

The 20th Annual America-Israel Dialogue □ Jerusalem, Israel

# CONGRESS MONTHLY

## WOMAN AS JEW                      JEW AS WOMAN

*An Urgent Inquiry*

Sponsored by the American Jewish Congress



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## Contents

- 3 The Significance of the Dialogue  
*Henry Siegman*
- 4 SESSION 1: **Opening & Keynote Addresses**
- 4 On Being a Woman, a Jew, and an Israeli  
*Rivka Bar-Yosef*
- 7 Women and Jews: The Quest for Selfhood  
*Betty Friedan*
- 12 SESSION 2: **Discussion of the Opening Presentations**
- 20 SESSION 3: **Women in the Workplace**
- 20 Working Women in the United States  
*Cynthia Fuchs Epstein*
- 24 Women in the Israeli Labor Force  
*Dafna Izraeli*
- 28 SESSION 4: **Women in the Family**
- 28 Feminism and Family: A Time of Transition  
*Blu Greenberg*
- 32 The Centrality of the Family in Israeli Society  
*Michal Palgi*
- 34 Discussion
- 36 SESSION 5: **Women in Jewish Religious Practice**
- 36 Judaism and the Feminist Critique  
*Judith Hauptman*
- 39 Feminism and the Forging of Jewish Identity  
*Penina Peli*
- 41 Discussion
- 45 SESSION 6: **Women in Politics**
- 45 The Political Perils of Israeli Women  
*Shulamit Aloni*
- 47 The Empowerment of American Women  
*Elizabeth Holtzman*
- 50 Discussion
- 54 **Closing Session**

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# Twentieth Annual America-Israel Dialogue

## WOMAN AS JEW, JEW AS WOMAN/an urgent inquiry

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Henry Siegman

### The Significance of the Dialogue

THE 20TH ANNUAL America-Israel Dialogue — “Woman as Jew, Jew as Woman: An Urgent Inquiry” — sponsored by the American Jewish Congress in Israel this past summer, aroused unusual interest, not only in the Israeli media but in the American press as well. The *New York Times*, for instance, ran two feature stories on the Dialogue (August 1 and 5, 1984), and an article in the *New York Times Magazine* (October 28, 1984) by Betty Friedan, a Dialogue participant, was devoted in large part to a discussion of the Jerusalem proceedings. The present publication affords an opportunity to examine the transcript of this unusual event. The exercise should prove enlightening to every thoughtful person concerned with the implications of one of the major political and social revolutions of our times for Jewish life, both in Israel and in America.

Jews, as has been much noted, have played a disproportionately large role in most of the political and cultural revolutions that have occurred in the post-emancipation era. This is true, too, of the contemporary feminist revolution in the United States. And as was the case with most other modern revolutions, Jews who participated in the feminist movement did not consciously do so, for the most part, out of Jewish motives. It is only recently that these Jewish activists began to examine the connection between their Jewish identity and the larger goals of the revolution in which they played so important a part. Even more significant from the Jewish perspective, they began to raise challenging questions about the connection between their deeply-felt commitment to women's equality — to the releasing of energies that culture and politics have conspired to repress — and the struggle for the creative survival of Judaism and the Jewish people in the 20th century. Indeed, the excitement generated by this Dialogue can be understood only in terms of this interaction between Judaism and the feminist movement — *in the personal lives* of women who played so critical a role in the women's revolution in the United States and in Israel.

That is why, unlike most of the Dialogues that preceded it, the closing session of this Dialogue was not an ending, but a beginning. For Israeli women, it marked the establishment of the Israel Women's Lobby, a new force on the Israeli scene. Israeli participants in the Dialogue marched from their final session at the Van Leer Foundation in Jerusalem, where the

proceedings had taken place, to the King David Hotel, where Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Shamir were engaged in difficult negotiations over the formation of a new government. In an unprecedented display of unity across party lines, Tamar Eshel of the Labor Alignment and Yael Rom of Likud, together with newly-elected chairperson of the Israel Women's Lobby, Alice Shalvi, an Orthodox Jew, confronted Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Shamir and put them on notice that Israeli women will no longer acquiesce to a political system that consistently demands that narrow party considerations take precedence over women's concern for equality and simple justice.

For their part, American participants returned to the United States determined to create an instrumentality through which their newly-focused concerns as women and as Jews would receive sustained attention. That instrumentality was fashioned shortly thereafter as the National Commission for Women's Equality of the American Jewish Congress. The participation in this commission by such celebrated feminist activists as Betty Friedan, Bella Abzug, Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, Letty Cottin Pogrebin, Blu Greenberg, Elizabeth Holtzman, Cynthia Ozick, Anne Roiphe, and from the Jewish “establishment,” Leona Chanin, Jacqueline Levine, Peggy Tishman, Sylvia Hassenfeld, and many others, is an indication of the seriousness of this new initiative and of the promise it holds for the enrichment of Jewish life both in this country and in Israel.

It is our hope that the publication of these Dialogue proceedings will contribute significantly toward that goal.

“WE ARE MET in Jerusalem,” Cynthia Ozick observed in her address to the Dialogue, “in this city luminous with holy continuity, because every day in every generation there were those, women and men, who passionately and yearningly pronounced the name of Jerusalem. This happened because Torah entered the souls of some rabbinical spirits and some Zionist spirits and some who were only the plain followers of the tribe of Israel. ‘We will no longer be buffeted, we will no longer be the instrument of the policies of others,’ said the soul of the Jewish people, set in the likeness of the Creator.

“And now,” as Cynthia Ozick concluded, and as this Dialogue affirms, “it is the turn of Jewish women to say the same.”

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Monday evening, July 30, 1984

## Session 1: Opening & Keynote Addresses

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*The proceedings were opened by HENRY SIEGMAN, executive director of the American Jewish Congress, who welcomed the Dialogue participants and guests. Greetings were offered by SARAH DORON, Minister Without Portfolio in the then Israel Government, and by SAMUEL LEWIS, United States Ambassador to Israel. The chair was then turned over to THEODORE R.*

*MANN, president of AJCongress, who introduced the two keynote speakers of the evening: RIVKA BAR-YOSEF, a professor of sociology at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, active in a wide variety of public spheres in Israel; and BETTY FRIEDAN, author of the pathbreaking *The Feminine Mystique* and founder of the National Organization for Women.*

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Rivka Bar-Yosef

### On Being a Woman, a Jew, and an Israeli

THE BIBLE RECOUNTS the dramatic story of the building of the city and the tower of Babel. Until then, "All the earth had the same language and the same words. . . . The Lord came down to look at the city and the tower which man had built, and the Lord said: 'If, as one people with one language, this is how they have begun to act, then nothing that they may propose to do will be out of their reach. Let us, then, go down and confound their speech there, so that they shall not understand one another's speech'" (Genesis 11:1-7). The people of Babel lost the battle of communication and they left off building their city. Since then people have had to work very hard to recapture the lost ability of dialogue. Maybe the story of Babel also tells us that in order to build something great, people have to be of "the same language and the same words."

We have met here for a Dialogue for which we need a common language of concepts and meanings. We have to beware of the Babel pitfall of using seemingly identical concepts, which nevertheless have different meanings for Americans than for Israelis. Modern linguistic studies have shown that the overt meaning of words and statements are only the tip of the iceberg, while the main body which defines the deeper meaning is submerged in a sea of experiences, associations, and images. Similar tips do not necessarily belong to similar bodies. Mutual understanding depends on knowing at least a little about the submerged part.

We have chosen as the theme of this Dialogue the subject of womanhood in relation to Jewishness, or Jewishness in relation to womanhood. We have assumed that because all of us are Jewish women, we have a common experience of being Jewish and being women, and hence we expect to understand the meaning of these two concepts in the same way. However, by their nature the two concepts are different in character. Undoubtedly there is more consensus about the definition of "woman" than the definition of "Jew."

Although sociological and psychological treatises tend to

emphasize the layers of meanings implied by the word "woman," there are but few instances when the status of being a woman is disputed. Not so with Jewishness. The concept is rather vague, very complex, and even the core meaning is not universally accepted. Perhaps one of the most dramatic examples of this vagueness is the sensitiveness of the question, "Who is a Jew?" In Israel it is one of the most emotionally charged political issues, one which has already caused governmental crises and may do so again in the future.

It seems that Israelis and Americans mean very similar things when they refer to women, but much less when they refer to Jewishness. Here the existential differences between being a Jew in a Jewish state, and being a Jew in a non-Jewish state, create different parameters, which are especially relevant for women. In Israel, being Jewish is an integral part of citizenship, whereas in the U.S. it is a voluntary affiliation — you are Jewish by choice. As Israeli citizens we cannot opt out from the membership in the Jewish society, except by radically changing affiliation and becoming members of an equally and probably even more strictly defined non-Jewish community. Citizenship is not an undifferentiated universal category here. The main concept provides a very general common framework, but within this framework, there are two sub-categories: one of a majority which is Jewish, and the other of a minority, which is non-Jewish. An Israeli belongs necessarily to only one of the sub-categories.

The distinction between these two categories is justified by the nation-building philosophy of Israel, which is essentially different from that of the U.S. The ideal of the immigrants who came to America was to build a *new* nation, which would absorb and assimilate those who arrived to the new world. An "American way of life" was created in which a certain measure of pluralism was tolerated, and Jewishness found its place within this restricted pluralism. Israel, however, was intended to "ingather the exiles," a people believed to belong to this *old* world. Israel was to ensure the continuity, the preserva-

tion, the advancement, and the primacy of an *old* nation.

The second parameter which determines our respective statuses as Jews is the connection between citizenship, religious values, and institutions and religious practice. We tend to accept the statement that in modern democratic states, institutionalized religion is separated from the state. I think that this is too sweeping a generalization, which is true only if looked upon as a designation of tendency. I do not know any Western democracy in which Christianity is totally separated from the political setup. The question should be the tightness and form of the relationship. If I were to illustrate graphically the situation, I would draw a line with one pole of total separation and the other of total overlap. While none of the democracies is situated at the separation pole, the U.S. is much nearer to it than Israel, the European countries ranging in between, and the Arab-Muslim countries behind Israel, nearer to the overlap pole.

The legal status of the religious courts (Jewish and others), which have monopolistic jurisdiction in a series of fields concerning personal status, creates an important area of overlap between citizenship rights and religious practice. The politicization of the religious sector leads to the establishment of church-like organizations in which the dominant authority is invested in traditional-Orthodox élites, who like any organized church use political power to maintain their monopolistic status and exclude more liberal or innovative religious currents.

In spite of the undisputed fact that the great majority of the population tends toward a liberal interpretation of religion and a wide variety of patterns of religious observance, the Orthodox version enjoys legal backing and imposes its standards in important aspects of the public and private life. Personal religious commitment is thus restricted in its scope and influence, and is often in conflict with the imposed religious behavior. As Israeli Jews, our Jewishness develops within these two severe constraints on voluntariness and choice: our affiliation with Jews as a nation and conformity to certain religious prescriptions.

Within the limits of these constraints, there exists the second tier of sociopolitical organization: political parties and other voluntary organizations and pressure groups. While all these have to function under the two constraints, they provide the variety of interpretation of the concept of Israeli Jewishness. The question of the status of women is yet not central to the great majority of the political parties. It becomes relevant as the logical result of the political ideology and as a practical problem of legislation (abortion, equal pay), and of the business of political representation.

Women's organizations are by definition instances of autonomous initiative and activity. But the large and important organizations, while not always overtly affiliated with political parties, have strong party leanings and interests which restrict considerably their militancy and independence in matters concerning the status of women. The active élite of the women's organizations define themselves not only as Israeli Jews and women, but also as loyal members of one or another of the political parties. The conception of Jewishness as it de-

veloped in the ideological currents and the political credos of the various power groups is thus a major factor in shaping attitudes toward women and in specifying the degree of freedom in raising issues publicly, proposing solutions, or acting for the implementation of agreed upon solutions.

**T**here are two main ideological currents to be considered: the primarily secular-historic and the primarily religious. I am emphasizing the "primarily" because this is not a clearcut dichotomy where types are mutually exclusive. There is much overlap and interpenetration. The pure types, such as the Canaanite movement and the religious extremist Neturei Karta, are small, marginal currents, only occasionally relevant to our discussion.

The national-historic approach sees the common history and common fate as the core of Jewishness and commitment of affiliation and the preservation of continuity as its main expressions. The Bible, the Talmud, Hebrew language, prayers, symbols, and religious customs are regarded as the most important elements of the cultural heritage, necessary for continuity and national identity formation. But the approach to religion is historical, meaning that it is accepted in its pluralistic and dynamic form, being influenced by historical-social processes, external influences, and internal dynamics. It follows that all religious currents are accepted as worthy Jewish creations, even one like Neturei Karta, which negates the Jewishness of the historic Zionists and its main creation, the Jewish state. It is also logical to answer the question of "Who is a Jew" as Ben-Gurion suggested: anybody who declares him or herself as being part of the Jewish people, accepting its fate and carrying on its historical and cultural heritage.

Religious observance as a private commitment is relevant only as a personal right to be secured and provided for. The secular-historic ideology was the ideological basis for modern Zionism, the intention being to develop the Jewish people into a nation among nations.

The most important thinkers and leaders wanted more: they wanted a high-quality society, or, once more in the words of Ben-Gurion, "to be a light to other nations." Therefore, historic Zionism was open to the external world, its models and ideas. Democratic government, welfare policy, secular legislation, the concept of citizenship, egalitarianism were absorbed from the international marketplace of ideas, and institutions were eclectically modeled after countries which were in various phases of the century of state creation considered as the "most developed." Concern for the status of women was part of this general orientation toward democracy. It is already mentioned in *The Jewish State*, the utopian blueprint of Herzl. There is a close parallelism between the ideas and processes in the Western world and the development in Israel. Sometimes Israel is ahead of other countries, sometimes it lags behind; but the connection is unmistakable. The idea of political suffrage, which was the main issue in the 1920s, and later issues of equal status had no connection whatsoever with religious Judaism, and quite often were aspects of the rebellion against it.

The core of the religious ideologies is the belief that Jews are the "Chosen People," the Land of Israel is the "Promised Land," and the halachic laws have a historic, universal validity. The law cannot be changed, but has to be interpreted by rabbinical authority. Jewish religion in general, and its Israeli version more strongly so, is a familistic-natalistic religion. Its symbols, images, and a large part of its values, prescriptions, and rituals are tied to family life. Jewishness itself depends essentially on biological continuity, hence the reluctance to accept converts.

The purely religious ideology is antithetical to the values, openness, and even the organizational structure of a modern democratic state. Israel being a Jewish state in the "Promised Land," the Orthodox version of religion cannot fully accept a secular state. There are only two logical ways to react: the extreme one is that of Neturei Karta — the denial of the Jewishness of the state and its basis of legitimacy as a state for Jews. The other is participation at the face of decision-making, mobilizing power and exerting as much influence as possible, the outcome being politicization of religion, church-like organizations tied to political parties with diminishing emphasis on humanistic and purely moral issues.

**I**n the transactions between the secular and the religious sector, disagreement on the position of women was an issue that precipitated crises which sometimes resulted in the secession of the religious parties. In the early 1920s, the issue was the suffrage of women in the elections for the self-governing bodies of the Jewish population. A similar crisis occurred when the Knesset passed the law of compulsory draft for women.

The question has been often asked whether Jewish religion is indeed patriarchal in its essence and therefore women are intrinsically of lesser importance. It is probably a sign of the impact of the feminist revolution that halachic arguments are now marshaled to prove the importance of women in the religious system. Whatever the arguments and the ensuing conclusions, they are intended to strengthen the traditional system and not to dispute its validity.

Undoubtedly, discussing the topic shows more awareness and this in itself is of some importance, but it does not affect, at present, those norms which are hardly reconcilable with democratic-egalitarian precepts. I am referring to four main such tenets: the segregation of women and men; the proscription of access of women to the higher levels of religious education; the exclusion of women from any function of judicial authority in the rabbinical judicial system; and the asymmetric status of men and women in the family.

Although these are Orthodox-religious elements, because of the overlapping areas of the religious and secular system, their impact is felt outside the ritual-religious areas. I shall mention only those which are in obvious conflict with the constitutional status of the women in Israel.

Religious courts in Israel have the exclusive jurisdiction in nearly all questions concerning family status. Women cannot appear as witnesses before these courts. The judicial personnel is appointed by the government, but women cannot serve

in any function. There are now women judges on the Supreme Court and women are sitting as judges in military courts, but they cannot try divorce cases, even at the lowest level.

After the establishment of the state, the compulsory coeducational education was considered a major achievement. Although the school system is split into two sub-systems (the religious and the secular), coeducation has been maintained in both. In the last couple of years, we are witnessing a renewed endeavor in the religious sub-system to establish separate schools for girls and boys, which will obviously have different curricula. We already have a network of state-supported yeshivot, which are closed to women, but we do not have parallel institutions for women.

The army service is seen in Israel not only as a citizen's duty but also as an important phase in the personal development of the young people. The army symbolizes social integration and participation. For this reason the army service of women is not only a question of equality, but also of the societal integration of women. The attitude of the religious establishment to the army service of women is either ambivalent or outright negative. There were periods when the service was branded as contrary to the Halachah and immoral. Even the reasons for exemption of young women are unlike those for the exemptions of young men. The non-military national service, which should have been a voluntary alternative, was never seriously implemented. How paradoxical that those young women who contribute two years of their life to serve Israel — the "Holy Land" — are labeled as deficient in Jewishness when compared to young women who declared themselves observant and therefore exempted and allowed to start their careers or earn money in the same period.

**C**oncern for the issues I mentioned presupposes at least a modicum of commitment to the ideal of equality of the sexes. The issue of family status is different inasmuch as it can affect the private life of any woman, whether she cares for equal rights or not. There are many examples of the preferential status accorded to men: men cannot be divorced against their will, but women can; although monogamy is the accepted law, in certain cases when divorce is impossible, a man can wed a second wife, but a woman is never allowed to wed a second husband; only a woman can be declared an *agunah*, an abandoned wife who cannot marry; only a widowed woman needs to undergo the ritual of *halitzah*; the concept of a "rebellious" wife and the property repercussions tied to it apply only to women. These and similar instances are obviously discriminatory toward women. They are not the only discriminatory laws known in Israel or in other democratic countries. But in the democratic parliamentary system laws can be changed by the democratic processes. These norms, because they are rooted in the Halachah, are outside the realm of the democratic process. As such, they are considered as binding because of our Jewishness and, given the relationship between state and religion, they have become elements of our Israeliness.

I have not discussed the position of women in the purely ritual, cultic sphere. These are similar for Jewish women in

Israel and in the U.S. We in Israel are less concerned with it because the scope of our Jewishness is much larger. In spite of all the constraints and the overt and covert political pressure to sustain the supremacy of Orthodox Judaism, there is still a certain degree of freedom in shaping the rituals. Israelis maintain a vast variety of Jewish lifestyles in which religious and secular elements are creatively interwoven. Women take an active, albeit informal, part in this process.

I started my talk with the argument that being a woman and being Jewish is the common basis on which to proceed in this Dialogue, but being a Jew in Israel introduces an additional factor of special relevance for women. In the discussions during the following days we shall find the common and the different, in concepts and ideas, emphases and proposed solutions. May we understand each other, learn from each other, and continue to stand by each other.

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Betty Friedan

## Women and Jews: The Quest for Selfhood

**I** SPEAK TO YOU as a woman and as a Jew, as an American and as one proudly confronting here in Israel the profound resonances of our mutual experience, "Woman as Jew, Jew as Woman." It is an urgent inquiry that we undertake here. I think of my own experience, of the growing awareness of the convergence of these two deep strains of my own identity.

A century of the women's movement came to a head with the winning of the vote for women in the U.S. in 1920, but thereafter it seemed as if the impulse had been lost and the great movement of women's rights came to a standstill. By the time I wrote my book *The Feminine Mystique*, in 1963, it was as if millions of women had been living a sort of half-life, a dream awake — and then these multitudes of women, each hitherto feeling that she was alone, suddenly realized their communality of experience and began moving again. After my book helped to revive the women's movement in the U.S., I sometimes thought, "Why me?" Then it occurred to me that this passion against injustice, which made me address myself to the problems of women, probably had its roots in my own earliest experiences as a Jew growing up in Peoria, Illinois. I would not have been the only one of the social prophets through the ages who have been Jewish to have taken this fiery passion against injustice from our own experience and then applied it to the largest possible sphere of action in the community. As we acted as women in America to confront the truth of our own existence, and to break through the barriers that kept us from moving as people in the mainstream of society, it seemed that we transcended the bonds of race, of class, of generation, and we found our communality as women.

What in 1963 had begun as a small radical movement on the fringes of society, before long seemed to me ready to erupt. (This despite the ridicule of the media, which sought to trivialize the women's movement by emphasizing the extremist rhetoric and dismissing the significant reality of women affirming their own personhood and moving to equality in American society.) Accordingly, I called for an action — to take place on August 26, 1970, the 50th anniversary of women's suffrage in the U.S. — that would see women join together in the streets of our cities in a march for equality. Our issues

were economic rights, job rights, equal employment and educational opportunities, a political voice of our own, control of our own bodies. In New York City, 50,000 women most improbably marched down Fifth Avenue. It was the first nationwide action of women since the winning of the vote. I found myself in the park behind the Public Library on 42nd Street, speaking to this vast throng of people. For some strange reason — strange because my own background was not religious and I cannot remember ever having heard the familiar prayer before — I found myself harking back to the religion of my ancestors, and giving voice to a variation on the prayer that religious Jewish men recite each morning, "I thank Thee Lord that I was not born a woman." What I said was: "I hope that from this day forward, in all religions, women will wake up in the morning and be able to pray, 'I thank Thee Lord that I was born a woman.'" The sense of somehow having broken through the feminine mystique to affirm my authentic full identity as a person, as a woman, brought me to confront my Jewish identity.

After the Second World War, in the years of the 50s and 60s, we in the U.S. — and perhaps you, too, in Israel — lived according to an image that might once have been true in defining a woman's life, but that in fact was no longer so. This image was confining our energies, our very sense of what was possible and necessary for us to do with our own existence in society. I called that image "The Feminine Mystique." It resembles the traditional image built into the Judeo-Christian tradition, into the formal language of Judaism. But now it was pushed on women from the mass media in modern disguise, still, or again, defining us only in terms of our sexual relation to men — wives, mothers, housewives, fulfilling the physical needs of husbands, children, and home. Never were we seen as persons, defining ourselves by our own actions in society. In ancient times, or in an earlier period of American history, that definition might not have been a "mystique," but an accurate description of a woman's life. For those were times when many babies had to be born for a few to survive, when many hands were needed to till the earth and to pioneer the land, when women's lives did not last much longer than their

child-rearing years, when the work of society required brute masculine strength. These were also times when women had no control over the biological child-bearing process, and when the work of the society was done in the farm and in the home. It was later, when women were barred, because of lack of education, from taking part in the work of advancing society, that the necessary image hardened into prejudice and became a mystique.

In the mid-part of the 20th century, in America and in other lands and nations of equal development, all this kept women from using their full energies. Now, motherhood alone was no longer the same kind of defining necessity, shaping a woman's identity for all of her life. There were choices now for women in different ways than before, with different moral values. Now the babies that were born would survive. Now there was a greater possibility of quality of life and of equality. Work no longer depended so completely on brute masculine strength, and it was no longer performed exclusively in the home or on the family farm. It was necessary that women move forward accordingly. Thus we broke through the feminine mystique. We began to move, using the ideology of our American heritage, the ideology of equal opportunity — no taxation without representation, full participation, our own voice in the decisions of society, respect for human dignity and individuality. We applied these values — not abstractly, but concretely — the values of the American experience, to the substance, the style, of our lives as women, in the home, in the office, in the hospital, in the school.

To apply those values to ourselves as people, we had to defy the popular image of womanhood. The spirited women who had been the heroines of the movies in the 30s had come to be represented, thanks to the pervasive power of advertising, by the image of the passive housewife of the 50s, whose peak experience was the throwing of soap-powder into the washing machine. This image, of course, was an insult to every living American housewife who actually got beyond the fifth grade. This American housewife, supposedly the envy of women all over the world, in her suburb in the split-level or ranch house, with carpeting and appliances and a station wagon, a cat and a dog, three children and a successful husband, in that suburban sexual ghetto where, between the hours of 9 and 5, nothing stirred over three feet tall — was she indeed alive, did she exist or not? We broke through this blissful image to confront our own authenticity as persons. We said, "We will tell you what being a woman, being feminine, is." We would not take the word of the experts on femininity anymore, who would deny women their reality. Then, all the anger that had been suppressed for so long broke free — the anger at being put down in the office, never getting beyond the job of secretary, not even supposed to notice that women were paid half of what men were for doing the same job, not even supposed to know that women were being insulted by the language of the prayerbook and the textbooks, not even supposed to notice that when women were placed on the pedestal at home, they were really being humiliated.

Having confronted our authentic identity as women, we who were Jewish began to confront our authentic identity as

Jews. It has not always been so easy to be Jewish in America, especially for those of us growing up in the smaller cities — like Peoria — where you were very marginal as a Jew. Certainly this was so for members of my generation. There was some kind of an attempt to distance yourself from that painful experience. People changed their names and did something to their noses, tried not to talk with their hands, sometimes even used canned peas, and denied the very richness, the warmth, the specialness, the good taste of their own background as Jews.

I came to Israel on my first visit, in 1972, with a sense of being moved, of wanting to get in touch with my Jewish roots. To my amazement I was received as a leper. The Pope had given me an audience; Golda Meir, then prime minister, wouldn't see me. The editor of the women's page of a leading newspaper said, "Take those women libbers back to America with you." There were three or four young women then who were trying to make a women's movement in Israel. In great despair, they came to see me in my hotel one night and told me that there was no hope for women in Israel to get anywhere at all. They couldn't buck the religious tradition, the Jewish tradition. They were laughed at, and not taken seriously. I tried to cheer them up, and said, "Don't be ridiculous. You know women are needed here, women's energy is needed here. Women are equal in Israel, women are in the army. What are you talking about?" "No, no," they said. "Don't believe any of it, it's not true." I began to see part of what was true, and what wasn't true, but I didn't think they were right to be so despairing. I told them that the women's movement was just about ready to move, that there were special reasons why it wasn't moving in Israel yet.

I came back to the U.S. after my first trip to Israel, not having had such a great time. My experience at the Wall was marred by the fact that women are relegated to one side and men to the other. When I went to tour an army post, I watched a young woman do a parachute jump. I asked her what kind of unit she was going to be in and what she was going to do with her parachute jumping. She sort of smiled at me and then the army spokesman said, "Well, she will pack every parachute with a kiss." I said, "Why then do you train women to jump?" He answered, "Because then they will be more careful packing the parachutes, and besides, if they are brave enough to jump, then the boys would be ashamed to be afraid to jump." Then someone told me that Israeli women, after completing their army service, often showed new signs of lack of self-confidence. There was something very strange going on.

I came back to the U.S., and then in Israel there was the terrible crisis of the Yom Kippur War. Dorit Padan-Eisenstark, whom I had met on my visit and who shared many of my thoughts, wrote to me the following year that things were beginning to change in Israel. The shock of the Yom Kippur War made Israeli women realize that they had to move, that women had to get training for things that they hadn't been trained for before. "We are beginning to move

here," Dorit wrote, and then she came to America, and many of the feminists in America met with her. Unfortunately, Dorit was killed in an accident a few years later, but I know how happy she would have been to see the many Israeli feminists there are today, far more than the handful of 1972.

Things are moving in Israel, and for me too. I have to tell you that I have spent a lot of time in the last few years somehow confronting the dual experience of woman as Jew, Jew as woman, in the organized Jewish community in America as well. There, too, despite the fact that Jewish women like myself have given a lot of the ideas and the vision to the leadership of the modern feminist movement, the Jewish community, as represented by the male heads of organizations, has been a bit threatened by us, the same as the leadership of Israeli society. Why was this threat more profound among Jews than elsewhere in American society? Or did it just pain me more, because after all I was and am Jewish? And why this sense of threat in Israel? It somehow seemed as if moving for the liberation of women, for our equality and personhood, was terribly threatening to either Jewish masculine identity or Jewish survival, or both.

In the last few years, I have confronted this question with increasing urgency. I began to wonder whether now the equality of women, the personhood of women, was not in fact a condition of Jewish survival, indeed, a matter of the survival of life itself?

Let us face this question of survival head on. The family is basic, as it has always been, to Jewish survival, more consciously so perhaps than in many other parts of our society. There was a completely false notion that feminism was a basic threat to the family. But feminism — as I elaborate in my book *The Second Stage* — is not the enemy of the family. In fact, it is my strong belief that the liberation of woman to her full strength and her own full personhood is essential for the future strength and evolution of the family — if the family itself is not to be an endangered species.

