* (wedding canopy) in variations of traditional Jewish wedding customs and ceremonies. Tamara Charm, a twenty-six-year-old business school student and former JOFA professional, recounts diverse forms of participation in Orthodox weddings she has recently attended. She describes scenes that blend old and new: the Orthodox groom traditionally sits in one room with his male family and friends, and some recent Orthodox brides have established a room for themselves and their female cohort who read the bride edifying homilies and sing and dance for her. At one wedding, the rabbi and groom came to the bride's room in the moments before the ceremony to sign the prenuptial agreement that would prevent her ever becoming an *agunah*. Tamara participated in a wedding in which she and a friend read the *ketubah* (marriage contract) under the canopy, an honored task often performed by a rabbi, teacher, or male family member. At some ceremonies, female friends and relatives read the English translation of the *sheva brachot*, the seven blessings bestowed upon the wedding couple under the canopy, comprising the heart of the wedding ceremony. And, in an innovation that preserves feminist change for all time, some Orthodox rabbis today include the name of the bride's and groom's mothers, as well as their fathers, in the traditional *ketubah*.

Young married focus-group participants talked about a wedding in which, after *kollel* (devoutly Orthodox) rabbis had recited the wedding blessings, the elderly aunts of the bride and groom read the blessings in English. They agreed that on many different fronts room is gradually being made to incorporate women and women's life-cycle experiences into Jewish rituals (Newton, Sept. 14, 1998).

Not unexpectedly, such changes sometimes provoke negative responses. According to one twenty-four-year-old Orthodox married graduate student, a rabbi in the New York suburb her bridegroom lived in before they married gave a cautionary sermon three weeks before their wedding. The rabbi spoke out against such "feminist" and putatively disruptive innovations as a double-ring ceremony, a bride having her own *tisch* (a separate room for the bride and her female friends and relatives to enjoy singing, scholarly commentary, and socializing prior to the wedding), and a married woman keeping her own name for professional reasons. She noted that the same rabbi off the pulpit brags approvingly to congregants, "My wife earned a master's degree—but it sits in a drawer" (Aug. 19, 1998).

In contrast, encouraging reinterpretations of tradition, the ever-outspoken Leah Shakdiel comments on the limitations, for contemporary women, of the unmediated Jewish wedding ceremony:

Women's maturity is not based on individuation vs. God, Torah, and Community, but on their transition from father to husband, on their *kiddushin*, i.e. being set aside from all women in the world for a particular man who is going to make them into a *kli* (vessel) by having kosher sex with them. Note the wedding: father negotiates the *ketubah* and is present when it is signed, then accompanies the groom toward the bride, then lingers a moment behind to bless the daughter as he hands her over to her next possessor.... This is how it is if we just let halakhah and tradition do their job as effective socializers, without active reinterpretation of all this on our part (WTN, Sept. 9, 1999).

The Symbolism of Women and Kaddish

Communal norms are changing not only in the area of joyous life-cycle celebrations but also in the area of death-related ceremonies. Indeed, the universality of mortality and loss have made women's roles in Orthodox bereavement situations a motif that touches many nonfeminist women. More and more, Orthodox women expect to be involved—to speak at a funeral, to give a class at a *shiva* home, or to say kaddish for a departed loved one.

Once rare, the sight of a woman saying kaddish, the traditional prayer that mourning children recite at daily prayer services for eleven months following interment, has become increasingly familiar in some Orthodox congregations. This transformation, however, has proceeded at a very uneven pace, so that mourning Orthodox women in an unfamiliar congregation may well run the risk of encountering unreceptive responses.

"Three years ago, when I was saying kaddish for my mother, most congregations were not used to seeing a woman on weekdays," one woman recalls. "On occasion, men screamed at me. Some ogled. Finally, one old man walked over to me and asked me who I was saying kaddish for. I told him, my mother. 'Oh,' he commiserated sadly, 'she had no children?'"

Recently, it has become far more common for Orthodox women to make the commitment to say kaddish on a daily basis and, as a result,

some congregations have adjusted to this reality. I turn here to my own recent experience, which provides an anecdotal basis to believe that change is well under way, but responses to women and kaddish differ strongly from community to community. After my mother's sudden death in 1997, when the exhausting but supportive *shiva* mourning week was over, our young Orthodox rabbi, Benjamin Samuels, encouraged me and my two younger sisters to make the commitment to say kaddish on a regular basis. Waking in the winter darkness, driving to the synagogue by the cold light of the crescent moon, I found that the daily davening rhythm of the prayer services became critically important to me. Individual prayers emerged with powerful meaning. As the year passed, I could feel the mysterious healing effect of the communal kaddish and the community of worshipers answering.

Over the course of eleven months, traveling for work, I said kaddish in synagogues across the country and in Israel. Often I was welcomed, more often politely ignored. In one Seattle synagogue, where I huddled alone in the tiny corner of the social hall behind a horizontal *mekhitza*, the rabbi's face materialized suddenly as he set up a second, vertical *mekhitza* in front of the horizontal one. The unexpected pain I experienced was a lesson to me as a researcher about the power of kaddish issues in radicalizing Orthodox women.

A bittersweet, memorable experience came one morning in Los Angeles, when a solicitous older man asked me if I knew how to use the *sid-dur*, the Hebrew prayerbook. As the men arrived, he counted to himself in Yiddish: "*Noch a yid, noch a yid*" (another Jew, another Jew) as he waited for a minyan, a quorum of ten men. I, of course, was a *yideneh*—a Jewish woman, and thus not quite a Jew. But he made up for it all when someone asked him, "Who is she?" "A *kaddishel*," he answered simply, a child who has been designated to say kaddish for the departed parent.³⁹

However, the simple reality of women reciting kaddish on a regular basis has provoked some reactionary thinkers to heat up the opposition. Many observers note that to bolster their opinions, they distort facts or resort to perverse arguments. For example, years ago Rabbi Joseph. B. Soloveitchik gave permission to the daughters of Rabbi Simon, a revered teacher at Boston's Maimonides Day School, to say kaddish for their father. One daughter was distressed recently to hear that her own story was being erroneously cited by a prominent rabbi, who publicly declared that Rabbi Soloveitchik had *refused* these daughters permission to say kaddish. Rabbi Simon's daughter communicated to them that the opposite was true

and received a private apology, but as yet no public retraction has been offered.

In another incident, a recent issue of the respected journal *Tradition* includes a putative book review, in reality a vicious attack on the observant women who contributed to a new, fascinating volume, *Jewish Legal Writings by Women*.⁴⁰ Ridiculing a masterful article on "The Female Voice of Kaddish" by Rochelle Millen—a scholar who is a professor, Stern college graduate, and the wife of an Orthodox day school principal—the reviewer insists that women saying kaddish unequivocally constitute a sexual distraction to male worshipers.⁴¹ The reviewer's argument also ignored the statement in Norma Baumel Joseph's article on female modesty in the same volume, demonstrating that Rabbi Moses Feinstein referred almost offhandedly in one of his rulings to traditional synagogues in which a few women frequently stood at the back to say kaddish or collect charity.⁴²

For women struggling with the loss of a loved one, such venomous opposition to their saying kaddish is a source of pain and puzzlement. Ironically, the kaddish issue has galvanized many Orthodox women to become much more feminist in their outlooks than they might otherwise be. Women's kaddish has also been one of the primary causes, along with *agunah*, unifying Orthodox and non-Orthodox women. By harassing women who wish to say kaddish, reactionary elements in the Orthodox community have encouraged two developments that they wish to avoid: they have made Orthodox women into feminists, and they have helped build bridges between women in Orthodoxy and other Jewish denominational spheres.

4. PROBLEMS AND DIVISIONS

Neither Seen Nor Heard: Synagogue Architecture, *Kol Isha*, and the Silencing of Women

The male-centeredness of public Judaism, displayed in a plethora of contexts, was cited by many women interviewed and in numerous entries on WTN. When bar mitzvah boys or grown men are called up to the Torah, for example, they are traditionally called up only by the names of their fathers—"Yaakov ben Yitzhak"; only sick persons are identified by the names of their mothers in the public *mishebayrach*, prayers for healing—"Yaakov ben Rivkah." Even on gravestones the deceased are traditionally identified by their fathers' names only.

In an effort to reclaim their own names, along with their own voices, women and men who are involved in the women's movement have made an effort to insert the names of mothers into each of these areas. Sometimes, they meet with puzzlement, sometimes with active opposition. Sometimes, however, they find that custom can be changed by a simple, nonbelligerent request. Rabbi Noam Zohar reports that whenever he is asked to have an *aliyah*:

I give my name as "Nahum Yaakov ben Ora Tamar ve-Yitzhak." This has been accepted in a great variety of shuls, with the *gabbai* [sexton] not seeming to bat an eyelash (just shows you how hardy those *gabbaim* are!). Of course it probably helped that in some cases the name was preceded by "*Harav*" [the rabbi].... In any case, there's nothing halakhically problematic about it, and there is a habit to just repeat whatever appellation an individual gives for himself (WTN, July 13, 1999).

Similarly, individuals report quietly inserting mothers' names in marriage

contracts, grave markers, and many other situations in which they have not traditionally been used, with little or no resistance.

Lest observers imagine that the inclusion of women's names in official life-cycle documents is an inconsequential gain, it is important to recognize the powerfully disfranchising and disorienting effect of finding oneself rendered invisible by the omission of one's name in an event that has changed one's life. Nessa Rappaport's moving short story "The Woman Who Lost Her Names" provides imaginative documentation of the psychological devastation experienced by a young mother who can protect neither herself nor her infant daughter from this lack of female agency. In contrast, one Orthodox female lawyer who participated in and whose name was included in the traditionally all-male *pidyon ha-ben* ceremony thirty days after the birth of her male first-born child reified her pathbreaking participation by declaring, "Look, it's my *rehem* [womb] this prayer is discussing" (Newton, Mass., October 1996).

Another realm in which antifeminist backlash is often felt is that of Orthodox synagogue architecture. In old-style Orthodox synagogue buildings, women were usually physically distanced from the service by being placed in a balcony or behind a substantial *mekhitzta*, and, in some cases, women prayed in a separate room adjoining the men. As a mark of changing times, these extreme separations fell out of favor, and for decades the trend in synagogue architecture approached giving women close to equal access to the central activities of the prayer service. Even in some hasidic circles, concern for women's participation was manifest, as one-way mirrors were installed, which would allow women complete visual access while preventing the men from looking at them.

