

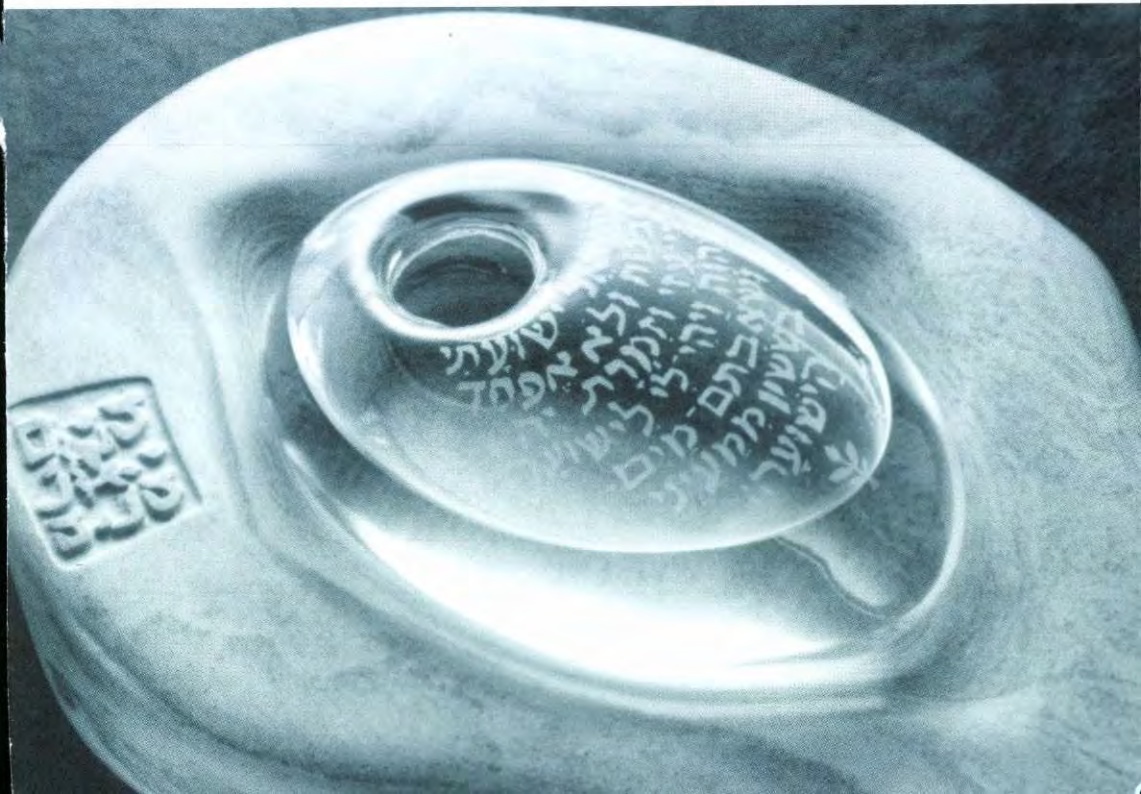
M A ' Y A N

מעין

The Jewish Women's Project
a program of the JCC
on the Upper West Side

J O U R N E Y

Spring 1999 | אביב 5759



MA'YAN

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Ma'yan acts as a catalyst for change in the Jewish community in order to create an environment more inclusive of and responsive to women, their needs and their experiences. Ma'yan facilitates this transformation by training and supporting advocates for change and developing and disseminating innovative educational programs.

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M A ' Y A N

J O U R N E Y

As American Jews partaking of at least two cultures, we live according to multiple calendars. This year, the overlap of the Jewish calendar and the secular calendar has produced a wonderful coincidence, the symbolism of which I urge us all to use to our advantage. Women's History Month, the month of March, begins with the holiday of *Purim* and ends with the holiday of *Pesach*. When we read the *Megilla* (Scroll of Esther) on the evening of March 1, the 14th of *Adar*, we have the opportunity to focus on this coincidence. We can do so by calling attention to Esther's plea "write me down for generations" and explaining that plea as a recognition of the need to record and study women's contributions to history. In this *Journey*, you will meet six new Jewish women whose names and accomplishments should be "written down for generations" — three from the past, the 1999 Women of Valor chosen by the Jewish Women's Archive and Ma'yan, and three whom Ma'yan has chosen to profile for the ways in which they are currently continuing the legacy of the 1999 Women of Valor. To help you make the most of the fact that the last day of Women's History Month (March 31) coincides with the first night of Passover, we offer you in these pages a variety of approaches to connecting Passover with women's history and current feminist activism and creativity.

After Women's History Month and Passover, the Jewish calendar gives us the *Omer* and *Shavuot* — both of which are explored in this *Journey* through personal essays.

Be sure to look over our upcoming programs and those of other organizations listed on pages 42-48, and mark the dates on your calendars. Also, if you have something you would like to contribute to a future issue of *Journey*, please let us know.

Tamara Cohen
Editor



Women's Cup by Beth Jacobson, 1999

Hannah Greenebaum Solomon and her daughter,
granddaughter, and great-grandchild





women of valor: then and now

HANNAH
GREENEB AUM

Hannah Greenebaum Solomon was founder and president of the National Council of Jewish Women, the oldest Jewish women's organization in the United States. A civic leader in Chicago and an advocate of women worldwide, Solomon modeled a life in which community involvement and support of women's rights co-existed with a deep commitment to family.



"Who is the new woman?...She is the woman who dares go into the world and do what her convictions demand."

SOLOMON

"Woman's sphere is the whole wide world, without limit."

Paving the way for women's voices in the public affairs of the Jewish community, Hannah Greenebaum Solomon founded the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), the first national Jewish women's organization in the United States. Under Solomon's leadership, the National Council of Jewish Women provided family counseling, supervised loan programs, worked to improve housing conditions and directed new immigrants to appropriate social service organizations. NCJW also attempted to combat assimilation by educating its members, mostly German Jewish women, about Judaism and Jewish life.

Hannah Greenebaum Solomon was chosen by the Jewish Women's Archive and Ma'yan as a Woman of Valor because of her key role in founding NCJW and because of her multiple commitments to Chicago's civic life, new immigrants, suffrage, the international women's movement, and her family.

W O M A N O F V A L O R

Sallie Gratch

Sallie Gratch, like Hannah Greenebaum Solomon, was born and raised in Chicago. One hundred and six years after Solomon founded NCJW, Gratch founded Project Keshet in 1989. Project Keshet is the only organization working in the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union (NIS) that is committed to building women's leadership skills, creating an environment receptive to religious pluralism and doing outreach to the non-Jewish community to improve communication and cooperation and ultimately, to reduce anti-Semitism. When Ma'yan approached Sallie Gratch for this interview explaining that we wanted to profile her as a contemporary Solomon, Gratch did some research. She discovered not only that her own family background was similar to Solomon's, but that, through marriage, she is a descendant of Solomon's.



Ma'yan: *What was your impetus to establish a new organization?*

SG: In 1986, when my children and other teenagers like them were saying they didn't have a future because we would all eventually go down in a nuclear holocaust, I joined the great peace march for global nuclear disarmament. I needed to make a strong statement that I believed in a future, and I was going to try to make it happen. That peace march transformed my life. Because I felt my Jewish identity keenly, I decided to bring the message of nuclear disarmament to the Jewish community.

Then, in 1987, when the American Jewish community was raising the issue of refuseniks, I joined a walk for peace from Leningrad to Moscow. In small towns along the route I met many Jews, men and women, who didn't expect to leave the Soviet Union and didn't know what it meant to be Jewish. It became clear to me that the American Jewish community was hearing only part of the story about Jewish life in the Soviet Union. I felt dissatisfied with the injustice of western Jewry's assuming they knew the answers for Jews in another country and impatient with the narrow focus [of western Jewry] on refuseniks. So in 1988 I went on another march, this time from Odessa to Kiev. I held Friday night services during the march and was shocked by the numbers of people who attended.

I returned from the march resolute. I had to do something more pro-active than walk for peace. I believed, perhaps naively, that I could create an organization that didn't work from anger and hostility but was founded on a citizen diplomacy model — I believed that peace could be built through friendship by getting people on opposite sides of the world to talk to each other, to appreciate cultural differences. I believed that I could use my social work and community organizing skills to bring the richness and diversity of Jewish life in the United States to the international scene in order to support the interests of Jews in the Soviet Union in search of their own Jewish identities. I knew that even if it was just my voice at the beginning, there would be thousands of voices behind mine eventually, if they but knew what was happening over there. So in 1989, Project Keshet was founded as a 501C3 (not-for-profit organization.) I lived in Kiev in 1991, building relationships and developing a stronger base there.

Ma'yan: *Why did you choose to create a specifically Jewish women's organization?*

SG: Project Keshet was not founded as a women's organization. However, it became clear that it was difficult to address the Jewish community as a whole in the States; it is heavily laden with paternalism and all I received were pats on the head. I had attended a women's conference in Chicago and experienced how close women could become in a short time. So during my next trip to the former Soviet Union I held a meeting with women only. The attendees had never met just as women and certainly not as Jewish women. It was an incredibly empowering experience for them and another amazingly transformative experience for me. I decided to organize an international conference of Jewish women.

In 1994, 100 Jewish women from eight western countries met with 200 Soviet Jewish women. Everything was so successful that I thought that this could be the end of Project Keshet; we would, at the conference's end, have 100 mouths to spread this Jewish story across Europe and the US. The amazing thing was that the women were so excited by the meeting, they wanted help to build skills and networks. It became clear that if we could empower the Jewish community through women, if we could instill women's values into community life, there was a chance for peace.