We hold an idealized and romanticized image of the family — Mom the housewife, Pop the breadwinner, the children (always under six), all together blissfully in that lovely little isolated house. But just look at the case-histories of the psychoanalysts and see how often the mother is the villain. If she does not stop living for the children, if she does not get off the back of her husband or her children, they will end up in an institution. The Jewish mother, as we all know, became an obscene joke in the media (in the U.S. at least — I hope that hasn't happened in Israel). For women like myself, who are Jewish and who are mothers, that kind of joke makes us profoundly uneasy, for there is a bit of truth to it.

But, oh, the travesty that has been perpetrated on the energy and the strength of the Jewish woman! In every Jewish family I have known, including my own, the Jewish woman is indeed strong, like her ancestors in the shtetl, who performed the practical work and were the breadwinners, who kept the family eating when the men were virtually castrated by the larger society. That is the true Jewish woman — not the myth that

has been imposed of the meek, little passive woman, wife and helpmate, and the big dominant Jewish man who has his foot on her neck. Maybe it was necessary in the Diaspora to perpetuate the latter myth, perhaps in the interest of masculine identity — let the Jewish man be free to study the Torah, he is the master, he is the boss, in the home at least; we women will put ourselves back to save us all.

Now I am not an anthropologist, nor that much of a student of history. I can surmise, however, that patriarchy may have once had its roots in historical, economic, biological necessity. But long after the myth of male superiority was no longer necessary to maintain, it became necessary to do so in a different way, perhaps for the sake of Jewish survival and the Jewish family. But then we got locked into that other myth: being strong and energetic was fine for the immigrant Jewish women in the slums of America, who worked as seamstresses in the garment industry, who cooked, sent the children off to school, the boys to become doctors and lawyers, who kept everybody going. It was another matter, though, for the Jewish women of the next generation, the middle- and upper-middle-class women, whose strength and energies all went into maintaining the comfortable house, the harried husband, the two-three children.

This was the Jewish mother who was raked over the coals in such books as *Portnoy's Complaint*, *A Mother's Kisses*, and all the rest. The strength of the Jewish mother finally became a dirty joke, with chicken soup as her symbol. (I hereby affirm my own right as a Jewish American woman feminist to make chicken soup, even though I sometimes take it out of a can, and you can add spinach to it or something . . .) The strength had to be concentrated on too narrow a focus — only that little family, and that wasn't really good for the family. And it certainly was not good for the man, encouraging in him a façade of false machismo.

What did this do to the men of my father's generation? They had to shoulder the economic burden all by themselves, in addition to dealing with the discontent, the anger, that was bottled up in the women — our mothers, our sisters — and that affected the children. It is thus in the interest of evolving life that we break through the feminine mystique, in order to enable men to liberate themselves from the masculine mystique, to give up the need for false strength, to become rooted in their own authentic feelings. The process that is going on now is indeed very difficult for men, tougher than it was for women, for men have never been supposed to, been allowed to, deal with their real feelings. Once women broke through the mystique, we could give each other support in confirming our own reality. But can men, who are supposed to have their fists up against every other man, give each other support?

Do we do justice to our task of Jewish survival, human survival, by perpetuating such polarizations? Must we not now think in terms of shared strength in the family? Feminism is not opposed to the family. What I was against, even in *The Feminine Mystique*, was the either/or aspect of the matter as it affects women — what I see now as a false conflict between woman and the duty to herself as a person to move in society, use her abilities, and have a voice in her destiny, as well as to

partake in the identity that we share with women of generations past. I mean those values that nurture, that bespeak love . . . chicken soup, if you will. Those values of love and nurturing include, as I write in *The Second Stage*, the having and rearing of children. Women can now *choose* to have children, or, if they wish, they can choose to be generative in other ways.

I have fought for the right to choose, and I will continue to do so. At this stage of technological development, the right to choose to have children — which is how I would phrase it — is to me a value in “generativity.” There is, I repeat, a value in having children. There is no value as such in abortion — only a necessity for abortion to be available as a last resort, if other forms of birth control have not worked, and if a woman cannot see fit responsibly to bring a child into this world. When I say the right to choose, I mean the right to choose to bear children — a choice that liberates motherhood and renders it an authentic, responsible act.

The right to choose to have children brings in its wake the consideration of certain structural social changes — child-care centers, maternity and paternity leave, restructuring of work hours, and other things consonant with the evolution of modern technology, but which have not, in America (at least not until very recently), been sufficiently addressed by the Jewish community.

**F**or several years I served on a task force on the Jewish woman, sponsored by the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies. For about two years we wrangled with the men on that task force — the rabbis, the heads of federation agencies, etc. — who kept saying such things as, “Now how are we going to get the Jewish women to stop this nonsense about careers and professions and go back home and have children again.” We would look at each other — the women rabbis, the academics, the heads of Hadassah and other organizations, and myself — and we would patiently try to explain that if you want the new generation of Jewish women to continue to choose to have children, then you have to deal with the new realities of women’s participation in modern life. Women, we kept stressing, will be increasingly entering professions which up to now have been structured around the lives of men who heretofore have had wives to take care of the details of life. If such women are to be encouraged to choose to have children, they will not only require husbands who share the child care but also aid from the community, to substitute for the grandmother who may no longer be living down the street (indeed, she also may be working). What is needed, we argued, is a restructuring of the conditions of job and of the home and the community.

When we began this task force, the idea that a Jewish agency should institute maternity and paternity leave and sponsor child-care centers was unthinkable. They said it cost too much. I said, “How much does a stained glass window cost?” Then they began to move, and soon there were replicas of our task force all over the American Jewish landscape.

There is at last a lot of reality being faced in the American Jewish community, although many still tend to think of the

family as a woman’s question exclusively. The younger generation of men, as they enter into the child-rearing years, have begun to share the responsibilities of parenthood. My own father was like a stranger to the children. We looked up to him, but he worked long hours and didn’t have much time for his children. He died too young, from the burdens of all that economic responsibility. The father of my children shared in the parenting process, and my son even more so. Yet he too is locked into a job that precludes maximum participation.

These are the questions that we have now to face in the U.S. and Israel, in terms of the evolution of the family, for women will never go home again. What is developing is a situation where women *and* men are facing new choices and need new kinds of family support to be able to choose to have children.

**W**hat I said in *The Second Stage* — and it is very cogent for our Dialogue here — is that when we in the modern women’s movement first began to move to the question of equality, we had only male models, because all the concepts in all the disciplines had been defined only by men. We have not yet achieved complete equality according to that male model, but we have come far enough along the way that we are beginning now to have our own voice in state and church and synagogue, and every discipline. We are beginning to form the concepts, terms, and definitions out of female experience. This second stage is absolutely essential if we are going to confront the real problems, as I see it, of our survival as human beings, as Jews, as well as women.

For instance, take the question of equal pay for equal work. This is guaranteed by law in the U.S., yet the fact is that American women are making only sixty-two cents for every dollar a man makes. The situation may be somewhat better in Israel, I am told, but not by much. In the U.S. we call this the “feminization of poverty.” If we look at the level of poverty in the United States, or within the Jewish community, we see that it largely involves families headed by women. Why? Because women are mainly performing the sales and service and other jobs that are increasingly important to the society but that are not well paid or highly valued — because they are being done by women. What women have done all their lives in the home is not valued either or given equal precedence with the wage contribution of men when it comes, for instance, to divorce, pensions, social security, and the like.

I think that you in Israel have comparable questions to deal with, for instance, in the kibbutz. I have always been fascinated by the kibbutz, which was first held up as an ideal of women’s equality. Then people would come back from researching in Israel and tell us otherwise, that if we wanted to see an instance where women have been offered equality and rejected it, then we should look at the kibbutz. That can’t be true, we said; and in fact, I don’t think it is true. But there is a limit, I feel, to the degree of equality that women can attain, not only in the kibbutz but anywhere, if you use only a male model or place no value on female experience. This always happens when women try to be just like men, whether it is “dressing for success” like the men in the professions in

America, or whether it is what the first generation of women in the kibbutz had no choice but to do. It just doesn't work.

There is no need for feminism to deny the differences between men and women; the human similarities are more important than the differences. The actualities of female experience have never been put into the value system — economically, politically, or religiously — in Israel or in the United States, in Jewish life or in secular life. That is what is happening in the "second stage" and that is what has to happen regarding such issues as equal pay for work of comparable value. There has to be a sense, too, that women are not just members of Hadassah or toilers in the domestic work of the synagogue, the charity work, the volunteer work, but that they can also become rabbis, preaching the sermons. Indeed, 40 percent of the students in the Jewish theological seminaries in America are now women, but they had to fight to get in there.

The second-stage battle is even more interesting than the first. What will female experience do for the evolution of the spiritual dimension? As women begin to define the rabbinical terms and male rabbis share the child care, there will, I feel, perhaps be a greater closeness to life, a stronger emphasis on human survival. At an Israeli army post that we visited, we were told that it was necessary to have this inequality in the army, because men have to be free to fight the battles and the women have to be free to bear the children. These are basic values, they said, particularly for Israeli society, the life values nurtured in the family, and we don't want to tamper with them. But all of us today throughout the world live under the shadow of nuclear threat, where it is not easy to see how we can truly defend ourselves or win the wars. Can we afford any longer to polarize the sexes, to free men to engage in nuclear war and assign women to specialize in survival? Do not both women and men, everywhere, have to assume the responsibility for perpetuating life, by solving the seemingly insoluble problems of the nuclear arms race? Survival will not, I maintain, be assured by the polarization of the sex roles.

I have now been to two international conferences on women, in Copenhagen and Mexico City, and I have experienced the terrible pain of seeing those occasions turned into an attack on Israel. Why? It is because certain nations — Arab nations, Third World nations, Fascist and authoritarian Communist regimes — don't really want to deal with the question of women's rights and use Israel as a scapegoat. Moreover, the same authoritarian regimes that are threatened by women's emergence to full personhood also feel threatened by the Jews, by the very existence of Israel, by Israel's survival. It is not really surprising, when you think about Nazi Germany. The very year that witnessed the first Nazi decrees, stripping the Jews of their citizenship and their humanity, also saw decrees against feminism and feminists and then against all women, taking away their rights to vote, to hold office, to be in professions, and reducing women to *Kinder und Kirche*. The spirit of freedom of life, so basic to Jewish survival and also constituting the life force for women, is a threat to despotism, to authoritarianism. The enemies of evolving life are the ene-

mies of Jews and the enemies of women — our enemies are one and the same.

To ensure our survival as women, as Jews in Israel or in America, we have to see to it that the roots of our Jewish identity and the evolution of equality for women converge. Who knows how it is going to end? Most of my life I have lived in secular terms. There might have been a time in my youth when, asked to state my religion, I would have said "atheist" or "agnostic." Now, of course, I say "Jew." I do not know about Jewish theology, and some time I am going to spend six months or a year here in Israel and absorb myself in the mystery of Judaism. I do know this, however, about Jewish theology — that we who are Jews practice a living religion that is never finished. There is no "pie-in-the-sky" for us. We are charged with our own being to make life better, not only for ourselves, but for future generations as well. That is how I view religion altogether, but I think it is truly the Jewish way. I think that it is the task of this generation of women to bring our voice and our experience into the full mainstream of our society's survival and our people's survival. I think we do this in the interest of life.

## חג שמח

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Tuesday morning, July 31, 1984

## Session 2: Discussion of the Opening Presentations

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*The session was chaired by Yael Rom, a Likud member of the Haifa City Council, who invited the Dialogue participants, Americans and Israelis, to "grapple with the questions" raised by the presentations of Rivka Bar-Yosef and Betty Friedan the previous evening.*

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HAYA KURZ: I would like to address myself primarily to the presentation of Rivka Bar-Yosef, who I think described very well some of the problems of the status of the women in Israel. However, if these problems are seen within the larger context of life in this country, then perhaps we may also have more of a chance of finding solutions for them.

What I mean can be illustrated in terms of the integration of family and career. All of us who live in this country, whether we immigrated to Israel or were born here, are vitally concerned about the survival and regeneration of the Jewish nation. Of course, one doesn't raise a family in order to help a nation survive, but if it is meaningful for you, you take this into consideration. Therefore, the solutions we have to consider are, in a sense, the second-phase solutions that Betty Friedan was talking about — the integration of career and family. This means that from the very outset we have to begin educating our partners, our men, to take an equal part in family life. Given the importance of family life in this country, which is meaningful for men too, it seems to me that we stand a greater chance of succeeding in this regard.

I would also like to comment on the question of religion in Israel as it concerns our discussion. There is a parallel here with the question of the integration of family and career, for the solutions of women's problems in this country, as I noted, are tied to general solutions. I very much agree with what Rivka Bar-Yosef said regarding the negative effect of religious influence upon women — the matter of segregation, the fact that women do not have primary positions as religious leaders, their inferior status in the rabbinical courts, the question of insufficient education. However, to my mind — and this I know is controversial — it would be a dangerous thing in this country, taking into account our long-range survival, to divorce religion from the state. What we have to do is fight to correct the distortions imposed by the religious establishment, not by way of separating reli-

gion and state, but by fighting from within the religion itself. I think we can do it.

I don't think these distortions derive from basic Halachah. I think they are based on two points, one of which Betty Friedan noted yesterday. I refer to certain sociological conditions that obtained in the Diaspora, which stressed segregation of the sexes and emphasized stereotypical roles. The other point has to do with power. Once you give a certain segment of the population power, they don't want to give it up. That is the chief reason why these distortions now exist in the religious community. The leaders of the religious community, who don't want to deal with the need for women to come to fulfillment and equality, are finding it very difficult to even consider giving up their power. But if women would push for equality and fulfillment from within, instead of seeing the solution to their problems as lying in the separation of religion and state, then in the end we would achieve more integrated solutions for the good of women.

JUDITH BUBER AGASSI: I should like to comment on the title of this Dialogue. I feel it is definitely problematic, because "Woman as Jew" is an entirely different matter for the American woman than it is for the Israeli. In the U.S. and Canada the struggle for women's rights is taking place in the general arena, in a non-Jewish context. The special women's problems that American Jewish women have, as Jews, apply only to a minority of American Jewish women, those who identify as Jews and for whom there is a problem of religious observance.

The Israel situation is entirely different from the American one. In Israel, insofar as women's rights are concerned, we have not yet completed even the first stage. There are two problems that we who fight for women's rights in Israel must confront. The first derives from the fact that Israel was founded as a Jewish state, based very largely on Jewish tradition, Jewish culture, Jewish history. The second thing is that in Israel there is no clear democratic constitution and that part of our law is rabbinical law, which cannot be changed democratically. The whole appeal to values in this country is therefore an appeal to Jewish values. Moreover, there is a tendency to regard Jewish values and Jewish tradition as monolithic and as morally superior.

There are in this country women who want equal rights — personhood, as Betty Friedan calls it. We have to learn the simple lesson that has been learned by many liberal people

the world over: that tradition is neither a good nor a bad thing; that you cannot live without tradition, but that you must be critical of it. You have to take from your tradition what comes up to your moral criteria, and reject what does not. The strong patriarchal element in Jewish tradition simply has to be openly and clearly criticized. What is good in the family, for the individual, for women, men, and children, for the survival of the society — all these things have to be critically examined.

Family is a positive value in Israel and there are very few people here who would want to abolish the institution. The kibbutz movement, for instance, is very proud of its pro-family stance and takes umbrage when people assume that the kibbutz is anti-family. But even though everybody in Israel seems to be pro-family, people do not ask themselves, what strengthens the family? Therefore I was very pleased to hear Betty Friedan make the point that interest in the survival of the family is not a monopoly of the anti-feminists. At the same time, we have to be critical of the family sentimentalists and traditionalists, particularly in this country, whose attitudes cause many women to accept the intrusion of the anti-woman patriarchal law into our lives.

ALICE SHALVI: I wanted to address myself to something that Rivka Bar-Yosef said last night, almost parenthetically, but which I think is of considerable importance, precisely because I feel that education of both sexes is absolutely vital if we are going to effect change in anything, and certainly as far as the status of women is concerned.

Rivka mentioned the fact that, under religious pressure, there might be a return in Israel to single-sex education, with a differentiation in curriculum. I may appear reactionary in this respect, but I myself am a great proponent of single-sex education. I think that as things are today, girls, perhaps even women, feel intimidated in the presence of the opposite sex and very frequently feel themselves manipulated into roles which they perhaps do not innately feel they want to fulfill.

This begins with the selection of subjects of study. The statistics published annually in the Year Book of the Israel Government indicate that there is very little difference between the coeducational schools of the state system and the single-sex schools of the state religious system, where the choice of subjects for matriculation is concerned. In other words, there is no indication that girls in co-educational schools are going in for the kind

of subject matter which is traditionally still considered the male field, such as science and technology. On the contrary, I have found, as principal of an all-girls' religious school, that I have been able to get far more girls to go into advanced technology, to apply for study in the special program at the Haifa Technion concurrently with service in the army. I have also found it much easier to engage in consciousness-raising in an all-girls' school than, I think, I would have been able to if I had been the principal of a mixed school.

These are the facts, regrettable as they may seem. Israel is still, as has been pointed out, very much a marriage-oriented and family-oriented society, and since many of us seem not to want to change that situation — I certainly don't — there is undoubtedly pressure on adolescent girls to find favor in the eyes of adolescent boys. Finding favor in the eyes of Israeli boys, as in many other places in the world, very often means playing down your intellectual gifts and playing up the non-intellectual gifts. We may be very retrograde and regressive in this respect, but I fear this is where we are still at. Therefore, my feeling is that, at this stage, I would rather encourage single-sex education in the awareness that in such frameworks, both male and female, we can engage, overtly or covertly, in the kind of consciousness-raising that is necessary. And perhaps ultimately, we will reach the stage where we will be not separate-but-equal, but together-and-equal.

**ANNE ROIPHE:** I just want to remind everybody that in America the women's movement was fueled by Jewish energies. That does not mean that everybody in it was Jewish, but there was a large proportion of Jewish women, primarily secular women, who felt a kind of pain and anguish with the image of themselves as Jewish women in America, and this caused an explosion. We have Betty Friedan, and many of the other leaders of the movement, who were Jewish women.

I don't believe this was entirely an accident. Part of what happened to us was that we were exposed to a dual experience — the democratic values and hopes of our society, but also the Jewish expectations that we would be nice Jewish girls. At the same time we were subject to jokes; whatever anti-Semitism there was in the country, was caught by Jewish men and reflected on their Jewish women. We were put down by our own menfolk as Jewish mothers and Jewish American Princesses, we were attacked in the press, in the books we read — and we exploded. It had a very positive effect for everybody in America, and I believe that we have truly contributed to a change as Jewish women in America.

One thing that we did not do so well is that we got very angry, and we let our anger get out of control. We said a lot of things that hurt a lot of people's feelings, and every time we

hurt somebody's feelings, we created an enemy. Every time we created an enemy, we created further trouble for ourselves. It seems to me that Israel, which is perhaps in the middle of the first stage of feminism, can avoid some of our worst mistakes, by being very careful to respect what people's needs are, and to find ways to avoid making people feel insulted. That we in America did not do; we insulted people all over the place. We did it with great sass, with great pleasure, and we made a terrible mistake. That is why the Equal Rights Amendment was not passed, and that is why we are fighting back.

I don't believe that we should necessarily have been more polite; I just believe that we might have been more imaginative and more empathetic with people who were what we

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*In America the  
women's movement  
was fueled by  
Jewish energies.  
This was  
no accident.*

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call "just housewives." When we spoke to the woman who was "just a housewife," we made her feel as if we thought she was nothing, and that was a very bad mistake which we now have to backpaddle on, to pull her in, to be with us and behind us, instead of attacking us. It is going to take, I am sure, another ten years before we heal some of those rifts.

**FRANCES RADAY:** I would like to pursue what Anne Roiphe just said, but with regard to Israel. I think that in Israel the chances are greater for achieving equality for women in public life without causing anger to housewives. Why? Because in Israel we have a very different economic reality from that of the American women when they went into their feminist revolution. The economic reality in Israel is such that very many women don't *choose* to be career women and housewives, they *have* to be career women and housewives. As a result, they don't have to push for an ideological revolution, they have to push for fairness within an existing reality. I believe that they can fight that battle with weapons that the American women simply didn't have.

On the other hand, I think we are going to create enemies in different directions. However much we talk about the synthesis of the sexes in Israeli society and of convincing the Orthodox, there are basic splits in Israeli society between Jewish women, which means

that there will be enemies created on a different basis — not on the housewife/career women basis, but on the religious/non-religious basis. All the signs point to the fact that this will become a stronger, not a weaker, element in the struggle.

I am not an expert on religious women, but from what I see, religious women do in fact also work. Many religious men are full-time students in yeshivot, and here are these women, working full-time, and bringing up fourteen children. Nevertheless, their ideology is clearly anti-feminist. What do I mean by anti-feminist ideology? When it comes to the end of the working day and a woman asks herself: "What am I entitled to as a person? Am I entitled to grow and develop as is a man? Am I entitled not only to make an economic contribution to the family, but also to go to the theater, to the cinema, to read a book, to go to a political meeting, while somebody else makes dinner?" I think that the answer of many Israeli women at that stage will be: "No, I am not." Even if she is a committed career woman, the answer very often is "No." This is the point, therefore, at which we in Israel are going to create enemies — not at the point of the right to work, the right to have a career, or the right to equal pay. In these areas, perhaps, we are having an easier time than the American women did, because we can talk about necessity, whereas they have to talk about desirability.

**SHARON SHENHAV (SHANOFF):** I sit on both sides of the Atlantic. I am a civil-rights lawyer in the U.S. and practice in Washington, D.C. For the past five years I have also been an Israeli lawyer and a wife and mother.

The reason I became a lawyer derives from the passion for justice. It's what started the women's movement in the United States twenty years ago and, as an Israeli woman lawyer handling women's problems, I want to talk a bit about the injustices I see every day in my office. I'm speaking about the problems that women face in the rabbinic courts. I don't think that our American counterparts are aware of what happens here.

I invite all of you to come to a rabbinic court session with me one day and see what goes on there. It is so insulting, not only to women but to all Jews and all human beings. More than that, it means that today women in Israel, if they want to get a divorce, are often blackmailed, because our rabbinic courts have no power to grant a divorce. Only the husband does, and if he refuses, the court washes its hands and that's the end of it. If a young, childless widow — unfortunately, because of the many wars, there is a large number of such widows in Israel — wants to remarry, she cannot unless her brother-in-law goes through a very primitive ceremony called *halitzah*, in which he must take off his shoe, she must spit on the ground, and the

rabbis have to make sure it was all done properly. Needless to say, a lot of young men do not want to go through a ceremony like this, just after they've lost their beloved brother in a war. In many cases, the widows are forced to pay the brother-in-law to go through with the ceremony. If she cannot pay and he still refuses, she cannot remarry in Israel, because we have no civil marriage.

These are injustices that are facing women every day. In my office, in Jerusalem, I see many religious women, including wives of rabbis, Orthodox women. They are just as concerned as the majority of non-religious women. I would therefore suggest that out of all the things that may come out of this conference, there emerges that fight against injustice that took place in America some twenty years ago. As Jewish women, we should all band together now — Jewish women in America, Jewish women in Israel, and Jewish women all over the world — and fight this injustice together.

There is a lot of anger out there. About two months ago, there was a bill proposed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs to enlarge the jurisdiction of the rabbinic courts. Na'amat sponsored a meeting that was filled to capacity in a hall five times as large as last night's, with a lot of angry women present. The chief rabbi of the rabbinic court in Tel Aviv became very defensive.

Which brings me to Anne Roiphe's comment about making enemies. I think we have to be careful in this fight. Our enemies are not our religious women. Our enemies are the rabbinic leaders of Israel who are a political, not a religious, force. There are also a lot of considerate, sensitive, creative, Orthodox rabbis out there who simply are not in political power today and who might band with us. We must be very careful not to insult, and there are ways of doing that. I think we have the skills to be diplomats, but we must above all concentrate on the fight, because there are women suffering every day in Israel.

**JUDITH HAUPTMAN:** One of the problems that American Jewish feminists have is that feminist thinking is perceived by the Orthodox and even by the Conservative movements in the United States as a force from without and therefore non-kosher. Had the founders of feminist thinking been committed or religiously observant Jewish women, then the feminist movement might have been regarded in a much more positive light. As any movement which begins from outside and then infiltrates Judaism, feminism for us is considered essentially non-Jewish and therefore not acceptable. I mention this, because the fact that American Jewish women, including some who live in Israel — outsiders, that is — are among the most outspoken women in terms of feminism, might be damaging to the cause of equality for women in Israel.

One of the best kept secrets among Israelis of all persuasions — secular and religious alike — is the fact that Halachah has changed radically over the centuries. (I will have an opportunity to speak about this at greater length at a later session, but I feel it necessary to say a few things right now.) Laws have changed tremendously, from Torah to Talmud, from Talmud to the medieval period, and, to a certain extent, from the medieval period until the present time. It is therefore clear to me that Halachah can change in the present as well. The interesting thing though, is that I don't believe that the pressing problems in Israel even require the Halachah to be changed. It's the particular Jewish women's concerns in the United States, with relation to synagogue participa-

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*As Jewish women,  
we should all  
band together to  
fight injustice.*

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tion, where radical change in the Halachah is necessary.

The way I understand it, the urgent problems for women in Israel today do not involve equal participation in the synagogue, for the synagogue is not a place where Israeli women, even the observant ones, spend many hours of their week. The problems here have to do much more with marriage, divorce, and *halitzah*. I'd say that the second well-kept secret, in addition to the fact that Halachah changes, is that with regard to the various problems of marital law, which have been noted this morning, there are solutions within the halachic framework already in existence. But, unfortunately, the rabbinate that controls such matters here deny that implementation of solutions is possible, and indeed refrain from implementing already available solutions.

According to Israeli law, a man who withholds a writ of divorce from his wife can be sent to prison, but, as Sharon Shenhav told me yesterday, such Israeli men are not being jailed — and women have no recourse whatsoever. The point, though, is that there are available existing solutions to many of these problems. I have a feeling that until women in Israel, particularly the religious women, speak out and indicate to the rabbis that they are simply not implementing solutions which already exist, until that happens, I don't think things are going to change very much.

**TZIVIA COHEN:** I just want to correct some impressions that I think some of our American counterparts may have gotten from the discussion. It should be noted that there

are very strong women's organizations in Israel, dealing with feminist or women's issues. There is, for instance, Na'amat, my own organization, which is the largest women's organization in Israel, belonging to the Histadrut. There is WIZO, and there are the women in Herut and Likud, and there is also a large movement of women within the religious bloc, who, as matter of fact, are even more aggressive in their style than the women of the labor movement, saying they will not go to elections if one of them is not put on the upper reaches of the electoral list for the Knesset. So, actually we have many large women's organizations in Israel fighting for women's rights, each with magazines and journals and papers. Our basic problem in Israel, however — given the fact that our rabbinical courts are actually a political power and not religious in the sense that we would like — is how to be religious/observant, and yet be modern, advanced women.

**MARILYN SAFIR:** I want to go back to some of the things that Alice Shalvi noted, because I think that we have some very serious problems in our educational system that a lot of people in Israel are still unaware of; indeed, the problems start at a much earlier age than Alice cited. I have many theories as to why this happens, and let me share them with you.

In 1977, the Ministry of Education asked me to be a consultant for a program for gifted children. You should know that all of the children who attend public schools in Tel Aviv and Haifa are tested. At one point, the tests were given in first, second, and third grades, but now it's at the nine-year-old level. The tests are group tests, intelligence tests, etc., and the children who pass the cut-off of the upper 7-10 percent are then retested, and the top 2 percent are then selected for classes of gifted children.

The reason they turned to me was that 90 percent of those selected for the classes were boys, and only 10 percent girls. We went through all the Western literature on gifted children and found that boys do tend to show up as gifted more often than girls. However, the largest percentage that was found was also in a very traditional society, England; there, for every 100 gifted girls you had 116 boys — nowhere near the proportion that was found in Israel.

Another thing that I'd like to mention is that, generally speaking, in recent years, when tests of intellectual functioning are done, sex differences tend not to show up until age 14, and then the girls tend to do better on the verbal skills and the boys on performance and mathematics skills. This had been a pattern also in entrance exams to universities.

In the first couple of years of schooling, if there was a difference, it tended generally to favor girls in the West. One of the reasons for this is that at ages 6, 7, 8, girls tend to mature

physically faster than boys and therefore pose fewer behavior problems. Some people say that girls have also been socialized to be quiet, to sit and be more receptive. Boys also show up with more reading problems and other learning disorders, at a ratio of 4 to 1, the same as in Israel.

With these young children, we found that in the first year of the program, at the first testing, something like 50 percent of both boys and girls passed; then, at the second point, 70 percent boys, 30 percent girls. These percentages still hold today. We also found that, in addition to some questions benefiting the boys, there were different patterns in test-taking behavior. The boys tended to answer all the questions and make mistakes, whereas the girls left lots of blank answers and made hardly any mistakes — patterns that show up again in the United States, but in late adolescence and not at such an early age.