For decades, the construction of balconies for women was on the wane when new modern Orthodox synagogues were built. Those that did make use of balconies were likely to have U-shaped, low-slung balconies surrounding the men's section on three sides, from which the ark and reading stand were clearly visible and the service was easily heard. During the past ten years, however, some Orthodox congregations have reverted to the older style of high balconies, in which hearing and seeing the service is significantly impeded for female worshipers. Professor David Berger of Brooklyn College/CUNY commented with astonishment that this building style should outrage even moderates on women's issues. "Why doesn't anyone talk about this?" Berger wondered, shocked at the lack of outcry. "Surely no one can be against women seeing and hearing the service" (Manhattan, Apr. 19, 1999).

Orthodox women in their thirties who participated in a focus group spoke bitterly about a synagogue that had burned down and been rebuilt in a neighboring community. The destroyed building had an “inclusive women’s section,” they said. But as the new building was being planned, powerful men in the synagogue worked with the rabbi and the architect to make sure that in the new structure all women except the handicapped would have to climb into a high balcony. Those congregants who protested were repeatedly put off with a series of rationalizations about why the balcony had to be built: first, that women couldn’t be on the same floor because the women’s section would interfere with the sanctuary facing east, and then that a women’s section on the main floor would interfere with accommodating the city’s fire laws, which required a certain number of access doors. In the end, neither the direction the sanctuary faced nor the number of access doors was adjusted as the planners had claimed—but the balcony was built nonetheless. Many congregants said they felt tricked and manipulated (Sept. 14, 1998).

Many newly visible stringencies are associated with the parameters of women’s roles. One particularly significant locus of contemporary halakhic rigor centers on *kol isha*, or “a woman’s voice.” As it is colloquially understood within the Orthodox community today, prohibitions clustered around the concept of *kol isha* laws prohibit observant men from hearing women’s voices in songs that have erotic valence. Concern about hearing women’s voices sounds arcane to the point of pathology to many observers outside the Orthodox world (and to some inside it as well). The fact that Orthodox environments must acknowledge such concerns and deal with them is one important boundary between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jewish feminists.

Currently, a broad and disparate range of communal norms and rabbinic pronouncements determines what is perceived as an erotically enticing woman’s voice: At the most stringent end of the spectrum, some rabbis proscribe any female singing, even in the synagogue among a large group of worshipping Jews or around the Sabbath table in the home. At the more lenient end of the spectrum, some rabbis state that only a woman singing overtly sexual musical solos, such as a night club torch song, really fulfills the intent of *kol isha* prohibitions. A few even more lenient rabbis suggest that in contemporary American society, men are so accustomed to hearing women’s singing voices in the public media, and men and women work so closely together on a regular basis, that women’s

voices are not ordinarily erotically charged and concern about *kol isha* prohibitions is misplaced.

Historically, the evolution of the concept of *kol isha* is convoluted, as Rabbi Saul Berman has demonstrated in his article tracing the law's history. The evolution of the *kol isha* concept can be briefly summarized. The talmudic axiom *kol b'isha ervah* (the voice of a woman is naked/sexual/licentious) is twice attributed to the Amora Rabbi Samuel. These initial talmudic references to *kol isha* are concerned with the speaking voices of women, not their singing voices. In the first, primary text, the sound of women speaking is considered a distraction to men absorbed in sacred tasks: were a man to hear his wife's voice as he recited the pivotal *sh'ma yisrael* prayer, it might distract him in a similar way as her naked body would, and he would lose his devotional intent and intensity (Berakhot 24a). Secondly, in a completely different discussion, Rabbi Samuel is quoted by a colleague who insists that talking or communicating via messages or messengers with married women, even to inquire about another man's wife's well-being, might lead to billets-doux and illicit sexual liaisons (Kiddushin 70a).

A third, entirely separate discussion about banning singing at feasts comments that when men and women sing together in a festive environment they create an erotic conflagration (Sotah 48a). This discussion became the basis for prohibiting female instrumentalists or vocalists at such gatherings, but was not linked to the concept of *kol isha* until much later.

The two separate talmudic principles about the dangers of women's speaking voices (1) in prayer or (2) in conversation remained unlinked in rabbinic literature for hundreds of years. Some rabbis focused on *which* women's voices should be prohibited, stipulating that the voice of a woman who is sexually unavailable to a man—that is, another man's wife—is the most important application of *kol b'isha ervah*. It was not until the late medieval period that the contemporary conception of *kol isha* began to jell. By the time of the *rishonim* in Franco-Germany, rabbinic assumptions were usually that *kol isha* refers to women's singing voices, rather than to their speaking voices. Many of these commentators did not consider women's voices to be inherently inappropriate, only situationally inappropriate. Moreover, they articulated the principle that the novelty of exposure makes *kol isha* arousing and problematic, whereas regularity—*regilut*—insulates men from erotic feelings in ordinary situations.⁴³ Perhaps counterintuitively, significantly greater stringency developed in the rabbinic definition of *kol isha* over the centuries. Although rabbis

differed widely with each other over the trajectory of halakhic development, with few exceptions rabbinic conceptions in early modern and modern times moved toward considering the voices of postpubescent women as tantamount to nudity.

The fear of male sexual response, with its commensurate loss of control leading to inappropriate sexual behavior, is the animating rabbinic anxiety articulated in discussing each one of these separate laws, as they have developed. Women are not, by and large, pictured as deliberate temptresses, as they are in some other religious cultures. Rather, in the rabbinic imagination, male sexuality is viewed as an extremely volatile element. Given visual or auditory stimulation and the opportunity, the assumption is that men will pursue inappropriate sexual liaisons. Fascinatingly, the rabbis of the Talmud seemed to include themselves in this observation. Many anecdotes that illustrate the strength and involuntary nature of male sexual response feature prominent rabbis trying to outwit their own powerful sexual impulses.

One way of dealing with men's capacity for inappropriate sexual activity is simply to prevent interaction between men and women, except under the most controlled conditions. Rabbinic law prevents prohibited sexual intercourse by prohibiting social intercourse.

The technique of preventing male arousal by legislating strict separation between the sexes is very effective, but at what price to women's well-being? Jewish law never asks that question. The constant reference point in rabbinic interpretations of *kol isha* is the impact of given behaviors on males only. By focusing only on men, we lose sight of the total effect of these laws upon the external and internal lives of women.

Within the sociological realities of twentieth-century life in the United States, concern about strict observance of *kol isha* laws did not move to the fore until relatively recently. What seems clear is that the greater extremism of the *haredi* world, rather than isolating ultra-Orthodoxy even further from modern Orthodoxy, often causes a crisis of confidence among more moderate Orthodox Jews. The very extremism of the *haredi* world sometimes causes moderate Orthodox Jews to doubt the authenticity of their own norms. Thus, *haredi* norms influence modern Orthodox norms.

As a result of this new emphasis on *kol isha* strictures, communal norms are changing, especially in the right-of-center community. Boundaries between various segments of the Orthodox world are permeable, and people who define themselves as "modern" or "centrist" Orthodox often

find themselves interacting unexpectedly with those to the right—who adopt increasingly stringent attitudes about women's voices. Thus Orthodox women report that their sons returning from yeshivot in Israel sometimes refuse to sit at the Shabbat table with their mothers if their mothers join in the singing of *zemirot* (Sabbath melodies). Similarly, some young women have reported that before communal matchmakers will introduce them to eligible young men, the women are required to promise that they will not sing *zemirot* at the family table after they are married. How widespread this phenomenon may be is difficult to ascertain, but its mere existence is telling. Even in modern Orthodox congregations, women with resonant voices are sometimes asked to keep their voices at a whisper during the congregational singing of liturgical passages. "I heard your voice," one rabbi said to an observant woman who has since stopped attending synagogue altogether, "and I don't want to hear it again."

In contemporary Orthodox societies, two genres of laws have been sociologically conflated: The rabbinic concept of female modesty (*tsniut*) has led in the past to proscriptions against women taking leadership positions or making themselves prominent in Jewish communal or religious life. Resistance to women speaking in leadership roles has today been conflated with laws of *kol isha*. Thus, at international conferences of right-wing Orthodox rabbis and laypersons, rabbinic leaders have delivered impassioned diatribes against Orthodox women who (1) speak in front of family and friends at family life-cycle celebrations—such behavior was described as "a great tragedy befalling Jewish communities today"—or (2) speak out against the treatment of *agunot*—such behavior was described as "women who deliberately set out to undermine the rabbis and Torah authority."

The social construction of reality within contemporary Orthodox communities is such that women's voices are always considered dangerous. Women's voices are dangerous when they sing prayers in the synagogue where men are present; when they pray and study the Torah in women's *tefillah* (prayer) groups where no men are present; when they sing *zemirot* at the private Sabbath table; when they address family and friends at a public *simcha*; when they speak out against the mistreatment of *agunot*; and when they engage in ordinary conversation with men who are not their husbands.

It is impossible to overestimate the psychological impact of silencing, stifling—or giving up—one's voice. Orthodox women report that they frequently are made to feel that if they insist on voicing their prayers and

their concerns, they will place themselves beyond the pale of the Orthodox world and make themselves outcasts. Ironically, it is the very loyalty and devotion of Orthodox women that make them vulnerable to this kind of psychological manipulation.

In opposition to this approach, rabbis who encourage expanded roles for women often quote the views of a leading European halakhic authority, Rabbi Yehiel Weinberg, the *sredei aysh*, who noted in the 1960s that German-trained Orthodox rabbinic leaders, *gedolei ashkenaz*, are more sophisticated in their pedagogical techniques than those from more easterly communities; the former believe

women of our generation, who are highly educated, and know languages and science, have feelings of self-respect, and would feel isolated and alienated if they were forbidden to participate in holy singing. For this reason the *gedolei ashkenaz* allow women to participate in singing *zemirot* on Shabbat together with men.... We saw women treated in this way who became learned and upheld the *mitzvot* with great fervor.... Women who are forbidden, on the other hand, can leave traditional Judaism, *halilah* (*Sredei Aysh, Sha-alot uTeshuvot*, pp. 13-14, Item 8, circa 1960s).