Since 1994, we have held seventeen leadership seminars and mother/daughter retreats. In addition to Svetlana (NIS Director who has been working side-by-side with me from the beginning), we have one and a half full time people and five facilitators in the NIS. The women there

now take full responsibility for the seminars which are expanding quickly. There are 1500 women in the network in 124 locations throughout the Ukraine, Russia, Belarus and Moldova, learning about health care, activism and advocacy.

Ma'yan: *Who have been your role models?*

SG: If anything is a motivation for me, it is the absence of women as role models. My father taught me to believe I could make a difference, to dream and reach for the stars. My family valued board service as social activism, but I wanted to work directly with people to make change.

Ma'yan: *As a role model yourself, what message do you have for the next generation?*

SG: I know it is so overused, but people must believe that they can make a difference. Whatever you want to be, know that it takes time to get there. The journey has its own process; it's not about fifteen minutes of your life, it is your whole life — that's the only way we are going to achieve anything in this world that can even feel peaceful.

If you are interested in learning more about Project Keshet, they can be contacted at projectkeshet@compuserve.com or 847. 332. 1994. From April 29-May 2, Project Keshet will hold Women's Exchange USA, an international Jewish feminist conference in Chicago. See page 48 for details.



W O M A N O F V A L O R

Irena Klepfisz

Irena Klepfisz was born in Warsaw, Poland in 1941 and emigrated to the United States in 1949. Over the past twenty-five years she has taught English, Women's Studies and Yiddish. An activist in the lesbian/feminist and Jewish communities, she was a founder of *Conditions* magazine, and co-editor of *The Tribe of Dina: A Jewish Woman's Anthology* and *Jewish Women's Call for Peace: A Handbook for Jewish Women on the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict*. She is the author of *A Few Words in the Mother Tongue, Poems Selected and New* (1971-1990) and *Dreams of an Insomniac: Jewish Feminist Essays, Speeches and Diatribes*.



Both Emma Lazarus and Irena Klepfisz began as poets but were then moved by political events — for Lazarus the Russian pogroms (1880s), and for Klepfisz the Lebanon War (1980s) — to write essays that addressed their Jewish identity and their feelings about the responsibility of the American Jewish community to respond to these events. At the same time, as they rose to the task of addressing the Jewish community about what they saw as critical moral issues of their day, they also remained committed to pursuing their art, unhampered by boundaries of identity or politics. Klepfisz's frank discussion of her resistance to classifying her writing as simply "Jewish" (or simply anything) offers an interesting balance to the current academic debates about the relationship between Emma Lazarus' work and her Jewish identity.

Ma'yan: *What do you see as the connection between your writing and your activism?*

IK: I don't think it is an inherent connection. I started out as a writer. For 13-14 years, I was not active at all. When I came into feminism I first began to see literature in a political framework — through issues like who gets published and what is included in the canon.

It was my activism in the women's movement and the Jewish content of some of my writing that made me turn later to essay writing. My visibility as a Jewish writer pushed me into a public position. People began asking me what I thought, and so I had to really start thinking — particularly about issues like Zionism and Israel. It wasn't until 1982, the war in Lebanon, that I really began to be active around Israel and the Occupation. In some way I feel that my commitment to Yiddish and

Yiddish culture was put aside during those years. I'd never accepted the Diaspora/Homeland dichotomy, and yet I was totally absorbed by Middle East peace issues.

In the last 5-6 years, I've been preoccupied with Yiddish. Cultural work is much less visible than politics and isn't often perceived of as political. My focus on Yiddish women writers, however, is motivated by my feminist commitment, and of course that's political, though it's not pure protest politics.

Ma'yan: *Do you feel that poetry is a particularly good venue for making change?*

IK: I've seen poetry bring about enormous changes in the United States. I've seen poetry transform people. In the beginning of the women's movement, women who never thought about poetry were coming *en masse* to poetry readings. Poets were an arm of the feminist movement all along in the US: African-American women poets, Native-American women poets — they brought women into women's bookstores, raised consciousness, and made change happen. Judy Grahn, for example, had a profound effect on me personally; she inspired me.

I think there is a myth in the US about poetry being dead, but those who make this claim are talking about academic poetry. Academic poetry moves no one. Poetry that argues from a deeply felt political commitment always moves people. I was recently at the 25th anniversary concert of Sweet Honey and the Rock... Theirs is an extremely powerful poetry. People who put contemporary poetry down are just reading the wrong journals. As Audre Lorde said: poetry is a necessity and not a luxury.

Ma'yan: *What is the connection between your identity as a Jew and your work?*

IK: I think every writer at least begins with a sense of alienation and mine comes from a variety of things. I think the source of my original alienation was my Jewish experience — being born during the War, coming as an immigrant to the United States. This Jewish experience made me a writer. But it's not the only experience that has fed me as a writer. I learned in adulthood that Jewish experience is not the only subject of my work and not the only source of my alienation. I'm also a lesbian, a Ph.D. who never completely settled into academic life, a woman who never had children, a secular Yiddishist...

We try too hard to pinpoint a writer. If I write poetry about the Holocaust, is that lesbian poetry? If I write about lesbian relationships, is that Jewish poetry? I think these are hard questions. I consider myself a Jew in the world, but when I look at my poetry I find that I've written far more that doesn't seem like "Jewish work." Some would take my work about class issues and work and attribute it to my Jewish secular

identity. It's very hard to separate all these things. It's a very tricky question. But to look at my work just through a Jewish lens skews my work.

Ma'yan: *Have you faced obstacles in your work due to your gender?*

IK: Actually no, because I deliberately started publishing in the 1970s within the women's movement and only in feminist journals. I was interested in women reading my work, so that's the media I turned to. Now I'm amazed that my work is included by editors of mainstream anthologies of twentieth century American poetry — not necessarily Jewish poetry.

Ma'yan: *Who were your mentors and who are your role models? Did you have any Jewish women mentors or role models?*

IK: Growing up my role models were male because those were the only writers I read and knew... I wasn't conscious they were all men. The one woman I read as a teenager was Carson McCullers, and she made an impact. Later, I encountered writers like Pat Parker and Judy Grahn who spoke to a working-class oral tradition. Tillie Olsen was very important to me. I remember vividly when *Silences* came out.

Now I look to role models about how to age. I look to Grace Paley because she remains in touch, remains active in the community and is a writer. Also Adrienne Rich who is so prolific.

In six years of graduate school, I didn't have a single woman teacher. I remember a moment in graduate school when I was in class and looked at the row behind me: there were 8 young men all in suits and ties, their attaché cases next to their chairs. I had gone to graduate school because I liked to read. At that moment I experienced such alienation, I never saw myself mirrored in the people around me. But it's not like any woman would have made a difference. There were women around who were pretending they weren't women and that wasn't any better.

Ma'yan: *Do you see yourself as a role model?*

IK: I am very pleased to be a role model. The first time a young woman spoke to me saying that I was a role model for her, I practically fell off my chair. I hadn't realized I'd gotten so old. But I think I am a role model. Students look you over — not because they want to be exactly like you but because they want to take in what kind of lives women can lead. Young women have told me they received *The Tribe of Dina* as a Bat Mitzvah present. I think it's a wonderful thing. I think it's important for young women to see a variety of possibilities in their lives — different ways of being in the world — married, unmarried, heterosexual, lesbian, mothering, childless, teachers, artists. Role models are not necessarily people you want to imitate, but people who give you another way of being in the world.

W O M A N O F V A L O R

Judith S. Kaye

Judith S. Kaye was appointed Chief Judge of the State of New York in 1993 by Governor Mario Cuomo, 53 years after Justine Wise Polier was sworn in as the first woman Justice of the Domestic Relations Court of New York State. Judge Kaye is the first woman to occupy the State Judiciary's highest office. She is also a mother of three, as was Polier. Kaye speaks of Polier as a role model, calling her a great judge who was ahead of her time.



Ma'yan: *What, if any, is the connection between your identity as a Jew and your work?*

JK: Instinctively, I immediately answer “none”— and in some sense I guess that is true. Judges must be impartial and come to every dispute with no preconceived biases. In that sense, the fact that I am a woman, a Jew, a mother, is something I try to put aside in judging particular controversies.

In truth however, my identity as a Jew has everything to do with my work: it is who I am, my value system. While surely I would not decide for or against someone because of shared religion, that I am a Jew — raised in a Jewish household, transmitting that heritage to my children and grandchildren — is at the core of my being and therefore essential to everything I do.

Ma'yan: *What obstacles have you faced in your work because of your gender?*

JK: Actually, my first ambition back in the 1950s was to be a world-famous journalist. I thought, as the editor of my high school and college newspapers, that I really had an inside track. Soon after my graduation from Barnard in 1958 I found that the world of journalism did not have its arms open to women. It was impossible to find any job, except as a social reporter, reporting weddings and women's club meetings, which I did in Union City, NJ.

I enrolled in law school — night law school — working by day, simply to earn a credential so that I could get off the social page and into the “news.” Ironically, that obstacle turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to me.

Law school, indeed the entire legal profession, was no picnic for women either. Out of sheer *chutzpah*, I determined back in 1962 to get a job with one of the most prestigious “white shoe” Wall Street law firms — and I did!