Another thing that we found: we asked teachers to recommend children for this special class to see how successful they would be, and they tended to recommend 70 percent boys, 30 percent girls; this was true even of the kindergarten teachers.

The same has been found to apply in the general population. In a recent Hebrew University project, a team of researchers did a new standardization of some intelligence tests, and found no essential difference between boys and girls up to the age of 6. (In fact, the girls performed somewhat higher, although this wasn't significant.) At the beginning of first grade, there was again no difference. Starting in second grade, the boys started outpacing the girls on the verbal sub-tests, so by age 12, the boys were superior on all the verbal sub-tests. By age 14, the boys were superior on all the performance sub-tests, and by age 16, the boys had an average I.Q. of 10 points higher than the girls. This was a representative sample of the Israeli population.

We did a similar study of people applying to universities. We considered all the people who applied to Tel Aviv and Haifa University in one year and decided just to examine people who had been educated in the Israeli school system. We had people who had gone through school either in a kibbutz setting, or a moshav setting, or a city setting. What we found was that, generally speaking, the males were superior on all of the verbal sub-tests — this was on a college entrance exam, similar to the American Scholastic Aptitude Test — as well as performance and mathematical sub-tests. The difference was most extreme in the moshav group. Among the kibbutz group, there were two sub-tests where the males were not superior, and that speaks to some educational differences there. Among the city group, the boys were superior to the girls on all the sub-tests.

So, my feeling is that when we talk about equality and opening up careers to women, if we want to make changes, we have to start

working on the school system, where I am convinced there are major problems.

JACQUELINE LEVINE: I have a career in the American Jewish voluntary community, like many American Jewish women who chose the voluntary sphere as their area of vocation or avocation. (In the coming years, I am sure, more will find this an avocation as greater numbers of women go to work.) There are some lessons to be learned from our experience. For us, the struggle for equality has been played out on two levels. The first concerns the general society; the second is the struggle within Jewish communal life for recognition and participation at policy-making and decision-making levels.

The winds of change of the feminist revolution, which blew through the entire American society, also wafted through the American Jewish community, and there has indeed been an interaction. As Betty Friedan put it, women are moving in the general society. They are now in top political positions, state legislatures, mayoralties, the governors' mansions.

For those of us in the institutional Jewish community, it's been a difficult task to attain the leadership level, and I would say that here we are at the beginning of the second stage. We are more advanced in the voluntary community, where women are assuming leadership positions more than in the professional

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### *The Dialogue can be an occasion for reciprocal energizing.*

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Jewish community. I think it is the obligation of all of us, volunteers as well as professional women, to see that this condition improves.

I find the reciprocal energizing very important, the interaction, that is, between what has happened in the total American society and what's happening within the Jewish community as far as women are concerned. I hope there will be some reciprocal energizing here at this Dialogue between American Jews and Israelis.

RINA SHASHUA-HASSON: I am chairman of the National Council of the Shinui Party and legal advisor on the status of women of the Na'amat organization. After more than 20 years of legal practice in both rabbinical and civil courts in Israel, I must concur in all of the statements made by Sharon Shenhav.

We in Israel now live under a legal system which sends all Jewish citizens, for questions

of personal status, to the rabbinical courts. The rabbinical courts apply halachic rulings, not the civil laws enacted by the Knesset; and in so doing, they tend toward the strictest interpretations of the Halachah. The question is, how to effect change? I dare to stress, after 20 years of practice, that the way to try to change the trend is not by seeking to influence the Orthodox authorities for amelioration from within, but to fight for civil rights. I strongly believe that a raising of consciousness to civil rights and women's rights, which are in my opinion the same, is the way to change the awareness of women about their status today.

I think that, even in this room, there are some who were unaware of the inequities that Sharon cited. Let me add some more. Take the question of sterility, for instance. Sterility in women is a cause for divorce; sterility of men is not so regarded, on the assumption that male sterility cannot as easily be determined as female sterility. Well now, finally, we have the scientific methods to establish who is the sterile partner of the marriage. Even so, male sterility cannot be adduced as a cause for divorce, according to our rabbinic authorities.

Let us now pursue the matter of *halitzah*, which Sharon raised. The rite of *halitzah*, as you know, applies to a childless widow, who before she may remarry, must obtain a special release from the brother (if there is one) of the deceased husband. If the brother is under 13 years of age, she has to wait for him to grow up and to agree to give her this release.

Another case: If a husband becomes insane, the woman is tied to the marriage for life. There is no halachic solution for her. However, if a woman becomes insane, the husband can get a *heter*, a consensus obtained from 100 rabbis to dissolve the marriage, freeing him to remarry.

The difficulties of obtaining a divorce in Israel apply not only to women who have married in a religious ceremony. Even a woman who has contracted a civil marriage — this in cases where both she and her husband are Jewish — if she decides to divorce and remarry, she will be unable to do so unless she obtains a religious divorce.

The only solution for all these inequities, as I see it, is to make civil marriage possible and to enact a law for civil divorce. This will accommodate those women who do not want to be obligated to the halachic rules. Also, only in this way — by offering a choice between religious marriage and civil marriage — will there be pressure on the Orthodox authorities to begin looking for solutions in the Halachah to all these serious problems.

CYNTHIA FUCHS EPSTEIN: I've done research on women in the professions and government and business over the past 20 years and I'd like to make some general observations. First, I think that some of the problems that we face in each of our respec-

tive settings — in Israel and America — are very similar. Indeed, we share these problems with women throughout the world, whether we come from a complex modern society or a less developed society.

The situation of women in the world is most democratic with regard to oppression. Women are oppressed at every social class level, in every ethnic group, in every setting in which they congregate. They tend toward the bottom of whatever stratum to which they belong, whether in the legal profession, or as domestic or agricultural workers. The curious thing is that, contrary to certain theorists, people who belong to subordinate groups are persuaded to enter into their own rationale for subordination. Of course, this is because, as members of the society, they are much affected by the culture, which is a culture developed and supported by the people who are powerful.

We are constantly testing our ideas against reality. Often, we see contradictory facts before our very eyes, while denying them all the time. This seems to apply particularly to the issues that women face. For instance, women are regarded as not working when they are working; they are regarded as being weak when they are strong; they are regarded as being incompetent in areas where their competence is apparent. The arguments and rationales I hear in Israel are not so different from those in other societies.

Let us take the most powerful issue — survival. Now, Israel is not the first country to undergo problems of survival. Many countries today, looking for a resolution of national aims, face the question of survival — Algeria, for example, or Cuba. You may agree or disagree with the type of government they have; nevertheless, survival here was and is an issue. In a majority of these societies, women were used to support the aims of the state. In other societies, women were told to wait, that national survival had to come first and that women's positions, particularly with regard to equality, would be attended to later. But this never happens; in fact, the reverse usually happens. The Algerian women who had concealed guns in their robes, after the revolution were told to go back to the kitchen. The issue of timing is always used as a rationale for undercutting women's perception of equality, and the time never seems to be right.

This was also true in the black movement in the United States. Black women were told not to press for equality, that indeed they should stand behind their men. For a while, black women shunned identification with the feminist movement even while adhering to feminist ideals, because they were afraid that they would be undercutting the black identity. I think that's now changed somewhat, as black women as well as white women understand the real consequences that flow from this particular rationale.

With regard to Jewish women in the femi-

nist movement in the United States, I think that most women who came into the feminist movement in the earlier days were women who had some background in terms of identification with Jews, not a religious identification, but with the ideological and humanistic perspectives of Judaism. There were those who believed in the model of Israel, specifically, the kibbutz, as the model of women's equality.

To some extent, Israel remains the great connecting rod. In fact, some of the disaffection with Israel on the part of certain Jewish young people today, who are turning their backs on issues of Judaism, derives from the fact that they feel that the Israeli state no longer typifies this ideal of equality in society. If Israelis are interested in continued support from the American Jewish community, they will have to address this problem.

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*Israeli women  
are excluded  
from every center  
of power  
or prestige.*

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DAFNA IZRAELI: I want to make a bold statement — I'm feeling very bold this morning, with the blood pounding through my veins — and say that to regard Jewish Orthodoxy as a primary villain in women's oppression, as we have been doing all morning, is a red herring. Let me explain why.

I agree with those who claim that Orthodox Judaism is patriarchal and not egalitarian, and I am certain that the inequities and the consequent suffering this causes are very real. But if our purpose is to understand inequality in Israeli society, this is a case of misplaced causality. I assure you that if tomorrow divorce and abortion were available to everybody from the age of five up; that if no women had to undergo *halitzah*; that if civil marriage were available to everybody who wanted it — it wouldn't make one ounce of difference in terms of women's secondary status in this society, because women are excluded not only from the religious centers, but also from the political centers, the party centers, from every single center or establishment of power or prestige.

The formative structures and ideologies in Israel, in relation to many things, including women, trace back to the contributions of the labor movement, to the second and third waves of immigration. Rivka Bar-Yosef explained quite well yesterday that while these movements spoke in the name of equality, they did not have any clear conception of equality with regard to women. They as-

sumed, in accordance with their traditional Marxism, that when capitalism would be replaced by a socialist economy, the major problems of women will be solved. While there was lip service paid to equality, there were no institutionalized measures taken to assure that equality. We have to understand that the perception of women as being primarily homemakers servicing men, is rooted, if not in the ideology, then at least in the practice of the labor movement, which virtually controlled the country from the 1930s until the 1970s.

Along with this, we find, to be sure, large women's organizations. But, as Rivka Bar-Yosef pointed out yesterday, the women's organizations were also dependent on and loyal to the men's organizations. They have not been militant except on certain issues, and have not contributed to major cultural transformations of Israeli society. We can keep saying how awful the rabbis are — and it is important for us to air these grievances — but do not think that having solved the religious question, all the other men of Israeli society will then say, fine, you can join us in the centers of power and prestige.

You also have to understand that in this country liberalism is skin-deep. Eastern Europeans were not liberals. The North African immigrants, the Middle Eastern immigrants, have no tradition of liberalism. Whatever tradition of liberalism we have in this country derives perhaps from the immigration of the secular German Jews who arrived in the 1930s, and the handfuls of Americans who brought the ideas of liberalism with them. Moreover, Judaism is not an inherently pluralistic, liberalistic ideology. The labor movement was described by the sociologists who analyzed it as essentially Bolshevik; its structure was highly centralized, not democratic, and it saw itself as the nation-building tool, with the right to tell other people what was good for them and what wasn't.

We must understand the wider context of our problems. The struggle to secure full and equal rights for women in Israel will not be one of secular women against Orthodox women, or the secular community against the Orthodox community. I think it will be waged by the small band of women with a feminist consciousness against the rest of society, by those who put women's issues above particular political issues.

VIRGINIA SNITOW: I want to react to something that Prof. Shalvi spoke about, namely, the single-sex school. Most of us have been brought up with the idea that women and men should be together and that we are all equal and so forth — and Prof. Shalvi's notion may seem somewhat regressive. I do, however, believe that there are short periods, transitional periods, when "togetherness" is not always desirable.

I support Prof. Shalvi's idea because I see how successful it can be in creating the new

generation of young women and motivating them to learning and understanding. It must also be said that a number of presidents of women's colleges have found that their students have been very successful in their career choices; they have enjoyed the freedom to choose technological and scientific subjects, without the inhibiting factor of a male presence. I think that's a very important consideration.

The idea of unity is wonderful, but it is time-connected. When the right moment comes, we will know it. We will know when we can enter the mainstream and stand strong and vote and act as a group. You have to know when the moment is right. For example, take the National Organization for Women (NOW). The nomination of Geraldine Ferraro as vice-presidential candidate of the Democratic Party, spurred by NOW, could not have been achieved if the women, instead of coming together in NOW, had all joined the American Civil Liberties Union. Women have to get together as a unified group, and that's how the struggle has to be carried forward.

NAOMI COHEN: Let me begin by observing that the happy woman in Israel, in my view, probably has it easier than her sister in America, integrating successfully her dual role. However, not all women are happy; many have problems. These women are our concern — and they are, in great part, religious women. Among religious women, the realization that something has to be done is perhaps even stronger than within the non-religious field, because the awareness is greater. But such changes must take place within the traditional framework. If I am a maximalist on Judea and Samaria, I may want the Israeli law to extend to those areas, but as long as the Knesset doesn't enact such legislation, it doesn't exist. Likewise, as long as the religious establishment doesn't institute changes within the framework of Halachah, there aren't going to be any.

In other words, you have to figure out how you change the establishment, and for that there are many strategies. One is for the religious women to convince the men that it's the men's idea, which is the traditional Jewish way. The other way is for society to convince the rabbis that the changes are worthwhile.

Personal status in Jewish law, incidentally, reflects to a large extent the social situation as the rabbis see it. The existential status of women in real life can be changed. For example, within the Halachah there is the concept of *isha hashuva*, the "important woman," who enjoys a higher status in various matters. And who is an important woman? When I studied the subject, I came to the conclusion that it is a woman who has independent means. So, simply by succeeding in their professional careers, women can create a fact of life that serves as a catalyst for change.

A final point. Cynthia Fuchs Epstein said that young people in the U.S. are having second thoughts about supporting Israel because Israel is not the way it ought to be. I submit that this is a rationalization and not a reason. When I came to Israel at the age of 18, full of ideals, Israel was very far from what I would have liked it to be. But I came here to change things, and I felt I could because it was mine. If you identify, then you try to change. Why are those young people who find fault with America in the forefront of movement for change? Because they identify as Americans. Identification is all.

SUSAN WEIDMAN SCHNEIDER: Basically, it seems to me that we are talking here about issues of empowerment, about how one seizes or assumes power, and how one uses it; also, what some of the disadvantages are when one has this power, including, as Cynthia Ozick pointed out in a conversation last night, tremendous loss of self-esteem that comes for us all as Jewish women, whether in America or in Israel, when we feel powerless over certain aspects of our own lives, or when we feel that we are perpetually caught in a situation of second-class citizenship.

The issue of divorce (*get*) is probably the paramount example of an issue that has rendered Jewish women powerless; regardless of where we stand on the religious spectrum, the issue of *get* is of immense importance to us.

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*We are talking here  
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and use it.*

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The ancillary issue of Jewish women's self-esteem or lack thereof is a kind of chicken-and-egg problem. Do we feel a lowered sense of self-esteem because we have no power; or are we unable to seize or create power for ourselves because we have come out of a tradition that in many respects has treated women as less than equal participants? That relates, of course, to what Alice Shalvi was saying about single-sex education. I often think that when the Messiah comes and we have a perfect world, we won't have a need for this; meanwhile there are occasions in which it is immensely important for women to be able to speak freely with and to other women.

Regarding the issue of empowerment, there are distinctions which arise between Israeli and American women, at least as I perceive it — that we are dealing with different crisis points. It seems to me, for instance, concerning family issues, that for American

Jewish women the crisis points have to do with how we respond to the child-bearing imperative, how the personal and the political merge in a family context. In Israel, it appears that fathers, for example, are less removed from the parenting process than they are in America, which may have to do with the rhythm of quotidian reality, or with the fact that there's more time for the mothers and fathers to be involved. Or perhaps it has to do with all the good things in the Jewish tradition that have caused men to be less macho in certain respects than non-Jewish men.

In American Jewish life, the issues that women often raise have to do with a sense of frustration on the family scene. The same sense of lack of empowerment that many women feel on a larger scale is exacerbated in the home; there isn't the legitimation of women's career aspirations that many women would like. On the other hand, it seems to me that the balancing act for Israeli women — keeping all the oranges of work and family in the air at once — is a little different. In Israel there has always been sanction for women working outside the home, based on necessity. There has been the availability of child-care other than by the mother, as well as approval for the practice.

Along with questions of empowerment, Jewish women on both sides of the Atlantic have to deal with a sense of alienation. Certainly, this is what many American Jewish women feel — disenfranchised and distant from the seats of communal power. In the outside world, women see themselves as doctors, lawyers, labor chiefs. Indeed, it's becoming clear that many American Jewish women feel a strong sense of possibility in the outside world, in the professions, in business; they perceive themselves as powerful beings, instrumental beings. However, in the Jewish community they are treated condescendingly, both by rabbis and by secular leaders. In the outside world these women feel that they are strong women. In the Jewish community, they feel that they in fact are not full participants, merely observers.

JOANNE YARON: I am a journalist and a publicist. I am also very active in the Israel feminist movement and am a founder of the Tel Aviv Rape Crisis Center.

I'd like to shatter some myths about what's really going on in the women's movement in Israel. The women's movement here, incidentally, means not just the feminist groups, but also includes the numerous women's organizations that Tzivia Cohen spoke about—Na'amat, WIZO, and so on. Until the little Israel feminist movement (as distinct from the women's movement) came into existence, there was no subject called battered women, no subject called rape, no subject called the struggle for abortion or for reproductive rights. Even divorce, about which

we've heard so much, was not a big subject.

I want you all to know that the organization now called Mitzvah, which began as an organization of religious Israeli and American Jewish women and is today an organization of religious men and women, began in the offices of the Israel feminist movement in Tel Aviv. No one else would give them a home. In fact, when we had to close that center for lack of money, they kept operating out of my private office until they could create an organization of their own, even though on certain issues, such as the right to abortion, we didn't agree. We understood instantly that these women were struggling for the improvement of women's position in the rabbinical courts.

I would like to use this platform, in the presence of my sisters from the United States and my sisters in Israel, to make a plea to stop the divisiveness among ourselves as women. This, to my mind, is the major problem facing women in Israel. We now have ten women in the Knesset; seven on the Labor side and three on the Likud side. Why can't we all work together and form a women's caucus, something that we have never had in this country? We are all so busy defending our boys, whether it's the Histadrut boys (Na'amat) or the Likud boys (WIZO). Of course, WIZO and Na'amat claim they are not political, but they are.

We should learn to work together and stop starting every sentence with, "I believe in women's rights but I'm not a feminist." "Feminism" is no longer a dirty word. To be a feminist is to believe in the equality of women. It doesn't mean to burn your bras: they're too expensive here. It doesn't mean you hate men. I've been saying for years here in Israel, what Betty Friedan expressed so brilliantly last night, that feminist women are not anti-family; that feminist women do not hate men. I'm tired of reading articles in women's magazines disclaiming the legitimacy of feminism. I'm tired of hearing women in political power, some of whom are sitting in this room, claiming that feminism is an imported American *meshugas*, when of course it is really one of the basic elements of the original Israeli dream. I would like to see real cooperation among all factions of women. Our differences are irrelevant because we are 51 percent of the population in this country, and I think we have a right to power.

**LOTTE SALZBERGER:** Revolutions cannot be imported and exported. That, I think, is quite clear from everything that we heard yesterday and today. What can be imported are ideas, but these ideas have to be implemented in the precise context of a given society at a given time. From what we have heard this morning with regard to Israel, it becomes very clear that we as women in Israel face a very different situation than our counterparts in the United States.

What we actually face are two revolutions. One, of course, is the women's revolution; the other is the revolution of nation-building, which we are still in the midst of and which may now be at a very crucial stage with respect to the physical future of this society. For a while, Israeli women were not aware of revolutionary processes affecting women, because we were involved in other real problems. We were in a constant state of pre- or postwar existence, and it was necessary to postpone preoccupation with our own problems. Actually, we are still in a war situation. Women in Israel cannot be understood outside of this context.

We in Israel caught up with women's consciousness-raising 10, maybe 15 years too late. Eighty years or so ago, we started out

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*Let's get on with it,  
past the whining  
and on to the winning.*

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here with a whole ethos in this area, and that's why we now have certain features in our society of which we can be proud—women's rights, early-childhood facilities, legislation for working women, maternity leave, etc. But this process was somehow not consistently developed. What happened was that feminism, as we now know it, came to Israel only with the arrival of American feminists, who didn't have enough understanding of the society here. That's why their ideas were not sufficiently implemented. All of us accept the ideas of feminism but we were not really able to translate them into programs. I'm absolutely in agreement with Betty Friedan, that women present themselves as a crucial force for survival. This can be done in Israel more convincingly than elsewhere. But our women have to unite their forces, in order to prevent developments which threaten not only the family but society as such.

**MIRIAM CANTOR:** I must say that I was very excited by the enthusiasm that was generated last night. I don't know how many of you know that the excitement extended into a near state of anarchy in the King David coffee shop after the session.

One of the things that strikes me very much about this discussion, and I think probably about all feminist discussions, is the overriding sense of anger, indignation, and frustration. For myself, I have had a career spanning almost 20 years in the professional field, a good part of it devoted to Jewish communal causes. In the Jewish professional marketplace, I have very often been treated as a second-class citizen. Be all that as it may, the single overriding feeling I have is that I

want all of us, myself included, to get on with it. I want us to be practical, pragmatic, and hard-headed, and to get past the breast-beating and the whining and on to the winning.

The words that I have heard most frequently used here were "education" and "consciousness-raising." A number of women added the word "strategy." Let me suggest another—"prioritizing," a managerial term. We must determine what our priorities are; and here we have to agree to disagree. There are some priorities for Israeli women that will not be priorities for American women. O.K., there can be different priorities. It doesn't mean that the long-range goals are not similar. We have to learn how to strategize and we have to learn how to take risks. Learning how to take risks means occasionally, or frequently, even taking big losses.

How does this translate for me? Essentially, there are five points. The first is the ability to earn money, to give money, and to withhold money in key situations. The second is, doing my homework so I can learn how to maneuver cleverly in a very complex political-religious societal structure. Third is the power to effect change and maneuver outside of the structures that we feel most comfortable in, including the non-Jewish community. Hard work would be number four; and dropping the slogans, number five. I think that sloganeering is probably one of the things that we get most hung up on.

This conference, in my view, will succeed only if we walk out of here with plans for the next steps. Let me suggest a couple, and I hope that other proposals will come from the women sitting around these tables. I suggest, perhaps, a permanent U.S.-Israeli dialogue, to start with biennial meetings, and perhaps an international membership organization. Whatever the final decisions, let us walk out of here knowing what comes next.

**NAAMAH KELMAN:** I'm with the Melton Center at the Hebrew University, but more appropriately, I'm a founding member of the Egalitarian Minyan in Jerusalem. I'm a little troubled by the fact that not only do I not see any Israeli men in this room, I also see very few young Israeli women, or for that matter, young American women. I don't say this to offend any of the distinguished participants, or to blame the organizers of this Dialogue. I think it reflects a certain reality in Israel and in the United States, where, tragically, feminism continues to be a dirty word. In Israel, one senses a yawning passivity among many women. In the U.S. feminism has been replaced by careerism. I see this in my own family, where my younger sister, who is a successful lawyer in New York, refuses to recognize that she is in the position she is in because women of our generation made it possible for her to be there. So, what I want to

say is that although I sense a great deal of excitement and energy here, I also hear a great deal of anguish, certainly from the Israeli participants, anguish based on years of infighting and bickering. There are a lot of burned-out feminists in Israel who are exhausted from fighting the rabbinical courts and the army.

I don't mean to paint a totally bleak picture. There are a lot of exciting things happening, despite the haze of backlash to feminism in the United States and the strong resistance in Israel. I believe that we in Israel have a lot to teach our American sisters, especially about balancing family and career. The respect we have here for part-time jobs, our comprehensive day-care system—these are just some of the things we in Israel can offer our American sisters. What I ask from my American sisters is to continue to give us the energy that you bring with you to these conferences, the energy that comes from the tremendous strides you have made in America.

**ROCHELLE FURSTENBERG:** I'm a journalist and I've lived in Israel for 18 years. Last night, listening to Betty Friedan's inspiring description of women coming to their authentic selves, I thought, how wonderful this would be in Israel. Then, as I walked home, I thought of the four months that I spent in the United States this past winter. What I think has happened in the department of authentic selfhood for women, in the U.S., is that finally the professional business value-system that prevails has begun to encompass women as well as men. As a writer speaking to editors of women's magazines, I sensed that what was most compelling was how to get ahead within the professional hierarchy. Religion, family, all these other things are only the afterthoughts of the woman in the business office.

I say this not, heaven forbid, to undermine the achievements of the feminist movement, but to see it in its larger economic scope and what it is doing to many women. In other words, there is a monolithic value system in the United States, defined in economic and professional terms, and it would be fine if it weren't so single-minded. In Israel, on the other hand, as Lotte Salzberger and Dafna Izraeli indicated, we have a multi-value system. We have to consider family values, national values, religious values, as well as feminist values.

Declarations and sloganeering are necessary, I suppose, but we are avoiding the real subject that we should be talking about, namely, the quality of life in Israel. We haven't talked about the problems of the Sephardic women, perhaps half the women of this country. We haven't talked about the fact that children come home from school at 1 P.M. We haven't talked of the fact that when men are away at war, you polarize the roles—man fights and woman waits. We are not talking

about the quality of life and I would hope that we do.

**Yael Dayan Sion:** I must begin by declaring that I am not a feminist and that I appear here as some kind of devil's advocate. I have the feeling, though, that I represent, if not perhaps the majority, then a large section of Israeli women.

Feminism is not at the top of our program. It is true what Rivka Bar-Yosef said last night, that priorities in Israel are such that the fight for women's rights is low on the scale. I really feel, as do many women in this country, that we have other things to fight for. I've got all the space I want, in my party, in the political system, to fight for the things that I consider top priorities for the State of Israel, whether it is survival, or the shape of our society, and so on. Incidentally, all those in Israel who speak out for feminism, it seems to me, speak with an American accent. You are Israelis whose origins are in America. You are certainly welcome here, but we don't speak the same language. Perhaps I'm still at the zero stage; perhaps I take my equality for granted.

I think the main issue here is expressed in the title of this conference—"Woman as Jew, Jew as Woman." I don't know what "Jew as Woman" means, but "Woman as Jew" is another matter and I hope that by the end of our discussion, I will have an answer to this question. For me, you see, Jewishness is not optional. I live in Israel, I was born Jewish. I take this for granted, as I do my femininity. So, if at the end of our three days together, someone will make it clear to me what makes me different as a Jewish woman from any kind of other woman, I would be grateful.

I am not breaking away from the Jewish tradition. I celebrate the festivals, even though I'm not observant, and I bring up my children to know the Jewish heritage. I know the Bible by heart. My language is Hebrew, etc., etc. Is this what it means to be a Jew? Or do we go on to a further stage and say that we have a mission to spread our Jewish values? If that is the case, it does not relate to being a Jewish woman or a Jewish man, but to the civilization (or burden, or gift) that we have been given and which we are supposed to propagate—be it Einstein, Marx, Freud, or whatever. If we believe in this—I myself am not altogether clear about the chosen people idea—then our mission is to spearhead the solving of world problems, not just feminist problems.

**NITZA SHAPIRO-LIBAI:** Let me say, first of all, that I'm an Israeli-born feminist—no import—born here, educated here, living here all my life, born with the feeling of a feminist and growing up with that. The idea that feminism in Israel is an import is un-

true for myself as for very many colleagues of mine. Otherwise, I'm a lawyer, I teach in the university, I'm a human rights activist, and I served for three and a half years as advisor to the Prime Minister on the status of women.

Last week, a woman came to see me. She said: I'm working, my husband is incapable of working at the moment, and he beats me because he feels he is being treated like the wife in the family, like a woman. What does that mean? It means that being a woman is considered an inferior status. This, I submit, is the true issue we are facing in Israel, in the United States, in India, in Egypt, everywhere. Emphases may be different, strategies may be different, but wherever we are, women are still occupying an inferior status. It shows in the family, in the workplace, in politics, and in religious law. Our goal still is to attain equality. Everything is related to that.

It is, of course, a nice advantage to hold the upper hand and men will not, out of their free will or benevolence or liberalism, give up their superior position. Indeed, a recent study we conducted showed that educated men, who usually support human-rights causes and all sorts of liberal positions, do not hold the same attitudes on the issue of the status of women. Education and liberalism seem to stop at home, where it is very convenient for the man to have as a wife a second-class person.

My perception is that no man will surrender his advantage, either in politics, or in the workplace, or in the family. The only way to go about it is to have power. It's a battle of classes, I'm sorry to say. If we are not strong, and we don't have power, and we don't organize, I don't think we will win any battle. What I'm really calling for is for women to organize as a power that will force a change.