Others emphasize the concept of *regilut*, the accustomed behaviors of a given society, a longtime rabbinic principle. Where men and women routinely speak and interact, numerous rabbis have insisted, the regularity of this interchange removes the volatile sexual effect of women's voices upon male listeners.

The Politicization of Women's Issues

Anger has itself become a significant—and much commented upon—phenomenon in Orthodox life. Opponents of general or particular changes often support their opposition by referring to “those angry women.” Assertions that Orthodox feminists are “angry” are accompanied by the claim that such women are politically motivated. Political motivation is anathema in many Orthodox quarters, since it implies solution by the external forces of feminism. When discussing angry “Orthodox feminists,” detractors often charge that such women are “shrill” and “unhappy” and these alleged qualities become a basis for delegitimizing women and their goals.

Like others who feel deeply about a cause, it is true that some Orthodox feminists may express ideas with considerable emotion, and this can at times delegitimize the causes they champion. Much of the anger generated on both sides derives from feelings about rabbinic rulings. Individual rabbis and groups of rabbis sometimes declare particular activities to be halakhically prohibited, while these activities actually fall into the category of permissible but in their opinion(s) undesirable. Rabbi Saul Berman argues strongly that it is inappropriate for a rabbi to blur the line between what is halakhically prohibited and what is undesirable. As regards a permitted but (in his opinion) undesirable activity, a rabbi should try to persuade the suppliant. He should not create the impression that the activity is forbidden just to make sure people do what he wants them to. According to Rabbi Berman, it is symbolic of the deteriorating relationship between rabbinic authorities and the communities they serve that rabbis no longer trust their own powers of persuasion. Rather than taking the time to educate the community to a particular viewpoint, he says, these authorities unilaterally declare permissible activities to be *assur* (prohibited) (Manhattan, June 22, 1999).

This binary approach, which reduces rabbinic law to rigid yes-or-no categories, has created a dynamic of opposing backlashes crashing against each other. The anger of both those who work for change and those who oppose change was evident in stories told by two rabbis describing similar situations in two different communities. In one case, Rabbi "A" decided against the Orthodox feminists; he reported that they reacted with anger, and did what they wanted to do in an off-site women's *tefillah* group setting. In the second case, Rabbi "B" decided in favor of the Orthodox feminists; half a dozen congregational families expressed themselves as being so angry over this decision that they left the congregation for a more quiescent nearby synagogue. In both cases, those who didn't achieve their goals were angry. However, the anger of Orthodox feminists is often cited by those opposing them, while the anger of persons opposing change is seldom commented upon.

In the first incident, New York area Rabbi A was confronted by "feminist" women who wanted to dance with a Torah scroll on the holiday of Simhat Torah. Rabbi A described the congregation under his leadership as relatively liberal on women's issues: for example, women recite *kaddish* and *birkat gomel* (thanksgiving prayer for having escaped danger) from their side of the *mekhitzza* during the synagogue service; they also serve on the board and give classes. Traditionally, during this lively holi-

day, while Orthodox men parade with several Torah scrolls, singing and dancing for hours in the men's section, women have not traditionally danced with a Torah scroll on their side of the *mekhitzah*. Although some women passionately wanted to dance with the Torah, other members of Rabbi A's congregation, both male and female, just as passionately did not want women to hold the Torah scroll.

Rabbi A said he tried to resolve the strong antithetical feelings in his congregation by talking to each group and creating dialogue among them. These attempts, however, were not successful, and ultimately, "I felt that allowing women to hold the Torah would be destructive to the *kehillah* [congregation] in general, that it would be harmful to too many members of the shul [synagogue]," he recalls. "In the end I had to make a decision, and I said no. But I did tell them that it was halakhically acceptable. Judaism is not synonymous with halakhah. We don't do everything that is halakhically possible" (Manhattan, Apr. 19, 1999).

The women in his congregation, having been told that halakhah permits them to hold and dance with the Torah but that their own congregation would not permit them to do so, took matters into their own hands and initiated an off-premises Simhat Torah celebration, at which they paraded with and danced with the Torah. Rabbi A's experiences with the group have led him to reject the classical modern Orthodox principle of synthesis:

I used to believe in synthesis. But now I think that there are advantages to compartmentalization. Traditionalist Orthodox women are much happier than the feminists. Many of them are also highly educated and accomplished, and have careers, but their religious lives are in a different compartment. Their contentment stems from the fact that they avoid hard issues. They don't push for change in their roles in Judaism (Manhattan, Apr. 19, 1999).

Rabbi A was especially incensed that after the women had been meeting without rabbinic authority, they included a kaddish prayer in their all-woman services. This halakhically prohibited behavior was to him evidence that "Orthodox feminists can never be satisfied." He elaborated: "Orthodox feminists are in denial. Orthodoxy can never accommodate women completely. Ultimately, if you are a really serious feminist you cannot be an Orthodox Jew." Additionally, Rabbi A issued a psychological analysis of women working for change: "Orthodox feminists feel con-

stant tension. They are so unhappy," he said. He insisted that their desires to expand women's roles in public Judaism could never be accommodated in an intellectually coherent fashion, and that every "Yes" to change must inevitably be followed by a "No," which would simply produce more frustration, unhappiness, and anger. He added, "It's a high price to pay."

When asked if perhaps the women were disturbed about specific circumstances, such as not being permitted to dance with the Torah, rather than being just generally unhappy people, Rabbi A rejected the suggestion (Manhattan, Apr. 19, 1999).

In contrast, in an incident in the Boston metropolitan area, Rabbi B negotiated the requests of his congregation's women's *tefillah* group—and encountered frustration, discontent, and anger among some in his congregation who opposed change. Rabbi B's congregation has for several years incorporated optional women's activities that are considered very liberal in Orthodox circles: the congregation has a woman president and board members, women may speak from the *bimah* on Shabbat morning, women dance with a Torah scroll on their side of the *mekhitzah* on Simhat Torah, and a women's *tefillah* group meets in the synagogue sanctuary once a month for the Saturday afternoon *mincha* service, which includes a short Torah reading. Rabbi B was approached by members of the *tefillah* group, who asked for an innovation: they wanted a twice yearly women's *tefillah* service on Saturday morning, *shakharit*.

Rabbi B made an initial ruling that a Shabbat morning service posed no issues of rabbinic law that had not already been dealt with in the long-established afternoon service. This ruling was met with outrage on the part of those who opposed the service. When told that the service would be conducted halakhically, opponents said that their objections were "visceral" and "not about halakhah"—"about Orthodox norms. We want to look and act like other Orthodox congregations." Hearing these strong feelings, Rabbi B told his congregation that their objections were sociological rather than halakhic. He asserted that the sociological nature of the conflict made it appropriate for the congregation to work together to reach consensus, rather than trying to resolve the issue by rabbinic fiat. In an attempt to put his congregants on the "same page," Rabbi B held a series of classes on the religious factors involved in making a rabbinic ruling on this issue and facilitated a series of dialogue sessions among the two factions. Nonetheless, opponents continued to declare themselves to be "furious," and to warn the rabbi that "half the congregation will leave."

Ultimately, at an open town-hall style congregational meeting, congregants had an opportunity to express their ideas, and a secret vote was taken of all present. The vote was 112 for the women's shaharit service, and 42 against. Subsequent to the meeting, half a dozen families left the congregation and joined a nearby Orthodox congregation with conventional Orthodox roles for women. Those who left, and the members of the congregation they joined, sometimes still speak angrily of Rabbi B's congregation, calling it "Conservative" in disparagement.

These examples indicate that angry feelings can result regardless of whether a liberal or conservative approach is taken toward women's issues. People who lose battles express disappointment. Among the most disappointed, some will "defect" to another movement or institution. Writing to a colleague about the need for dialogue, and the desirability of permitting women to do that which is permissible and does not detract from Orthodox life, Professor David Berger warns:

If you refuse to speak to any group that holds a view with which you disagree, then you create deep fissures within the community over matters that do not justify such a tragic consequence. Reasonable people will draw this line in different places ... the *bentcher* [grace after meals prayer book] ... contains a *nusach* [liturgy] for women who want to make a *zimmin* [communal grace] among themselves. This is unequivocally permissible, and if we choke off even such an option for women who feel constricted in the expression of their religion, we will lose some of them (Brooklyn, Mar. 23, 1999).

Just as rabbis sometimes inappropriately declare actions off-limits when they are halakhically permissible, Orthodox laypersons who fear change may follow suit. As if to illustrate this phenomenon, in a separate e-mail communication, a writer described a recent incident in a private home in Jerusalem. A married couple and four visiting women shared a Shabbat meal. When a female guest asked for the women to participate in *zimmin*, stating that women are encouraged by rabbinic law to recite the group grace together, the male host agitatedly blurted out, "*Ani batel et zeh!*" ("I revoke the permission!") and prevented the women from praying together.

Commenting on the strong emotions evoked by women's issues, scholar Aryeh Frimer quotes the rabbinic sages, *hazal*: "Hatred destroys balance and love destroys balance." He believes that contemporary rabbinic authorities and Orthodox feminists share blame for creating a volatile environment of charges and countercharges. Frimer urges rabbis to work toward greater sensitivity to women, so that they can win back women's trust. On the other hand, he also urges Orthodox feminists to enter into a process of dialectic and synthesis and to abandon the notion that there can be "instant fixes." He says, "Women must be willing to be steeped in scholarship, to help recreate the system" (Bar-Ilan, May 28, 1999).

Orthodox feminists might do well to embrace the idea that they are "political" rather than continuously avoiding that appellation, suggests a Manhattan attorney and mother of four who is very active in adult learning. "We are a political action committee—a PAC," she asserted. "Just as political parties adopt platforms, we should have a platform also, which expresses the concepts we care about. One of the things we should work for is to encourage rabbis to deal straightforwardly with women's issues. We have asked our rabbinate a very big and basic question. We expect them to find a way to address our needs" (New York, May 18, 1998).