This was probably hardest on my parents. They were immigrants to this country from Poland and Russia, who had a farm and then a store in Monticello, NY. My ambitions were incomprehensible to them. Teaching and marriage were what was expected of me, and they despaired that as a lawyer, no one would marry me. Regrettably they didn’t live to see how well this all worked out.

I believe that still today there are obstacles for women, even in the “justice” system. The playing field is far more level than it was 35 years ago, but it’s still a struggle, especially balancing family considerations. Perhaps the greatest advance for women has been the fact that there are more and more women holding out a hand to help and mentor, and simply to listen to others.

Ma’yan: *Who were your mentors? Who are your role models?*

JK: Mentors and role models are extremely important — I tended to pooh-pooh that when there were none in the law. But I see how really helpful they can be. When I grew up, I never saw a woman conductor, or rabbi or judge. It’s so much easier to fix your star when you see someone actually living out your dream.

Most certainly, I would identify Justine Wise Polier as a role model. I think not only of her phenomenal path-breaking as a judge — a great judge I might add — but also the fact that she focused her talents on children. Children and families until very recently were regarded as the stepchildren of the courts. Greatest attention is paid to complex financial matters, and least to family matters. (That is changing today.) Justine Wise Polier saw the perversity of this. She was decades ahead of her time.

Benjamin Nathan Cardozo (a cousin of Emma Lazarus), one of the greatest judges in all of history and a predecessor Chief Judge of my court, is also a role model for me. What a thrill it is to stand in a small corner of his giant footsteps!

I could never mention role models and not include my beloved, gentle mother, who was the *balabusta* (super homemaker) I will never be, while always working alongside my father.

Ma'yan: *Do you consider yourself a role model? Do you have a message for younger Jewish women?*

JK: I bristle at thinking of myself as a role model — it's hard enough just working through my own problems; I hate to think that anyone's life will be guided by mine... But of course, in a sense I must be some sort of role model. I consider myself blessed: I have a very wonderful family life and I am Chief Judge of the State of New York. Hard as I try, I cannot imagine anything better — and I certainly recommend it!

A message for younger women? Go for it! Persevere. If you see only the obstacles, only the negatives, take a second look. And a third... Obstacles can be opportunities — don't be put off by them. Everything is possible if you believe it is. If you do not believe you can achieve your ambition, no one else will either... The opportunity is there for you to be the person you want to be.

women of valor 1997-1998



Rebecca Gratz



Molly Picon



Lillian Wald



Glikl of Hameln



Henrietta Szold



Rose Schneiderman

For more information about The Women of Valor call Ma'yan for posters and a resource packet. Also visit the extensive online exhibit at www.jwa.org.





transforming passover

BLAZING PASSOVER FREEDOM TRAILS

Bonna Devora Haberman

Bonna Devora Haberman is a lecturer in Near Eastern and Judaic Studies at Brandeis University. She is a founder of Women of the Wall in Jerusalem, and Director of the Education Initiative at the New Jewish High School of Greater Boston.

As we prepare to celebrate the festival of liberation and set our tables for the Passover *seders*, let us also set our hearts to contribute to redemption in our own day. It is a Passover obligation to recount and interpret the story of the Exodus, passing the liberation tradition from one generation to the next. Let us conjoin our lives with the legacy of our people, participating in contemporary acts of liberation. I propose that we focus upon the servitude suffered by young women who are sold into prostitution. Global trafficking of women currently sustains shocking profiteering, even in Israel. A humanly degraded conjunction of money with power, criminal networks operate with the collaboration of officials and authorities throughout the world.

- The United Nations estimates that 4 million people, mostly women, including girls as young as 8 years old, are trafficked globally every year into sexual slavery.
- Estimated profits to crime syndicates from human trafficking are \$7 billion per annum.
- More than 1000 women are illegally trafficked to Israel annually.
- In Israel, each woman is bought for \$10-20,000, held in debt bondage by their “owners” in brothels throughout the country.
- Most of the trafficked women in Israel are approximately 20 years old. Girls as young as 12 and 15 have been found in Tel Aviv.
- According to Haifa Police Commander Tyler and other Israeli officials, women are routinely beaten, tortured, raped and drugged. Isolated, deprived, and threatened, their documents are confiscated.
- Professor Menachem Amir of Hebrew University Department of Criminology and other experts contend that Israeli police collaborate with pimps.

- Chief Inspector Molli Cohen of Yarkon Precinct, Tel Aviv estimates that each woman earns \$50-\$100,000/year for her pimp.
- The prostitution mafia in Israel turns over approximately \$450 million/year.

The criminals who prosper from these unconscionable acts depend upon a clientele and a social norm which condone the violation against humanity entailed by the trafficking of women. A prevailing international consensus among “consumers” and institutions of power accepts the abusive commodification of human beings and normalizes the resulting commercial exchange. Unless we actively dissent from this consensus, we are acquiescing.

Passover begins with the search for and removal of leaven. We sweep away excess from our cupboards and closets, our hearts and minds. This is a time to inspect and desist from practices which cultivate and sustain violating acts: gender discrimination, degrading sexual innuendo, the trafficking of women, psychological and physical harassment, silencing of victims, ignoring abuses of status, authority and power in sexual relationships. These practices, too common to our societies, erode the ethical fabric of our culture, undermine our humanity, betray our vision of our spirituality and the sacred core of creation. Passover asserts the need for persistent vigilance and activism to overcome the conditions which render oppression possible and profitable.

In the Exodus story, the midwives, Shifra and Puah, stood before Pharaoh, defiant of destructive edicts. Miriam and Pharaoh’s daughter, Batya, collaborated across ethnic and class lines to save Jewish lives.

We too must stand against powers which oppress. There is a Jewish imperative to affirm our vision of humanity in the divine image and to liberate people from the slavery of trafficking.

This Passover at the *seder*, let us, the Jewish people, commit to struggle against contemporary servitude, to blaze Passover freedom trails. Take these and other issues to the table. Question, discuss, educate and organize. Raise our voices to heaven and humanity: “Let the women go!”

WHAT YOU CAN DO

For more information about the global problem, see www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/catw

For a copy of the Israel Women's Network report "Trafficking of Women to Israel and Forced Prostitution" e-mail: resource@iwn.org.

Tax-exempt donations to Israeli efforts may be sent, earmarked for the Trafficking of Russian Women Project to The Israel Women's Network: New Israel Fund, Suite 500, 1625 K Street, NW, Washington DC 20006.

Address these issues at your seder by honoring Bertha Pappenheim with one of the Four Cups. See Ma'yan's *haggadah The Journey Continues* for a sketch of her life, much of which was spent alerting the German Jewish community at the beginning of the century about the pervasive problem of "white slavery" and establishing support for destitute Jewish women and girls.

Come to Bonna Devora Haberman's study session and lecture at Ma'yan on April 13 (see p.43).



Deb Willis,
"Dunk! Dunk!
The Washerwoman", (1995)

TRANSFORMING YOUR HOME SEDER

In an effort to offer you more suggestions for transforming your Passover seder, Ma'yan asked several feminist leaders in a variety of communities to describe one thing they've done to make their Passover seders more feminist. We share many of their responses as a way of further inspiring you to make some changes in your seders this year. If you have more suggestions to share, please e-mail them to us at mayanjcc@aol.com and we'll add them to this growing list.

How is the seder led?

If you are in a heterosexual household, alternate leaders so that children can see women in the role of "head of household." Similarly, alternate gender while reading non-gender-sensitive passages in the traditional *haggadah*. Although these are subtle changes, they can have a major impact on everyone, especially if the assembled group is rather conventional. More aggressive feminist tactics would not be acceptable in such situations and would not receive a fair hearing.

– Ellen Frankel, Jewish Publication Society

Women lead! Everyone participates! No one gets stuck in the kitchen like my *bubbe* and *tantes*, cleaning dishes!

– Rabbi Elizabeth Bolton

My stepfather's Orthodox father led [the seders] and that was that. He sort of chanted through it, so my mother and I, and my sister when she was old enough, would interrupt him many, many times with singing and would make everyone stop and sing with us or listen to us sing at least... I always thought of that as an act of subversion. I thought I was Miriam.

– Arielle Derby, Smith College student

A few years ago, after having attended our first Ma'yan feminist seder, my mother and I were moved to make a few changes in our own family seders. The greatest transformation came when my mother insisted that I lead our seder. I was hesitant at first, not understanding why at the age of eighteen, I should lead instead of any of the other women there. But I saw that it was important to my mother, and I was secretly excited to get to share some of my thoughts on the different parts of the seder. My mother seemed proud in my leading the seder, my father and uncle seemed happy to be relieved of their duties, and I gained a sense of empowerment in the presence of my family. Disappointingly, however, my grandmother seemed to be the only one to disapprove of the changes... She was constantly getting up and down,

claiming the need to “check on the food”... What Baba did not understand was that my attempt at innovation was partly for her. It was my way of transforming the tradition to allow me to both hold on to the essence of what she has given to me, while infusing it with a spirit that is personally more fulfilling to me as a Jewish woman today.

– Margot Meitner, Yale student, former Ma'yan summer intern

What's on the table?

We always have a *Kos Miriam* (Miriam's Cup). We have put an orange on the seder plate, but so far haven't had the nerve to put bread on.

– Rabbi Margot Stein (For an explanation of the orange on the seder plate, a symbol of inclusion, and the idea of bread on a seder plate, a symbol of defiance see the Ma'yan *haggadah* introduction or *Like Bread on the Seder Plate: Jewish Lesbians and the Transformation of Tradition* by Rebecca Alpert.)