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*The session concluded with a decision to draw up a statement noting Israeli feminist concerns, for release to the Israeli press and addressed to the politicians who, following the inconclusive national elections held only a few days before in Israel, were at the time engaged in the deliberations that ultimately resulted in the present coalition government. After some discussion, it was agreed that TAMAR ESHEL (a former Alignment member of the Knesset) and Yael Rom (a Likud member of the Haifa City Council), representing the two major parties, would head a committee to draft the statement, for adoption by the Dialogue participants at a later session.*

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Tuesday afternoon, July 31, 1984

## Session 3: Women in the Work Place

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*The session was chaired by VIRGINIA SNITOW, founder and chair of U.S./Israel Women to Women and an honorary vice president of the American Jewish Congress, who introduced the two speakers of the afternoon: CYNTHIA FUCHS EPSTEIN,*

*a professor in the Department of Sociology of the Graduate Center of the City University of New York; and DAFNA IZRAELI, a senior lecturer in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology of Bar Ilan University in Tel Aviv.*

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Cynthia Fuchs Epstein

### Working Women in the United States

**B**ETTY FRIEDAN and Rivka Bar-Yosef yesterday stirred our imaginations with their keen analysis of the issues of women as Jews and Jews as women in our two societies. Today I wish to talk of the place and position of women in the work force — a frontier with physical boundaries and boundaries of the spirit; a place where reality and myth compete for the perception of men and women, where gatekeepers have not only tried and succeeded to guard the boundaries of the important domains but have been effective gatekeepers of ideas affecting the reasoning of women and men to keep them in their place. Yet, there is a David and Goliath story to be told about the revolt of the subjugated and I hope to convey some of it in the limited time I have. The position of women in the paid work force in the United States has been a subject of much attention and dispute. However, one thing stands out clearly and that is the extent to which their profile as paid workers has changed in the last decade, and the extent to which they have overcome and negated stereotypical views of their abilities to do work long excluded to them — namely the preferred and remunerative jobs in skilled crafts, business, and the professions.

The division of labor in any society is usually marked by assignment of work to people based on both their general qualities, such as membership in a particular age or sex group (or sometimes national or ethnic group), and specific qualities of ability and talent. Unfortunately, ability and talent is often of secondary priority, and furthermore, as the economist Lester Thurow has pointed out, much competence in the workplace is acquired on the job. If prejudice keeps certain groups from apprenticeship programs or on-the-job training, then they will not develop the know-how necessary to accomplish the task.

Jewish women, like Jewish men, have suffered in the past from discriminatory practices which have limited their participation in the work force in certain industries and spheres of work. As you all know, Jewish women were highly represented in the needle trades during the early years of heavy immigration at the turn of the century. But Jewish men ran sweat shops in which Jewish women worked; some even organized

the prostitution of Jewish girls (see *The Mamie Papers*). Though many women were active in the drive to unionize this industry, they never rose to leadership in the unions, which were male-dominated. Similarly, as the Jews began to prosper in the United States and as their strivings became more middle-class-oriented, Jewish women flocked into teaching as their brothers flocked into medicine and law as a way of aspiring upward. Jewish women were not encouraged to go into the prestigious professions any more than Gentile women were, and indeed, like them, faced barriers at the level of training and practice.

We do not have much information on those Jews who remained poor and whose education was limited. Many of them were Orthodox in early periods and both their attitudes and family lives were traditional, requiring the woman to stay home and rear their large families. However, the demography of the Jews is that they generally have had a low birth rate which theoretically would have permitted their women to enter paid employment should they wish. Of course, many Jewish women worked in countless ways — as did other women, in family businesses, running boarding homes and so on — although until recently they were not counted among the ranks of the employed. They also did not count themselves.

Nevertheless, although there were clear exceptions, prejudice against women was as characteristic of the Jewish community as it was in any Gentile community and Jewish women, like others, found limited opportunity in the world of work. A 1970s study of Jews shows that 32 percent of Jewish men are professionals compared with 14 percent of U.S. men and 15 percent of Israeli men; managers and administrators account for 39 percent of U.S. Jewish men, 13 percent of U.S. men, and 5 percent of Israeli men. But the largest occupational grouping for American Jewish women was clerical work — 42 percent in a study in 1973.

Banking and insurance, even the practice of medicine and law in certain kinds of firms and kinds of practices, only opened up to Jews after World War II. Yet Jewish women suffered from the double discrimination of not only holding one

discredited status, Jew, but that of woman. Thus they suffered discrimination in the society at large, but they also suffered discrimination in the newly developing parallel work communities that Jewish men were creating. Jewish banking firms and law firms did not hire women to any greater extent than did Gentile firms.

**H**owever, Jewish women were certainly responding to the social forces that were moving women into the work force in greater numbers in the last two decades, and beyond that, were especially active in the social movements which had an impact on the legislative and judicial actions that were instrumental in accomplishing greater equality for women in the work force.

First of all, they were active in both the civil-rights movements of the 60s and in the youth movements on the campuses, which were insisting on new equality for blacks and later women. This has carried through to the present day. A study of college freshmen shows Jewish women identify themselves as more liberal than Jewish men or other men and women, although on specific issues such as liberalization of divorce laws and abortion rights they are about the same and much higher than non-Jews. All women involved in these movements were somewhat disenchanted with their treatment by the men in them and their consciousness was raised as they perceived that they were not regarded as true partners in the search for equality for other groups.

Some of these women became radicalized and engaged in extremist behavior (like Kathy Boudin and Judy Clark), but most began to work within the system. Furthermore, a great deal of sober, sophisticated effort was mobilized by women (and men) through the women's rights project of the ACLU and the women in the law schools at New York and Columbia Universities. Many Jewish women were involved in the fight to implement the newly enacted 1964 Civil Rights Act that banned discrimination on the basis of race, age, class, ethnic background, and sex. Women in this room were among those who marched and testified and litigated to bring about equal legal rights. Ruth Bader Ginsburg, now a Federal Court Judge in the Washington, D.C., Circuit Court, was involved in this project, as was Harriet Raab of the Columbia Law School. (Her father-in-law is now Ambassador to Italy and was a prominent partner in a large Wall Street firm with one of the better records on women than many others.) Furthermore, Ruth Ginsburg argued many of the important rights cases before the U.S. Supreme Court.

As backdrop to this somewhat revolutionary behavior, was the woman's movement which, of course, was founded by Betty Friedan and a cluster of active women from quite diverse backgrounds. Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963, one year before the passage of the Civil Rights Act, served much as Tom Paine's writing did for the American Revolution — to identify women's dissatisfaction with limited opportunities in all spheres of work and decision-making valued in the society. In 1966 Friedan founded the National Organization for Women, which began to press for im-

plementation of the Civil Rights Act and engaged in educational and legal activity on behalf of women's rights.

One has to look at the broad outline of change in American society to see how Jewish women fared and also how all women fared. Between 1960 and 1980 more was done to improve the position of women than for forty or fifty years before. Both world wars certainly opened some opportunity for women in non-traditional jobs, but at the close of each war, women were pressured and directed to turn them over to returning veterans. Research has shown that contrary to popular belief, most women were not eager to do this but they were laid off from jobs, having little seniority and not being able to take advantage of special veterans' preference rules.

Nevertheless, in 1960, some fifteen years after the surge that came in the 40s, women were about a third of the nation's work force — approximately 23 million. But their current number is close to 50 million, representing 45 percent of all workers. Over the past twenty years, the number of employed males increased by about 27 percent while the number of employed females rose by three times that rate. That these changes are extensive and pervasive is not only the perception of feminists. In a soon-to-be published book of the Conference Board, a private business research organization in New York, Dr. Fabian Linden and Dr. Rina Maimon have written: "The tidal wave of women entering the nation's labor force has caused extensive psychological, social and economic changes in the way we live."

For one thing, the dramatic increase in the number of working women has improved the finances of millions of families. Women's paychecks have catapulted families in the U.S. from middle-class status to more prosperous brackets and are responsible for moving many working-class families into the middle class. Only 20 years ago, fewer than 13 million families (28 percent) had incomes of over \$25,000 (in today's prices); currently, that bracket includes 29 million (or over 46 percent of all families).

The labor-force participation of all women has risen dramatically over the years. Among the relatively young the change has been most sharp. Currently, more than two out of every three adult women under thirty work, compared with two out of every five in 1960.

As might be anticipated, there are some large differences in the proportion of women who work according to marital status. Single, separated, and divorced women are more likely to be earning a paycheck, than those living with husbands and caring for children. But of all working women, 55 percent are living with husbands. There are no statistics on Jewish women in the work force and it is hard to extrapolate their position because of the contradictory nature of the ways in which various factors correlate. For example, they are well educated, which should mean that they are likely to be in the labor force. Seventy percent of women college graduates are job holders. However, since Jews divorce one half as much as other Americans, they are more likely to be in intact families and therefore less likely to work — at least while children are small. Since educated women are likely to have husbands in the professions, this further reduces their likelihood of work-

force activity. However, like others they are also marrying later, which increases their likelihood of working and establishing a career before having children.

But the study of Jewish college freshmen that I mentioned earlier gave some hints; like other women, Jewish women now can be found in occupations in which they were barely represented at all, even a decade ago. For example, there has been a notable growth of academic and career expectations among Jewish women. Six times as many Jewish women planned to study for advanced degrees in 1980 as in 1969. Only 1 percent wished to be teachers in 1980 — a traditional women's field — although 12 percent did in 1969. And more Jewish women than Jewish men were choosing to be lawyers in 1980. Jewish women's interest in business careers also went up, from 2 percent to 9 percent; and medicine, from 2 percent to 6 percent. In law, for example, a field which I have studied over the past 15 years, Jewish women were following a pattern of women countrywide. The women's proportion rose from 2 percent of the profession in 1965 to over 14 percent today, and they now account for 38 percent of the students in law schools. A similar increase has occurred in medicine. Law is of particular interest because a legal career has also been a credential for careers in government, political office, and business, and one could account for the poor representation of women in the higher echelons merely by the fact that they were effectively barred from becoming lawyers.

I feel it is important to think of the exclusion of women from certain spheres as precisely that — exclusion — and not an expression of their choices, an interpretation offered by many economists and other social analysts. My work on women and the professions has shown just how powerful these forces of exclusion were, maintaining low quotas on women in professional and business schools and requiring higher standards of aptitude and performance from them. I would like to point out, however, when affirmative-action programs required that women be hired, and legal suits broke down the barriers to their entrance to training, standards were never compromised and women have competed with men, using *exactly the same standards*, tests, and so on. In fact, the research shows that when the barriers broke down and women saw that they might have opportunity in spheres of work in which they had no chance to work before, they also manifested quite different patterns of motivation and aspiration, and even different kinds of interests. First of all, in spite of their early socialization for chosen "male" professions, of the class of 1971, the same proportion of Jewish women (11 percent) were in law as in teaching in 1980 — and Jewish women exceeded Jewish men by 4 percent in their proportion in this profession. But within professions, in law and medicine, women began to choose specialties which were not narrowly conceived of as "women's specialties" (such as trusts and estates work and domestic relations in law; and pediatrics and psychiatry in medicine) and began to choose "male specialties" such as litigation and corporate work (in law) and surgery and internal medicine. They have also become experts in these areas.

In my study of women lawyers (*Women in Law*, 1981), I sought to ascertain whether once women were admitted to the professions, did they find greater opportunity in the Jewish firms? The answer was, yes. Statistics show that they were made partners earlier and more frequently.

Was it because Jewish men were more liberal than the men in the Gentile firms? A decade earlier women did not find any better opportunity in these firms than they did in Gentile firms. However, the Jewish firms were increasing in size rapidly — even more rapidly than some of the others — and many of the younger partners were probably liberal.

However, women also reported that the tone in the Jewish firms was often more compatible for women. They were warmer, friendlier, and if often paternalistic, more "friendly" in quality than the cool detached manner prevalent in the WASP firms. Furthermore, there was some evidence, although one could not call it truly empirical, that Jewish men were somewhat more used to having strong, competent women around and less unfamiliar with an assertive style in women.

Of course, the exclusion of women followed some of the pattern of Jewish exclusion a generation before. The worst spheres were those with an "old boy" culture, where school and social ties were important conduits to inclusion. Women, like Jewish men before them, started to emerge in fields where *competence* was more important than social ties. Thus women (including a high percentage of Jewish women) moved into law, medicine, and other professions where their high scores on exams indicated their aptitudes; less so in banking and corporate hierarchies where it was more difficult to assess achievement or where achievement was predicated on being shown the ropes by insiders.

Nevertheless, it would be premature to indicate that prejudice has disappeared or that there are no longer barriers to women's employment; or more so, to their promotion up the ladder to the top. I have found that subtle forms of discrimination remain and that they are pervasive in the culture. Dichotomous thinking pervades social thought. Assignment of human traits to male-female categories colors perception of what men and women do. Notions remain that women have different kinds of competence and different emotional styles — though research has consistently eroded the basis of such suppositions. People are committed to the belief in basic differences, internalizing the myths of gatekeepers whose privileges are supported by the maintenance of such distinctions. Feminists and non-feminists alike are affected. In practical-terms business and those parts of professional activities concerned with the economics of the professions, men fear that women are not sufficiently competitive or eager to make money; or not able to bring in business because of their poorer business connections.

To some extent, the prejudices are correct, but this is because distinctions are maintained. Women still are disadvantaged to the extent to which they are isolated in the work world; they are not included in networks of referral and con-

tacts. In the United States, many clubs at which business is conducted and political decisions are made remain barred to women. These include clubs at the grass-roots town level (such as the Lions and Kiwanis — although the Jaycees will be forced by a recent Supreme Court ruling to permit women to join) and at the highest prestige level, such as the Bohemian Club (to which President Reagan belongs) and the Century Club in New York, whose membership includes many leading members of the business, literary, and media worlds (including prominent Jewish men).

These restrictions are not only important for the specific harm they do to women who would be obvious choices for membership were the clubs open to both sexes, but also because they are symbolic expressions of residual antipathy toward the inclusion of women in the power centers of the society, and symbolic also of the remaining perspectives which define women as “others” and “lesser” persons than men. Furthermore, the symbolism which maintains dichotomous conceptual views on the presumed different nature of the sexes contributes to women’s treatment as second class.

One of the most pernicious cultural modes — one that occurs in all societies — is the sex-typing of jobs (meaning that jobs are categorized as male and female), so that essentially men and women operate in different employment markets. Men’s are usually larger and more wide-ranging; women’s are more circumscribed. People argue that these divisions are functional. I would argue that they are only functional for the domineering groups. Men’s may be of all ranks, while women’s are typically of lower ranks. The sex-typing also means that there is cultural definition and cultural approval for the designation and it is difficult for qualified women (or men) to seek employment in a field designated as appropriate for the “other” sex. Actually, men do somewhat better than do women in non-traditional work and have flowed into formerly women’s jobs as telephone operator and office-machine operator more than women have gained access to fields such as plumbing and carpentry. Furthermore, men rise higher in “female” fields such as nursing and home economics than do women in “male” fields such as medicine or law.

Current research has shown that most of the so-called objective interpretations of women’s segregation in the labor market and the wage differentials they suffer, such as their competing time priorities, their lesser commitment to the labor force, their choice to invest less in training, their intermittency, and so on, do not hold much water. Women’s jobs do not seem to respond to market forces — that is, when their skills are in high demand (such as in secretarial work or nursing), their salaries do not go up. Furthermore, men who have intermittent work lives do not suffer the same economic disadvantages as do women. This indicates that a “free market” is not in effect.

Society exists through the use of rules and law. Rules express values. It is almost certainly true that although women would have come into the labor force in the increasing numbers they did irrespective of a change in public policy, anti-

discrimination legislation created more opportunity for them to branch out and do better economically. In this audience, quotas may have a poor name, but in fact, affirmative-action quotas moved employers for the first time to recruit women rather than exclude them, as quotas have been used in the past. In the United States we have found that intervention by government has been of utmost importance in breaking down the



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barriers to women's achievement of equality in the work spheres. Cross-national research done in some of the Socialist countries of Eastern Europe and the Scandinavian countries also bear this out.

I have not mentioned the problems of child-care in this discussion of women's role in the work force. Certainly they are of crucial importance, and the United States does not compare well with other countries in the provision of child-care services to children of families in which the parents work. Furthermore, Americans have not addressed themselves to looking for other kinds of family-friendly provisions, such as flexible work schedules. On the other hand, unlike in Germany or Israel, children in the U.S. go to school for a good part of the work day and do not come home for lunch (which is provided in the school). After-three care is a problem and pre-school care is difficult to obtain. Yet I think it is important to point out that the revolution in opportunity happened in spite of the problems families face in caring for children.

Progress — even for the American women, who perhaps face less sexist behavior than most women of the world — is

far from a linear climb upward. American women are wary today of setbacks created by the Reagan Administration in taking the teeth out of enforcement agencies such as the Equal Economic Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and giving business a clear message that the administration will not press for equal treatment of women with men in the workplace. However, many of the new practices are in place, and new norms have been set which have created a new atmosphere in the country and a new sense that the concept of justice applies to the treatment of women. In addition, of course, the selection of a woman vice-presidential candidate is an indication that Americans are ready to accept women's voices as voices of authority and that women have learned how to utilize political process to attain and maintain power.

Some, but not all, Americans are wary that the strides they have made can be eroded and that often conflicts of interests even within the same groups seem to undermine long-range objectives. However, this is the best time in history to be a woman in some parts of the world — especially in the United States.

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Dafna Izraeli

## Women in the Israeli Labor Force

**M**Y MANDATE is to state common grounds for a discussion of the issues of women in the work place and to that end I have divided my presentation on women in the labor force in Israel into five points.

- 1) The social context of Israeli life, which shapes the decisions that women make about their participation in the labor force and the decisions that employers make about women's employment.

- 2) A brief overview of some of the labor-force trends.

- 3) Some observations on how women in Israel juggle their multiple roles.

- 4) A general evaluation of the situation — the advantages, the gains, and the shortcomings.

- 5) A brief statement of appraisal.

For Americans, owing undoubtedly to the Protestant ethic and the capitalist economy, work is a central institution. The Protestant ethic, however, is not the same as the Jewish ethic, and in Israeli society work does not hold the same importance as it does in American life. This was demonstrated in a recent cross-national study about values. A representative sampling of adults — English, Israelis, and so forth — were asked to rate certain values on a scale from one to six. The value that scored highest among Israelis — 97 percent gave it a five or six — was a secure life. As to the value of work, only 57 percent ranked it five or six, compared to over 90 percent in the English and American samples. Zionist ideology earlier in the

century sought to inculcate the value of physical work, but apparently with limited success.

The feminist movement has stressed that one of women's major problems was their economic dependence on men; if women could achieve economic independence, this would pave the way for equal opportunity. Within the Israeli structure, this is probably less true. Women may have greater economic independence here, but there are other factors in the society that militate against their gaining full equality. In America, for instance, the élites are drawn primarily from the class of managers of large corporations. In Israel, from the 1930s to the 1970s, the élites were to be found in the political parties, especially in the Histadrut and the government sectors of the economy. In recent years, this has broadened to include the army. Women in Israel have been excluded from the centers of power of both the political parties and the army. They are separated into what I call the female economy. The human capital resources that they accumulate are not perceived as transferable into the regular economy. One could say that the army and the political party are the equivalent of those male clubs in the United States which women do not enter, although they are not excluded by law.

It has been suggested that perhaps one of the reasons why Israeli women put so much emphasis and importance on motherhood is because it is the major source of power in a society which excludes women from high positions in politics, the

army, and other centers of power. In a country that values family so highly, being a mother is a source of legitimacy for women.

Consider, for example, the two main organizations that conducted demonstrations against the Lebanese war. One of these, Shalom Achshav (Peace Now), was run by generals. There were a lot of women in the movement, licking stamps, phoning, organizing, doing other important work, but all behind the scenes. The spokesmen for the organization were exclusively the generals. On the other hand, the organization that was officially called Parents Against Silence was more often referred to as Mothers Against Silence. Motherhood, it seems, conferred on women the right to public protest. (Even so, when these women went to members of the Knesset to present their case, they were subject to the accusation that their views had no value since, as mothers, they were reacting in an emotional and irrational manner.)

Another aspect of the social context, relevant to our concern, is the centrality of the family in Israeli society, especially the woman's role. It is the woman's responsibility to look after the family, tend the children, and incidentally, also to preserve the marriage. It should be noted that in Israel the woman who runs the family not only has an expressive role to play, but also a highly instrumental one. She is busy doing what I have called boundary-planning work, linking the family to the community, delivering all the necessary services to the family. This even applies to working mothers. I once did a kindergarten survey and found that, on the average, a working woman who has a child in kindergarten has to miss one day a month from her job. There are the parties, the holidays, the birthdays, guard duty, going along on the annual trip, not to speak of the child getting sick. It came out to at least ten working days during the year.

Another circumstance which helps Israeli women to make the decisions they do about work, is the short school day in this country. In first grade children go to school until 12 o'clock, in second grade until 12:15, and by grades six to seven, it extends to 1:30. In Israel the main meal is lunch, so that a woman often finds herself serving lunch until goodness knows when in the afternoon.

These, then, are some aspects of the social context within which Israeli women make decisions about their participation in the labor force.

**M**y next point has to do with some of the trends to be noted regarding women and work in Israel. Despite what I have just described, what has happened in this country is almost miraculous. In the last fifteen years, as in the United States, there has been a very impressive growth in the number of women in the labor force and in the proportion of women of the total labor force. There were years in the 1970s when women constituted over 70 percent of the net increase in labor-force participation. In other words, the economy was thirsty for new workers, and the major supply of new workers were women. Most of those who entered the labor force in the 70s were married women.

A word about marriage in Israel would seem to be in order here. There is a very high marital rate in this country, higher than in the United States. Furthermore, the marital age has not changed significantly in the last fifteen years; it is still very low, something between 21 and 23. Nor do women postpone having children. As a matter of fact, it is generally perceived that the university years are a great time to have children, because then your schedule is more flexible; you can arrange your study hours on the day when you have a mother's helper at home, or your husband is not working, etc. Something like 65 percent of the women who graduate from university are already mothers of young children.

Taking this particular background into account — underrated marriage, early motherhood, and an average family of 2.9 children — let us now look at the changes in Israel regarding participation in the labor market. The major growth has been among married women in the age bracket of 25 to 34, the child-bearing years. Just to give you some statistics — these come from a recent study by Yohanan Peres, *The Working Mother in Israel* — in the 1970s, 25 percent of the women ages 25–34 were in the labor market. By 1980, the figure was 50 percent. This marked increase was also true for women with children, unlike the United States. In Israel the presence of children does not significantly affect women's participation in the labor force. Also, unlike the United States, the age of the children is not a factor. In the United States, for every additional year under seven, the proportion of women in the labor force drops; in Israel, it is from two years and under. This may be because of the extensive services, whereby 57 percent of the two-year-olds, 89 percent of the three-year-olds, and 97 percent of the four-year-olds are in some kind of kindergarten program. Furthermore, the dip has also disappeared in Israel, so that women entering the labor force today have a continued commitment and do not move in and out, which is an important condition for accepting high-career jobs.

**A**nother point to be taken into consideration is the rate of participation in the labor force among women of European-American origin, both first and second generation, who have a higher rate than women from Asian and African countries. However, the gap is getting smaller. Also, it is coming to be understood that the explanation for the gap is not due to the difference of mentality or culture or attitudes, but the difference in education. When you control for education, the differences between ethnic groups disappear. The problem, therefore, is that certain ethnic groups in Israel have less access to education, with the consequence that not only do we have sex segregation of occupations, but also ethnic segregation, with the European-American women to be found in the academic-professional occupations, and the Asian-African immigrations concentrated in the lower-status occupations.

Thus, the best predictor of entry into the labor market in Israel is education. An educated woman is in the labor market; 78 percent of women with university education are working or looking for jobs, which is the definition of labor-force participation. This compares with 76 percent among men. Among

women with only a high-school education, and with a child two years or under at home, 63 percent are in the labor force. I think this is all very impressive, even by American standards, particularly the fact that the family is not an inhibitor to the same extent of labor-force participation as it is in the United States.

An interesting point that should be noted is that among academic and professional women, 47 percent work part-time, an even higher ratio than among the less educated. The major reason for this is opportunity. Industry has been highly unresponsive to flexible work schedules, while the academic, administrative, and clerical fields have proven more responsive. Therefore, women who have more education have greater opportunity to work part-time, which may also explain the strong correlation between labor-force participation and level of education.

A word now about women's selection of occupations. In Israel, there is definitely a selection on the basis of the following consideration: to what extent will the women be allowed to control their time. For women, the hours of work are inevitably very important; for men, less so. Women therefore select occupations on the basis of the extent to which they can synchronize their work schedule with the family schedule. They say that the two best things about teaching are July and August. Thus you find women entering the teaching profession or other occupations that have flexible schedules. Indeed, there is an interactive effect here, because occupations which are highly dependent on female labor are more flexible and more responsive to female schedules in order to attract females.

Within the occupations themselves, when women go to high-commitment jobs, they choose specializations or locales that give them control over their time. Thus, the major employers of the new women's labor force have been the civil service and, as in America, the legal profession, which has changed from a highly masculine into a balanced occupation.

One of the consequences of this juggling between home and work is that the occupational structure in Israel has become highly segregated, more so than in the United States. One of every two women in Israel is either a teacher, a nurse, a social worker, a clerical worker, a secretary, or in a related occupation. This is so primarily because of the opportunities that are available for coping with both the family and work. In addition to the various child-care services, 80 percent of the women who are in the labor force claim that they use some kind of paid domestic help, usually on a part-time basis.

**H**ow do we evaluate the situation? What are the gains, what are the shortcomings? With respect to gains, I think that Israel has to its credit the fact that it has enabled women to combine a family life with entry into the work force. Studies show that married women who are employed are more satisfied with the quality of their married lives than women who are not employed. There are also studies that indicate that men, too, feel more confident or have a better self-image when their wives are employed than when they are not.

Another gain has been the response of the Israeli labor market to greater flexibility in many of the occupations, enabling women who wish to combine family and work entry into the labor market on a part-time basis. A further gain is in the field of social policy, where women as mothers have achieved a great deal of protective legislation. In Israel women receive maternity leave with pay, and sick leave with pay even when other members of the family are sick. A woman cannot be fired on account of pregnancy, and so forth.

On the negative side, we can note that only those occupations which have been dependent on women's labor have been really flexible. The others, which enjoy a sufficient supply of the preferred kind of labor, have been much less willing to be flexible in their work schedules, thus precluding women from taking these jobs.

Social policy, too, has been criticized for reinforcing the image of the woman as the upholder of the family. There are some who decry this as regressive and claim that these rights should be parental rights and not women's rights alone. According to this view, the laws which in their time were regarded as highly advanced have today obviously changed in their value and need to be reconsidered.

Another shortcoming is that women in Israel do not have equal opportunity for mobility in the labor market. They have perhaps equal opportunity to enter the work force, but they do not have equal opportunity to maximize their abilities and to actualize their professional or personal potentials. Nor does the economy get maximum benefit from them, because women keep a low profile and shy away from high-commitment jobs.

Here we get another interactive effect. Every employer who has a woman employee who says, "I don't want to be a manager, I can't do it because of my kids," does not want to hire women with children. In other words, the advantages that working women have gained also affect employers' perceptions of women as primarily mothers who will be absent when their children are sick, and who therefore are less reliable investments. (I recall a story told to me by Mrs. Liza Rothbard, who is vice president of the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange. One of her supervisors, a woman, was absent for a few days. When she returned, Mrs. Rothbard asked her why, and the supervisor answered, "My son was sick." "Well, what's wrong?" Mrs. Rothbard replied. "Couldn't your husband take care of him?" "My husband!" she exclaimed. "He works!")

It is this need to juggle home and work which makes women appear less attractive to Israeli employers. On the other hand, the high rate of mobilization of men, the lengthy army service, thirty to sixty days a year, has also made men somewhat less attractive. Women today, especially if they don't have small children, seem like the preferred investment in many cases, compared to the havoc created by a country that has to take its men out of the economy so often.

A further negative point is the fact that legislation in Israel has not always been effective. Laws are passed, but often they don't result in changes. There has been a law on the books since 1964 mandating equal pay. But there has been only one case from 1964 to 1984 in which equal pay was challenged in

the courts. The woman won, but that was still a single case. In other words, if a law is not used, it is not effective — and Israeli laws have not proved effective.

Finally, to conclude the negative tabulation, women in Israel have entered the labor market within what has remained an essentially traditional role structure, ideology, and value system. Consequently, women have not really established their right to work. In a recent, startling survey that appeared in the Na'amat magazine, respondents were asked: In a case of a man or a woman, where one of them has to be fired, and each has a spouse that can support him or her, who should be fired? Over 70 percent replied that the woman should be the one fired. Other studies indicate that the majority of men and women say they prefer men as supervisors, or even as colleagues at work. In other words, these kinds of traditional stereotypes persist, even though women enter into the labor market.

**W**hat are the prospects? In my estimation, we will continue to see incremental improvements of the kind that we have had up to now — patchwork progress, a bit of change in the tax law, a bit of change in this or that law, a few more women in child services, depending on the economy. I do not see that we will have a major transformation as occurred in the United States, and for three reasons.

The first is the fact that the level of dissatisfaction, which is necessary for the beginnings of a movement, is not very high in Israel. Many women feel pleased at the fact that they can combine work and family and are grateful to their husbands for letting them both work and take care of the family.