Orthodox Women Who Reject Orthodox Feminism

From women who proudly assert their feminist goals to others who militantly reject them, American Orthodox women span the complete spectrum of attitudes about feminism. Arguably the most antifeminist pole of the continuum is occupied by women associated with Orthodox sects that reject many aspects of modernity. The Agudath Israel of America, for example, frequently makes use of conference platforms and movement publications to blast personalities and particular positions associated with modern Orthodoxy and Conservative Judaism. Sarah Blustain reports that one right-wing newspaper serving the Spring Valley, New York, community referred to Orthodox feminism as "a movement whose poison, if left unchecked, may seep into the minds of some unaware of its essence," which challenges the "root distinctions" between the sexes, and the different roles required of them putatively by divine preference. Some women within these groups have taken up the banner of antifeminism in their own enterprises. For example, the Manhattan Jewish Renaissance Center has

sponsored rallies designed to expose what they feel is the true nature of Orthodox feminism—a lack of understanding and feminine self-esteem.⁴⁴ Blu Greenberg argues that the ultra-Orthodox rejection of Orthodox feminism spills over into the “centrist” Orthodox world. She asserts strongly that this affects some women in very practical ways:

Whether a prospective bride fully accepts *kol isha*—which extends to singing ... *zemirot* around the Shabbat dinner table—is a standard question asked by ultra-Orthodox *shadchanim* when they try to match up suitable partners. So non-negotiable has this become, that it has spilled over into the modern Orthodox community, where *kol isha* had previously been on the wane.⁴⁵

How widespread such phenomena are may be arguable, yet the inroads of *haredi* Orthodoxy are evident. While modern Orthodox women's lives most often fully reflect demographic changes influenced by American feminism, younger modern Orthodox women often describe themselves as “not really feminist.” Indeed, it is far more common for modern Orthodox women in their teens, twenties, and thirties to explicitly reject what they call “the feminist agendas” of their mothers' cohort. For example, a conversation with Orthodox women in their twenties and thirties grew quite heated as several young mothers expressed their dislike of the term “feminism” (Newton, Sept. 14, 1998).

“Don't assume that every woman who participates in a women's *tefillah* group is a feminist,” demanded one.

“Even professionals don't think of themselves as feminists,” declared another.

“Why are we using that term, anyway?” said one young woman. “It's so sixties!”

In other settings, one eighteen-year-old girl condescendingly told her mother that feminism and Orthodoxy are antithetical: “You and your friends aren't real feminists, Mom” (New York, May 18, 1998). The teenager said that her mother and her friends were only fooling themselves if they thought that Orthodoxy could accommodate itself to contemporary conceptions of women and their roles.

A number of younger Orthodox women who were interviewed for this study forcefully voiced the idea that they are much more educated than their mother's generation of “women in their fifties” and that “women that age wanted the wrong things.” Younger women frequently

articulated the conviction that they are "part of the club" by virtue of their superior Jewish education, and that high level text study is a far more important priority than expanding women's roles in public worship or giving women access to Torah scrolls. Few of them seemed particularly attached to women's *tefillah* groups. Several said specifically, "We don't need feminism. We don't share your issues."

Some young women, however, reported that they had already discovered the extent to which they are not "part of the club," despite their textual erudition. Thus, one twenty-four-year-old great-granddaughter of a famous European talmudist, a young woman from a large, warm, close-knit family, described the process through which she had reorganized her priorities. For many years, she rejected women's *tefillah* groups and related activities. Following her marriage, she and her husband enrolled in the Talmud department at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She was shocked and hurt when her religious male costudents treated her as an ignorant interloper, despite her obvious competence in the classroom. When she gave an outstanding talmudic presentation, her male classmates stated their assumption that her husband had written her presentation. The experience was profoundly demoralizing. "I was a role model for many religious women," she recalls. "I covered my hair, I rejected overtly 'feminist' activities, I davened three times a day, I bought into the whole package. But then I saw that they didn't really buy the whole package—only the parts that suited their agendas."

Upon her return to the United States, she removed her headcovering for daily activities, and became very active in her local women's *tefillah* group. She describes herself as "still searching" for a comfortable religious level and acknowledges that she could very well now be considered a "feminist."

Bar-Ilan philosophy professor Tamar Ross describes a rather different, but still evolutionary trajectory of her attitude toward feminism and advocacy for change. Initially, writes Ross, "I adopted a wait and see attitude regarding halakhic change.... I felt that it was not my place to agitate actively for halakhic reform." However, "as the years went by," Ross found herself influenced considerably by the extent of change in the non-Orthodox world, by the insights provided by the feminist critique of male policy decisions, and by the inexorably male-centered nature of decision-making in the Orthodox community. Noting that "what had previously appeared revolutionary" eventually appears to many reasonable Orthodox practitioners as "just plain common sense," Ross comments that she now

has "little patience for the arbitrary exclusion of women from traditionally male-based centers of power."⁴⁶

Only time will tell if younger Orthodox women will retain their dismissive attitude toward middle-aged Orthodox feminists, or if they too will eventually be radicalized by their own experiences. Ross speculates that the superior Torah training of the younger generation may lead them in either of two directions, depending on the response of the male rabbinic authority structures. If the rabbinic establishment, as a group, remains unresponsive to serious women's issues, "as a critical mass of Orthodox women Torah scholars develops, the advancement in women's learning may serve even further to alienate women from official male authority and provoke them to independence in seeking out solutions to their problems without the need for formal rabbinic sanctioning."

However, Ross suggests an alternative scenario, in which male rabbis work cooperatively with female Torah scholars to create a vibrant "aristocracy of learning" with room for both men and women:

Perhaps then the communion of learning between men and women will be such as to foster more leadership based on genuine excellence in Torah scholarship and piety, rather than on official appointments. This is of course based on the assumption that scholars whose authority stems from rabbinic learning and not from official titles will be less subject to the more political stresses of public policy.

Ross admits that this may "be simply a utopian dream."⁴⁷

Confronting Agunot, Abusive Spouses, and Social Problems

Tamar Ross remembers the days when she assumed that the problem of vindictive husbands who deny their wives a religious divorce, a *get*, a necessity for the woman's but not the ex-husband's remarriage, could be dealt with through "ad hoc solutions, such as beating up the husband" until he would agree to grant the divorce, "for the sake of preserving halakhic integrity." However, most Orthodox feminists today agree that a case by case approach is inadequate given the extent of the problem and widespread rabbinic lack of responsiveness to *agunot* as a significant class of human beings.⁴⁸ According to Susan Aranoff and other Orthodox activists, the situation of the *agunah*, the woman chained to a situation of marital

limbo, "remains the most intractable issue in Orthodox life in the United States and Israel" (New York, Mar. 15, 1999).

A woman becomes an *agunah* either when her husband disappears through war, travel, or some other scenario, or when she seeks a religious divorce process, a *get*, but her husband refuses to cooperate. The *get* is a legal proceeding terminating the conditions set forth upon the signing of the *t'nayim* and *ketubah*, the legal contracts entered into at the time of the couple's betrothal and wedding. Jewish divorce proceedings can be initiated by the husband but theoretically should not be performed without the wife's acquiescence. When a couple separates without a *get*, under the terms of Jewish law a husband is free to remarry, while his wife becomes an *agunah*, a chained woman, and may not remarry. If a Jewish woman remarries without a *get*, her children are considered to be *mamzerim*, the illegitimate children of an adulterous union, who cannot marry into the legitimate Jewish community for ten generations; a man who has remarried without a *get*, on the other hand, does not stigmatize the children who come out of the new marriage.

The proliferation of such chained women is a product of the hyphenated lives of American Jews. The freedom of choice that many American Jews take as their birthright, together with the inequity of Jewish divorce law regarding women, combine to make the position of Jewish women vis-à-vis divorce even more unequal than it has been in historical Jewish communities, because American Jewish men have the option of obtaining a civil divorce and remarrying in a civil ceremony. Divorce has increased in all segments of the Jewish community, although there is an inverse relationship between the traditionalism of the household and the likelihood of divorce, with households strongly connected to traditional Jewish religious behaviors and community showing lower rates of divorce than those with weak connections. Although divorce is less common in Orthodox communities, rates of divorce have risen here as well, and Orthodox women are far more vulnerable than others to the threat of an *agunah* status.

Some communities have attempted to deal with the problems of women caught in *agunah* situations either on a systematic or a case-by-case basis. Advocacy organizations for women being denied a *get* have been formed in several cities and on a nationwide basis. Among these organizations are: G.E.T.—Getting Equitable Treatment, Agunah, Inc., Kayama, and the Israel Women's Network. One of the most recent and controversial Orthodox attempts to deal with the plight of *agunot* has been

spearheaded by Rabbi Emanuel Rackman, chancellor of Israel's Bar-Ilan University and long a champion of women's rights within a halakhic framework, and Rabbi Moshe Morgenstern, of the Bet Din Tzekek Le-boyot Agunot. The *beit din*, rabbinic court, that it sponsors annuls the marriages of chained women on the hypothesis that no woman would have entered into a problem marriage had she realized her husband's character flaws from the outset.

Rabbi Rackman comments on the importance of annulment as a strategy:

The annulment accomplishes three things. First, it disempowers extortionist husbands who use the *get* to obtain financial or custodial concessions to which they would not be entitled. Second, it frees a wife from her captor husband whose pathological need to control her is expressed in statements such as "You'll die before I ever give you a *get*" or "If I'm going to rot in jail, you'll rot too." And third, it provides closure for the women who yearn to begin their lives anew.

He concludes, "If for preventing husbands and others from causing pain to Jewish daughters I am impaled on the spikes of rabbinic fundamentalism, it is a relatively small price to pay for living with one's conscience."⁴⁹

Reaction to this rabbinic court has been dramatic at both ends of the spectrum. Those who approve hail the annulment procedure as the first broadly based, humane rabbinic response to a festering human problem. Susan Aranoff, intensely consumed by her constant devotion to the cause, reflects:

In looking back over all my years of activism, the saddest thing I've experienced is rabbis continuing year after year to insist that Jewish law requires that women suffer. Isaiah's compassion for the widow, the orphan, the downtrodden—how can rabbis say that what's happening to *agunot* is halakhic! Judaism is being dragged through the gutter! (New York, Mar. 15, 1999).