We place a number of feminist *haggadot* at strategic locations around the table and invite people to chime in with readings where they fit.

– Judith Plaskow, author of *Standing Again at Sinai*

I ask everyone at the seder to bring an object, a symbol of his or her personal freedom. These are placed on the table in a tambourine. When we get to *B'chol Dor V'dor* (in every generation), I pass this Miriam's tambourine around the table. Everyone shares what he or she brought and tells a story of personal liberation.

– Matia Rania Angelou, *Nishmat haNashim*

Put a pomegranate on the seder plate as a way of symbolizing the diversity of the Jewish people.

– Gila Gevirtz, editor, *The New American Haggadah*

Whose story gets told?

Part of being feminist to me means putting ourselves in the story... asking ourselves the questions and making room for the response... which of the four children have we been this year? Which one do we want to be next year and why? What is our bondage? What is our liberation? What are the four options available for us? What are our answers?

– Karen Abrams, *Through Our Own Strength*, Jerusalem

I have actually incorporated the Ma'yan approach of honoring extraordinary women at each cup, and try to balance between two women who are historical figures and two whom someone at the table knows personally and has been touched by.

– Myriam Klotz, RRC Rabbinical Student

Invite all participants in your seder to bring along some Passover object that is dear to them and holds part of the story of who they are or what they hold as sacred... At the part of the seder just after we point to the *pesach*, *matzah*, *maror* and ask, "what is this and what does it mean?" participants can place their objects on the table, point to them, and explain the object's resonance for them and their story.

– Vanessa L. Ochs, author of *Words on fire*

...We wrote about bonds we wanted to be loosened from, visions we had for change, spoke the names of women we wanted to honor and follow, symbolically burned the shackles we put on ourselves (burning pieces of paper); we brought flowers to remind us of rejuvenation and the cycles of living.

– Cindy Greenberg, *Jews for Racial and Economic Justice*

New songs to sing?

"Miriam Ha-Neviya" Hebrew by Leila Gal Berner, English by Margot Stein

"Show us How" by Juliet Spitzer

"Miriam's Slow Snake Song" by Linda Hirschhorn

"Avadot Hayyinu" by Margot Stein

"Miriam's Song" by Debbie Friedman

"Shifra and Puah", "Batya", and "Miriam" by Rayzel Raphael

"Miriam" by Laura Berkson

"Yocheved's Lament" by Jackie Cytrynbaum

(Many of these are available on cassettes or CD's through SoundsWrite at 1-800-9-SOUND-9)

Other interesting ideas:

At the time of the egg, we discuss reproductive rights and the struggle to protect them.

– Rabbi Leila Gal Berner

I always add Irena Klepfisz's poem *Bashert*.

– Sally Gottesman, Ma'yan Changemaker (See *Journey*, Fall 1998)

Especially for children:

Play an imaginary game: What were the Hebrew women doing during the plagues, during preparations for the Exodus, during the Exodus itself? We've even done such role-playing throughout the seder, asking kids to assume such roles from the onset of the seder, and then interviewing them throughout the evening in these roles. It's a great way to get kids (could be done with adults, too) to share a new perspective.

– Ellen Frankel

My 5-year-old thinks *Kos Miryam* (Miriam's Cup) is a regular seder feature. Her friend last year dressed up as Moshe, so she got out her tambourine and played Miriam, crossing the Red Sea (AKA a large red scarf), dancing.

– Rabbi Elizabeth Bolton

What I have done for kids who are there is tell a story about Miriam... the story I really like is about 20 minutes in length to tell, and it's the title story from Howard Schwartz's collection *Miriam's Tambourine: Jewish Folktales From Around the World*. I make some changes that really empower the women and I bring along a hand made African tambourine on which I have wood burned the *pasuk* (verse) from *Shemot* (Exodus) about Miriam.

– Shoshana Gugenheim, artist

We have everyone, especially the children, think up their own question and share it during the *Ma Nishtana*. Then, at different points during the seder, we try to answer all the questions.

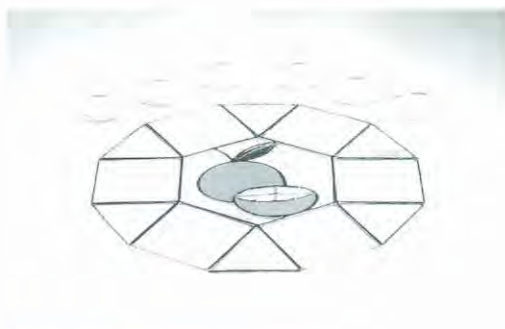
– Dr. Devorah Steinmetz, *Beit Rabban*

Note: Chai Kids, a children's Judaica materials supplier, has created a Miriam Package for Passover. It includes a tambourine, a cup that kids can color on their own and a copy of Fran Manushkin's beautiful book *Miriam's Cup*. Available for \$19.95 from 1. 888. 242. 4543.

Who is in the kitchen?

We liberate the hostess from doing all the cooking and clean-up (and liberate any potential black maids, like the ones we hired in my childhood.) Back in Toronto in the mid-80s, my *Rosh Hodesh* group used to do a feminist seder on *Pesach Sheni*, a month later, on the rationale that on the actual day of *Pesach*, we, too, were journeying (i.e. working like slaves) and unable to fully celebrate.

– Rabbi Margot Stein



Shank bone, green vegetable, hard-boiled egg
Seder Plate

ENRICHING YOUR COMMUNAL WOMEN'S SEDER

Best Practices From Around the Country

The Journey Continues, Ma'yan's *haggadah*, is being used for communal women's seders all over the country. In 1998, approximately 24 groups throughout the US and Canada used the *haggadot* (plural) to create seders that ranged in size from 20 to 500. Here are some of their ideas about how to enrich communal feminist seders.

- Have children from local day and religious schools make ritual objects for the table (*matzah* covers, *seder* plates, etc.)
- Reach out to other organizations to co-sponsor seders — congregations should think about local Hillels, senior residences, etc.
- Hold a *kumsitz* (songfest) prior to the *seder* to familiarize people with *seder* music
- Ask people to bring their own ritual objects (*seder* plates, candlesticks, cups, etc.) for the tables and then share the significance of these objects
- Encourage mother/daughter participation or other inter-generational groups
- Ask each sponsoring organization to nominate several women for the four cups, display the women's pictures and information about them in a communal space, and then choose four women from this group for the four cups
- Have young people from local day and religious schools lead the singing
- Insert into the *haggadah* a list of organizations and places for women to volunteer their time throughout the year
- Ask women to share meaningful personal Passover experiences
- Encourage and facilitate the establishment of ongoing women's study groups as an outgrowth of the *seder*
- Ask women to take home parts of the *haggadah* to use in their home seders
- Study biblical texts on the midwives at the portion of the *haggadah* entitled "Go Out and Study"
- Be creative about making the seders participatory — assign readings ahead of time, or designate table "captains" to organize table readings

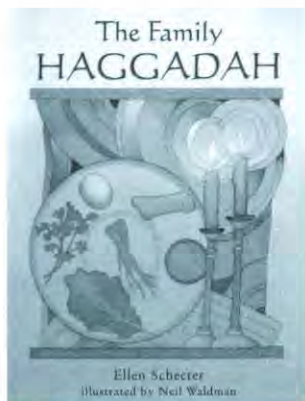
For more about how to plan and hold a communal women's *seder*, call Erika for Ma'yan's Guide to Planning a Communal Feminist Seder at 212. 580. 0099 ext. 232 or e-mail her at mayanjcc@aol.com.

NEW HAGGADOT

Written for a mainstream audience, these recently published *haggadot* incorporate feminist rituals, language and practice. Ma'yan brings them to your attention as part of our attempt to keep you up-to-date on books of interest to Jewish feminists.

The Family Haggadah by Ellen Schechter
published by Viking/Penguin/Putnam, 1999
(a Jewish Book Club and Book of Month
Club selection)

The Family Haggadah was written by prolific children's author Ellen Schechter who explains "because I did not grow up in an observant Jewish family and continue to reclaim my religious and spiritual identity a step at a time, I wrote this book over a period of seven years as a way of coming to understand more about the meaning of *Pesach*, and then share my discoveries with my children. The prospect of beginning to learn how to create Passover for my own family was both enormously exciting and deeply terrifying... My hope is that *The Family Haggadah* will be helpful to all the parents like me who need information, inspiration and the spiritual confidence to risk creating family *Seders* bearing their own unique marks."



The Family Haggadah assumes that part of what will attract families to use this new text is the fact that, as is explained in the introduction, the text "deliberately avoids sexist, patriarchal, or militaristic language, usage, or customs." Indeed, according to the author, "the desire to keep Jewish tradition relevant and alive" led her to make changes to the traditional *haggadah* which include: replacing the Four Sons with the Four Children; describing God in gender neutral English (Blessed are You, Eternal God, Creator of the universe); and adding a Miriam's Cup to the seder table. In discussing leadership of the *seder* *The Family Haggadah* urges, "before you begin your *seder*, decide who will serve as your leader this year... But please, don't automatically choose the oldest male for this key role."