Second, I think that women in this country have not been demeaned in the same way as in the United States. Women in Israel have not been treated generally as sex objects, the kind of degradation which really gets your blood boiling and can serve as a mobilizing force. I think, too, that there is not a strong feeling of injustice here on the part of most women. They believe strongly that they make the choices themselves, whether to stay home and take care of the children, or to work part-time or full time.

The third reason why I do not think that there will be many changes is that Israel generally has a low-level sense of political efficacy. People on the whole do not believe that if they organize they can really effect major changes. In general, we have a certain political apathy about issues.

Finally, let me admit that when I came to the first planning meeting of the Dialogue and was told that the title suggested from America was "Woman as Jew, Jew as Woman: An Urgent Inquiry," I laughed to myself. There's nothing urgent about women in this country, I thought. But I must admit that I have changed my mind. I think that we are here today at a very crucial time, that these days are urgent for women as Jews and Jews as women, because in the next few days we may be sold down the river as government coalitions are being formed — and if a recession really takes hold in the country and women's right to work has not been fully established or secured, the women may lose many of the gains. These are realistic possi-

bilities. I therefore hope that out of this Dialogue will also come some kind of statement in relation to the urgency of these matters.

*Following these presentations, the assemblage broke up into several smaller discussion groups. In the evening the Dialogue participants attended a theatrical performance, "Beruriah," produced by the Jerusalem Drama Workshop.*

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Robert Gordis, Editor

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Wednesday morning, August 1, 1984

## Session 4: Women in the Family

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*The session was chaired by JUDITH BUBER AGASSI, an Israeli sociologist, who introduced the two speakers: BLU GREENBERG, author of On Women and Judaism: The View*

*from Tradition; and MICHAL PALGI, a member of Kibbutz Ner David, serving as head of research of the Social Research Institute of the Kibbutz.*

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Blu Greenberg

### Feminism and Family: A Time of Transition

**B**Y COINCIDENCE, four years ago in Jerusalem, I happened to find myself in this very building. My husband and I had come to view the showing by a Japanese architect of his model for a Holocaust memorial. As we entered the Van Leer Foundation, we noticed a lone figure down the corridor, gazing at some pictures on the wall and simultaneously rocking a baby stroller. As we approached, we immediately recognized him — a long-time friend from the U.S., a young man in his early thirties, a professor at an Ivy League college, a man I would, without hesitation, label an ardent feminist. “What are you doing here?” we asked. “Sara [his wife, a student of architecture] is inside viewing the model, so I’m baby-sitting.” “No you’re not,” I replied with a laugh. “Of course I am,” he protested. “Didn’t you know we had a little daughter?” I said, “Sure we know. It’s just that fathers don’t baby-sit for their own children!”

I ask you: Have you ever heard a woman say of her own children, “I’m baby-sitting?” Indeed, we live in a time of transition — and the signs are unmistakably good.

While there are tasks of perception and of reconditioning, as well as a sizeable agenda to realize regarding men and women and family roles, there has been enormous progress during these last two decades since *The Feminine Mystique* was first published. What’s more, we all know that the process of moving toward equity in family relationships is irreversible.

If I had to describe in ten words or less the prevailing situation, I would say, “Everything and its opposite is possible.” There are no longer iron-clad rules regarding nurturing, working, breadwinning, and the construction of intimate relationships. The combinations and choices are endless. Nor is the variety merely in theoretical constructs; there are a thousand accessible models — one’s cousin, one’s neighbor, one’s colleague, the couple on TV or in the family-style page of the local newspaper. Indeed, the media are now careful to project the new images — a female banker coming home in her three-piece suit and her husband stirring the pasta sauce. Now men have the same privilege women once had, of uttering inanities about ring-around-the-collar or comparing one toilet-bowl

cleanser to another. In a perverse sort of way, this is progress.

Jews are like other Americans, only more so. There are very limited statistics about the American Jewish family, and what we have is outdated — the last major survey was completed in 1972 — but many smaller-scale studies support the popularly held notion, if only more so. Jewish women have combined the Jewish value of higher education with the feminist principle of self-actualization and have come up with a program of higher-status career choices that inevitably affect their choices and roles in family life.

In the 1982 graduating class of Barnard College (an all-women’s school), the overwhelming majority of Jewish graduates were continuing on to graduate school; law, business, and medicine were the primary choices. Similarly, just as the most significant impact of the women’s movement has been the full-scale entry of mothers of young children to the workplace, so too the American Jewish family. There is no longer a stigma attached to young mothers leaving home for the workplace, not even in the most insulated observant communities. Board the subway in Boro Park in Brooklyn — an Orthodox enclave — at 8:00 A.M., and you will see hundreds of women of childbearing age riding to work in Manhattan. (There is even a *mechitzah* — the partition separating men and women — on the bus taking Hasidim to and from suburban Monsey and workplaces in Manhattan every morning and evening.)

In a recent survey of two modern Orthodox day schools in New York City, 75 percent of the mothers were either in the paid labor force or in graduate school, a higher percentage than for the general U.S. population. Jewish women work for all the same reasons men do — for economic gain and emotional fulfillment.

It goes without saying that women and careers have had a major impact on the Jewish family and community — on men’s family roles, on children, on demographics, on Jewish institutions and systems, on the elderly. The revolution is so pervasive in the Jewish community that we have not yet begun to assess its impact. Meanwhile, Jewish women are not waiting. There are significant models of Jewish men and women

sharing breadwinning and nurturing roles. Wait at the entrance of the day-care center and you will see as many fathers as mothers delivering and gathering their children. Even synagogue sisterhoods, as famous for their cookbooks as for their good works, now put out a basic cookbook for men.

Moreover, the other basic gifts of feminism accrue to Jewish women as to all other women — the ability to choose whether or not to have children, when and how many, a woman's sense of economic independence outside of marriage, and consequently, the option to remain married or not to marry at all. Jewish women benefit from individual states' joint-property laws at the dissolution of a marriage.

Now if I were not a Jewishly oriented feminist, I would now turn my attention to the remaining agenda for women's equity in family roles — child care, pay equity, the feminization of poverty, etc. — and then take my seat. But I am a feminist informed by Jewish values and much taken up with matters of Jewish life and vitality, Jewish continuity and survival, so I must examine the issue not only from inside out but from outside in, from a broad view of the American Jewish family as we find it today.

The larger picture is not a pretty one. The American Jewish family takes on the full coloration of the culture in which it is grounded. Americans live in a divorce culture, one that is self-reinforcing. The U.S. rate of divorce is given at 50 percent, which means that for every four couples married in 1984, only two will still be married in 1994. For Jews, the rate is somewhat lower, with individual city surveys clustering around 35 percent. Similarly, the number of Jewish children under the age of 18 living in single-parent homes also cluster around 33 percent.

In a Boston survey — Boston is not a typical city, but it is often considered a forerunner of Jewish population trends — in the decade between 1965 and 1975, the percentage of adult Jewish marrieds declined from 73 to 56 percent; the percentage of those between ages 21 and 29 not married rose from 42 percent to 58 percent; and the overall population of singles (never married) rose from 14 to 32 percent.

Except for the very traditional sectors of the community, in which almost as a reaction the marriages are younger and younger each year, Jewish women and men tend to marry later and have fewer children. American Jews suffer not from Zero Population Growth but from No Population Growth, with a birthrate of 1.6 — a precipitous drop over the last two decades — although demographics have recently shown that the rate is now stable, at well below replacement levels.

Unlike previous generations, where immigration shored up the Jewish community, the two remaining sources of immigration are of little consequence: Russian immigration has all but dried up; and the primary source, Israeli emigrants, is like borrowing from Peter to pay Paul. Furthermore, the American sexual revolution has undermined the traditional structure of the Jewish family. While Jews seem not as ready formally to accept current broad definitions of family, including homosexual families and other "intimate" living arrangements, these prototype families are by no means unknown in American Jewish life. Finally, the intermarriage rate is such that one

of every three American Jews marries a non-Jew, with the significant rise in the last decade of female outmarriage.

All this, of course, is cause for concern, for the Jewish family is the basic and central institution of Jewish survival. Now I know that divorce in many instances is the better solution, particularly for women previously locked into an abusive marriage because of economic dependence. And I know that marriage is not for everyone, and that it is a great freedom to decide whether or not to have children. But as a Jew I also know that the community and its institutions cannot survive with a divorce rate of 40 or 50 percent, and a population growth below replacement levels. Jews, particularly after the Holocaust, have a different set of global concerns, and the stable, reproductive family is one of them. This is not an attack on women, as some have interpreted it to be, to keep them barefoot and pregnant. It is a reality that you need a critical mass to survive, to thrive.

So one is forced to ask the next two questions, taking the risk that we might not like the answers at all:

1) Is there a relationship between the new freedoms and new access for women; between the restructuring of roles for women and men in family life; between the long-awaited ethical opportunities for women to enter the mainstream into all sectors of societal life — between all that, and the vulnerability and dissolution of Jewish family life as we have known it? Conversely, was the confinement of women to family roles only the price we paid for stability and continuity?

2) Secondly, if there is a relationship, how shall we respond? Committed as we are to the principle of equality, should we admit that the traditional definition of family no longer works for the majority of adults, and therefore, we must scrap its primary emphasis? Conversely, if a relationship exists, should we apply brakes on feminist pursuits and say that feminism is a good principle but not a good practice at this point in history?

A good Jewish answer to both questions: yes and no.

Let us return to the first question. Of course feminism is not responsible for problems of the family. On the contrary, the principle of equality can only shape and strengthen a marriage relationship. Moreover, at the top of the feminist agenda is day care, surely a symbol that women need not make either-or choices.

And yet, it surely must also be said that in this revolutionary, transitory period there are some negative side effects on family; or more accurately, the women's movement has catalyzed the corrosive forces on family life. What are these negative effects?

I note a negation of self-actualization in place of self-transcendence; career fulfillment as more compelling and exciting than family satisfaction; a value on independence rather than interdependence in constructing human relationships. Feminism did not create these social priorities, but it has exacerbated them. Feminism is not to be blamed or held responsible, but neither can Jewish feminists ignore connections. There is a significant correlation of higher-status careers and

divorce. There is a great rise in female-initiated divorce in the last decade and the fact that while women cannot have children all by themselves, they are primarily the ones who decide whether to have them or not. If we care about Judaism as we care about feminism, we have to confront these facts squarely. To put our heads in the sand, to ignore any connections, for whatever reasons, is forever to elude solutions. Purists are not the ones who solve persisting problems in life. There is a tension between careerism for women and the Jewish family and we can make it a creative tension if we look it squarely in the face. If we talk superficially about autonomy of self and survival of people without acknowledging the conflict, we create a situation of cognitive dissonance and we force some people into either/or positions. The truth is that many young, well-educated, strongly motivated women are bewildered and are having a hard time sorting it all out.

Now for the second question: Given the fact that a relationship does exist — and it is not all positive — how must we respond? Feminism is a just, ethical, and long overdue prophetic movement and we could no sooner give it up than give up life itself. Judaism is a familistic religion and the family unit has worked for the Jewish people all these generations. So they must coexist as orders of high priority for Jewish men and women.

Where inequity, hierarchy, or discrimination exist in Jewish family structures they must be swiftly abolished — through the political means in which the women's liberation movement is well versed. Where feminist values of equality exacerbate Jewish family stability, they must be tempered and redefined. In other words, we must exchange agendas.

**W**hat should the Jewish survival-oriented feminist agenda look like? A short list:

1) Acknowledge that a primary model does exist: a family, with two parents of the opposite sex, in a stable and enduring relationship nurturing children at replacement levels. That is the optimal model. It does not mean that everyone who falls outside of this model is a pariah or outcast. It simply means that in the long view of community and history and peoplehood, not everything is equal to everything else. One must continually be sensitive so as not to read out or diminish those who don't fit the model; even to continually ask the question of how to do this will keep us on our toes. But I am convinced that Jewish feminism must build this primary model into the basic structure of feminism, because it affects in subtle and not so subtle ways the way we order our priorities, the way we speak to others, the valence we bring to feminist enterprises, consciousness-raising groups, the message we communicate to our children.

2) Defining equality in family life is more difficult than defining it in the workplace or the political sphere. I believe it is of value to define equality in family life in terms of "cognitive equality," the perception of partners as equals at the core of the relationship. Cognitive equality allows for role distinctiveness as well as role identity. It allows for a certain flexibility that is appropriate to the different stages of life we all go

through, finite periods of apparent inequity in status and function, simply because life is so arranged. Cognitive equality is a more serene base on which to construct a relationship rather than the turn-taking that often leads to frustration and anger.

As part of this cognitive equality, but also beyond it, we would be freer to acknowledge the significance of biology, including the fact that women can do something that men cannot do. The great gift of feminism was to teach us and the world that biology is not destiny; the great mistake was to say biology is irrelevant to one's choices. Biology, history, social memory, and what Nancy Chodorow in her new work calls "the reproduction of mothering" — these are large factors in a woman's natural consciousness. For someone to cry "sexism" every time someone else says "biology" is as ridiculous as making the opposite claim — that women can only breed and nurture. To eliminate biology as a factor is to deny women their genuine feelings. As Betty Friedan has written, in the second stage we must give men the support to feel their feelings and not force upon them a false machismo. I applaud and extend that call to women's feelings as well.

Jewish feminists must attend to what I call the "something about nothing" problem. A woman who has no address in the outside world, a woman who nurtures others and does volunteer work besides — ask her at the end of a day what she does and inevitably she will say "nothing," with a growing feeling of valuelessness inside her. That is our problem, our task, feminists of every persuasion, to assume that she understands the value of her life, her work, her choices. A man who is housebound and a primary care-giver would never answer "nothing" (he might answer "baby-sitting"). Perhaps part of the solution would be to make a clearer formulation of a continuum of choices, ranging from consecutive to simultaneous work and family roles. Every woman will work in the workplace, paid or volunteer, during a significant part of her life. Many women, and a small but significant number of men, do choose the consecutive model; work followed or preceded by full-time parenting. There is just so much time and energy in a given day and many women no longer want to play superwoman.

**J**ewish feminists have to address an issue, which will become an increasing phenomenon among Jews, given the high educational goals of Jewish women, of what is popularly referred to as "career boomerang." In the old days, our mothers used to warn (though mine never did), "Don't be too smart, or you won't find a husband." How sad that was, all those excellent Jewish female minds stifled and smothered, or as Cynthia Ozick has written, "half the collective Jewish brain idling." Today, in this transition period, there is increasing evidence of a much higher divorce rate in marriages where the woman's career — not so much money as status — outranks the man's. A woman need never hold back or apologize for success, ambition, achievement, but neither can we simply say, "Tough, it's his fragile ego problem, not mine." If family stability and not only self-actualization is a priority, then in this transition period we must learn new and sensitive

techniques to deal with this and similar problems. There are ways to separate issues of emotional dependence from economic and career independence.

Part of the agenda of a Jewish feminist is to ask how we can generate a desire in women to choose marriage and family. Sweden, which suffers a similarly low birth rate, has this item as part of its feminist platform. It does so without embarrassment, and with sophisticated tactics that engage trade unions and political parties.

Finally, on the short list of exchanged agendas, we ought to seek ways to maintain those values in Judaism that support family life — either to experience those rituals and traditions that maintain the centrality of the family or to appropriate parallel models. Shabbat, for example, is a profoundly liberating device for dual-career couples. All of my life I have observed Shabbat, but never did I need it as much as when I intensified my career. For those not connected to tradition, the parallel is family vacations and the principle of their inviolability — not once or twice a year, but every week. In a study that a colleague and I did of long-term, apparently happy marriages, the three primary factors that emerged in making the marriage work were: a) the will and commitment; b) a sense of humor; and c) family vacations. There are numerous other techniques in a familistic religion that can be implemented or borrowed in parallel form.

**A**nd now for the Jewish community short list:

1) The first, of course, is to support government laws that are pro-feminist. In the United States this means the Equal Rights Amendment (which most Jewish organizations did not support), the Economic Equity Act, the whole serious issue of feminization of poverty and the legislation surrounding it.

2) Second, the traditional community cannot stand in the way of legalized abortion, or oppose federal funding of abortion through Medicaid, despite the halachic opposition to abortion. The truth is that, unlike fundamentalist religions such as Catholicism, Judaism permits abortion under certain circumstances and does not consider it murder. For those who live outside of the dictates of Halachah, the Halachah can function to educate to the value of preciousness of life, rather than the right to life. But Halachah cannot impose its will toward eliminating abortion as an option for women who need one. This is not an easy hurdle to overcome, and there is inconsistency in that position, but so it must be.

3) The Jewish institutions must see themselves as a model of action of pro-family feminist policies, such as day-care, job-sharing, flex time. The organized Jewish community talks and talks about the importance of family and the need for Jewish population, yet is the last to do anything about it. Instead of serving as a model for these programs, the Jewish communal institutions have lagged behind the corporate world and the public sector. Jewish leaders cry “cost effectiveness,” and indeed some, though certainly not all (such as flex time), of these programs do cost. But the organized Jewish community must reconsider costs in a much broader framework. Moreover, for a community that claims it has valued women’s contri-

butions to home and family, it surely has not rewarded them. There is not a single affirmative-action program for women who have chosen the consecutive option, not a single scholarship or educational fund for a woman entering or reentering the work force at age 30 or 35. There ought to be an “old-girl network” operating.

4) Our educational institutions have to begin with *aleph-bet* in the process of reconditioning: to teach young men in Jewish educational institutions about sharing the nurturing and housekeeping roles, about stabilizing and persevering in marriage. If they do not have these models at home, it is vital they get them in school, starting at an early age. If they have the models at home, it will reinforce them. Similarly, girls have to be educated to share nurturing roles, to relinquish exclusive power in the home and family.

The second educational task is in the way we teach the sources, the Jewish traditional sources. We know that the sources are sexist, written in a society that accepted hierarchy as axiomatic. Now we do not want to throw out the sources, nor can we rewrite them, but we must teach them with correctives, with criticism, with interpretations that examine their relative appropriateness or inappropriateness to our times.

5) Access: If we are to believe that women fulfill family roles by choice and not by default, then Jewish leaders and decision-makers must ensure and work for opening access in all spheres of life, including the religious life of the community, religious leadership roles, such as women in the rabbinate, and certainly women’s participation in home and family rituals. As my friend, who spent four solid weeks of cleaning for Passover observed: “I realized that something was wrong when Larry came home from work, picked up a candle and feather, went through the house in fifteen minutes, and got the entire *mitzvah* of *bedikat hametz*.” If access is closed off in any area, it makes a demeaning statement about women in family roles.

6) There ought to be religious ceremonies and rituals that celebrate nurturing roles, including rituals that celebrate women’s unique biological functions. That a religion which developed such significant rituals celebrating every state of biological and psychological growth never developed a ritual celebrating the act of birth — what is one to think!

7) In our exchange of agendas, Jews must press for equality in the economics of divorce. In many states, new and just shared-property laws have been enacted. This should be a universal feature of all nations, and it should be interpreted into Halachah as well. During the medieval period, Jewish law concerning widows’ inheritance was improved over Biblical and Talmudic law.

8) Finally, and most urgent of all, the religious leadership must repair the areas of vulnerability and injustice to women, wife-battering and a one-sided, discriminatory divorce law. If we are to believe that male-female roles in family life are a function of distinctiveness and not hierarchy, then a wife-batterer must be reformed or remanded to jail — and not his wife to a shelter. Jewish family law forbids wife abuse. Why, one must ask with a measure of pain, is there not the same fidelity to that law as to *kol isha*, the regulation that deals with

the repugnance of a woman's voice in a synagogue setting?

The religious leadership must also address the issue of Jewish divorce, where a woman can be blackmailed or relegated to limbo status for years on end, until her *get* is delivered. The solution for a Jew is not in the civil courts, as the Orthodox community in the U.S. has sought. The solution lies within the confines of Jewish law itself, a solution that would be universally binding on Jews all over the world, in which Jewish women the world over can join hands in political pressure.

**I**n the past, over the centuries, many disabilities in Jewish family law were corrected. Where there was a rabbinic will, there was a halachic way. That no solution as yet has been forthcoming from contemporary rabbis signals to me their desire to maintain a husband's absolute right. And when imbalance exists in divorce law, it ripples and taints the whole institution of marriage.

The whole matter of divorce abuse raises within the heart and mind of even a very committed Jew fearsome thoughts of religious disobedience and insurrection. I used to think that the courts would solve the problem in any number of half steps, such as *havkiat kiddushin* (prenuptial agreements). Who cared if a theory of absolute right existed, so long as the law was fair and just to all. But the process has taken so long

that a sweeping reform is necessary. Perhaps it is time now to demand that women authorize and deliver the *get* — the essence of a Jewish divorce — in a situation where a recalcitrant husband refuses one. Such a change would spiral down to marriage rituals in which the husband initiates the change of status. As long as one battered wife finds no recourse in the system, all the rhetoric exalting women will ring hollow in my ears. As long as there is one woman who is blackmailed for a *get*, I will not believe a single rabbinic platitude about the noble, honored status of women in the Jewish family.

In conclusion, I want to say one last thing about family and equality. The family is not an ideal institution, but I think history shows it to be better than any other. Equality is not the only basis of a working relationship — the human species survived without it for centuries — but clearly it is superior to all other modes of relating.

I want to turn the thing around on its head, equality growing out of the family structure. What is the paradigmatic relationship in Judaism? It is the covenantal model, as in the relationship between God and the Jewish people. We do not enter the covenant as equals, but in the steadfastness of the relationship we are equalized, not like God, but an equal partner in the covenant. Perhaps it is the commitment that men and women make to marriage and to family that offers us the best hope for lasting equality.

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Michal Palgi

## The Centrality of the Family in Israeli Society

**M**Y REMARKS will focus mainly on the urban Jewish society in Israel, the kind of Jewish family it produces, and the role of women. Israel, it should be noted, is an urban society; about 90 percent of its Jewish population lives in towns and cities. Modernization accelerated during the 1960s and 70s, when the income per person almost doubled and the education level rose. Even so, while modernization processes have taken place, one could not perceive any decentralization of the family, as happened in Western society. The family has kept its centrality and importance in Israeli society.

The indicators of familism — these are not the only ones — are marriage at a young age, large families, low divorce rate. According to the latest available statistics — for 1981 — the birth rate per 1,000 in the general society in Israel was 21.4; 23 per 1,000 in the kibbutzim. (Incidentally, since 1964 the birth rate in the kibbutzim has been higher than in the rest of the Jewish society in Israel, though both rates are now converging.) The divorce rate per 1,000 in all sections of the society is 1.3. The marriage rate is 7.5 per 1,000 in the general society; 6.8 in the kibbutzim. Most Israelis are married. Only 2 to 3

percent remain unmarried all their lives. The high rates of birth and marriage and the low rate of divorce indicate the centrality of the family in Israeli society.

What are the unique features of Israeli society that have kept the family so central and how does this affect the status of women in the family? Before offering a description, I should like first to set forth the goals of family equality, as I see them. The prime goal is the abolition of the division of labor between the husband as breadwinner and the wife as homemaker. That does not mean that the entire society should hew to the same pattern. It can include families where the wife is the homemaker and the husband the breadwinner, or arrangements where both are breadwinners and both are homemakers, or variants thereof. What I am talking about is the abolition of the definite division between husband as breadwinner and wife as homemaker, as in most families. The second goal, as I see it, is to provide equal opportunities and rewards for all, both within and outside the family. By rewards I mean influence, prestige, recompense in the labor market. When a husband stays home — we have been talking about this — and looks

after the children, is he being accorded the same regard for his act as is his wife when she is performing a similar task? This, too, is a question of equality.

I return now to the features of the Israeli society, which I shall consider from the viewpoint of equality. The first feature to note is the special security situation in Israel. Social psychologists have shown that the ever-present danger of war has increased the craving for intimate life, for close relationships with other people. Moreover, men, in the Israeli society are the only ones who risk their lives in combat. The women stay at home, look after the household and the children, and when the men return safely, the women look to serve them, to make them comfortable, and not burden them with daily problems. Unfortunately, this situation recurs only too frequently in our society.

Another point related to the issue of security is family size. Very often, in planning a family, Israelis think of having more than one or two children, for God knows what will happen to our children in war and we do not want to be totally bereft. I do not say that everybody in our society thinks so, but it is a prevalent feeling. (Statistics show that after a war, there is a higher rate of marriage and birth. One might expect a subsequent higher rate of divorce among such marriages, but this was not found to be the case.)

**H**ow does all this accord with the goals of equality that I have noted? When we talk about the abolition of the division of labor between the husband as breadwinner and defender and the wife as homemaker, we must take into account the security situation, which often makes it impossible to abolish the division. Men go to war and women do not. This particular division is a given fact in our society. Because society has determined that only men go to combat, in this regard there is no equal division of labor within the family. If men go out to fight, somebody has to remain at home, if the marriage is to be a true partnership.

The second feature of Israeli society that I should like to note is the status of religion, about which much has already been said. From a feminist point of view, there is a great deal to criticize here, but that is not the only consideration. Jewish religious values and symbols are important as integrators of family life. Every milestone in our lives becomes an occasion for a family gathering. There are the birth ceremonies, like circumcision, and the celebrations in the kibbutzim. A bar mitzvah is a religious activity and again the whole family comes together; likewise, a marriage. All these are integrators of the family.

Another reason for the importance of religion to the family is that being Jewish, which means giving expression to Jewish values, is one of the justifications for the existence of the State of Israel. The Jewish religion strengthens the family — marriage, having children and educating them, these are all religious duties. The division of roles within the household, according to Jewish tradition, also increased the mutual dependence of husband and wife. Traditionally, he is responsible for praying and studying the Bible; she is the one who keeps the

rules of purity and maintains kashrut in the household. How does this accord with the goals of equality? Can there in such instances be an abolition of division of labor between the husband who devotes his day to studying and the homemaker wife? Where the definitions are so precise — and variants of the traditional ways are still very much with us — there cannot be interchangeability between the roles of husband and wife. If there are to be any changes, I will be very happy to hear about them. As of now, we are still greatly bound by traditional Jewish constraints.

The third feature which accounts for the centrality of the family in Israel is the smallness of the society. Israeli society, in general, is an intimate society. It is well known that social control in small societies is much stronger than in large societies. Thus there are many pressures in Israeli society to keep the family intact. The reason for this is that a disintegration of the family is a threat to society as a whole. This is felt much more in small communities. In the kibbutzim, for instance, there is strong pressure for women and men to get married, to stay married, and the percentage of unmarried people in the kibbutzim is minuscule. In my own kibbutz we have 400 members over the age of 30 or 32, and among these there is only one unmarried person. The reason for the high stability of marriage in the kibbutz stems from the fear of disintegration. When somebody gets divorced in a small society like the kibbutz, it is perceived as a threat to all the other married people. It is also a threat to the integrity of the whole kibbutz, because one of the divorced partners may leave the community and take the children away with him or her.

**I**f there is such a strong pressure in Israel to keep the family intact, how does this affect sexual equality? To answer this question, one should look also at the division of labor between the married partners within the household. A recent study revealed that there is a very fixed pattern of the division of labor. The husband is usually responsible for breadwinning and the wife for the domestic tasks, including child care, even if she works. According to the survey, 82 percent of married women and 73 percent of married men said the domestic jobs were done mainly or only by the wife. There was not even one case where they were performed mainly by the husband. If this indeed is a true description of Israeli society, then what about the socialization of our children? If the division of the labor within the household is so pronounced, what happens to our kids as they witness the division?

The special conditions that obtain in Israel — the security situation, the status of religion, the social control of the family — affect all aspects and all members of our society. They certainly affect the goals of equality between the sexes. In my opinion, the main effect is that which occurs in the conjoining of the security issue with the issue of religious status. This particular combination renders equality between the sexes within the family extremely difficult. It also causes men to speak a different language than women and perpetuates a situation whereby man's work in society is seen as for the benefit of all, while woman's tasks are specific to her own family.

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## DISCUSSION

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**TAMAR ESHEL:** I would like to consider the question of Jewishness. Do we Jews want to be exactly like other people? Do we think we are different? Do we owe something to our history? Do we want to retain special values and characteristics, and transmit them to future generations? I think we ought not to be ashamed that Jews are different and want to be better. We in Israel, in building our society, from the earliest pioneering days, always wanted to make a better society, one that has its roots in Jewish ethics.

I believe that equality is not outright equality but the right to choices. In its quest for equality, has the feminist movement really given enough stress to the freedom of choices for women? I am one who has worked all my life, but I respect the wish of another woman who wants to be at home and devote herself to her children and her family. We have given the woman who has opted to stay at home a feeling of tremendous guilt, of inadequacy, of being a "nothing" as Blu Greenberg said, since there is no economic value to what she does. We must do more throughout the world to give economic value to the work of the housewife at home.