Activists such as Aranoff and Rifka Haut, Orthodox *agunah* activist and author of articles and books on women in Judaism, continue to express frustration or outrage because thousands of women are trapped in situations in which husbands and lawyers use the obtaining of a Jewish divorce as a tool for unfair bargaining or wreaking vengeance.⁵⁰ However, not

every activist believes that the annulment approach is halakhically workable. Indeed, even Rifka Haut has regretfully suggested that the *beit din* does not pay adequate attention to halakhic protocol and may thus be inadvertently worsening the situation of the women involved by making them think they are free when, in the opinion of many, they are not.

On the other side of the issue are traditionalists who see the vocal outrage of women like Aranoff and Haut as a brazen attempt to undermine rabbinic authority. When confronted with the tragic cases of actual trapped women, these traditionalists express sorrow that the *agunot* are thus afflicted, but say that the principles of rabbinic authority and halakhic integrity are more important than the situations of individuals.

The non-Jewish press has helped to publicize the extent to which the Orthodox world has had its own specialized problems with divorce. Understanding all too well the desperate need of Orthodox women for a religious divorce, some lawyers servicing traditional communities have allegedly specialized in deliberately "encouraging husbands to extort large settlements from their wives in return for granting a *get*." One male attorney combating a policy of "absolute blackmail" on the part of such colleagues initiated a "Get Project" in the *New York Law Journal* for the purpose of collecting data in the form of cases and complaints--affidavits, bank books, correspondence between litigants--concerning lawyers who encourage *get* extortion.⁵¹

Not infrequently, Orthodox divorce situations are related to spousal abuse. Dr. Samuel Klagsbrun, executive director of Four Winds Hospital, a private psychiatric hospital in Katonah, New York, has been working with abusive situations in Jewish households for many years, including high profile situations such as the notorious case of Hedda Nussbaum, who allowed her daughter Lisa to be beaten to death by her husband, Joel Steinberg. Klagsbrun believes that resistance to dealing with violent family dysfunctions has, ironically, been based on attempts to preserve traditional family values such as *shalom bayis*, the Jewish ideal of the serene and orderly household. In addition, loathing of women's liberation makes some in the right-wing Orthodox community skeptical about battered women's assertions and unsympathetic to women who come to them for aid: "these women don't feel safe going to rabbis who will tell them they've been contaminated by women's rights." When women finally work up the courage to leave, husbands frequently respond with escalated violence. As Klagsbrun notes: "Seventy-five percent of murders of women

who are abused occur at the time of, or shortly after, the time the woman leaves. Their fear is real."⁵²

The efforts of Orthodox feminists on behalf of *agunot* are sometimes helped by the lurid headlines accompanying notorious cases, such as that of a dysfunctional hasidic family in which Blima Zitrenbaum was brutally attacked on the Sabbath of February 10, 1996, allegedly by her bearded, traditionally garbed husband. As one reporter explained:

The case is being watched closely by advocates of *agunot*, women whose husbands refuse to grant them a Jewish divorce. They say Blima Zitrenbaum, 34, is an *agunah*—Hebrew for chained woman. And Joseph Zitrenbaum, in a recent phone interview with *The Jewish Week* from the Rockland County Jail, confirmed that he does not want to grant his wife a *get*, or Jewish divorce....

"She didn't want to go back to him because of the drugs," said a man who identified himself only as Jacob, a member of the synagogue where he said Joseph Zitrenbaum would pray or seek shelter.

"He used to come to synagogue all stabbed with drugs," said Jacob, who sat in on the trial one day. "A few people are scared to testify. They are afraid he will be free and he would come after them."

... "After Mrs. Zitrenbaum was beaten [in February] we called for the rabbis to declare that when women are almost murdered by their husbands, the rabbis should have their marriage annulled," said Rifka Haut, co-founder of Agunah, Inc., the Brooklyn-based organization that helps *agunot*.

"There was no response," said Haut, who said Blima Zitrenbaum had called her several times for advice before the February beating but never since.⁵³

Many communities have established kosher facilities for battered women and their children. One example of contemporary communal responses to Jewish dysfunctional families, Ohel, a division of Brooklyn Children's Home and Family Services, offers Sabbath-observant foster care for children and a community residence and supportive apartment program for Jewish young adults with emotional disabilities. The organization distributes literature to alert teachers and neighbors to the "10 warning signs of child abuse," which range unflinchingly from physical evidence such as "bruises, welts, burns, bites, fractures, and lacerations ..."

to "inappropriate sexual knowledge or behavior for age or cultural environment."⁵⁴ Other programming for problem households include efforts to locate Jewish homeless individuals and families and to meet their needs in kosher, Jewishly aware facilities.

Again, as a mark of the extent to which certain feminist principles have transformed a postfeminist Orthodoxy, pious Orthodox women have led the way in creating facilities for battered Jewish women. In New York, for example, the Shalom Hotline was created as a way to reach out to battered observant women who may feel isolated and assume that they are somehow to blame for their situation. Similar efforts are springing up in many communities, and their open sponsorship by Orthodox synagogues and organizations speaks volumes about the willingness of women to challenge the status quo and search for a form of halakhic integrity that is not based on the human misery of its practitioners.

Motivations and Slippery Slopes

Rabbinic authorities, both those who perceive themselves as basically friendly to women's issues and those who are outspoken opponents of feminist-induced change, have characteristically responded to women's questions by invoking halakhah, rabbinic law. Depending on their positioning on the egalitarian continuum, each rabbi takes a firm (for some, it is firm-but-friendly) stance at the point at which they believe "the halakhah can bend no further. As one interviewed rabbi put it, "Sociological concerns are valid and legitimate considerations when making an halakhic decision." It is important to note that acceptance of extrinsic considerations seems to work in one direction only: it is acceptable to consider social-psychological factors when resisting change, but not when attempting to implement it.

Rabbis who oppose feminist change in Orthodox women's lives agree with all or most of the following statements. While not every rabbi agrees that each of these is a serious obstacle, with only two exceptions even the "woman-friendly" rabbis interviewed for this study subscribed to at least some of these statements:

* Unaccustomed activities cannot be initiated by women who lack the proper "motivation." Knowledgeable, devout women who are motivated purely by a love of Torah and a love of God might be allowed certain halakhically acceptable activities. However, those women who are

motivated by a desire to make a point or to acquire power should expressly not be allowed to initiate atypical activities.

* Feminism is a pernicious, impious outside influence. If a suggested change seems to emanate from feminist impulses, it should be rejected—even if it is halakhically permitted.

* Many women who lobby for change are actually trying to imitate men. They would be men if they could. Their activities are often referred to as “masculo-feminist” behavior. Their goals are inimicable to the wholesome gender role definitions of historical Judaism.

* Giving women opportunities to change starts them down a slippery slope toward Conservative Judaism. If they are given one change, they will not be happy or satisfied, they will just ask for another. Eventually, they will reach the point where there is no choice but to say, “No.” When that time comes, they will be frustrated and angry. Since they are going to be frustrated and angry anyway, there is no reason to upset the Orthodox status quo. Most people like the status quo. Why upset the normal Orthodox Jews to meet the unmeetable demands of the others?

* Women ought to consider the impact their demands have on the larger community. They cannot elevate their selfish concerns above the greater good of the Jewish people. Women’s inappropriate demands have already brought great grief and schism to local, national, and international Orthodox communities. Therefore, even if their requests could be justified halakhically, women should show their devotion to the Jewish future by abandoning these troublesome demands.

“Why don’t they just go join the Conservatives [*sic*]?” is the classic litany of some exasperated Orthodox rabbis and practitioners who imagine that their lives would be far simpler without the recurrent irritant of Orthodox feminists. In reality, Orthodox feminists have served as convenient lightning rods in the Orthodox world. By focusing on curtailing feminist expansion of women’s roles, some reactionary Orthodox leaders have enjoyed the luxury of avoiding other difficult questions suggested by the uneasy fit of Jewish traditionalism in the postmodernist American milieu. One need not go so far as to suggest that Orthodox antifeminists are deliberately using women’s issues to distract practitioners from deep spiritual and philosophical concerns. In practical, *de facto* terms, however, Orthodox feminism may unwittingly have served as a conveniently facilitating factor in the Orthodox turn to the right. It remains to be seen how long right-wing Orthodoxy will be able to use women’s issues for the symbolic

exorcism of modernity. Perhaps when women's new roles have become commonplace, an honest confrontation with the deep religious issues of modern life will be unavoidable, and a healthier, less polarized Orthodox community will emerge.

5. ORTHODOX FEMINISM BRIDGING BOUNDARIES

"One person can't dance at two weddings," suggests a familiar Yiddish aphorism. However, despite the vigorous efforts against and the denial of change, contemporary Orthodox life has been transformed by feminism and other social movements. Across the spectrum, but in divergent ways, Orthodox societies have undergone deep, multifaceted changes. Many of these have occurred as the natural by-product of sweeping changes in society at large.

Orthodox feminists are deeply concerned about the implications of the changes they champion, and what the process of change will mean for Orthodoxy as an organized culture. Leah Shakdiel, for example, worries about the relationship between the *tzibbur* (congregation), custom, halakhah, and the process of change:

Halakhah and custom have always been an intricate thing, part textual constraints, part congregational influence, part individual leadership. I prefer this intricacy to the jump into literal democracy. I would much rather be tyrannized by halakhah than by a group of my human contemporaries (WTN, Oct. 7, 1999).

The parameters of change will not only affect the functioning of synagogues and other institutions and be visible with them, but will also influence the lives of the girls and boys who are growing into tomorrow's women and men. "The real question," commented women's *tefillah* group pioneer Sharon Haselkorn, now the mother of adolescent and young adult children, "is how our sons and daughters will look at their own gender roles" (Newton, Sept. 11, 1998).

As Orthodox communities struggle with pressures for change and status, they find themselves caught on many levels "between tradition and innovation." *Tefillah* network activist Shelley List comments:

If we innovate, orthodox Orthodoxy trivializes us. If we go the traditional route—using common synagogue ritual—orthodox Orthodoxy says we're stomping on custom ... many of us have the same response, and choose to walk a tightrope over the pit of *issur* rather than do some new form of communal prayer that may for some feel unauthentic.