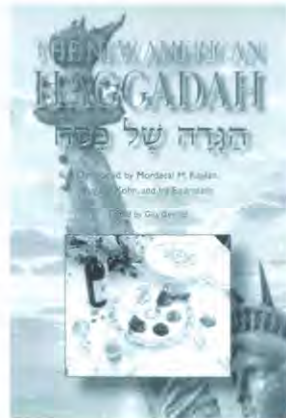
The Family Haggadah tells the Exodus story in the present tense in an attempt to make the events seem as if they are actually happening on the

night of the seder. This is more than just a clever way of honoring the injunction of experiencing the seder as if we personally are leaving Egypt. It is also a way of shifting the gender of the authoritative voice of the *haggadah*. While Yocheved (Moses, Aaron and Miriam's mother) and Miriam are mentioned in this *haggadah's* telling of the Exodus story, the women of the Exodus are also given an additional role. After the singing of *Dayenu*, the Miriam's Cup is poured. The reading accompanying the pouring of the cup invites participants to reflect on the Exodus story just told and to notice that "there would have been no Exodus, no Passover, no Seder, no freedom, without the many brave women who played crucial roles in the Passover drama." The text goes on to discuss the midwives, Shifra and Puah, Yocheved and Pharaoh's daughter, here named Thermutis. It then describes Miriam's role in the Exodus as well as the legend of Miriam's Well. As part of the dedication of Miriam's Cup, participants are invited to say aloud the names of "women in our own lives who help heal us and repair our world."

The New American Haggadah

Developed by Mordechai Kaplan,
Eugene Kohn, and Ira Eisenstein (1941)
Edited by Gila Gevirtz
Published by Behrman House Inc., 1999

The New American Haggadah is an updated edition of a *haggadah* originally published in 1941 by Mordechai Kaplan, Eugene Kohn and Ira Eisenstein for the Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation. This new edition retains much of the groundbreaking approach of the original editors whose *haggadah* reflected their experience as American Jews living in the age of Nazism, aware of the power of oppression in the world and sensitive to the ethical imperatives of Judaism. Among their innovations were the inclusion of readings about spiritual freedom, the inclusion of the Moses legends (not part of traditional *haggadot*), and the inclusion of biblical verses that root a Jewish ethical imperative in the past experience of slavery. The editor of *The New American Haggadah* retains many of these changes but further edits "those features [of the original *haggadah*] that are at odds with the sensibilities and circumstance of our time." Central to these is a sensitivity to gender issues. All the English language has been changed to gender-neutral language. The matriarchs are added to all references to the patriarchs in Hebrew and Aramaic.



The Cup of Miriam is part of the list of items on the *seder* table. The Exodus story includes the midwives, Yocheved and the daughter of Pharaoh. A sidebar adds the commentary that “the story of Yocheved, Miriam, and Pharaoh’s daughter models how the cause of justice and freedom can be furthered when people from diverse backgrounds — different generations, religions, and economic circumstances work together.” This *haggadah* also includes the matriarchs in the covenant; when the text recounts God’s hearing the cries of the Israelites and remembering the covenant; the covenant is referred to as God’s covenant with “Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and Jacob, Leah, and Rachel.”

A special focus of this *haggadah* is its effort to incorporate historical personalities — women and men — who have been involved in freedom struggles throughout Jewish and American history. The *haggadah* text includes a photo of the Statue of Liberty and an explanation about the life of Emma Lazarus and her famous poem “The New Colossus.” During the section about *maror* (the bitter herbs) the story of Clara Lemlich, a shirtwaist maker whose impassioned words ignited the Uprising of the Twenty Thousand on New York’s Lower East Side in 1909, is told. The words and photograph of Kessaye Tevajieh, a contemporary Ethiopian woman who left her home for Israel at the age of 21 during “Operation Moses,” serve as a moving companion piece to the story of the Israelites leaving Egypt. Biblical and historical women are also present in the text in the words of songs by contemporary Jewish feminist songwriters Debbie Friedman and Linda Hirschhorn.

Family Haggadah: A Seder for all Generations

By Elie M. Gindi, commentary and foreword by Rabbi Lee T. Bycel,

edited by Pamela B. Schaff

Published by Behrman House Inc.

This *haggadah*, which arrived at Ma’yan’s door too close to our publication deadline for a longer review, is beautiful (featuring full color reproductions of old illuminated *haggadot*), short (40 pages), very affordable (\$6.95) and it also has Miriam’s Cup! Written for children or families that want to hold a child-centered *seder*, the *haggadah* specifies that it is intended to facilitate a *seder* that will take approximately 45 minutes before the meal and 15 minutes after. The English text is completely gender inclusive, inviting participation through a series of text boxes filled with engaging questions and commentary.



Thou shall protect
me from all violence,
rape, abuse, murder.

Thou shall trust
me to be true.

Thou cannot steal
my self-worth.

Thou shall not
degrade, stereotype
or discount me.

Thou shall not covet
what I have or who
I am, but honor
each life as blessed.

I am connected
to all women, men
and living things.

Thou shall not create
God in man's image.

Thou shall hold my
name in highest respect.

Thou shall provide
peaceful rest every day
and on the Sabbath.

Thou shall honor all
mothers and creators
of life and art.



towards revelation

THE OMER. LET US NUMBER OUR DAYS

by Anita Altman

Anita Altman, a Jewish feminist and social activist, works at UJA-Federation of New York and is a member of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun.

I was raised in a highly identified Greek Jewish family, but one which denied its daughters any formal Jewish education. I experienced Judaism as empty ritual, and as a child of the 60's rebelled, and left those traditions behind. It wasn't until I had my own child that I recognized how much it meant to me that he too become linked with my religious traditions. How fortunate I was that my search for a Hebrew school for my son brought me to Congregation B'nai Jeshurun (BJ), a community undergoing its own transformation and renewal.

BJ has become my spiritual home, providing me a Judaism that I have found worth struggling with, a tradition that not only lays out a sacred vision of the world and who we are in relationship to it, but has taught me as well the importance of ritual and ceremony in our lives. It was therefore not surprising that as I approached my 50th birthday I chose to celebrate this important life passage by becoming a *Bat Torah*. I was blessed to find a gifted teacher who labored with me to learn the tropes and gave me the courage to stand before my own congregation to chant from the *Torah*. My portion that day was from Leviticus 23, *Emor*, specifically the passages describing the Gleanings and the *Omer*. As a political person, the meaning of the Gleanings, which require us to leave both the gleanings and the four corners of the fields unharvested for the poor and the strangers who live among us, was readily apparent. However, it was the sacrifice of the *Omer* that I found confounding. What possible meaning could a Temple sacrifice have for me? As I struggled with the text, reading commentaries and exploring other sources, I came to realize just how relevant the *Omer* was to my life.

The overall purpose of our holiday celebrations is to help us to achieve holiness, not only in terms of ceremonial purity, but also to help us to affirm and commit ourselves to both personal and social righteousness. The Passover holiday, which celebrates the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, is marked with two evenings of feasting, the *seders* during which we recount the story of our liberation from *Mitzrayim* (Egypt or "narrow places"). It also initiates a less well understood ritual, the counting of the *Omer* which begins the evening of the second day of Passover.

In Leviticus 23 the *Omer*, an agricultural rite is described. We are told to bring the first sheaf of the harvest as a wave offering to the Priest at the Temple, and from that day to count off seven weeks for a total of 50 days to a holy gathering, unnamed in the *Torah*, but now celebrated as the holiday of *Shavuot*. *Shavuot* is the day that Moses and the Jewish people received the *Torah* from God at Sinai.

From my readings, I learned that with the destruction of the Temple, the *Omer* sacrifice by the Priests could no longer be performed. It was transformed into a temporal connection between the two most important events of the Jewish people. Hence this countdown is the linkage between Passover, and our receiving of the *Torah*.

The relationship between God and the Israelite people that began in Egypt was clearly spelled out and accepted at Sinai. Therefore the consequence of our delivery was simply not to be freed, but to be transformed into a people with goals and obligations to fulfill.

The Kabbalists saw this period as a time of preparation to be ready to receive at Sinai the blueprint for a new order of choice and responsibility in place of slavery. They saw this period as a time of ascent, a climbing of 49 rungs of a ladder to reach a state of purity, so that by the 50th day as we reach the summit we have made ourselves ready to receive the *Torah*.

What I realized as I prepared for my *Bat Torah* was that in the same way that the Israelites had a 50 day period to prepare and to come to this main event and stand at Sinai, that in fact for me it had taken 50 years. That my standing at Sinai meant that I had to prepare, to study and to discipline myself so that I could grow and fulfill my birthright and assume my responsibilities as a member of my congregation. My learning of Hebrew and the chanting of the cantillations was such a struggle, which I believe made it even more empowering once achieved.

Since that remarkable event, I have felt a need to make this period of the counting of the *Omer* into a meaningful ritual for Jewish feminists. I have had this vision of creating an *Omer* calendar. In my mind it looks something like an advent calendar like the one Christians use for the countdown to Christmas that I used to covet as a child. But what would be included? What would it have us do as we marked each day? I put this out to you, the readers of *Journey*.

I do believe that it is important for us to count each day, to mark the passage of this crucial time as a reminder that we should mark all time's passage. It is too easy to lose days, to have days flow one into the other. *Limnot yamenu ken hodah venavee levav chochmah*, Help us to treasure each day, so we may attain wisdom (Psalm 90). With the counting of the *Omer* we must challenge ourselves to remember what day it is, who we are, and how close we stand to Sinai.