Our responsibility is to ensure that the community provides supporting services to the family. This is a prime responsibility, and we should stop thinking of this as services merely for women. These are services for the entire family and for future generations.

When we speak about early education and the changing of roles, we should also insist that, along with the formal educational system of the children in our country, there be education for parents, fathers as well as mothers, on the role of parenthood.

I belong to a generation that was taught to give up a great deal of personal indulgence for the sake of communal or national needs. We may have gone a bit too far with this, but I do think that communal responsibility is a very important element when we speak of continuity. I believe that we all ought to do much more in preparing young people for marriage, in helping couples overcome crises in marriage. There is much that we can do for stabilizing the community, and not at the expense of women, either.

**CYNTHIA FUCHS EPSTEIN:** We've heard a lot here about the question of Jewish survival, both from the perspective of survival of the Jews as a body in the United States and the more crucial issue of survival in Israeli society, considering its vulnerability to outside attackers. But we probably don't have any consensus on what Jewish survival means. Speaking for myself, I am part of a large group of Jews who identify as such but

who have no religious preference. When I think of Jewish survival, I think of humanistic Jewish values. I care about those values attached to the Jewish people that focus on international concerns, on humanistic concerns, and so on. I do not care for the survival of those Jewish elements which to me represent an oppression of sub-groups, which seek to preserve the inequality of women, for instance.

I know I am in opposition to many people here who value highly traditional Jewish elements and are seeking desperately to reinterpret them in ways which will be found bearable for modern life. I am distressed by all the rationales that I have been hearing on both the religious side and the survivalist side, regarding women's inequality. Do we

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*Equality  
for women  
is the right  
to have choices.*

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want a society to survive merely because it is there in its present form, or do we want it to survive because it expresses important values and serves important social goals? If the society must rest on the inequality of women, then I have serious questions about it and I oppose it.

I agree with Tamar Eshel that there are communal solutions to the so-called women's problems. Indeed, they are not women's problems, but problems of the community as a whole. Take the question of whether or not to have children, in the U.S. as well as in Israel. We always say that this is the woman's decision, as though men have nothing to do with it. But men today are also refusing to have children, or deferring children. Men also are questioning whether they want the family to exist in the same form.

Perhaps things are different in Israel, because of all the factors that Michal Palgi spelled out. I suspect, however, that if concern with women's equality doesn't happen here now it will sooner or later, when, hopefully, things are more regularized and less focused on sheer physical survival. However, we cannot always defer the answers to some later utopian time when everything will be wonderful. That time will never come.

**MARILYN SAFIR:** I think the point that Michal Palgi made at the end of her talk,

about socialization, is very important. This is where we, as women, have tremendous power. We have been talking about women as a political bloc of 51 percent of the vote, but in terms of socializing children we have far more power than that, since we spend most of our time with the children, whether as teachers in school, or in the family. Very often we socialize in such a way as to maintain a system that brings about inequality to future generations of children.

I would like to make a further point, one resting on biology. I don't believe that women exclusively have a "mothering" instinct; I believe that human beings have a nurturing instinct. I believe that men can love and nurture children as much as women. You can see this with young boys and their relationships to animals and Teddy bears (the girls, of course, have their dolls). But then we tend to encourage only one-half of the population to develop these feelings and the other half not to. One way to bring about equality is to encourage everybody to love and to be sensitive to others' needs. This might even go a long way to change our attitude toward war and peace. Women have a very strong contribution to make here, because women are more willing to admit that they are concerned about the ravages of war.

**BARBARA SWIRSKI:** I feel on the part of the American participants a kind of soul-searching, a questioning, a self-criticism. On the part of the Israeli participants, I feel an attempt to give answers. I sense this particularly in connection with Michal Palgi's presentation. I disagree, however, with Michal's analysis of the constraints of Israeli society regarding equality of women. I do not think that we have to go along with these constraints. To the best of my knowledge, American Jewish religious women have looked for new and creative solutions within Judaism. They have not said, "Ah, we have this given situation. The men study Torah and the women wait at home." The American women have gone out to study Torah and Talmud and they have become rabbis and cantors, and they have done other things. So it behooves us to seek creative solutions rather than to say, "My sisters in the United States, you must understand that we are constrained by Judaism." I don't know if our Judaism is different, but that seems to be the implication. We must look for solutions within the reality of our situation and not use it as a rationalization and a justification for doing nothing.

**ALICE SHALVI:** It seems to me that if we are desirous of achieving equality in the home, in the face of those factors which

Michal identified as militating against that equality, the best way to do so will be by attempting to increase the prestige of homemaking by professionalizing it. How does one go about that? First of all, education. It seems to me astonishing that the profession of homemaking, and particularly the parental aspect of it, is virtually the only profession for which in modern society we do not require some kind of certificate. You have to have a B.A. today for even the most menial jobs, even in Israel. Nobody expects us before we bear children to have any kind of preparation for that job.

It seems to me essential that in the program of studies at schools there be courses in family studies which address themselves specifically to the homemaking aspect. The family studies in Israel, at the moment, unfortunately are restricted almost exclusively to the sexual aspect; only in the religious sector have there been some rather feeble attempts to correct that.

Second, it seems essential to introduce the element of choice into homemaking as a profession. We have already heard that everybody makes the choice of whether or not to marry, to set up some kind of partnership, but I think there are not enough choices in our society between the two partners as to which of them will undertake the major burden of the homemaking. As Blu Greenberg mentioned, not very much prestige accrues to the man who decides to take on that part of the partnership.

Finally, there is the matter of reward. I can't envisage any society in which we are going to pay the homemaker, but I think it is possible to have increased parental leave, whereby the mother or father, or both, can divide the leave between themselves, as now is the case in some Scandinavian countries.

**BETTY FRIEDAN:** The presentations this morning of Michal Palgi and Blu Greenberg, and of Cynthia Fuchs Epstein and Dafna Izraeli yesterday, indicate to me that we are now absolutely at the heart of the matter. I listened to Dafna Izraeli's brilliant analysis and I thought to myself, "Well, this explains why they don't need a women's movement in Israel, why they don't want a women's movement. Therefore, what are we doing here?" It was presumptuous of me, I thought, as an American woman, to tell you to have a women's movement in Israel when you don't need one and don't want one.

Then I thought, "Wait a minute." I had this uneasy feeling of *déjà vu*. I'd heard this before, all of us had, at meetings of women twenty years ago in the days before the women's movement. So there is, I guess, no substitute for breaking through the feminine mystique to arrive at the elementary view that women are people, and further, if we are people, that we are entitled to the equality that is our human heritage, our American heritage, and our Jewish heritage.

The fact is that Israeli women are here. They want some kind of women's movement. They think it's necessary. So what is missing? What is missing is the question that you have to ask of yourselves, and even more important, of Israeli society, just as we asked American society. Are you proceeding from the assumption that the values of equality are shared by the larger society? Can you assume that Israeli society accepts these values on behalf of Israeli women, or do you have yet to go through that first stage of making the perception of equality be heard louder and clearer, in your own minds and in the minds of society?

I am not saying that you in Israel have to follow every stage the way it was done in America. I am not saying that you have to follow certain excesses. You don't have to get rid of the family. Such extreme notions — test-tube babies and the like — were never representative of the mainstream of the women's movement in America. Our primary concern is the personhood of women. We hold that to be essential and that there must be a conscious breakthrough to such awareness.

Even though the values of equality were fully established in American democracy, with women receiving education and having the vote, women were not using their rights in a full way for personal growth or for service to the society. They weren't even using them in terms of the traditional values that Israeli society and Jewish tradition celebrate. Only now, after nearly twenty years of the women's movement, are women coming to be a political factor in America.

Before I wrote *The Feminine Mystique*, I lived through the post-World War II experience of being a professional housewife — a combination of hostess, chauffeur, dietician, nurse, etc., etc. It was all part of the then feminine mystique. And it didn't help women at all, being placed on a false pedestal. The women's movement declared that women are people, that we are entitled to our own voice, that we are to be defined as subjects and not as objects. Then, after breaking through the barriers that kept us out of male society, where all the values so far were defined, we embarked on what I call the "second stage" of the women's movement. You don't necessarily have to do it in that chronological order, but first you have to secure such things as equal pay for work of comparable value, economic value in social security, etc. Only then can you say that the values of the society are not just masculine-defined but also include the female experience.

**DAFNA IZRAELI:** I would like to take up something that Blu Greenberg raised, regarding the problem affecting the large number of people who are outside the family structure, that is, the many unmarried people. My comment is this: Men and women do not have equal opportunities to marry and have children. Men can do this for two decades longer

than women. Hence, men tend to marry women who are younger and, therefore, as women get older, the pool of possible partners shrinks considerably. It is an illusion to think that women choose to marry or not to marry beyond the age of 30 or 35.

Given the new technology — we are now at a stage where technology can not only make heart transplants and leg transplants and nose transplants but is also able to enhance the child-bearing process — I would suggest that the feminist movement put on its agenda work that would enable women to extend the childbearing period beyond the age of 40 or 42, the age at present beyond which women cannot give birth comfortably. Let us find the means to increase women's abilities to have families at later stages in their lives — say, to age 45 — because today women live to be an average of almost 80. I realize that this is a radical statement. I suggest, however, that you contemplate it because it relates, I believe, to many of the problems we encounter in our effort to enhance equal opportunity for women and men as they pass through the life-cycle.

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Wednesday afternoon, August 1, 1984

## Session 5: Women in Jewish Religious Practice

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*The session was chaired by ALICE SHALVI, an Israeli educator and a professor of English literature at Hebrew University, who introduced the afternoon's speakers: JUDITH HAUPT-*

*MAN, an assistant professor of Talmud at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America; and PENINA PELI, program director of Shabbat Yachad in Jerusalem.*

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Judith Hauptman

### Judaism and the Feminist Critique

**T**HE PRACTICE of Judaism in the United States today is radically different from what it was fifteen years ago. In great part, the changes have come about as a result of pressure brought by Jewish women to enhance their opportunities for active participation in Jewish ritual and eliminate discrimination against them in other areas of Jewish law. This afternoon I will describe what the feminist critique of Judaism was, the changes that were made, and the underlying issue of the possibility for change in Halachah.

Jewish theology, which speaks of an omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent God, does not pose a problem for women (although it is commonplace to refer to God as masculine), but Jewish ritual, the concretization of Jewish religious principles, does.

The basis for Jewish ritual is Torah. Examining its set of laws, we discover that the Torah did not regard women as equal with men, but as dependent upon and subordinate to them. Since Biblical society was patriarchal, women were not given responsibilities to God, their ultimate master, but only to men, their immediate masters.

The Talmud, which developed the Judaism practiced today, incorporated the Torah's outlook into its legislation. For instance, it does not require women to pray or study, even though these acts are the essence of Jewish ritual and intellectual experience. As for her personal status, it places a woman almost always under a man's aegis — that of her father or husband. In some areas, e.g., criminal law, Talmud treats women as equals with men.

For hundreds of years Jews lived according to Torah and Talmud. Men and women, upon learning what was expected of them as Jews, found Judaism meaningful and rewarding. Today the situation is different. In this post-patriarchal feminist era, women think differently about themselves and about how they should be treated by others. It is not surprising, then, that the feminist critique of Judaism has isolated several areas of discontent. Among them are: women's place in the house of prayer, of study, and in marriage.

The problem with the synagogue is one of imposed marginality. Women were always welcome in the synagogue,

but because they were not counted in the quorum for prayer, in the *minyan*, their presence was not as valued as that of men. They were not allowed to lead the prayers, to be honored with an *aliyah* to the Torah, to serve as rabbi or preach. The synagogue liturgy was replete with references to God in the masculine. Girls were not accorded a rite of passage in the synagogue as were boys, a rite which assumed disproportionate importance.

For a long time, Jewish women were not chafing over this marginality. There were many women, myself included, who, when offered the option of a bat mitzvah by their parents, turned it down, probably because it lacked authenticity or acceptability. The sex-role division inherent in Jewish practices was appealing as a way of expressing one's femininity, by being a passive participant in the synagogue ritual and by feeling pride in the fine performance by men (both relatives and strangers) of their synagogue duties.

As for the exemption to pray daily in *tallit* and *tefillin*, this was viewed as a lucky circumstance by personally observant women. There was no need to get up early day after day and repeat the same prayers. That such exemption from daily prayer led to a more limited religious experience was not bemoaned or even recognized by anyone.

The situation in the house of study paralleled that of the house of prayer. Women were not educated Jewishly as were men, primarily because of the common belief that women were intellectually inferior to men. Boys in a yeshiva high school were required to spend three or four hours each day mastering Talmud, not generally known as an engrossing subject. Girls did not resent their exclusion. I attended what was probably the finest Jewish day school in the United States and do not recall any girl complaining when, after studying Talmud for five years, we were told at the age of sixteen that our career in Talmud was over. I don't believe that any girl was disappointed at the prospect of never being able to understand the underlying principles of Jewish observance and the possibilities for change in Jewish law, which is what Talmud is primarily about.

The situation with respect to Jewish divorce was somewhat

different from the situation with respect to prayer and study. Most women already knew, before Jewish feminist thought became popular, that Jewish law discriminated against women in the law of divorce, that it was only the husband who could write a bill of divorce and should he withhold it, the wife, even though not living with him, could not remarry, whereas he could. The same was true of a woman (called an *agunah*) whose husband disappeared but could not be proven dead — she could not remarry. Were a woman to disappear, the husband could remarry. Divorce was a problem which Jewish legislators struggled with for centuries, but could not resolve, even though many solutions were proposed. More energy was spent discovering flaws in proposed solutions than in fashioning newer, more perfect ones.

It was the advent of secular feminism which caused Jewish women to take a hard look at their religious tradition, a tradition much loved by many of them, and to discover that the discrimination against women characteristic of the secular system of law was true also of the Jewish system of law. It was a painful recognition, one which many women sought to deny. Pressure for change was first suggested by a group of women called *Ezrat Nashim*. They proposed extending equality to women in all aspects of Jewish ritual and law. Incredibly fast, Jewish women all over the United States joined in their call for change. The reason for this quick and massive acceptance of the Jewish feminist platform was that women had already sensed the secular inequality surrounding them and upon hearing the feminist critique of Judaism easily recognized how cogent and compelling the arguments were.

Knowing what the problems were, understanding how they were rooted in the ancient outlook of men toward women, Jewish women began to seek answers to the following question: Is unequal treatment of women an essential or inviolable aspect of Judaism which men and women will simply have to live with, or can the system tolerate change?

It is on this issue that we run into major disagreements. The Orthodox say that today there is no possibility for change, the ultra-right say that these differences are God-ordained and therefore no change is needed, and the Conservatives, who accept Halachah as binding, say that the history of Jewish law and observance is the history of change, and, if done in the proper way, the laws which treat women unfairly can be altered. Since the Reform do not regard Halachah as binding, they do not have to deal with these issues.

As a student of the Talmud, I know that already 2,000 years ago the rabbis were aware of the fact that some Jewish laws which were appropriate to the Biblical period were no longer appropriate to, or considered ethical in, their period. Their response to inequity was to introduce change while at the same time asserting that no actual change had taken place. That is, the Talmudic method is the adaptation of Torah rules, through creative interpretation, to an evolving set of ethical sensitivities.

Let me illustrate this point. According to the Torah, when a man dies his estate is inherited by his sons. We read in Num-

bers of the daughters of Zelophehad who came to Moses and asked to be assigned their father's parcel of land in Israel since he left no sons, only daughters. Moses consulted God who responded that in such a case daughters may inherit from their fathers. Women, in general, do not inherit.

The discriminatory aspect of this law was evident to the rabbis of the Talmud. In response, they made a series of new laws to rectify the situation, one of which I will describe. It is called the *ketubat banin dikhrin*, the clause in the marriage document dealing with male offspring. The goal of this legislation was to encourage fathers to give their daughters, on the day they married, a portion of the father's estate, since, after a father's death, his daughters could inherit from him. Before this enactment, when a woman died, whatever monies she had brought into the marriage were inherited by her husband. Upon his death, he could leave these monies to sons of his from a second marriage. For this reason fathers did not like to give big dowries to their daughters because the money would not necessarily go to their grandsons but possibly to the grandsons of some other man. The rabbis therefore enacted that whatever money a woman brings into a marriage may temporarily be inherited by her husband after she dies, but upon his death, these monies had to be given to her sons, i.e., her father's grandsons. It is in this way that women were given a portion of their father's estate, not after his death but in his lifetime.

After describing how to circumvent the Torah's law of no inheritance for women, the Talmud asks (Ketubot 52b): How can the rabbis give a woman an inheritance if the Torah rules no inheritance for women? Can rabbinic legislation abrogate Torah law? In this instance the question is answered by citing a different Biblical verse which indicates that a man should make sure his daughters marry and, the rabbis conclude, only if he gives her a share in his estate will she become marriageable.

This is only one example of change. It is clear to anyone who studies Talmud that there was a persistent effort on the part of the rabbis to ameliorate women's status under Jewish law. It is important to note, though, that general equality for women was never granted, nor was it sought. I think then that the message is clear. In order to rectify situations which, as time passes, are perceived as unethical, even though in the Biblical period these same practices did not appear discriminatory, laws may be changed as long as the changes can be justified, in particular if they can be based on a Biblical verse. This technique for change was utilized to make many changes in laws of interest on loans, in the laws of divorce, laws of establishing a man's death, laws of *ketubah* payment. It was even used to enhance a woman's sense of satisfaction upon fulfilling a religious ritual. In the medieval period a debate arose as to whether a woman may recite a blessing when performing a *mitzvah* voluntarily, one that she is not obligated to perform. The issue here is whether or not she is uttering God's name in vain. Tosafot ruled that she may and Rambam that she may not. We follow Tosafot. They justified this amazing innovation by citing a Biblical reference.

What about today? What changes are being made? What impact has Jewish feminism had on the different branches of

American Judaism? The Conservative movement made a number of changes in recent years to start eliminating discrimination against women. Having already approved granting women *aliyot* to the Torah in 1955, in the pre-feminist period, it decided in 1973 to count women in the *minyan*. Interestingly enough, many Conservative synagogues across the country found it easier to accept the notion of counting women in the *minyan* than honoring them with *aliyot* because, it seems, counting women in the *minyan* did not feel or look different from counting men, but inviting a woman to the *bimah* introduced a radical change into synagogue practice. It became clear, at that time, that the halachic considerations were not

critical to many people, but the emotional ones were. In October 1983 the faculty of the Jewish Theological Seminary decided to admit women into the rabbinical school as candidates for ordination. This decision caused a tremendous outcry from the Orthodox that Conservatism had now abandoned its commitment to Halachah and was moving toward Reform, which for a number of years has been ordaining women. Anyone who understands the philosophy of the Conservative movement and the mechanisms for change which exist in the Jewish legal system knows that this was not true. In fact, the halachic barriers to women's ordination were less serious than those to counting women in the *minyan*.

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As for the ability of Jewish women to obtain a bill of divorce from their husbands, the Reform movement accepts civil divorce and does not require a *get*. The Conservative movement has introduced an antenuptial agreement which provides for annulment of the marriage should the husband withhold a divorce. In the Orthodox movement the *agunah* is still a serious problem. It seems that suggestions are now being made for a different kind of antenuptial agreement which should virtually eliminate *agunot* in the Orthodox movement as well, but it is not clear how soon this solution will be implemented.

A problem unique to the Orthodox movement today is the need for expanding women's public participation in prayer. No changes have occurred in the Orthodox synagogue. However, there exist in the Orthodox movement women who wish to have the opportunity publicly to participate in prayer. These women have organized into a number of women's *minyanim*, or *davening* groups, which meet once a month in various parts of the United States. Many rabbis are adamantly opposed to these groups but do not give any halachic reasons for their opposition. As for women studying Talmud, the majority of Orthodox schools still do not permit it. It is not clear that much pressure is being brought by women to change this situation.

In the Reform movement a major feminist issue is introducing change into the liturgy, removing references to God our Father and King, and including references to Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah, after mention of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The English translation of the new Reform prayer book has already incorporated these changes.

In all the movements, celebrating the birth and the bat mitzvah of a daughter are rapidly spreading and gaining acceptance. Also, women are becoming involved in the synagogue, the major American vehicle for expressing one's Jewishness, in the new ways. In general, women's quest for deeper religious satisfaction has injected an element of vitality into the practice of Judaism today in the United States.

**O**n a closing note, though, it is important to recognize that problems still exist, both in the area of making changes and of accepting them. Change and religion still remain, to my mind, antithetical terms. Religion has been a force in the lives of most people for continuity and tradition.

However, Jewish law is much more flexible than it might have seemed to most people who are not thoroughly familiar with it. The major Jewish law codes are as much a record of change as of tradition. Be that as it may, the enormous ethical responsibility that falls upon us when any change is recommended, is to figure out whether or not that change is necessary, and if it is not necessary, to abandon it. Bertrand Russell once said: if it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change. On the other hand, not making necessary changes will cause alienation from Judaism, in particular of Jewish women, which is what we are fighting in 20th-century assimilationist America. I conclude with a quotation from the Talmud: "Sometimes the abrogation of Torah is its foundation" (Menahot 99b).

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Penina Peli

## Feminism and the Forging of Jewish Identity

**I** AM REMINDED today of the first time in my life that I ever stood up before an audience. I was six years old, and together with my male classmates at a Jewish day school, we sang, "I am a Jew/ and I will do/ everything a small child can/ for Palestine/ that land of mine/ till I grow up to be a man." I wonder whether it was then that I began to feel some problems about my Jewish identity as a woman.

I came to Israel in 1952 and for a while my feminist consciousness lay dormant. Nevertheless, I believe that I was among the first in the country to obtain a copy of *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* — it was hard to find a copy here at the time, but I managed — convinced me that I wanted to break out of this mystique. My heroines were women like Eleanor Roosevelt and Henrietta Szold, whom I still admire.

We are asking all kinds of questions here at our Dialogue. We talk about agendas, energies. I am happy to say that I am very fortunate in that Jerusalem energizes my feminism and my Jewish identity.

I would like to recall for you, if I may, an incident that in-

volved Cynthia Ozick. Five years ago a women's *minyan* was begun in Jerusalem, in which I am still active. The America-Israel Dialogue, then as now, was taking place in Jerusalem, with Cynthia as one of the participants. Another was my husband, Pinchas Peli. Cynthia and I had become friendly and I phoned her. For some reason she didn't get to call me back before Shabbat and I do not use the phone on Shabbat. Shabbat morning I also had the women's *minyan*. Well, in walks Cynthia to the *minyan*. I said to her, "How did you know to come here?" "Bracha brought me," she said. And this is how it came about. The night before, *erev Shabbat*, she had gone to a synagogue, where the only worshippers in the women's section were the rabbi's wife, herself, and a cat. That Shabbat morning she was walking the streets of Jerusalem with her husband, feeling very depressed, not knowing what synagogue to go to. Cynthia saw this young woman walking along, carrying a prayerbook, and asked where she was going. "To the women's *minyan* at Penina Peli's house," she replied. The young woman was Bracha and Cynthia accompanied her to our *minyan*. There, Cynthia had her first *aliyah* to the Torah.

She told me later that she was trembling as she recited the blessings. "For fifty years I've been talking about Judaism," she said. "All week long here in Jerusalem I've been talking about the Jewish people. Today, for the first time, I feel like a full member of that people."

**T**o me Judaism, in a sense, can be summed up by saying that it is a search to discover the *Shechinah*, the indwelling presence of God. How the world will be when the *Shechinah* is among us, we do not yet know. We do know, though, that the matter is concerned with sanctification of the works of Creation through the works of mankind. Simply put, Judaism seeks to establish the divine presence of God, the *Shechinah*, on earth, which in turn will grant man his place in Heaven. We may say that making God a part of our earthly world insures our place in any future worlds contemplated by the Master and Creator of the universe.

That God created this world for realizing the blessing of existence together with its holy dimension is clearly and plainly stated at the very beginning of the Biblical narrative. We all may assume that the world is supposed to be good, but this is an original Jewish idea. Many religions and spiritual philosophies find that the world is evil, because it is temporal and material. The Bible says that "God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. . . . God said to them, be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it." The holy dimension is added by the Shabbat: "And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation which He had done."

The first Adam who is mentioned in Genesis is both male and female. The original account of the creation of Adam — the tale of the rib is a later addition — is interpreted by the rabbis as meaning that man at first was androgynous, male and female, and only later were the two halves separated. The first Adam failed to fulfill the highest level of human destiny by falling prey to the imaginations of the serpent, who obviously represents the lowest powers of nature. The serpent convinced Adam that it was more desirous to eat of the Tree of Good and Evil than from the higher Tree of Life. Adam's and Eve's punishment, accordingly, was enslavement to those very powers of nature to which they had been tempted to surrender. Man was condemned to work the earth by the sweat of his brow; woman was condemned to her body and to her earthly mate who, it was said, would rule over her.

This judgment was never interpreted in the Jewish sources as condemning mankind to an irrevocable, miserable fate. On the contrary, the Torah was given to the Children of Israel to guide them and to enable them to restore the presence of God on earth and imbue existence with divine and earthly blessings, fulfilling the promise of Creation as first envisioned. The Torah is frequently called the Tree of Life, since its intention is to enable mankind to free itself from tyranny of any kind and thus redeem its existence forever.

Exile from Eden is followed by one calamity after another in the Bible. A flood wipes out a generation of evildoers and

ten generations after Noah, a family is begun and a new nation is inaugurated. Abraham and Sarah obey God's command to go up to the land He chose and they enter into a covenant with Him. The people of Israel, it should be noted, did not begin solely with Abraham; it began with Abraham and Sarah. It may intrigue you to know that the name *Yisrael* — Israel — contains the initials of all the patriarchs and matriarchs. Thus, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah, like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, also have spiritual qualities essential for the founding of the new nation. Our sages, who were often sparing in their compliments to women (although not in their criticism), say that Sarah possessed a higher degree of prophecy than Abraham. "Whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says," God says to Abraham; whereas Eve was told, "Your urge shall be to your husband, and he shall rule over you." The high regard in which Sarah is held is a reversal of the condition to which Eve, previous to the origins of the Jewish people, was subject.

The story of the people of Israel deals with the struggle for recharging the earthly with the divine, reconciling what has been wrongly divided, defeating forces that block or oppose the fulfillment of our destiny. To release mankind from tyranny of any kind in any form is the *sine qua non* for obtaining the Torah's vision of redemption of human existence. The people of Israel became necessary for this accomplishment, because they were the only ones to agree to bear witness to the will of God through acceptance of the Torah at Sinai. Anything that blocks the fulfillment and unity of earthly existence with its spiritual dimension is seen as opposing the very fulfillment of Judaism. The unity which motivated the construction of the Tower of Babel, as Rivka Bar-Yosef noted, was wrong: unity must be based on freedom, for when all tyranny is totally wiped out of the world then God may reign in the world.

Jewish women throughout Jewish history have written heroic chapters. The Talmud says that women prophets are equal in number to their male equivalents. Seven outstanding women prophets — the number seven is significant, associated as it is with the Sabbath and Sabbath Queen — are cited: Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Hulda, and Esther. Moreover, the *Shechinah*, the indwelling presence of divinity that is also seen as the feminine aspect of Godhood, was eclipsed when the Jews went into their long Exile. Women are described in the Talmud as going up to read from the Torah. (Apparently the problems that trouble the latter-day authorities — that is, the question of disturbing the "honor" of the male congregation — did not bother the sages of the Talmud.) Women were also permitted to read the *Megillah*, the Scroll of Esther. On the other hand, despite all that we hear about women as mothers, women are not required by the Jewish religion to fulfill the commandment of the propagation of the species, even of the Jewish species. Only men are so commanded, and even though men can't fulfill the commandment without the participation of women, the latter are not given merit for their share in this great *mitzvah*. Be all that as it may, Judaism never demanded that women have endless numbers of children. Two children — a boy and a girl — is the legal requirement of the Talmud for fulfilling the *mitzvah* of propagation, because the human being was created male and female.

Jewish women today, who are excluded from many performances of rituals, are seeking their religious expression. At long last, they look to share in the performance of the commandments given to all the Jewish people, whether as a matter of choice or of obligation. When I speak of obligation I am often told, "Why do you want to be obligated? Do you want to get up early every morning to go to the *minyan*? Do you want to be obligated to put on *tefillin* every day?" Well, I don't know that I want to be so obligated, but I *do* want to be a Jew who is free to perform all the commandments of Judaism and I don't want to be told by the rabbinical authorities that I have no right to do so.