Orthodox feminists often feel that they are positioned between the proverbial rock and a hard place, but List argues that differing situations appropriately precipitate differing responses:

There's really no tension at all. New rituals are for new (or newly recognized) situations, especially when we are trying to express something to, or request something of God. But when we're fulfilling the daily requirement of prayer, i.e. fulfilling what we believe to be God's will in the world, we choose to do it as closely as possible to the way it's always been done (WTN, June 29, 1999).

Doing things "the way they've always been done"—by men—carries women into activities that are unprecedented in earlier eras of Jewish history. Those who wish to make sure that women do not appropriate male roles often go through logical contortions, piling up esoteric "minutia of detail" as they try to "prove" that "God doesn't want us performing these rituals." In contrast, it is often much easier to "prove" that women's participation is acceptable, List maintains, especially when one makes use of "the concept of *nakhat ruach le-nashim* (based on the Second Temple precedent of allowing women to touch a sacrifice to enhance their spiritual lives) (June 29, 1999). The bottom line, says Jennifer Ann Horowitz, is that Orthodox feminists are very clear about the fact that "we are not trying to invent a new religion for women who are Jewish, but rather we are trying to find a way to participate in the religion that we already have." She insists succinctly: "We're not trying to be more like men, but more like Jews" (WTN, June 30, 1999).

Significantly, bald statements that women should be excluded from public Judaism because of their gender have diminished. Women's access to the Torah has been dramatically expanded in many settings—but it continues to be controversial in others. The rabbinic principle that women are not halakhically prohibited from being near or touching the Torah has become far better known today than it was for hundreds of years. How-

ever, many argue for women's continued exclusion because of sexual issues as they affect men and the communal dynamic. Thus, as we have discussed, a few rabbinic authorities now warn women not to say kaddish because their voices will be "sexually distracting" to worshiping men, and women's *tefillah* groups are often accused of being "masculo-feminist" imitations of male behavior.

Underlying such arguments may be fearfulness about what Lucy Dawidowicz once called "sexual *shatnes*," a perverse blurring of sexual boundaries.⁵⁵ Additionally, numerous interview participants felt that masculine anxiety about losing power over public Judaism is a significant factor in contemporary rabbinic resistance to allowing actual women to do in real life congregations what the halakhah permits them in classical rabbinic texts. Perhaps most influential is the impact of long-sanctified *minhag* (tradition) that permeates almost every aspect of Jewish life.

For women and men who are deeply involved in expanding women's roles within the guidelines of halakhah, the motivations for Orthodox feminism might best be summarized by Horowitz's observation: "...your account of the women being moved to tears as the Torah was carried around the women's balcony reminds me ... that the Torah belongs to all Jews, and all Jews need the Torah" (WTN, July 2, 1999).

Not least, Orthodox feminists serve as a living bridge between the Orthodox world and other streams of American Judaism. Adele Tauber, whose "career" as an adult learner and Jewish activist began when she left a career as a lawyer working for the federal government to raise her four children, credits a stint in a Wexner program to train lay leaders for "opening her eyes" to the "extraordinary" importance of Jews from the various streams of American Judaism "being in dialogue with people" with differing Jewish background and approaches, from "nondenominational to Orthodox." As she recalls:

During a class on prayer, a rabbinic leader went around the room and asked people how they related to prayer. Some said they couldn't understand Hebrew, others said they don't find English prayers resonant, and I felt free to say that I read and understand Hebrew but I still find many prayers not very moving. We all were able to see each other as individuals, struggling spiritually. One of my new friends said, "I never thought I'd have a friend who was Orthodox" (Manhattan, May 18, 1998).

Other women spoke warmly about the cooperativeness between women in settings such as the "Women of the Wall" prayer efforts, in which women from non-Orthodox backgrounds agreed to follow halakhic guidelines so that Orthodox women could participate in the service. Peri Rosenfeld commented that cooperation and valuing friendship does not mean the obliteration of difference: women can disagree with each other quite spiritedly and still remain friends. She feels that the survival of the WTN despite frequent disagreements is evidence of women's ability to care deeply about particularistic causes, and also about each other.

From the testimonies of Orthodox women, and from other sources on the recent social history of American Jewish life,⁵⁶ it seems clear that women's new leadership and activism in the major wings of American Judaism has fostered a level of mutual influence quite different in nature from the competitive, often male-dominated "turf wars" that characterize much of the Jewish organizational world. Orthodox women's exponential leap into rabbinic text study, claiming enthusiastically for themselves a cultural value long limited to men, has played an important role in the revitalization of adult education for men and women, non-Orthodox and Orthodox, devout and even secularized Jews. Reform and Reconstructionist women's successful entry into rabbinical and other leadership roles galvanized the social forces that resulted in Conservative ordination of women, and eventually in Orthodox creation of pararabbinic roles and credentials. Conservative women's liturgical literacy, nurtured by the Ramah camping movement and the elite Leadership Training Fellowship educational youth group cadre, provided a model of women's competency in public prayer that had an impact on the growth of the women's *tefillah* prayer group network. It is fair to say that, as a group, Jewish feminists who are committed to the health and survival of their respective wings of Judaism have created significant paradigms for cooperation, listening, and learning from each other.

Working Toward Coherence

Second-wave feminism, in conjunction with changing economic realities and new realities in patterns of family formation, such as larger proportions of singles and divorced persons and lower fertility levels, have together brought about a great societal shift in attitudes toward gender role construction. Most women plan to work for most of their adult lives. Gen-

der gaps in educational and occupational levels have narrowed, although financial rewards for women continue to lag behind those of men. Orthodox American Jewish women, and their fathers, husbands, friends, lovers and children, have expectations of women's lives that differ dramatically from ideas at midcentury, and indeed probably from most other historical periods.

It is not that women's—and Orthodox women's—lives were bad before and now they are good. Before the impact of second-wave feminism, observant Jewish women lived neither in a state of prelapsarian innocence nor in one of unrelieved oppression and subjugation. But earlier in the century, American Jews were much more likely to compartmentalize their lives than today. They were comfortable with the idea that they lived by one set of rules at work and in their relations with their gentile friends, and another set entirely in their synagogues, homes, and Jewish friendship circles.⁵⁷ In contrast, today's Jews, including Orthodox Jews, tend to coalesce American and Jewish values and behaviors. On the computer screen of life, they call up "America" and "Judaism" and merge the screens.⁵⁸

American Jews today expect their lives to have coherence. No longer comfortable with the divisions between milieus that "worked" for them in previous decades, they tend to blur the boundaries. Thus social life takes place among office colleagues, and more and more people work at home during the evenings and weekends. Jews also look for coherence between their assumptions about religion and about life in general. Orthodox Jewish women, highly educated, working in all the venues of employment as non-Orthodox men and women, often experience profound cognitive dissonance when they encounter attitudes toward women that seem more motivated by fear of women's progress than by halakhic considerations.

In different ways, many Orthodox feminists and their supporters try to reduce this cognitive dissonance and create greater coherence by making Orthodox Judaism as friendly as possible toward expanded roles for women. They have different approaches, and stress different aspects of Jewish life, but for all of them the landscape of Orthodox assumptions has changed profoundly.

Orthodox feminists, both male and female, stress their loyalty to Orthodox lifestyles and values. With fully egalitarian worship opportunities literally down the road from their Orthodox synagogues, Orthodox

feminists insist that Orthodoxy is their birthright, belonging to them as well as to their brothers and their more conservative sisters. Rather than leave the spiritual place they call home, they continue to strive to make their home more welcoming and nurturing to their religious needs. As Noam Zohar comments, "the fact that they seek to 'defy' through seizing the Torah is very beautiful and encouraging! It is not the Torah that they are defying, but the exclusion from Torah" (WTN, Oct. 25, 1999).

Women's issues continue to be a focal point and potent symbol both for those drawn to new American trends and those repelled by them. As this study has demonstrated, some Orthodox communities respond to external stimuli negatively. More substantial proportions of the Orthodox community manage to "dance at both weddings"—whether they acknowledge it or not—by fostering a marriage or coalescence of American and Judaic values. While many experience the discomfort of confronting overtly conflicting and competing systems, these Orthodox Jews, and especially the Orthodox feminists among them, are changing minds, as they create spiritual, intellectual, social, and emotional bridges in their ongoing dialogue.

APPENDIX 1. MAJOR AREAS OF CHANGE

When asked to indicate what they considered to be five major areas of change due to the impact of feminism and related social trends, some respondents moved confidently from one point to the next, unwilling to limit themselves to five changes. Others struggled and meandered, and found it difficult to complete five items. Some leaped ahead to what would be the second group of questions, preoccupied with problems they felt the women's movement had precipitated. Nevertheless, clear patterns emerged in the responses.

100 percent of study participants cited:

- * high-level Jewish education for women.

About half of study participants cited as major areas of change:

- * increased interest in Jewish women and their spiritual lives;
- * the presence of women in religious and communal leadership roles;
- * attention to resolving pressing women's issues such as the *agunah* (women trapped in a nonmarried, nondivorced limbo).

38 percent each talked about:

- * more egalitarian relationships between spouses in younger households;
- * events—shalom bat, bat mitzvah, etc.;
- * more actively incorporating women into traditional life-cycle rituals, such as wedding-related and death-related rituals and events;
- * the growth of women-run worship services, especially those involving the reading of sacred scrolls, such as women's *tefillah* groups reading from a Torah scroll and women's *Megillat Esther* readings on Purim.

One-quarter of study participants stated:

- * careerism and high levels of secular education in the secular world had an impact on Orthodox Jewish life and expectations.

10 to 15 percent brought into the discussion their belief that:

- * a generation gap exists between mothers and daughters (or "women in their fifties" versus women in their teens, twenties, and thirties) in a postfeminist age;
- * Jewish feminism galvanizes and threatens the unity of Orthodox life; while, in a more positive vein, others noted that feminism provokes serious spiritual production;
- * in the study of classical Jewish texts, Jewish feminism causes a broad spectrum of the community to pay more attention to women's issues and experiences.