JOURNEY TO SINAI

by Merle Feld

Merle Feld is a playwright, poet, community activist, teacher of writing and longtime feminist. Her book, *A Spiritual Life: A Jewish Feminist Journey*, a memoir in poetry and prose, is forthcoming from SUNY Press in April. The following is an excerpt.

In the early stages of my Jewish exploration, my gender seemed irrelevant. I was faced with the enormity of gaining entry into an ancient tradition of which I knew nothing...

I think the first time my identity as a woman was a source of alienation or pain for me as a Jew was as an undergraduate in a Hillel class studying the third century rabbinic anthology *The Ethics of the Fathers*. I was reading along, blissfully engrossed in unlocking the treasures of the text, when I hit my head on the line: "Let your house be wide open to strangers, treat the poor as members of your own family, and do not gossip with women." The first two sentiments of course were noble, enriching, filling me with the ever-increasing pride I was feeling at the beauty of this tradition. But the third injunction, casually included in such an ethical series, literally knocked the breath out of me. Suddenly, I was "other," in fact, I was the enemy. Moreover, the injunction made clear that my assumption of being addressed, being included in the text, was false, untrue. This was a text written by men, written for men, describing a male religious tradition elucidating subjects of ultimate concern about how men ought to lead their lives and behave in the world.

The sudden recognition of all of this flooded me; I was conscious as well that the insult was not solely an ancient one, but that a continuing line of learned men had failed to edit out the offending sentiment and so had cumulatively added their stamp of approval. I closed the book. The men sitting around the study table with me offered bits of apologetics, none to my mind satisfactory; after a while they tired of this sidetrack we'd gotten off on and so finally, sensing their heightening impatience, I released them to go on to the next verses. But the damage was done. Like suddenly being confronted with incontrovertible proof that a dearly loved and trusted friend was guilty of some truly despicable act, there now was the beginning of a fissure between me and this ancient tradition I had increasingly been cleaving to: I began to ask myself, where was my place in this Jewish world as a woman? I dealt with my immediate hurt by laying the blame at the feet of the text and it was many years before I again was willing to open the

pages of *The Ethics of the Fathers*. But the more I learned, and the more my day to day life became inextricably tied to Jewish tradition, practice, and sensibility, the more I would find myself recycling that question: what was my place in this Jewish world as a woman?

...A number of years ago a dear friend, Rachel Adler, wrote an article for *Moment* magazine in which she analyzed some of the biblical passages that precede the giving of the *Torah*: men are enjoined, as part of their spiritual preparation for the encounter with the Divine, “Do not go near a woman.” Rachel had essentially the same reaction to this that I had had as a young college student studying *The Ethics of the Fathers* — the pain of suddenly realizing you’re not being addressed, the pain of being excluded from the tradition. But this expression of misogyny was a far more visceral and profound blow than the one that I had found in a rabbinic text — this was in the Bible itself and moreover it occurred in the midst of the holiest moment the Jewish people were to share with God. Since women were not included in this biblical passage, Rachel questioned with considerable pain whether we as women were in fact present at Sinai at all. And if we were not addressed, and we were not present, then were we even a part of the covenant with God?

I read this article in the company of friends who met monthly at that time for a Jewish feminist theology group. The group was somewhat weighted in favor of scholars, academics, rabbis. Though they made it clear that they respected me, I frequently felt inadequate. This particular winter evening, in the overheated Upper West Side apartment, I remember feeling dismayed and even a bit frightened that my feminist compatriots seemed to me quieter than usual, slower to jump in with arguments, refutations. (Later, on more careful examination of the text, it turned out that the offending words excluding women are in fact not part of God’s message to Moses, rather Moses adds them for good measure when he relays God’s words to the people.) But none of us saw that initially. There seemed to be no ready response.

I couldn’t believe they were willing to consider this, I could hardly control my passion. “I refuse to entertain the notion that we weren’t there. I won’t hear of it, I won’t accept it. Whatever happened, whatever pivotal, actual or mythic experience there was, it was our experience as fully as it was their experience. Maybe we have no account of it in our voice, maybe we have to recall or reconstruct or imagine

what that moment was for us, but for me the premise that we were present is unshakable, nonnegotiable.” It was already late when I left the group that evening to meet a friend with whom I was visiting overnight. It was bitterly cold, my blood was racing from the evening’s discussion, and my friend the insomniac, knowing how I love to dance, said, on a lark, “I’ve always wanted to take you to Studio 54 — how about tonight?” And on a lark, I replied, “Sure.” So we headed for the famous disco, the strobe lights flashing, the music splitting my ears, the rhythm vibrating from inside me, the insistent bass overcoming me. I danced till I had no breath left to dance, soaking through the woolen turtleneck sweater, the high leather boots I had worn to ward off the frigid January air. Blissfully emptied of energy, I was ready to call it a night. Sometime between three in the morning and seven in the morning, the intellectual argument with Rachel’s article, the emotional wrestling with my feminist friends and the physical release of the music and the dancing combined to wake me from my sleep on my friend’s pull-out couch in the living room. I sat up and wrote about Sinai...



We All Stood Together

for Rachel Adler

My brother and I were at Sinai
He kept a journal
of what he saw
of what he heard
of what it all meant to him

I wish I had such a record
of what happened to me there

It seems like every time I want to write
I can't
I'm always holding a baby
one of my own
or one for a friend
always holding a baby
so my hands are never free
to write things down

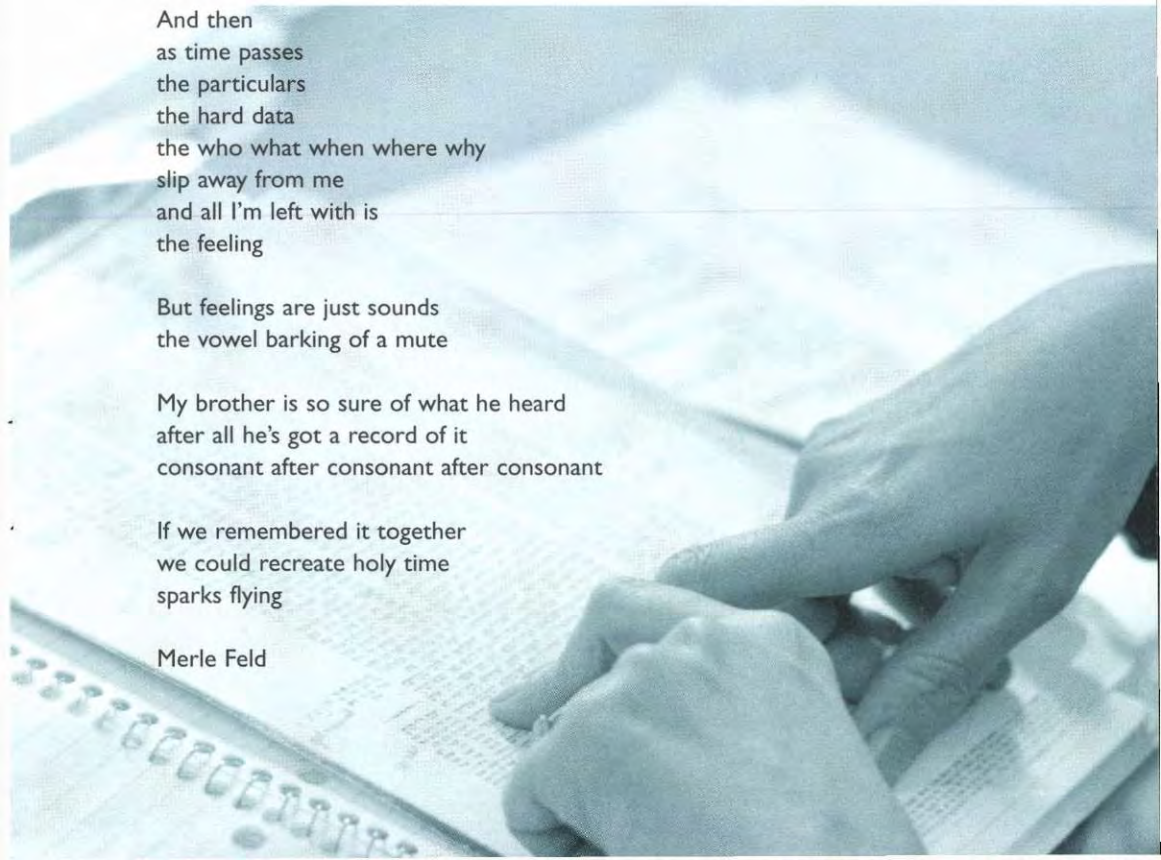
And then
as time passes
the particulars
the hard data
the who what when where why
slip away from me
and all I'm left with is
the feeling

But feelings are just sounds
the vowel barking of a mute

My brother is so sure of what he heard
after all he's got a record of it
consonant after consonant after consonant

If we remembered it together
we could recreate holy time
sparks flying

Merle Feld



JEWISH FEMINIST RESEARCH GROUP

“Women’s wisdom has built her house” (Proverbs 14:1)

Jewish feminist scholarship has the potential to enrich both how we study our Jewish past and the ways in which we construct our Jewish present and future. As a forum for scholars, students, teachers and writers to share and critique unpublished research which use the insights of both Jewish and gender studies, the Jewish Feminist Research Group showcases the cutting edge of this burgeoning new field. Each month, a scholar presents her current research. In advance of each session, all subscribers to the group receive copies of the paper to be discussed. Two respondents from complementary interdisciplinary fields offer short responses to the paper. The presenter has an opportunity to respond to them and then the floor is opened for further discussion, questions and comments. I hope the following summaries of some of this year’s discussions will give you a taste of the rich potential of this new scholarship and will inspire you to join us for more learning next year.