We have talked here of the status of women in the family. So much lip-service is paid to the family and so little is actually done for the family in our society. Women, so to say, must break down the walls of the ghetto that still enclose them. They are undoubtedly still exploited by the legal profession as far as divorce goes. Women in Israel who are involved in a divorce suit are usually given over into the hands of lawyers, who demand gigantic legal fees. The lawyers drag out the cases for years and years; and the irony is that for a Jewish divorce, one does not even need a lawyer. I was once invited to speak on the radio, on the problems of divorce in Israel, and I was asked to blast away at the rabbis. I agreed, but I pointed out that we are having problems with lawyers, too. The spon-

sors of the program asked me not to mention the lawyers and to talk only about the problems with the rabbis. I said, "No thank you." Women are also tyrannized by the dominant patriarchal male medical profession, which has now instituted laws against the right to abortion in Jerusalem because of the hypocritical ideals of some doctors who are not themselves necessarily religious.

It has been said that the rabbis want what society wants. Are the rabbis really paying attention to what the people want when they deal with legislation regarding women? Do the rabbis want to give their blessing to tyranny over women in our time? Is this the meaning of Judaism, or the purpose of redemption? Is this why we created our own country, after 2,000 years, to perpetuate religious laws which have no legitimacy any more? Lawyers, doctors, people in the professions must give women their just due in Israeli society. Maybe then the rabbis will be convinced that women are equal members of society.

MAY I SHARE my goals, hopes, and dreams with my American-based counterparts? I am seeking what is most basic to my existence — my freedom as a Jew, my full rights in every area of life in my society. It is this that I confront here in Israel and it is this that I hope to attain, if not in my lifetime, then in the lifetime of my children.

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## DISCUSSION

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**HANNAH SAFRAI:** Hearing Judith Hauptman's presentation, I was struck by the fact that the American Jewish model of three denominations — Orthodox, Conservative, Reform — is totally irrelevant to the religious situation in Israel. Israeli society has abandoned responsibility for the Halachah to a certain group that in many of its aspects is absolutely alienated from the 20th century. As long as the total Israeli society does not assume some sort of responsibility for the Halachah, there can be no dialogue on the subject.

**DEBBIE WEISSMAN:** I want to focus on the issue of change as it was raised by Judith Hauptman, because that is really the heart of the matter. The issue of halachic change is very complex. I would suggest that people who are not familiar with Jewish texts are unaware that from the very beginning there was the notion that the Torah was given in incomplete form to serve as a kind of raw material for further development. The Torah, the Midrash says, is the wheat from which you bake a lovely *challah*, or the flax from which you weave a *challah* cover. The teachings of the rabbis are perceived as part of the system of the developing Torah. This is important to stress, because many people simply see the

Torah as something that is written down, which you either accept or reject.

The area that I am particularly familiar with is the revolution in women's education. This has involved a conscious recognition that historical and social changes have necessitated a halachic response to the condition of women's education. There are today more day schools in which girls study Talmud the way boys do, and alongside the boys. Anyone who has been living in Jerusalem, as I have for the past twelve years, cannot fail but be struck by the incredible explosion of opportunities for Torah study generally, and for women particularly. The situation is still not ideal and I am not trying to be an apologist. But I really do believe that within the traditional framework there are avenues to solution. Here one of our greatest enemies is ignorance.

**RINA SHASHUA-HASSON:** There is a basic difference between the possibilities given to American Jewish women and Israeli Jewish women. Because American Jewish women had the choice between going the Orthodox way or the civil-marriage way, many new rulings were developed by the Conservative and Reform movements. In Israel we have only an Orthodox establishment, which

leaves no room for choice, and which applies to all Israeli women.

There is a civil law in Israel, regarding religious councils, dating from 1972. (Religious councils are civic bodies responsible for all religious services in the particular locale, which have to be established by every local municipality.) Although there is no legal obstacle to appointing a woman, not a single woman has yet been named to a religious council. The councils' appointments are made as follows: 45 percent by the local municipal council, 45 percent by the Ministry of Religion, and 10 percent by the local rabbinical establishment. When there were attempts to appoint women by the local council, the religious parties always applied strong pressure to prevent the appointment. One attempt was made in Nahariya, another in Haifa, another in Jerusalem. Not one succeeded. So before we try to attack the problem of the alienation of women in the synagogue, let's start where civil law gives us the possibility to do so.

**NAAMAH KELMAN:** I would like to share with you the pain and loneliness that I have felt being in Israel all these years as an activist Jewish feminist. I have had a major communication problem, not only with the Orthodox Jewish establishment but also, I am

sad to say, with secular Israelis. This is not only based on the fact that there is a tremendous amount of anger, legitimate anger, on the part of the secular Israeli community here against the established Orthodox community; it is based on the myth held by many Israelis that the only authentic Jew is an Orthodox Jew. But I come out of the Conservative movement, and I come here with a tradition that is open to change.

For too long secular Israelis have been silent partners in the religious coercion that goes on in this country. Not only have they abandoned their responsibilities as being part of the Jewish community, they have also released themselves from the obligations of being active members of a vibrant Jewish heritage. I strongly accept the necessity of some civil solution in this country, but I also feel the necessity of finding Jewish solutions.

For those of us who have been active in the women's movement in the United States, it has meant engaging in experiments to find an authentic Jewish women's voice within Judaism and to be recognized as such. I therefore appeal to my Israeli secular counterparts to stop making women like myself — not only women, but also men — who come out of Reform or Conservative backgrounds, feel like pariahs in this country.

I would like to take this opportunity to make an announcement. Although I am the founder of the Egalitarian Minyan in Jerusalem, this is not the only *minyan* to count women in Israel. I see representatives in the room from other women's congregations as well. We would like to take this unique, historic opportunity to invite all of you to a *minyan* at 8:15 tomorrow morning in this room. It being a Thursday, we will read from the Torah, and perhaps Cynthia Ozick will have a second chance for an *aliyah*.

ROSE SUE BERSTEIN: As a foreigner living in Israel for the past three years, perhaps the most outstanding feature of Israeli society which bothers me is the wide intolerance of different sectors for each other. I find it nearly impossible to imagine how different groups of people can coexist in one tiny country without understanding each other and listening to each other.

Everyone talks about the non-empowerment of women through the army and the religious establishment. Naamah Kelman talked about the abdication of responsibility on the part of the secular Israeli society. I can't help but underline how odd it seems to me, as an American working in the American Embassy, to hear Israelis talk about the Conservative and Reform congregations in this country as if they don't exist. Nobody wants to do anything for them and yet you expect Americans to immigrate here, when there is nowhere for them to be comfortable religiously. Not every American who comes here is a fanatic religious extremist. There are many

people immigrating to Israel who would like to express themselves in the ways that they know best.

SHARON SHENHAV (SHANOFF): There is an issue here that crosses lines of Conservative, Reform, and Orthodox Jews, secular women and non-secular women, and all political parties — and that is the issue of justice for women, most specifically, as has been stressed, the problem of women in the divorce courts. We hear Jewish leaders speaking out on all kinds of issues, but I haven't heard any of our Jewish leaders across the Atlantic and on this side speaking out about the injustices against women in the rabbinic courts. I don't see why today in Jerusalem, in Haifa, in Tel Aviv, Jewish women, no matter what their persuasion, have to suffer from the lack of justice.

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*The problem is  
how to make  
women in Israel  
live with dignity,  
with equality.*

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TAMAR ESHEL: I say, especially to our American friends here, that I speak in the name of the majority of women in Israel — secular women, and many Orthodox women too — who have been forced in their daily life and primary needs to abide by a monopolistic Orthodox rabbinate that is growing more and more extremist from day to day. I want you to know that the attitudes of the monopolistic rabbinate have estranged and alienated many Jews who might otherwise have had a positive attitude to religion. I want you to know that there is a complete barring of pluralism of Judaism in Israel, and I appeal to you to be more aggressive to help remedy the situation.

We are speaking here of the primary needs of women as women. Take divorce, custody of children, property rights. In America, you have options; we don't. Moreover, we are confronted here with the real threat of the extension of the jurisdiction of the rabbinical court, so that we will not be able to appeal to the Supreme Court of Israel for the redress of human rights.

I suspect that a great deal of the difficulties which we women confront in Israel derives from the fact that we don't have the help and support of men, because in the long run the present laws serve them and they are not interested in change. I have seen this happen in the Knesset, where when such issues came up, the men suddenly disappear or don't participate in the vote.

I am full of appreciation for women like Penina Peli and others in the Orthodox community. However, I have sat with ultra-Orthodox women who start asking questions, but they don't dare go against the men, they don't dare question the rabbis. I look around and the women from the Orthodox camp who speak out had their roots in America, where they were educated, both Jewishly and professionally. Their Israeli counterparts, unfortunately, do not reach the same stage of education.

While you are preoccupied as Orthodox women or as Conservative women with the role of women in religion, let me tell you that our main problem is how to make women in Israel live with dignity, with equality, and not with this asymmetry of attitude between men and women as it is manifested in the rabbinical courts.

SHULAMIT ALONI: Listening to some of the comments here, I felt that I was sitting in a theological seminar sometime back in the 1950s and not at a Dialogue in Israel in 1984.

I would like to ask a rhetorical question of our American friends. How would you feel if your Congress enacted legislation that all Jews, in matters of personal status, are henceforth to be under the jurisdiction of Christian law? In Israel, of course, all matters of personal status — marriage, divorce, guardianship, etc., etc. — are by law under the jurisdiction of men of the religious establishment, who get their power from the secular state and who want us to live according to laws which were up to date 3,000 years ago.

America is a pluralistic society. But we Israelis, Israeli Jews that is, are a majority of the people in our country. We are a nation. What is Judaism for us? To my mind there are four things that constitute Judaism on which I hope all of us agree, and let's start with them.

The first is that God created Adam as a person, not as a man; meaning, as a man and a woman. The Jewish tradition holds that all people, all over the world, are children of Adam, and that is why they are all equal, entitled to equal rights and opportunities. They are all of them in the image of God.

The second feature of Judaism is that we never had a pope. The various "popes" we do have today are a result of politics. Traditionally, Jews chose their rabbis; they cannot be imposed upon us by political attitudes.

The third thing is that all of us — men, women, and children — were at Mount Sinai. Hence I, as a woman, am also declared to be a Jew, just like every rabbi, and I have the right to say what Judaism is if I go and study. Everyone, women as well as men, has the right to study and to teach, since the Torah was given to all of us.

The fourth thing is that each of us has the right to choose, be it the right way or the wrong way. It is up to us to choose whether to follow the path of the Priests or the Prophets,

the way of ritual or the way of morality. Those are the thing that we as women, as human beings, as Israelis, have to face today.

I second what Tamar Eshel said. It is all very well for women to be in a *minyan* and to pray wearing a *tallit*, but let's not whitewash the double standard under which Israeli women live. The problem for us women in Israel is that religion is a political instrument. In Israel the price of an egg is a political issue, and so is the status of women.

A woman stands alone in the world, a Jew stands alone — unless he or she belongs to a community. And as a community we have to struggle to work together, as women and Jews, to be what we really want to be.

CYNTHIA FUCHS EPSTEIN: The previous speaker has made the outstanding point that in Israel religion is tied in with politics, possibly more so than anywhere else. Perhaps we from America can be helpful in extending our hands across whatever national divisions there are.

In the early days of the women's movement we in America used the power of the press. We made public our private tragedies and problems by joining together and making them social issues and social problems. For example, women who had had abortions took full-page ads in the newspapers. There is no reason why here in Israel battered women, women who have suffered the problems of the divorce courts, who have lost custody of their children, could not make their private tragedies public as a way of exerting pressure on the populace to understand what the consequences are of these religious laws which are the law of the land.

In the early days we marched on the State Houses, we tried to show solidarity. Those of us who could write wrote in the newspapers and the magazines, and when the time was necessary, as Betty Friedan pointed out, 50,000 of us took to the streets with signs and placards. Those mechanisms are not alien to Israeli society. Perhaps it is time to march on the temples and on the courts where power holds reign and show what the opinion of the people truly is.

Yael Rom: One of the problems we have here in Israel is the lack of an inbred democratic way of looking at things. We have no tradition of standing up for our rights and asserting ourselves and crying out against injustice. I wish that things were different.

Shulamit Aloni has been in the Knesset for quite a number of years, as was Tamar Eshel. But women are always a minority there, and are not taken into account as such in the system of coalition government that has been in effect here for the past 36 years. The major political parties are always bending over backward to get the help of the smaller parties. This results in a situation where the smaller parties can often call the shots.

I suggest that women in Israel take a lesson from this. Israeli women make up almost 51 percent of the population and within their own parties can have great influence. Heretofore we have never been successful in forming a women's caucus in the Knesset. On some of the most important issues the women members have tried to set up a lobby, but when it came time to vote, the lobby was broken and the women did exactly as the whips told them to. The way for women to become politically effective is to become active members within their own party, in the grass-roots chapters, and to use their voting power everytime somebody has to be elected for office in the chapter.

For our part, at this Dialogue, we are going to pass on a resolution, which will be put on the table tomorrow. It will probably include many of the things that were discussed today and will certainly reflect the spirit of our discussion.

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*We are in  
a historic moment  
and much  
will come of this.  
There is  
a genuine passion  
here.*

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FRANCES RADAY: I enjoyed Judith Hauptman's address but I see no relevance in her observations to the situation in Israel. I think it is wildly optimistic to feel that we can change the Orthodox establishment from within. The Orthodox establishment in this country controls idea-making and policy-making within the whole area of Jewish law as it affects women's personal lives. We are not going to be able to have the kind of influence from within because of the political aspects of the religious monopoly in Israel.

The religious parties in this country, together with the religious authorities, have created deep divisions in Israeli society. Not only have they removed women from all say in things which are essential to their lives, they have also divided women from women. There are women who serve in the army and there are women who go to the university to study while their sisters are doing army service. There are also men who serve in the army and men who sit and learn in yeshivot while the religious authorities tell us that Israel's wars are not sufficiently essential to Israel's survival to suspend Torah studies to go and

risk one's life on the front together with the rest of the Israeli population. Israeli society tolerates all this, as well as condoning the enormous injustice to women. I do not think that we women can bring about what the men have not managed to do regarding the religious establishment.

We are thus faced with an agonizing choice — either to go on submitting to the dictates and domination of a tiny minority of males in this country, or to create a parallel system. Many women, who cherish humanistic values, would perhaps choose to create a parallel system which allows women here to have the same choices that American Jewish women have.

BETTY FRIEDAN: I have a very trustworthy historic Geiger counter, as my American sisters know, and it is clicking very fast at this moment. I think we are in a historic moment here and that much will come from this. I have been greatly moved by this session, by the passion of Shulamit and Tamar and all the people who had seemed to me earlier to be so divided. There is a genuine passion here that is the preceding necessity for action.

When we first began our movement in America there were few of us and we were hesitant and timid. It was also the end of the McCarthy era and it was really risky for women in government and in the labor unions to take part in our activities. But we were able to accomplish what we did by using the media and making the personal political. It was all done without an enormous amount of machinery. The women almost spontaneously came together and built a movement. It wasn't a political or ideological thing, but a matter of deciding to deal with specific issues that arose out of our concrete experience as women.

For instance, we were once invited to a board meeting in the Biltmore Hotel in New York, which happened then to have a men's bar that refused to serve women. So we said: How can we go to a board meeting at the Biltmore and not do something about the bar situation? It may seem a frivolous issue — the right to be served in a bar — when we have such matters as employment to think about. But no, we said, we have to confront our issues where we face them. Well, a husband tipped off the hotel management about what we were planning to do, and they closed the bar before we got there with our picket signs. But we had alerted the TV and we picketed in front of the TV cameras outside the closed for-men-only bar. The message got across to women who would never have identified with the women's cause if it had been just a job action we were protesting.

What I am saying to you is that there are creative ways for women to take concrete actions to dramatize the issues, to use the media to get the message across to those who are not within the reach of your own organizations.

You don't need to do this in a way that requires a majority vote from eight million different organizations. You do this by appealing to individual women. There are lessons here for the Israeli women that can be learned from the American women.

**HENRY SIEGMAN:** I am reminded by Betty Friedan's comments how different the situation is in the United States than in Israel. Betty speaks of dramatizing the plight of the women in the media, but the media in Israel are, in effect, one television station

controlled by the government. This should give one some sense of the difference in the two.

I am in complete agreement with those around the table who have expressed their anger and outrage at the inequities that have been caused in this society by the stranglehold of the rabbinate in Israel on certain areas of domestic life. Forgive me, however, if I say that there is a certain degree of hypocrisy here. Let me tell you specifically what I mean. Who gave that monopoly to the rabbinate? If the Labor Alignment today were able to form a government with the religious parties, wouldn't they do so, even if it meant changing the "Who is a Jew" legislation in accord with the latter's demands? Over the past 30 years, it was the Labor Party that gave them that monopoly, as the price of forming stable governments.

I had an experience here the other day that drove home to me the reality of how profoundly, how egregiously, life is politicized in this country in every respect. The head of an organization I shall not name, an Israeli organization, deeply concerned about religious coercion, called our president, Theodore Mann, and myself and demanded an immediate, urgent meeting. This was when the coalition negotiations to form a new government had just started. We were asked to drop everything and meet with them because there was great danger that one of the two parties might reach an agreement with one of the religious parties, and the price of that would be not just changing the "Who is a Jew" legislation but also giving the religious courts absolute jurisdiction in certain domestic matters, without recourse to secular courts. That sounded like a very critical situation, so we dropped everything and met with them. At one point, one of us asked the head of the organization the following question: If the Alignment were able to form a Government with the religious parties, and the only thing that prevented a Likud Government would be capitulation to the religious parties, what would you say? He said: I would say go ahead and make that deal. This, mind you, is the head of an organization dedicated to the ending of "religious coercion."

The same experience was repeated in this very room yesterday, when we were discussing the matter of submitting a resolution to both major political parties, an innocent resolution, to my mind, which said nothing more than, "If you are about to form a coalition and make agreements, please don't do this on women's backs." Those of you who were here yesterday saw how provocative this was and the kind of furor it caused — which suggested once again that the politicized nature of Israeli life apparently transcends all principles, including those enshrined in the agenda we are discussing here today.

The integrity we demand of others ought to express itself in our own deliberations here as well.

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Thursday morning, August 2, 1984

## Session 6: Women in Politics

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*The session was chaired by TAMAR ESHEL, a former member of the Knesset (Labor Alignment), who introduced the two speakers of the morning: SHULAMIT ALONI, the leader of an Israeli political party, the Citizens' Rights Movement, who was recently reelected to her fourth term in the Knesset; and*

*ELIZABETH HOLTZMAN, a former U.S. Congresswoman, now serving as District Attorney of Brooklyn, N.Y. Before the session convened, many of the Dialogue participants joined in a woman's minyan (prayer service), led by NAAMAH KELMAN, a member of the Hebrew University's Melton Center.*

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Shulamit Aloni

### The Political Perils of Israeli Women

**T**here is a notion that we in Israel cling to, namely, that before the state was established, during the pioneer days, women and men shared equal rights and equal responsibilities. This is a myth. Men and women, to be sure, shared equal responsibilities and labored under the same yoke of hardship, but the women did not really enjoy equal rights and status. The problems we are facing today were already manifest in the pre-state period.

In 1946, you may remember, we experienced what came to be called Black Sabbath, when many of the leaders of the Yishuv (the Jewish polity in then Palestine) were taken to prison and Golda Meir was thus appointed head of the Political Bureau of the Jewish Agency. The religious parties then issued the following statement:

We of this nation find it difficult to accept a woman as head of a political bureau. For this is the nation that for generations to come has enacted the code of *kvodah bat-melech p'nimah* (the honor of woman is within her home); that imposed commandments on men and not on women; that withheld from women the right to be judges, leaders, and witnesses; that determined woman's place to be within her own domain. With all due respect to this wise and diligent woman, she cannot stand at the head of one of the most central posts in Jewish public life. This is as clear as the laws of nature. It is the eternal Hebrew law. There are boundaries and limits, and each sex must recognize its limits.

We move now to 1948. The Declaration of Independence, establishing the State of Israel, is promulgated and signed by all the political parties, including the religious ones. The Declaration states that all the inhabitants of the state to be established will enjoy equal opportunities, regardless of sex, race, etc. Not long thereafter Golda Meir seeks to run for mayor of Tel Aviv on the Labor Party ticket. Now, the religious parties, which then as now were members of the national coalition government — indeed, Ben-Gurion had given them whatever they wanted, including the powerful Ministry of Religious Affairs — decided they were not going to stay in a coalition that included a party, one of whose leading members was a woman

mayor of Tel Aviv. Golda Meir, of course, never became mayor of Tel Aviv.

In the late 1950s the president of Israel was the veteran Labor leader Yitzhak Ben-Zvi. The Speaker of the Knesset was another Labor veteran, Kaddish Luz, and the Vice Speaker was Beba Idelson, a long-time leader in the woman's arm of the Labor movement. When the president is away, the rule is that the Speaker of the Knesset takes his place. President Ben-Zvi was once abroad, and Speaker Luz was due to go to Ethiopia, I believe. The religious parties didn't permit Luz to leave the country until Ben-Zvi returned, because they wouldn't tolerate a woman, Beba Idelson, as acting head of state.

If all this was so, how did Golda Meir become the prime minister? It happened as follows: when Premier Levi Eshkol died in 1969, the Labor Alignment had a majority in the Knesset and didn't need to depend on coalition votes. Golda Meir was quickly appointed by her party as prime minister. The religious parties, which had every reason to remain in the government if they wished to maintain their various controls, had to decide whether or not to stay in a government headed by a woman. They went to consult with Chief Rabbi Nissim, who ruled that it was permitted for the religious parties to remain in a government headed by Golda Meir, because the head of state is the president and not the prime minister. But that didn't satisfy them completely, so they turned to other rabbis, who advised that if a woman is appointed and not elected — and Golda's premiership didn't come about as the result of an election — then she may be compared to the judge Deborah, whose appointment in ancient times was of divine inspiration. Golda was flattered by the comparison and returned the compliment by acceding to the religious parties' demands to change the Law of Return from a secular law to a religious one, against the recommendation of all the judges of the Supreme Court.

This happened in 1970 and the story is instructive. Apparently, things didn't change all that much since 1946, insofar as Golda and the religious parties were concerned. (Incidentally,

during Golda's premiership, in 1972, there was a film on TV dealing with women. Among other things, the commentary said that women should stay at home and have nothing to do with politics. This, at a time when a woman was prime minister!)

I myself — and forgive me if I get personal for a moment — until I became involved in public political life, I was not aware of the question of discrimination against women. I lived as a person. I felt myself equal or not equal to individuals and not to groups. I am married. I have three sons. My husband is not a true feminist, but he is a strong man and he didn't think that my work would challenge his dignity or threaten him in any way.

At one time I had a radio program — it was quite popular — which dealt with the problems of the individual and the state, focusing on abuses of the bureaucracy. Moshe Dayan, Avraham Ophir, Ariel Sharon, and other Cabinet ministers complained to my husband about me. "What kind of a man are you," they said to him, "if you cannot stop your wife from doing all these terrible things?" One day, when I took issue with the minister of justice over some matter, he stopped talking to my husband. The only person who didn't punish him for what I was doing was Golda Meir. All the male politicians,

however, felt that they had the right to tell my husband how I should behave, and if he wasn't going to do something about it, then something must be wrong with him.

In 1973, I dared to run for election to the Knesset. I discovered that the Israeli people, especially the women, are more open-minded, more sophisticated, more liberal than the system. In my campaign, I decided to push women's issues. There were other women in the race, and we worked together, then as now. When we came to the Knesset, in 1974, there was a government in which the religious parties were in opposition. For the first time ever we raised women's issues on the floor of the Knesset. You wouldn't believe the whisperings in the chamber. "This is not a problem." "What are you doing?" "Only a man who loves his wife beats her." "There is nothing to complain about." Etc., etc.

When Tamar Eshel and I brought up the question of rape victims — we sought to change the prevalent notion that the victim is really to blame for her rape — you wouldn't believe the indifference we encountered. But as it happened, three cases came to light, where the victims were over the age of 70 and had been raped in their own homes. No one could accuse these women of provocative behavior. We proceeded to enlighten our male colleagues about the nature of rape. I cite

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these reactions — it was the same when we raised the issue of battered wives — so that you will understand what we are up against here.

The question of abortion in Israel is another point of contention, linked as it is to political issues. In Jewish tradition the fetus is considered part of the mother's body. It becomes a person, a human being, only after it is separated from the mother. Abortion, in the Jewish view, is not murder and should therefore be permitted. However, the problem is that the wife, in Jewish tradition, is regarded as the instrument of her husband, his accessory in his fulfillment of the commandment to be fruitful and multiply. Moreover, there is the feeling in this country that propagation is for the benefit of the nation, particularly after the losses of the Holocaust. But a woman, as a person, must have the right to decide whether or not she wants to have children. This is an issue which the Knesset today is ignoring, because of the religious pressures.

**H**ave things changed since 1946, when Golda Meir's appointment as political head of the Jewish Agency was castigated by the religious authorities? I am afraid not. The same attitudes prevail and have even become stronger. In the last municipal elections, for instance, there was an agreement among the religious parties, running as a bloc, that they would enter no coalition with a party which was running a woman for mayor.

We have in this country two large women's organizations,

Na'amat and WIZO. Unfortunately, they are anachronisms in our present society. Before the establishment of the state they served a real purpose, providing welfare and educational services that are now the prerogative of the state. But imagine what would happen if the women's organizations — which number more than a half-million members — would decide to stand up for the rights of women and to send women to the Knesset. Imagine, too, if the Labor Party adhered to its principles of assigning a sufficient percentage of women to its election lists. These are matters that can come to pass if women in the ranks are ready to fight for their rights. But they need leadership and a green light to move. Consider, if you will, the hypocrisy of a situation whereby two women judges sit on the Supreme Court, but cannot sit on a family court, nor even be witnesses in family court. Why do we tolerate this? I believe that change will come about only when the public is ready for it, and demands it.

As you know, I have just successfully concluded my fourth campaign for election to the Knesset, again as the head of my own Citizens' Rights Party. Although I was in the Palmach, I was never a general, but I suppose I may be compared to those generals who at one time or another headed political parties and had won seats — Moshe Dayan, Ariel Sharon, Ezer Weizman. At any rate, as I noted, this is our fourth time. You must understand that we achieved victory without a political machine, without money, and with a woman at the head of the ticket. It must mean that the country is ready for women to move ahead and to stand up for their rights.

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Elizabeth Holtzman

## The Empowerment of American Women

**T**HE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT in the United States did not spring full-grown from the brow of Zeus. It started as a painful, difficult, lonely, small struggle. We had to invent everything along the way. There was no tradition, no pattern, no precedent. And the struggle is still not over. In the early 1960s, Betty Friedan and others started the movement. But only slowly, over the last few years, have women's rights been taken seriously in the United States.

The struggle is still painful for women who break barriers. Only last year, for example, were women finally admitted, by court order, into the ranks of New York City firefighters. Then, these few women firefighters were so viciously harassed by their male colleagues that a judge had to order the fire department to desist. The harassment, among other things, consisted of the male firefighters taking away the oxygen equipment, so that if the women had gone to fight a fire, they might have died. I hear someone in the audience asking, "Why does a woman want to become a firefighter anyway?" I would answer, why does a man want to become a firefighter? Why do we deny a woman her dreams? Aren't a woman's dreams as valid as a man's?

It is critical to understand not only how difficult the struggle has been, and continues to be, for women's rights in the United States, but also that not all women support the effort for women's rights. There are organizations, including some large, well-financed ones, with articulate women leaders, organized specifically to fight against women's rights.

Nevertheless, we have achieved much. To begin with, we have gained important laws prohibiting, for example, discrimination in all aspects of employment. We have changed laws in order to protect women more effectively against violence — both on the street and in the home. We have elected many women to public office. Indeed, 13 percent of all seats in state legislatures are now held by women; and 10 percent of all seats in municipal councils. Moreover, 7 percent of all mayors are women.

Also, we have a woman who broke the "space barrier" and became an astronaut. We have a woman on the Supreme Court of the United States (only a century ago, the Supreme Court would not allow women lawyers to practice before it). We have seen a major party in the United States nominate a woman for vice president. Beyond that, perhaps the most important

achievement of all, we have changed the minds and consciousness of millions of American women. The political achievements could not have been made without the understanding and the support of these women and millions of men as well.

For all the successes, our agenda is still large. We don't have an Equal Rights Amendment. We need better laws with respect to family rights. We don't have adequate day care. We don't have the proper protection for women with respect to insurance and pensions. Yet, despite the existence of considerable discrimination and the opposition of certain sectors of society to the advancement of women, we remain profoundly optimistic. We believe we can change things, and we will.

**L**et me explain the important role women in political office in the United States have played in furthering the movement. This knowledge may be helpful to women in Israel. Women holding public office in the United States have made an enormous difference with respect to women's rights. Virtually all of the legislation in the U.S. Congress advancing the status of women has been authored by other women. So, in the United States, the position of women in the legislature has been key to advancing the status of women.