5 percent each mentioned the following changes:

- * increased dialogue between Orthodox and non-Orthodox women;
- * politicization of issues and attention to the rhetoric of acceptable and unacceptable change;
- * higher divorce rates due to women's economic independence (and men's discomfort with female independence);
- * designing "gender sensitive" synagogues and *mekhitzot* (apparatus for separating the sexes in Orthodox worship);
- * more awareness of domestic abuse in Orthodox families;
- * creation of a feminist, cooperative sensibility among women;
- * creation of gender-sensitive language in liturgy and texts;
- * reevaluation of questions on Jewish sexual ethics.

APPENDIX 2. CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS

When asked, "What do you consider to be the five major problems or concerns caused by or affected by the women's movement and related social trends?" participants overwhelmingly identified intergroup conflict as the most disturbing trend.

Over 80 percent articulated this intergroup conflict as:

- * Avoidance, failure of the Orthodox religious community as a whole to deal constructively with women's issues, outright intolerance and power struggles from the right and right-moving wings of Orthodoxy, and lack of leadership from the so-called "centrist" institutions.

Another 43 percent made the related observation—but from the opposite side:

- * Women's issues have precipitated great tension between subgroups in Orthodox communities, and there is a threat of divisiveness and destabilization as a result of too much change.

An additional 10 percent articulated the belief that:

- * Women have lost faith in the rabbinate because of institutional intransigence.

Over one-quarter of participants worried:

- * Women who want change are inevitably doomed to frustration, because no matter how much halakhah can bend, eventually one gets to the point where halakhah says no.

About one-fifth each felt great problems were posed by two very different concerns:

- * unresolved *agunah* issues;
- * women imitating men, either by seeking out opportunities (such as women's *tefillah*) to be like men, to indulge in "pseudo-masculine behaviors," or, in a very different take on this topic, those who voiced the concern that women who adopted a male approach to texts would be trapped within the intellectual confines of that approach rather than bringing to it a uniquely feminine vantage-point.

5 to 10 percent each cited as problems:

- * apathy of educated women who do not take advantage of their resources;
- * too much permissibility with regard to gay rights distorts the focus of the movement;
- * shift to the right;
- * problems of women in Israel;
- * issues around female rabbis;
- * lack of sufficient educational opportunities for women;
- * tension between personal needs and needs of community, also tension between feminist-ethical goals and religious goals.

APPENDIX 3. GOALS TO IMPLEMENT IN ORTHODOX COMMUNITIES

When asked for a list of their own personal goals vis-à-vis women's issues in the Orthodox community, female respondents were most concerned about creating substantive, communally recognized roles for women at the center of Orthodox life. The traditional approach, in which women have been marginalized in public Judaism, was firmly rejected in their recommendations.

44 percent spoke about:

- * the greater incorporation of women in synagogue protocols, rituals, and educational settings.

One-third each recommended:

- * women should be recognized as scholars of rabbinic literature with titles that reflect their expertise;
- * women should achieve more prominence as Jewish communal leaders and teachers;

28 percent advocated change in communal approaches to problems:

- * more creativity and flexibility in rabbinic responses to modernity and women's issues.

17 percent each cited as their goals:

- * solving the *agunah* issue;
- * creating more gender-sensitive architecture in synagogues;
- * creating more role models of sensitive men who are taught to value women.

5 to 10 percent advocated a variety of often disparate goals:

- * changing liturgy to be gender inclusive;
- * educating women to recognize and assume more of their halakhic obligations;
- * providing better education for *haredi* women;
- * reducing the phenomenon of blind acquiescence to what is perceived as rabbinic authority by educating women and men to know the difference between halakhic requirements and personal preference;
- * increased spirituality;
- * respect for the arduous and slow-moving halakhic process, and realization that change isn't instantaneous;
- * creating harmony between warring subgroups of Jews and lessening the atmosphere of antagonism;
- * finding a balance between religious activism and human needs, so that women and men can both express their spirituality—and still take care of their families, equality without sacrificing the family unit or overburdening the parents;
- * respect for the happy women who can compartmentalize and don't mind traditional Orthodox gender roles.

ENDNOTES

1. For a brilliant history of this term in American Jewish life, see Jonathan D. Sarna, "The Cult of Synthesis in American Jewish Culture," *Jewish Social Studies: American Jewish History and Culture* 5, nos. 1 & 2 (Fall 1998/Winter 1999): 52-79.
2. Bernard Lazerwitz, J. Alan Winter, Arnold Dashefsky, and Ephraim Tabory, *Jewish Choices: American Jewish Denominationalism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), p. 20.
3. Joyce Antler, "American Feminism," in *Jewish Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*, eds. Paula E. Hyman and Deborah Dash Moore (New York: Routledge, 1997), 1:408-14: 408-14, 408-9.
4. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963).
5. For a history of Jewish feminism within each wing of American Judaism, see Sylvia Barack Fishman, *A Breath of Life: Feminism in the American Jewish Community* (Hanover, N.H.: Brandeis University Press, 1995).
6. Blu Greenberg, *Women and Judaism: A View from Tradition* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981).
7. Rabbi Yehuda Henkin, *Equality Lost: Essays in Torah Commentary, Halacha, and Jewish Thought* (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 1999).
8. Micah D. Halpern and Chana Safrai, eds., *Jewish Legal Writings by Women* (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 1998).
9. From the Brandeis Series of Jewish Women: Rahel Wasserfall, *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1999); and forthcoming Judith Baskin, *Midrashic Women: Constructing the Female in Rabbinic Law* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England); Rochelle Millen, *Eros and Ethics: Jewish Women and Rabbinic Law* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England).

10. Joel B. Wolowelsky, *Women, Jewish Law, and Modernity: New Opportunities in a Post-Feminist Age* (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1998).

11. Eliezer Berkovits, *Jewish Women in Time and Torah* (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1990).

12. Avraham Weiss, *Women at Prayer: Halakhic Analysis of Women's Prayer Groups* (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1990).

13. Aileen Cohen Nusbacher, "Efforts to Change in a Traditional Denomination: The Case of Orthodox Women's Prayer Groups," *Nashim* 2 (Spring 1999): 95-113. See also Sidney Langer, "Women's Prayer Groups: A Study in Feminism and Modern Orthodoxy," *Ten Da'at: A Journal of Jewish Education* 11 (Spring 1998): 43-48.

14. Lynn Davidman, *Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); and Debra Renee Kaufman, *Rachel's Daughters: Newly Orthodox Jewish Women* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

15. Tamar Ross, "Halakhah and Its Relationship to Human and Social Reality—Case Study: Women's Roles in the Modern Period," unpublished paper.

16. Ibid.

17. "A Quiet Revolution," *Jerusalem Post: International Edition*, June 4, 1999.

18. Shoshana Zolty, *And All Your Children Shall Be Learned: Women and the Study of Torah in Jewish Law and History* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1993).

19. For a fuller discussion, see Fishman, *Breath of Life*, pp. 181-200.

20. Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, *Me-Sichat Shabbat Pashat Emor, Erev Lag B'Omer 5771: Al Devar Hiyyuv Neshei Yisrael be'Himukh Limud haTorah*, May 1990.

21. Brenda E. Brasher, *Godly Women: Fundamentalism and Female Power* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), pp. 81-82.

22. Those interested in researching this area further should look for publications by Jewish feminist scholars such as Tikvah Frymer-Kensky, Ross Kraemer, Nechama Aschkenasy, Carol Meyers, Susan Niditch, Judith Hauptman, Judith Baskin, Paula Hyman, Marion Kaplan, Hasia Diner, Shulamit Reinharz, Joyce Antler, Sara Horowitz, Rochelle Millen, Norma Baumel Joseph, Chava Weissler, Marcia Falk, Deborah Dash Moore, Ellen Umansky, Judith Plaskow, and Riv-Ellen Prell, to name just a few rep-

representative scholars among scores of actively publishing academics. Within each field, the list of feminist scholars is long, diverse—and growing.

23. Natalie Zemon Davis's brilliant study of seventeenth-century women from three religious traditions, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), suggests that unusual women actually used the constrictions of their lives as the creative building blocks for extraordinary expressivity. One of her examples is Glikl bas Judah Leib (Glikl of Hameln), the pious daughter, wife, widowed businesswoman and mother of thirteen, whose lively memoirs remain a major historical source of information on seventeenth-century European Jewish life. Recorded stories of exceptional Jewish women span time and place, including among others women such as the renowned fourteenth-century *rabbanit* wife of Rabbi Joseph ben Johanan; the fifteenth-century *rabbanit* Miriam Spira Luria (from the same family) who gave lectures behind a curtain in a yeshiva; the late-sixteenth-century halakhic expert Bella Falk, who originated the now long-established principle that Shabbat candles are lit before and holiday candles after the recitation of the appropriate blessing; the seventeenth-century scholar Deborah, daughter of Samuel Nahum, who in Vitebsk established a network of women's study circles and revitalized men's study as well by creating yeshiva scholarships for promising young men and bringing teachers into the area; the eighteenth-century scholar Sara Rifka Rochel Leah Horowitz, author of the erudite "*Tekhinne* of the Matriarchs," arguably the most famous women's prayer; the late-eighteenth-century composer of mystical *tekhinot*, Shifra bas Joseph; Merish, daughter of the Hasidic leader Rabbi Elimlekh of Lyzhansk, who attracted Hasidic followers to her learned discourses; the nineteenth-century Hasidic "Maid of Ludomir," Hannah Rachel Webermacher, who devoted her life to study and pious devotionism, drew thousands to her weekly *shalosh se'udot* (third Sabbath meal) lectures, and was famous for wondrous curative powers; and of course Sara Schnirer, discussed above, who changed the face of modern Jewish life through her innovative, inexhaustible activism on behalf of Jewish education for women, as cited by Zolty, *All Your Children Shall Be Learned*, pp. 186, 194-95, 222, 249, 270ff. Recent research has revealed information about such individuals as the frustrated nineteenth-century *mitnagdik* (non-Hasidic, rabbinic class) pious intellectual, Reyna Basya Berlin of Volozhyn. See Don Seeman and Rebecca Ko-

brin, "Like One of the Whole Men: Learning, Gender and Autobiography in R. Barukh Epstein's *Mekor Barukh*," *Nashim* 2 (Spring 1999): 52-94.