Scholarship on women’s experiences in the Holocaust has been a topic of recent debate. Sara Horowitz’s (University of Delaware) paper, “The Last Taboo: Ethics of Representing Sexual Violation in the Holocaust” analyzed a number of texts (a liturgical poem, women’s Holocaust memoirs, and Holocaust fiction) which addressed women’s sexual violation and activity during the Holocaust. She posed the question: how can we address the topic of women’s sexual experiences (both desired and forced) during the Holocaust era, with dignity? Bonnie Gurewitsch (Museum of Jewish Heritage) addressed the parameters of the Jewish concept of martyrdom, *kiddush ha-shem*, and pointed out that there is no clear rabbinic commandment to choose suicide in order to avoid rape. Myrna Goldenberg (Montgomery College Humanities Institute) expressed the view that for her, there is a distinction between sex that is described in Holocaust memoirs and the use of the Holocaust as a background in sensationalist erotic fiction. For her, the latter is a clear distortion of the Shoah experience.

In “The Widow’s Portion: Law, Custom and Marital Property among Catalan Jews,” Elka Klein (NYU) discussed how Jewish inheritance laws, which did not allow widows to inherit directly from their husbands, were affected and improved by the prevailing practices of the surrounding Christian community. Jonathan Ray (JTS) noted that Klein’s paper illustrated the “Convivencia” (the cultural interchange between Jews, Christians and Muslims) of medieval Spanish culture. He also noted that Klein’s study revealed the agency and independence of

individual Jews within a medieval Jewish legal system. Martha Howell (Columbia University) noted that inheritance patterns like those in Catalonia were found in other regions of Europe. She cautioned against seeing fluctuations in Jewish practices as simply an effect of "influence" from local Christians.

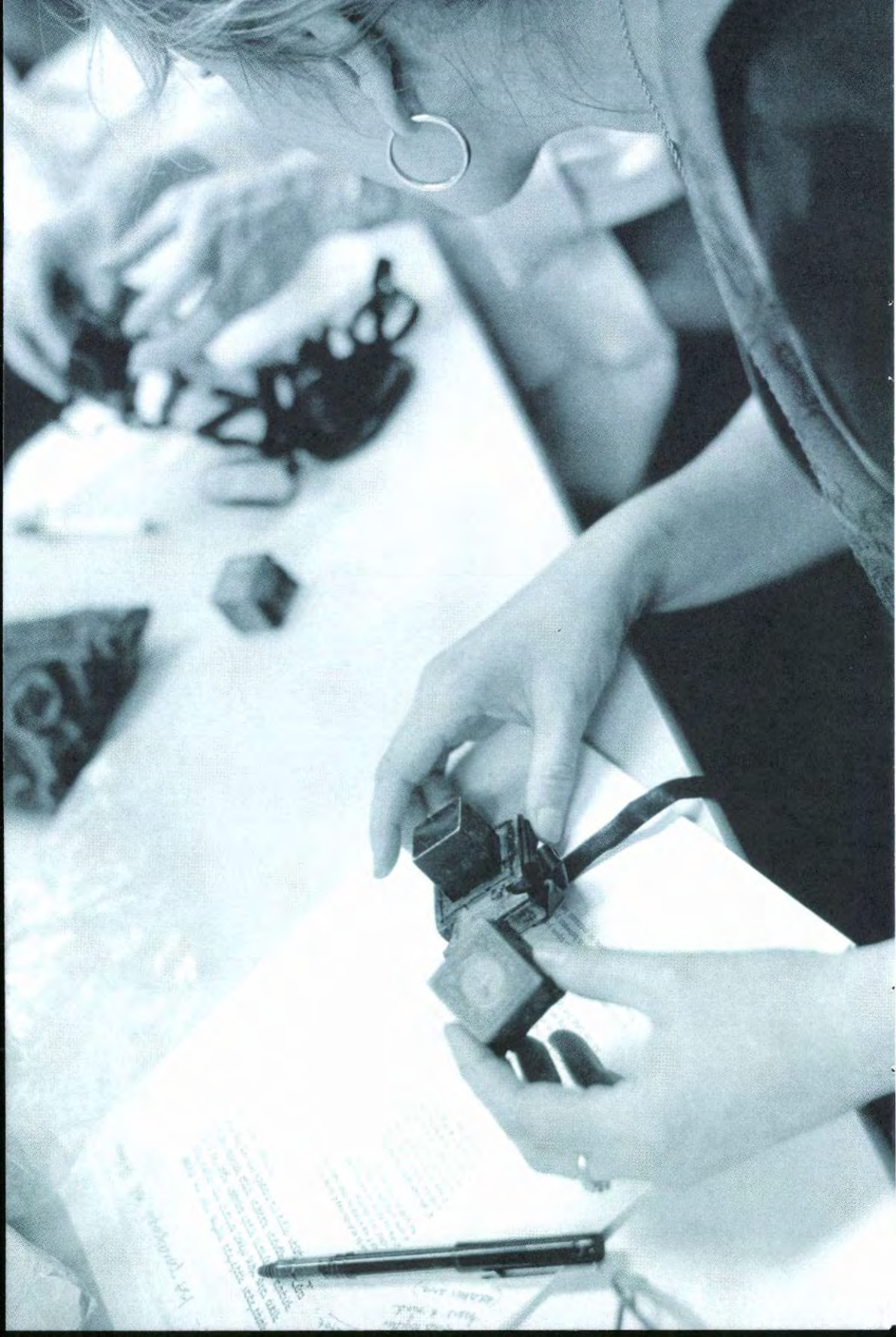
How do we tell stories about our lives? How truthful do we have to be? These are some of the questions that were raised by Jerilyn Fisher's (Hostos Community College) paper, "The Blurring of Memories into fictions: Kim Chernin's Autobiographical Novel, *Crossing the Border*." Using Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's discussion of Jewish history and memory in his book *Zakhor*, Fisher compared the process of questioning and reinterpreting sacred memories during the Passover *seder* to Chernin's narrator who challenges the stories told by her younger self in the book. Ann Shapiro (SUNY Farmingdale) described Chernin's novel as a rebellion against both patriarchal social expectations and masculine literary style. To Barbara Shollar, a scholar of Jewish women's autobiographies, Chernin's novelization of her past makes readers suspicious because for autobiographies to be meaningful, we demand that they be truthful.

Betty Friedan: discontented white, middle-class, assimilated housewife or Jewishly-inspired activist? These are the two self-portraits of the feminist leader discussed by Andrea Beck (Miami University, OH), in her paper, "Jewish in the Background: Friedan's Discussion of Jewish Identity in Second Wave Feminism." Kelly Anderson (CUNY Graduate Center) added the background of the Cold War and specifically the figure of Ethel Rosenberg as context for understanding Friedan's history and position as a Jewish female activist stifled by domesticity. Shuly Rubin Schwartz (JTS) addressed the American Jewish context of Betty Friedan's feminist critique and her self-presentation by noting that "passing" was a general and unconscious mode of post-war American Jews and Jewish women in particular.

Susan Sapiro

The Jewish Feminist Research Group bridges the gap between the academic and the personal and is an important medium for spreading this new knowledge beyond the walls of the ivory tower. We invite you to help break down these walls and join in the conversation.

For upcoming sessions see listing of Ma'yan Programs on p. 42-45. If you are interested in presenting a paper, serving as a respondent or becoming a member of the Jewish Feminist Research Group contact Susan Sapiro at 212. 580. 0099 ext. 209 or at sesapiro@aol.com





spring programs

SPRING PROGRAMS

Tuesday, March 9, 7 pm

Emma Lazarus Poetry Reading and Birthday Party

Co-sponsored with the JCC

Ma'yan and the JCC celebrate Women's History Month with this poetry reading and 150th birthday party for Emma Lazarus, social activist, poet and author of "The New Colossus," the poem engraved on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. Come hear the winners of our poetry contest read their work, learn about Lazarus and share some birthday cake!

Held at West End Synagogue, 190 Amsterdam Ave. Free.

Wednesday, March 10, 7 pm

Half the Kingdom (documentary film) and Guest Speaker Alice Shalvi

Co-sponsored with The Museum of Jewish Heritage

In this challenging documentary, seven remarkable women from Israel, Canada and the United States discuss their approaches to integrating feminism and Judaism. One of the principals of the film, Dr. Alice Shalvi, founder of the Israel Women's Network, who currently serves as Rector of the Seminary of Judaic Studies in Jerusalem, will lead a discussion after the screening.

Held at Florence Gould Hall, 55 East 59th Street. 212. 968. 1800
\$7 adults/\$5 students & seniors

Saturday, March 13, 8 pm

Celebrating Bella!

Co-sponsored with the B'nai Jeshurun Arts and Culture Committee

A high-flying, multi-media tribute to the life of the late, great Bella Abzug. This event will not only recognize her achievements in Congress and her international crusade for women's and human rights, but will also highlight her love of opera, Yiddish song, and hats!

Held at Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, 257 West 88th Street. 212. 787. 7600. \$20

Sunday, March 14, Monday, March 15, Tuesday, March 16

Ma'yan's Community Feminist Seders

SOLD OUT

Tuesday, March 23, 5-7 pm

Jewish Feminist Research Group

Co-sponsored by the JTS Jewish Women's Studies Program and the CUNY Center for the Study of Women and Society

Gender Identity and Language Socialization Among Hasidim

Presenter: Ayala Fader, PhD candidate in Linguistic Anthropology, New York University.