Regarding the judiciary, a recent study done in New Jersey about the attitudes toward women in the court system found that there was systematic and pervasive bias against women in the judiciary. This bias was found not only in employment (there are very few women judges) but also with respect to substantive decisions regarding family matters — custody, divorce, alimony, and support payments. These are things that we are beginning to address, and that is one reason it is critical to have more women in the judiciary.

In executive positions, women have made a big difference. I would like to talk briefly about my experience as a District Attorney in Brooklyn. I was amazed, when I took office in 1982, to find serious discrimination. Despite the existence of laws prohibiting discrimination on a federal and state level, there was widespread discrimination. There were roughly 350 lawyers in my office, about 30 percent women, yet not one single woman held a position of authority. Since I took charge, I made a sustained effort to promote qualified women. Now almost half of all of the bureaus in that office are headed by women. This gives you an idea what can be done to redress discrimination against women. Indeed, I cannot stress enough how critical it is to have women holding positions at every level of government, whether it is in the President's Cabinet, a municipal office, or a county office, such as mine. Women in authority, committed to advancing the status of women, can make extraordinary and important changes.

Women also have problems in campaigning. We have problems raising money. We also encounter serious problems with public attitudes. When I ran for District Attorney, there were women and men who came up to me and said, "You know Liz, I voted for you for Congress and I voted for you for the United States Senate, but this is not a job for a woman and I'm not going to vote for you." I thought to myself, why should

that be? Then I realized that perhaps the public thinks that all legislators do is talk — and women can undoubtedly talk just as well as men. But being a district attorney is a real job, involving the prosecution of criminals and putting people in jail; women just can't do those things. A central theme of my opponent's campaign was the notion that a woman couldn't be district attorney.

Well, I can inform you that last year my office had the highest conviction rate of any of the district attorney's offices in New York City, so obviously, a woman can do the job just as well as a man.

Women also confront hostility from the press. Assertive men are described as "bold," while women exhibiting similar characteristics are pejoratively called "aggressive" or "strident." There is clearly a double standard. Behavior that is acceptable on the part of men, indeed valued and admirable in political life, is attacked and mischaracterized in women.

Perhaps the most serious problem that women confront has to do with the at best indifference, or at worst hostility, of the political establishment. Most of the women elected to office never got there with the blessing, support, or help of the established political parties. When I first ran for Congress, I did so outside the party structure. Similarly, when Geraldine Ferraro first ran for Congress, she did not have the support of the established political machine in her area. In general women had the support of the political parties and the political establishment only when the latter thought the race was impossible; if their side has to lose, if the candidate is a woman, fine. Perhaps things are changing now, but the political parties still will not choose and support women as candidates for office unless it is overwhelmingly clear that it is in their own interest to do so.

**A**s it happens, it may now be a matter of self-interest in the U.S. to support women in politics. Since 1980, a new phenomenon has emerged, the so-called "gender gap." This means that more women than men are voting and that there is a disparity in the attitudes between women and men in terms of candidates and issues. In the 1982 elections, for instance, three governors were elected by the votes of women. In 1984, it is expected that if the registration of women takes place, up to 9 million more women than men will vote in the American election for president and vice president. Women clearly hold the balance of power in the United States.

The gender gap emerged partly, I believe, because of Ronald Reagan's rhetoric. We now have a President who, for the first time, has abandoned the bipartisan position on women's issues and has said "no" to women — no with respect to constitutional equality, reproductive freedom, budget allocations, appointments to high-level positions. Beyond that, as the polls have shown, there is a difference between men and women on issues of war and peace. Women in the United States were more negative on the issue of the invasion of Grenada, more supportive of cuts in the military budget, and much more concerned about the problems of nuclear holocaust and nuclear destruction. Ronald Reagan has, if you will,

helped to radicalize American women and raise their consciousness enormously. (If there are regressive steps taken in Israel with respect to the status of women, that may have the same result of raising the consciousness of Israeli women in a profound and irreversible way.)

The second factor that affected the gender gap was the women's movement itself, that Betty Friedan led and has now been growing for twenty years. A third factor is that more and more women are entering the work force in the United States because of economic necessity. They are coming into contact with the harsh realities of discrimination, and that has deeply affected their consciousness.

A clear consequence of the gender gap has been the nomination of Geraldine Ferraro as vice president. This is the first time, I believe, in the history of the world that a woman has been picked to run for such high office, not despite the fact that she is a woman, but because she is a woman. Geraldine Ferraro was chosen precisely because of her commitment to women's rights, and because of the intention of the Democratic Party and the Mondale candidacy to appeal directly to women voters and to feminists of both sexes in the United States. Remember that at this year's Democratic Party convention, 50 percent of the delegates were women, following party rule. That is also a critical factor in Ferraro's candidacy. The consequences of Ferraro's selection are enormous. It represents a culmination of decades of struggle and will serve as an inspi-

ration to women everywhere. It legitimizes the political struggle that women have been making.

**W**hat does the American experience have to say to Israeli women? First, that political power for women is difficult to achieve, but despite what seem to be insurmountable obstacles, it can be attained, particularly in the voting booths. There are more women than men. Israeli women, if their consciousness is raised, like their American counterparts can make a difference at the polls. Second, more women in office at all levels have to be part of this program. Third, women in office have to begin to work together despite party lines.

I can speak about this point from personal experience. When I was in the U.S. Congress, I helped found the Congresswomen's Caucus, made up of all the women of both parties in the Congress. We picked an agenda of issues on which we could unanimously agree and we worked on it together. Without our unity, certain important legislative achievements could not have been attained. We formulated the women's agenda then in the Congress. We became a pressure group. We couldn't have existed without bypassing party lines and finding common ground and respecting each other, despite the differences.

Finally, it is critical that pressure be applied on the political process from outside the traditional party sources. Yes, you

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can work from within the party structures, as we did. Yes, you can use quiet diplomacy. But important pressure came from outside, from organizations like NOW, the National Women's Political Caucus, and other groups seeking to move the political parties. The National Women's Political Caucus, significantly, is a bipartisan group made up of Republicans and Democrats. The head of the organization currently is a Republican. When she stands up as a Republican and attacks Ronald Reagan, it has much more force than if the attack came from a Democrat. Still, she speaks as the head of a bipartisan group focusing on women's issues. That kind of structure outside the existing political parties has been a key factor in the United States in advancing the women's agenda and may also be useful in Israel.

In the course of the last several days, we have talked about many issues. We have talked about matters of survival. We have talked about the problems regarding marital status, divorce, employment, social services. These are questions for

both American and Israeli women. In the United States, we women have the power in the 1984 election to change the shape of American society and government, and possibly the world. Will we use the power wisely? I certainly hope so. I hope that women search their consciousness, understand that they count, and then go out and vote in a way that reflects their own sense of personal dignity as women.

It is the same in Israel. The issues that Israeli women have agonized over are, in the final analysis, solvable within the context of political power. The issue is not, do you have the power? You do. The question is whether or not you will use it, and that is a decision only you can make. We in America stand ready to give you whatever benefit of our experience we can. Ultimately, however, the issue is the same for both our communities: Will women use the power they have? Will they stand up for themselves? Will they also stand up for their society? I look forward to a positive answer.

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## DISCUSSION

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**NAOMI COHEN:** I address myself to Shulamit Aloni. Most of what you said pertaining to women's trials and tribulations are points well taken. But why must you use the religious establishment as the scapegoat for society's attitude to women as people? One of the important functions of religions is to be a stabilizer, to help society retain balance while all sorts of important social experiments are being made. I am a committed Orthodox Jew, and as you well know, there are many like me in the country in all strata of society. Let's fight together, not against each other. The cause needs the religious women even more than the non-religious women. But we can't really join hands when what we stand for as people, in addition to our being women, is constantly being maligned.

**NAAMAH KELMAN:** Many of us feminists here in Israel feel like we are aboard a sinking ship, and I'd therefore like to thank Shulamit Aloni for being the daily reminder of the women who are constantly bailing water out of the boat, cup by cup, making sure that we don't sink completely. I'd also like to thank Elizabeth Holtzman for throwing us a lifejacket. Permit me to make a strategic suggestion for grass-roots organizing in Israel with the help of our American sisters and brothers. There's a whole network in Israel of baby clinics and day-care centers. I don't think we've infiltrated them sufficiently. There's enough energy in this room alone to go into these centers and start doing grass-roots organizing. The day-care centers can be turned into women's centers at night, for people who care about human rights, civil rights. We can't do this without the help of

our American sisters. I think that funds should be earmarked in the Jewish women's organizations in America for such activities.

**HAYA KURZ:** I think in the description of the political situation of women in Israel, there was one important omission — women in the labor unions. Even though they constitute about 40 percent of the labor force, they have almost no power in the labor unions. I think we have to examine why this is so, and see what can be done about it.

**CYNTHIA FUCHS EPSTEIN:** There is no question, as Elizabeth Holtzman pointed out, that women have to mobilize resources, and that money has been a terrible problem for women in the United States. It certainly must be a problem here in Israel. Women cannot operate politically without having economic power. Therefore it is very important that this issue be addressed.

I also want to make a comment about Golda Meir, about whether women are selected for high office because or in spite of the fact that they are women. Although it may have been true that Golda came in through the back door, she has acted as a symbol in the world, showing that a woman was competent to handle the affairs of state. I think that what you should do is not attack her, but instead, hold her up as an example. Never mind what she didn't do. Let's point to her competence and effectiveness. Take political advantage of the fact that a woman held the highest political post in this country. Indeed, this is a strategy that can be very effective.

**JUDITH AGASSI BUBER:** We in Israel

have to learn to use the big central value that the American women's movement has created — women's support. We must support each other to get into positions of power and to fight for all those issues that any group of women can agree are common women's issues. Within the political parties, women should form permanent caucuses to act as pressure groups. We also need a strong women's pressure group from outside the parties that would utilize the great potential power of the women's organizations. And for heaven's sake, let's start with the very active feminist movement that we've got in this country; it's small but it's there. Let's overcome all the old hostilities and work together.

**DEBBIE WEISSMAN:** I agree with what Shulamit Aloni said, that the people who are really to blame for the sell-out to the religious establishment are not just the rabbis, but those other Israelis who abdicated their responsibility for Judaism. That's where the problem lies, and it pains me that there were no native Israelis present at the very beautiful prayer service that Naamah Kelman ran this morning. They should have come just to see what it's like; I mean, it doesn't make you into an Orthodox person to come to a service. The service wasn't even Orthodox, and I think it would have been an important experience to see something like that and begin to consider the ways in which secular Israelis can speak with a Jewish voice.

**HAVIVA AVI-GAI:** As a member of Na'amat, I feel obliged to comment on the criticism that was pointed against women's organizations. If you look at the wide spec-

trum of women's rights that have been achieved in Israel in the area of family law, labor law, you cannot ignore the heavy fingerprint of Na'amat, as well as the other women's organizations. It is true that women encounter difficulty finding their way into high political positions. Nevertheless, organizations like Na'amat are schools where the majority of women who have achieved such positions began their education. Don't underestimate the role which women's organizations play in advancing women into high political position.

**Yael Rom:** Elizabeth Holtzman mentioned that the way for women to break into politics is not to go through the political parties or the women's organizations, but to strike out on their own. This, in a country where primary elections are already part of the democratic process. We don't have primaries in Israel and this makes it even more difficult for women to break into politics.

I once ran for the office of mayor of Haifa on an independent ticket, which I didn't want to do, but I couldn't win the nomination of my party. The person who was running against me thought that if he brought the matter before a rabbi, maybe he would get some kind of ruling opposing my candidacy, the way it happened with Golda Meir in Tel Aviv. I'm very proud to say that the rabbi they turned to went on the radio and gave me a *hechsher*, a seal of approval. He said that a mayor is not a head of state, and that the office could be held by a woman. The matter was discussed several times over the radio, and it was marvelous free publicity for me, all this about a woman running for mayor of Haifa and a rabbi giving her a *hechsher*. I didn't win the election, but I made my point and everybody was happy about it. The time was right then for what I did, and the time is right now for women in Israel to break into political life as never before. The temper of Israeli women is ripe for certain decisions, as you will see when we present the resolution we have been preparing.

As you may know, I've been a combat pilot with the Israel Air Force. Now, I'm a small woman and I flew a rather big plane. I was told there was no way I could engage in combat. But I did, by using my brains. This is what all of us have to do. We don't need muscle power, we need brain power. With this, women are as equal as men. Women who want to go into public office should do so, and then all of us should unite around them and give them every support we can.

**SHEILA LEVIN:** It seems that we have come to the conclusion that many of the answers to women's problems lie in and through the political process. Of course, that is a conclusion that American Jews arrived at many years ago, and indeed, Jews have made good use of the political process in the United States. Until very recently, any candidate for

political office who espoused anti-Semitism was summarily rejected by the major political parties. As an American Jewish woman, I now find myself facing an agonizing decision. The Democratic Party represents more of the kinds of rights that women want. But despite the fact that 50 percent of the delegates to the recent Democratic Convention were women, the convention refused to bring to the floor a resolution condemning anti-Semitism. The Democratic Party allowed Reverend Jesse Jackson to play a prominent position at the convention because of the fear of losing the constituency that he represented. It would appear that the Democratic Party has written off the Jewish vote, although it seems to have accommodated the women's agenda. My question, therefore, to Elizabeth Holtzman, is: How do you as a Jewish woman reconcile this dilemma?

**ELIZABETH HOLTZMAN:** First of all, I personally have fought against anti-Semitism, and I am very proud to have started the effort in the U.S. Congress to expel Nazis living in America and to bring them to justice. With regard to the issue of Reverend Jackson, he made a speech in which he apologized for having caused any pain or consternation to Jews. I hope he's sincere. The Jewish religion allows for not just forgiveness, but also for the opportunity, when you've done some-

thing wrong, to try and correct it. We hope Reverend Jackson has done that.

We in the United States live in a society which is multi-racial and multi-ethnic. It would be a great tragedy for Jews and black people, for all Americans and indeed for the world, if blacks and Jews in the U.S. are divided. I hope and I pray that Jesse Jackson is sincere. I will speak out against him if necessary, as I did before. But now he's made his apology, and let's see whether his actions follow his words.

**ALICE SHALVI:** Many of the women who are on the Israeli side in this Dialogue participated, as I did, in a commission established by Prime Minister Rabin to examine the status of women in Israel. We produced, I think, a coherent, cogent, albeit depressing report, which, incidentally, was an eye-opener for many of the women who were themselves on the commission. We also presented a list of recommendations. But both the report and the recommendations were submitted to another Prime Minister and very little of what we reported was taken notice of or acted upon.

On the first anniversary of the submission of the report, discussing the matter at the breakfast table with my husband, I came up with the idea that we ought to have a strike, calling out all the women to demonstrate

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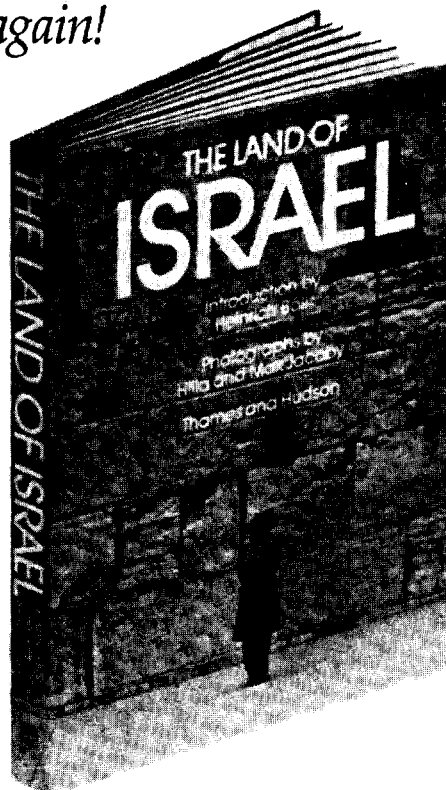
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against the fact that nothing had been done. Having said it, I laughed ruefully, and said, "Small chance." I blame myself now for not having at least tried. The women members of Knesset who were on the commission, also did not try. Was it out of a sense of despair that they could not reach out across the partisan barriers which divide us right through Israeli society? I urge that the time has come for all Israeli women, irrespective of their political beliefs, their party politics, to band together on the lines that American women have set as an inspiring example, to stand together on all those innumerable issues in which I know we share common opinions and common thoughts.

**BETTY FRIEDAN:** I want to relate the question of tactics and strategy to the larger question of values. Here we go back to what Rabbi Hillel taught: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I?" In my country and in Israel, women are often passionate fighters for the rights of others — the poor, the blacks, the

Arabs, everyone but ourselves. On the other hand, certain women, who can be regarded as exceptions, are moving into positions of power in male-dominated fields. In order now to be of service to the larger community of which we are a part — whether it be Israel, Judaism, America, or world peace — we have to admit into our consciousness the empowerment of women as individuals and as part of the community of women. We have to empower ourselves in each other. The women's movement is not a selfish movement. In the most profound sense, the women's movement is each woman empowering other women, and in so doing, putting the values of service and of life that have characterized women traditionally into the public-political arena in a much more conscious and effective way than ever before. I think that this would happen in Israel, too, in ways that I can't even tell you because I'm not Israeli.

I realize that in Israel the existing women's organizations are somehow meek and seeking to curry favor with the establishment. In America, it was no different. Not a single

women's organization, for instance, would take up the opportunity to enforce the law on sex discrimination in employment. That's why we had to start NOW. The League of Women Voters, the American Association of University Women, the United Church Women, the Jewish and Catholic women's organizations, the trade-union women, all would say they are not feminist. So you had to have something new. At the same time, you had the political parties, where women were not on the political agenda at all. We had to make the personal political in a new way and we had to change the political agenda. Looking back 15 years, you can see how different that's become. We come here today from an America where the massive women's organizations are now in a network, where even the establishment women's organizations are feminist, and where the political agenda of the political parties has been changed by the movement of women into politics.

You in Israel don't necessarily have to follow the American model. But you do have to engage in consciousness-raising, and you do have somehow to make political that which before has been personal, and you do have to establish the empowerment of women.



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**NITZA SHAPIRO-LIBAI:** We have heard the names of Geraldine Ferraro and Elizabeth Holtzman mentioned again and again as women who were elected to high office because of their commitment to women's causes, as well as their own capabilities. This could happen in the United States in part because there you are personally elected as a member of Congress, as a District Attorney. Unfortunately, we don't have such elections in Israel. The reality here is that, electorally speaking, we live by party lists. The party machinery, as we all know, is controlled by men, and they decide who will run on the list, including who shall be the token woman. Thus there is a certain minimal women's representation in the Knesset, but is it a representation of women's concerns? I doubt it. In the case of Shulamit Aloni, she ran on her own ticket and headed her own list; that was a kind of personal election. But, by and large, the system is such that a candidate's real commitment to women's causes is irrelevant in the choice of party delegations. When we support women for senior positions we should, I believe, support women who are specifically committed to women's causes. We have not done so in the past, and it's about time we started now.

**FRANCES RADAY:** When I was a student, I was interested in socialism and not feminism. And when we were studying the question of why there was a revolution in France while the English aristocracy maintained its hold without serious problems, we used to say that the aristocracy in England

had an excellent technique of flicking crumbs off the table. Those crumbs kept the masses in line. What are the table crumbs which concern us here in Israel? The crumbs are the powerful women's organization which have been nurtured by our political parties. We also have women in the army, a high participation of women in the labor force, and large numbers of professional women who have reached top positions. What is wrong? Our women's organizations have not shared political power. Women may serve in the army, but they are not part of the general club which wields enormous informal political power. The high participation of women in the labor force has not resulted in trade-union representation. And regarding professional advancement for women, all our district attorneys and lawyers and Ministry of Justice officials have not resulted in the participation of women in any top economic or policy-making body in the country. This is the astounding reality.

Nevertheless, I think there is room for optimism. From this Dialogue I gain the feeling that we Israelis can overcome those things which divide us, that we can stop being satisfied with the crumbs and begin to work together. I think we have a very firm basis to go on, for the crumbs of the past have in fact developed into useful frameworks; however, we cannot rely on them. We must develop an independent framework, a framework outside those male organizations which have proved to be totally indifferent to our concerns.

**RINA SHASHUA-HASSON:** I started out as a lawyer specializing in human rights and personal status cases in both rabbinical and civil courts. Seeing that many things should be corrected in this area, I tried action in women's non-political organizations. After a few years I found that trying to improve women's rights through such organizations meant lobbying with members of the Knesset, who maintain political power in their own hands and do not consider lobbying from outsiders as important. My personal conclusion was that action should be taken through political parties, not only by supporting women in high-rung positions, but by encouraging women to enter political activity in large numbers. We must bring women in Israel to make a connection between their consciousness of women's rights and the power of their political vote.

**LOTTE SALZBERGER:** There are two clear messages which this Dialogue has produced and which have very succinctly and persuasively been presented this morning. The existing structures of the political parties and the women's organizations do not lend themselves to the promotion of our cause. We must desist from the illusion that they can. Second, this message should be translated into action after this Dialogue is concluded. We must take this opportunity to consolidate

our forces instead of dividing our power. We have ten women in the Knesset, we have 80 women in positions of local authority, we have a couple of hundred women in the universities, we have women in the Histadrut, we have women officers in the army. We have to start today to establish a national organization of women. We have to defend not only those things we want to achieve in the future, but the gains we have achieved in the past which are now at great risk. I urge the participants of this Dialogue to accept the resolution which will be presented to you today, and with the help of the American Jewish Congress and our American counterparts, to establish a national organization of women who can defend one another in Israeli society.

**VIRGINIA SNITOW:** It seems clear that what will grow out of this Dialogue is some form of political expression. I am not quite sure whether we should work through the parties or behind the parties. My own feeling is that the Israeli women will have to find a way to express themselves purely and clearly in those areas which are essential to them, even though they may differ politically on issues concerning the nation as a whole. Through the years, there has been, as far as I as an outsider have been able to see, a growing sense of unity, of a common purpose and common goals. Simone de Beauvoir said years ago that no political party, Left, Right, or Center,

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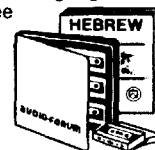
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can be depended upon to really speak for women. We may ultimately have to count on the initial strength and power of the women themselves. They must work from a center of strength, because, in my judgment, unity is the name and unity is the game. We must reach out to those women who still think of their problems in personal terms, who are passive, and break into their ranks. When we do that, we will be building an enormous and powerful women's movement in this country, and I for one will be very happy.

Following this discussion, Alice Shalvi — on behalf of the committee charged with the drafting of the statement specifying Israeli feminist concerns — presented the document to the Dialogue participants for approval. There was unanimous agreement on the text of the statement (reproduced below), which was addressed to the Israeli politicians who, consequent to the elections held only a few days before, were now engaged in attempting to form a new government. Betty Friedan then suggested that, at the conclusion of the Dialogue proceedings, the participants march as a body from the Van Leer Foundation to the King David Hotel, where Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Shamir were holding coalition talks, and present the political leaders with the statement. The suggestion was greeted enthusiastically, and the session adjourned for lunch.

## Closing Session

The Dialogue reconvened in the afternoon for the closing session, devoted to a summation and to future planning, with PHIL BAUM, associate executive director of the American Jewish Congress, presiding. Mr. Baum introduced CYNTHIA OZICK, the novelist, essayist, and critic, who delivered the Dialogue's valedictory address, "Torah as Feminism, Feminism as Torah" (previously published in CONGRESS MONTHLY, Sept./Oct. 1984).

The ensuing deliberations included a discussion of strategies for the upcoming United Nations Conference on Women, marking the end of the UN Decade on Women, to take place in Nairobi, Kenya, in July 1985. (Earlier UN women's conferences, in Mexico City and Copenhagen, had turned into anti-Israel and anti-Zionist forums.) The participants

also pledged to work toward an international network of Jewish women and men, ranging across religious and political lines, that would be concerned with equal status and opportunities for Jewish women throughout the world. Further, they adopted a decision to prepare a statement for presentation to American Jewish communal leaders, a parallel to the Israeli statement. In his farewell remarks to the Dialogue participants, Theodore R. Mann, president of AJCongress, observed: "With a little bit of luck and a lot of hard work, it may be that something was born here today."

The formal business of the Dialogue having been concluded, the participants, now joined by other interested women, over 100 strong, filed out of the Van Leer Foundation and marched to the nearby King David Hotel, providing, as the Jerusalem Post noted, "an unusual sight on the streets of Jerusalem." The Post account continued: "Hotel security officers were pushed aside as the wall of women, chanting in Hebrew 'no government on women's backs,' pressed for-

ward demanding to be heard." Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Shamir interrupted their negotiations to receive a delegation from the women's group. Alice Shalvi, flanked by Tamar Eshel and Yael Rom, read out the Israeli women's demands to the two political leaders who, it was reported, reacted sympathetically. In the view of many observers, this demonstration, a first for Israel — made up of women representing every political party in the country, most of the women's organizations, a variety of professions, and all the religious and secular streams in Judaism — marked the beginning of a real feminist movement in Israel.

As a result of the 20th annual America-Israel Dialogue — "Woman as Jew, Jew as Woman: An Urgent Inquiry" — two permanent groups have been formed: in Israel, the Israel Women's Lobby, coordinated by Alice Shalvi; in the United States, the National Commission for Women's Equality, a full commission of the American Jewish Congress, co-chaired by Betty Friedan and Leona Chanin.

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## A Statement of Concern

We, leading Jewish women from Israel and the United States, meeting together in Jerusalem at the 20th annual Dialogue of the American Jewish Congress to discuss the status of the Jewish woman, feel impelled to express to you our deep concern lest the cause of women in Israel be ignored or sacrificed during the present political negotiations for the formation of a new government.

While women have, in the course of the election campaign, played an active role within the various parties, they are grossly under-represented among those elected and are not adequately represented in the negotiation procedures.

We therefore urge that the concerns of women be granted the attention and action appropriate to a group constituting 51 percent of Israel's population.

In view of Israel's past coalition government agreements, we are particularly concerned that such agreements not be signed at the expense of women. We therefore wish to draw your attention to the following points, which are only some of the vital ones:

1. In order to prevent any erosion in the status of women, we demand that their concerns be given high priority in government policies, programs, and practices.
2. We insist that the new government take no action and enact no legislation detrimental to the personal status of women.
3. We demand legislation to ensure women's freedom of choice in family planning.
4. We strongly oppose budget cutbacks in social services which would adversely affect the condition of women.
5. We urge the government to take affirmative action to ensure women's freedom from discrimination in all aspects of employment, including the safeguarding of their rights during economic recession.
6. We demand that there be a significant increase in the number of women in key policy-making and administrative positions.

In conclusion, we wish to express our firm belief that strengthening the status of women in Israel is vital to strengthening the nation as a whole.

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**"The idea that religion and politics don't mix  
was invented by the Devil  
to keep Christians from running their own country."**

**-- Rev. Jerry Falwell**



## **WHAT ABOUT THIS JEWISH CHILD? ISN'T AMERICA HIS COUNTRY, TOO?**

If the Moral Majority has its way and the Constitution is changed to permit prayer in our schools, Jewish children — and children of other minority faiths — will experience daily humiliation.

But school prayers are only the first step. Criminalizing abortion, censoring school textbooks, teaching "scientific creationism" — these are some of the ways by which the Evangelical Right seeks to impose its fundamentalist views on the American people.

In the words of a Moral Majority founder, Paul Weyrich, "We are talking about Christianizing America."

The threat that confronts every American Jew — and all other religious minorities — is without precedent. Never before have the forces intent on twisting the Constitution to their own purposes had at their disposal such political influence and financial resources.

One organization has led the struggle for religious freedom and separation of church and state since its founding in 1917 — the American Jewish Congress. Our lawyers have said "no" to violations of the First Amendment in some 400 church-state cases since the end of World War II. The Jewish community calls us its Attorney General.

We will not stand by and permit the radical Right to roll back the freedoms of America's minority faiths. We are determined that the Jewish experience in Europe will not be repeated in America. We will not be made guests in our own land.

### **How You Can Help**

To win this battle — in the Congress, the courts, the media — we need your help right now. Here is how you can play your part in the campaign to preserve religious liberty in America:

- (1) Join the American Jewish Congress.
- (2) Make a gift to the Fund for Religious Liberty of the American Jewish Congress.

Please respond today. Our children — and our country — need you.

American Jewish Congress, 15 East 84th Street, New York, NY 10028

...Please enroll me as a member of the American Jewish Congress  
☐ \$100 (Century Club) ☐ \$50 (Couple) ☐ \$35 (Individual)  
 ...Here is my contribution to the American Jewish Congress Fund for Religious Liberty.  
☐ \$1000 ☐ \$500 ☐ \$250 ☐ \$100 ☐ Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 ...I wish to volunteer my services and skills in this urgent cause. Please contact me.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY AND STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE (DAY) \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE (EVENING) \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to the American Jewish Congress. All contributions will be earmarked for the Fund for Religious Liberty. Your gift is tax-deductible.

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