24. Michele Chabin, "The New 'Poseks': Orthodox Women," *Jewish Week*, Oct. 8, 1999, pp. 1, 35.

25. Weiss, *Women at Prayer*.

26. Over the past few years, Ross has articulated these ideas at the first and second JOFA-sponsored International Conferences on Feminism and Orthodoxy in New York, February 1997 and 1998, and at sermons and classes in a variety of synagogues and educational institutions, including Maimonides School in Brookline, Massachusetts, in May 1997, and Manhattan's Kehilath Israel in February 1998.

27. Anna Urowitz-Freudenstein explains the evolution of this principle: "This hermeneutical principle, that is classically attributed to the School of Rabbi Yishmael, first appears in the Tannaitic (Halakhic) *Midashim* in two places: *Sifra Kedosha Parsha 10* and *Sifre Numbers Piske 112*. It is also found in many places in the Babylonian Talmud. In Tannaitic literature, the phrase is used to explain the phenomenon of two words, or at least two roots repeated consecutively in the Bible ... according to the principle that the Torah speaks in human language, special significance need not to be applied to each occurrence of the two words/roots in question" (*H-Judaic Digest*, Oct. 7, 1999).

28. Tamar Ross, "Halakhah and Its Relationship to Human and Social Reality," p. 19.

29. Phyllis D. Airhart and Margaret Bendroth, eds., *Faith Traditions and the Family* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), pp. 23-37, 53-72, 100-114.

30. Sidney Goldstein, *Profile of American Jewry: Insights from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey* (New York: Council of Jewish Federations and CUNY Graduate School Occasional Papers No. 6, 1993), p. 117.

31. Sarah Silver Bunim, "Religious and Secular Factors of Role Strain in Orthodox Jewish Mothers," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Wurzweiler School of Social Work, 1986, pp. 88-89, 133-38, 172-74, 208-13, shows that even among ultra-Orthodox Jewish women, contraceptive usage is the norm; however, women in that environment often do not begin using birth control until after they have had five children, do not always tell their husbands they are using it, and typically describe their motivation as being medical rather than personal.

32. Moshe Hartman and Harriet Hartman, *Gender Equality and American Jews* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 219-25.

33. Brasher, *Godly Women*, p. 9.

34. David Zigelman, "Babysitter or Day Care Center: That Is the Question," *Jewish Parent Connection*, September/October 1995, p. 22.

35. Deena Garber, "Mom and the Machzor: Balancing Spirituality and Maternal Realities," and Sharon First, "8 Ways to Help Make the High Holy Days More Meaningful for the Whole Family," *Jewish Parent Connection*, September/October 1995, pp. 9, 13.

36. Thus, women's *tefillah* group leaders have, by and large, conformed in many ways to the communal expectations of Orthodox Jewish life. However, despite the enormous care taken by Orthodox women's *tefillah* group participants to find acceptable religious authorities for their activities, their very existence has often antagonized rabbinic and lay elements within the Orthodox community. The fact that most prayer sessions of women's *tefillah* groups involve handling and reading from a Torah scroll has proved a source of great controversy in the Orthodox community. Despite the fact that women are not proscribed by Jewish law from handling or studying from a Torah scroll at any time in their reproductive cycles—the Palestinian Tosefta states that women may study the Torah even when they are menstruating or have recently given birth (Tosefta Berakhot, ch. 2, para. 12; Talmud Berakhot 22a)—communal customs have grown up over the centuries which viewed females touching the Torah scrolls as a highly non-normative event. The Talmud does not link the prohibition to ritual impurity but instead to the putative intellectual poverty of females, except in the case of exceptional women.

37. For a fuller discussion of this phenomenon, see Fishman, "Praying with Women's Voices," in *A Breath of Life*, pp. 158-170.

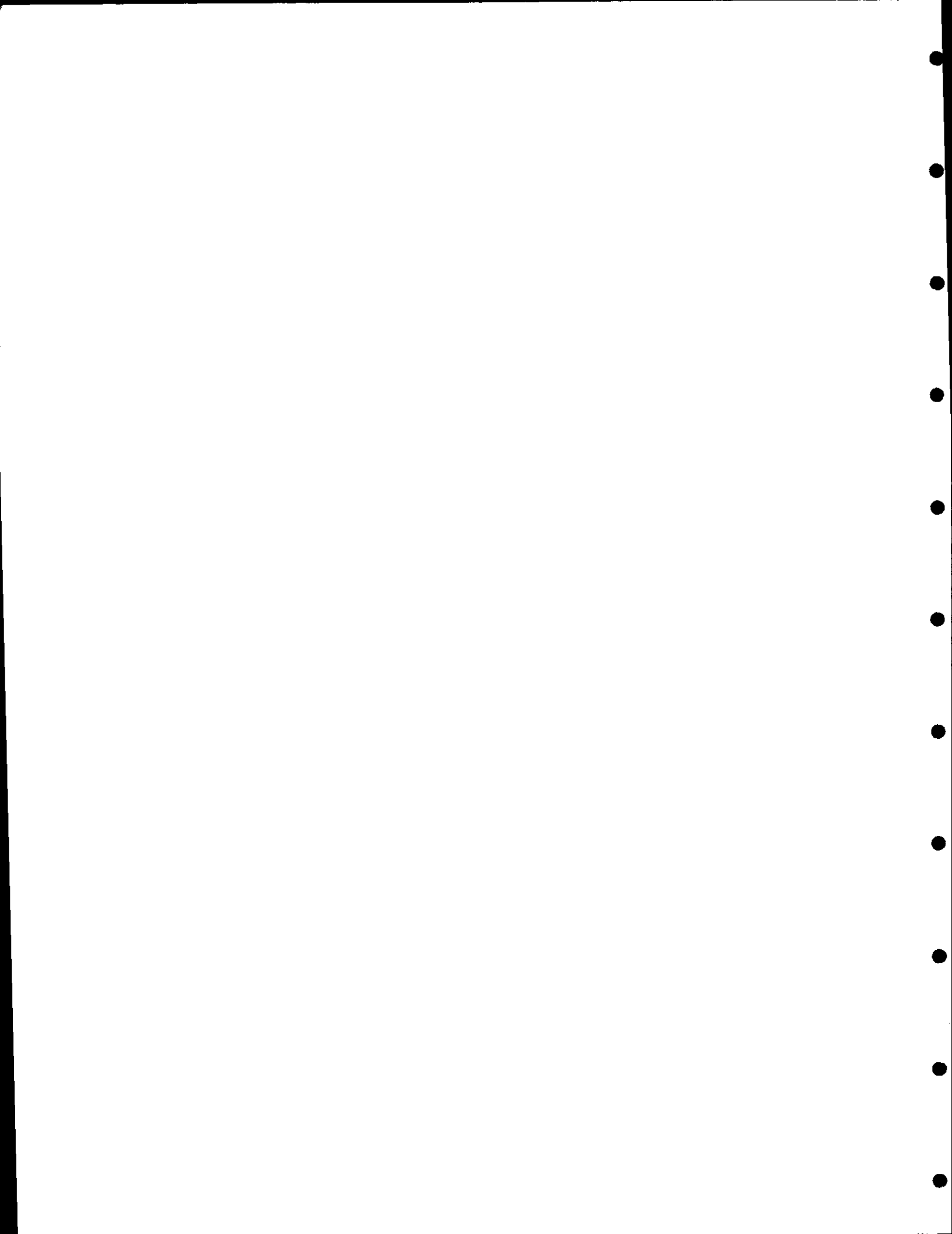
38. Brasher, *Godly Women*, pp. 14-15.

39. The word *kaddishel* has long historic significance. Parents would yearn for the birth of a male child, so they could be assured that kaddish would be said on their behalf, saving them from the extended torments of a limbo existence after death.

40. Aharon Feldman, "Halakhic Feminism or Feminist Halakha?" *Tradition* 33 (Winter 1999): 61.

41. Rochelle Millen, "The Female Voice of Kaddish," in Halpern and Safrai, eds., *Jewish Legal Writings by Women*, pp. 179-201.

42. Norma Baumel Joseph, "Hair Distractions: Women and Worship in the Responsa of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein," *ibid.*, pp. 9-22.
43. Saul Berman, "Kol Isha," *Tradition* (Fall 1973): 45-66. See also Millen, "Female Voice of Kaddish."
44. Sarah Blustain, "Right-Wing Women: Keeping Orthodoxy Safe from Feminists?" *Lilith* 23, no. 4 (Winter 1998-99): 8-15, 9.
45. Blu Greenberg, "Ultra-Orthodox Women Confront Feminism," *Moment* 21, no. 3 (June 1996): 36-37, 63, 36.
46. Tamar Ross, "Halakhah and Its Relationship to Human and Social Reality," p. 22.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
49. Emanuel Rackman, "For Agunah, Leeway in the Law," *Jewish Week*, Mar. 5, 1999, p. 28.
50. See, for example, Nathalie Friedman, "Divorced Parents and the Jewish Community," pp. 53-102, and Eliot Gertel, "Jewish Views on Divorce," pp. 201-30, in Steven Bayme and Gladys Rosen, eds., *The Jewish Family and Jewish Continuity* (New York: Ktav, 1994).
51. Steve Lipman, "Orthodox wives are victims of 'get blackmail': Lawyer," *Jewish Week*, Nov. 22, 1985.
52. Debra Darvick, "To Have and to Harm: Waking Up to the Reality that Domestic Violence Happens in Nice Jewish Homes," *Forward*, Nov. 8, 1996, p. 13.
53. Toby Axelrod, "A Community on Trial?" *Jewish Week*, Oct. 11, 1996, p. 6.
54. Brochures produced and distributed by Ohel Children's Home and Family Services, 4514 16th Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11219.
55. Lucy Dawidowicz, "Does Judaism Need Feminism," *Midstream*, April 1986, pp. 39-40.
56. See Fishman, *A Breath of Life*.
57. Samuel C. Heilman and Steven M. Cohen, *Cosmopolitans and Parochials: Orthodox Jews in Modern America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 89.
58. For a complete exploration of the concept of coalescence, see Sylvia Barack Fishman, *Jewish Life and America Culture* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000).





The American Jewish Committee
The Jacob Blaustein Building
165 East 56 Street
New York, NY 10022-2746

April 2000

Single copy \$5.00
Quantity prices on request