Held at Graduate School and University Center, City University of New York, 33 West 42nd Street, Room 202. \$5 for individual sessions (call ahead for papers.) \$25 for 8 sessions and all papers. (See article on p.38 for more about the JFRG.)

Tuesday, March 23, 7:30 -9 pm

Jewish Women in America

Co-sponsored with the JCC

Deborah Dash Moore, co-editor of the two volume historical encyclopedia *Jewish Women in America* and professor of religion at Vassar College, will speak about fascinating and important — but not always well known — American Jewish women who have been influential in our history.

Held at the JCC. Free.

Tuesday, April 13, 7-9

Women Enslaved/Women Liberators: Text Study and Update on the Trafficking of Women in Israel

Co-sponsored with US/Israel Women to Women

Bonna Haberman will teach about the heroic actions of the women at the beginning of Exodus and then draw connections to the current situation of trafficking of women in Israel. (See article by Haberman on page 18.)

Held at Ma'yan. \$10 JCC members/\$12 nonmembers.

April 27, 5-7 pm

Jewish Feminist Research Group

Co-sponsored by the JTS Jewish Women's Studies Program and the CUNY Center for the Study of Women and Society

Ritualizing Women's Bodies: Mikvahs and Other Ceremonial Spaces in Contemporary Israel

Presenter: Susan Starr Sered, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Bar Ilan University.

Held at Graduate School and University Center, City University of New York, 33 West 42nd Street, Room 202. \$5 for individual sessions (call ahead for papers.) \$25 for 8 sessions and all papers. (See article on p.38 for more about the JFRG.)

Sunday, May 2

JCC Works

Last year nearly 600 people participated in the third annual JCC volunteer day. Join us this year at sites throughout the city, painting, planting, cleaning, organizing and entertaining. Also, until May 2, the JCC is collecting gently used books for grades 2-6. For more information or to offer your help, call Helen at the JCC, 212. 580. 0099, ext. 206.



Sunday, May 15, 4-10 pm

Pre-Shavuot Tikkun: Women on Revelation

Co-sponsored with the Drisha Institute

Ma'yan's popular annual *tikkun* is back! Join us for a mini-marathon of great teaching from wonderful female scholars and rabbis in a variety of fields. Includes food, song, study and creative explorations of traditional and non-traditional texts.

Held at Drisha, 131 West 86th Street. \$18. To register call Ma'yan at 212. 580. 0099 ext. 232.

Tuesday, June 12, 7 pm

Premiere of *Women of the Wall* and Panel Discussion

Co-sponsored with the JCC

Whether or not you have been following the struggle of women to gain access to pray at the *Kotel*, the Western Wall in Jerusalem, you will be challenged and inspired by this exciting new film by documentary filmmaker Faye Lederman. The screening will be followed by a panel discussion of Jewish women representing a variety of approaches to issues of Jewish feminism and pluralism in Israel.

Call the JCC for details.

Thursdays, June 3, 10, 17, 24, July 1, 8, 7:00-8:30 pm

Smart Women, Smart Choices

Co-sponsored with the JCC

Jewish tradition includes the stories of many women who made daring and ingenious decisions, challenging the conventions of their time. Join us for an exploration of texts on Eve, Lot's daughters, Tamar, Abigail, Esther, Ruth, Judith and others. Taught by Rabbi Carol Levithan and Tamara Cohen.

Held at the JCC. \$55 JCC members/\$65 nonmembers.

Note: This class is also being offered during the day, on Tuesdays, June 1-July 6 at 1:30-3:00 pm, through the JCC New Horizons Group. The price for this class is \$30 JCC members/\$40 nonmembers.

ONGOING PROGRAMS

Friday mornings, 8:30–9:30 am

Feminist Torah Study

Bring your whole self to the study of *Torah* — everything you know, everything you don't know, all your doubts, anger, love and fear. Join us as we prepare for *Shabbat* by studying and grappling with the weekly *Torah* portion.

Held in the Ma'yan library. Free.

March 18, April 15, May 20, June 17, 7:30–8:30 am

Early Morning Rosh Chodesh Group

Integrating study, meditation and song, this participatory group offers the chance to integrate spirituality and community into your busy schedule. Learn about the meaning of the different months and experience how this New Moon Festival can enhance your Jewish life. Held at private homes.

Call for locations. \$18 registration fee.



COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Celebrate Feminist Leadership in America and Israel. US/Israel Women to Women Luncheon honoring Letty Cottin Pogrebin and Hannah Safran. Tuesday, May 11, New York Hilton, 1335 Avenue of the Americas. For reservations call 212. 206. 8057.

Ongoing Women's Study Group using Judith Hauptman's *Rereading the Rabbis*. West End Synagogue. For information call Judith Seed at 718. 392. 5110.

"Memory, Mobility and the Millenium: How Jewish Women's Lives Have Shaped Post-War American Jewish Culture" with Professor Riv-Ellen Prell. Jewish Theological Seminary Becker Lecture co-sponsored by the Jewish Women's Study Program. Thursday, April 22, 7:30 pm. Held at the Women's League Seminary Synagogue, 3080 Broadway. For information call 212. 678. 8069.

"Women and Midrash" with Dr. Alice Shalvi. 92nd Street Y Everett Institute. Sunday, March 7, 9:30 am-1:30 pm (light refreshments included), \$30. For reservations call 212. 996. 1100.

Monthly Rosh Chodesh Group. The Jewish Women's Project at the Sol Goldman YM/YWHA of the Educational Alliance. Spring dates: March 18, April 15, May 13, June 17, 6:30-8:00 pm. \$5 per session. Also: Why Women: Women Poets, Women's Words. Thursdays, April 29, May 6, June 3, 7-9 pm. \$5. 344 E. 14th Street. For more information call 212. 780. 0800 ext. 246.

Jewish Lesbian Voices. Pre-Shabbat study and celebration. Third Friday of every month. Congregation Beth Simchat Torah. Held at Church of the Holy Apostles, 28th Street and Ninth Avenue. Also: Feminist Minyan/Book of Blessings Service: March 27, April 24, June 26, 10 am, 57 Bethune Street. And join us on April 24, after services at 2 pm for a reading of *A Fragile Union* by Joan Nestle. For more information call 212. 929. 9498.

Rosh Chodesh art workshops with Elisheva Hurvich at Riverdale YM-YWHA. March 21, April 18, May 16, 4-6 pm. For information call 718. 548. 8200 ext. 233.

Multi-media exhibit of contemporary women's experiences with mikvah. June 20-October 17 at the Jewish Museum, 1109 fifth Avenue at 92nd Street. 212. 423. 3200.

CONFERENCES

March 17-19. The Role of American Jewish Women in the Yishuv and Early State of Israel. Brandeis University. For information call 781. 736. 2125.

March 19-21. The Calling: A *Shabbat* Retreat for women in the hills of central Connecticut. \$160 adults/\$100 girls. For information call 860. 233. 6838.

March 21. "Re-Imagining Politics and Society at the Millenium: Moving Towards a Caring, Ethical & Ecologically Sustainable Society." For information call Tikkun at 212. 704. 0888.

April 9-11. The Awakened Heart: An Exploration of Meditation in Jewish Life, presented by Elat Chayyim, in cooperation with Congregation Anshe Chesed and the JCC. Held at Anshe Chesed, 251 West 100th Street. Presenters include Sylvia Boorstein, Shoshana Cooper, Andrea Cohen-Kiener, Mindy Ribner, Dr. Nan Fink Gefen and Rabbis Shefa Gold, Sheila Peltz Weinberg and Shohama Wiener. For information call 1. 800. 695. 5208.

April 11. Voices of the Diaspora: Jewish Women Writing in the New Europe. Wellesley College. For more information see <http://www.wellesley.edu/JewishStudies/events.html>

April 23. Funding for Women and Girls, a full-day workshop in Chicago sponsored by the Jewish Funder's Network. For information call 212. 726. 0177.

April 29-May 2. Project Keshet's Women's Exchange USA, Chicago. In celebration of the fifth anniversary of their International Conference of Jewish Women in Kiev in 1994, Project Keshet is bringing top leaders from the former Soviet Union to the United States to determine how the experiences and resources of women in the West can transform the lives of women and Jews in the former Soviet Union. Contact Project Keshet at 847. 332. 1994 or projectkeshet@compuserve.com

May 13-16. Bet Debora Conference of European women rabbis, cantors, rabbinic scholars and other interested Jews. Berlin, Germany. For information see: <http://www.hagalil.com/brd/berlin/berlin.htm>

June 6. Erev Iyyun on Eating Disorders and Body Image. Parallel tracks for teens and adults. Open to teens, parents, educators, community professionals. Sponsored by Beit Rabban. Held at 8 West 70th Street. For information call 212. 595. 1386.

Note: jfr@shamash.org invites submissions of ritual and liturgy, torah commentary, sermons and recipes to <http://www.jew-feminist-resources.com>.

Ma'yan Staff

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Barbara Dobkin, Founder and Chair
Erika Katske, Officer Manager/Program Assistant
Susan Sapiro, Program Associate
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p. 16, 29, 41 Beth Shepherd Peters.

p. 17, 31, 36, 37, 40, 47 Joan Roth.

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M A ' Y A N מעין

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