

The Orthodox
Jewish Woman
and Ritual:

*Options and
Opportunities*

 Shabbat

THIS BOOKLET IS DEDICATED BY
ELLIE AND DAVID WERBER IN HONOR OF
THEIR CHILDREN SHOSHANA, TOVAH AND JOSHUA

STEPPING FORWARD, STEPPING BACK

“**A**nd God rested on the seventh day from all the work which God had done. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy.”

It is interesting that in *Genesis*, holiness is exemplified by lack of action; the seventh day is holy because it is the day on which God ceased to create. The space of the earth is filled, and God retreats to the domain of time, where it is the absence of creativity that engenders sanctity. It is the moments of stepping aside, rest, withdrawal, that allow God to appreciate creation.

When we think of meaningful ritual, what comes to mind is most often large defining events that mark turning points in our lives. Births, *Bat Mitzvah*'s, weddings, are sacred moments which serve as signposts and allow us to connect individual and community. When we search for increased participation for women in ritual, it is to these events that we turn, hoping that if we can in some way find space for women in these events, all else will follow. Life-Cycle events are big, they are public, they are important. Yet, we often forget to retreat, to take a step back and consider how to increase roles for women in a more private domain; a domain we encounter week after week, a domain which challenges us to consider the true meaning of holiness. In this issue we discuss women's ritual on Shabbat, in an attempt to show how it is in the rituals which recur day after day, week after week, that the true progress for women within Orthodoxy will be made.

Shabbat has always been connected to women in a special way. Women, just as men, are commanded to refrain from work on Shabbat, and hence are also obligated in the positive commandments of the day. There are distinct *mitzvot* for Shabbat which historically have been connected with women, such as lighting Shabbat candles and baking *challah*. Not to be overlooked is the tremendous amount of preparation time for Shabbat, that still today is for the most part is carried out by women. All of these things, whether we view them as liberating or restricting, tighten the bond between women and Shabbat.

In this issue, we attempt to illuminate some of the aspects of Shabbat ritual that women have historically been connected to. In doing this we hope to show that as we look to the future, we can also look to the past for paradigms of how women have shaped our religion. With an understanding of our tradition, we turn forward to new models of how

women's participation in Shabbat ritual may be increased. Thus in addition to discussing candle-lighting and study of Torah, we consider how women may take on increased roles in the synagogue and at the Shabbat table. It is our hope that by learning to take a step back and appreciate rituals which occur week after week, we are indeed coming one step closer to the holiness that is Shabbat.

The Editors

HALACHOT OF KIDDUSH, HAMOTZI AND HAVDALAH

On Shabbat, we mark time with rituals which serve as points of entry and reminders of the holiness of the day. The following is a brief outline of the *halachik* aspects of women's participation in the rituals of *kiddush*, *hamotzi*, and *havdalah*.

Traditionally, the ritual of *kiddush* has been reserved for men. The man was viewed as the head of the household, and thus recited *kiddush* for the female members of his household. However, if we investigate the laws of *kiddush*, we find that women's obligation to recite the *kiddush* is equivalent to that of men. The *Talmud* in *Brachot* 20b lays down the rule that just as women are obligated to refrain from work on Shabbat, so too are they obligated to observe the positive commandments of Shabbat. Thus, even though the *mitzvah* of *kiddush* is a time bound commandment (*mitzvat aseh shehazman grama*) and women would normally be exempt, in the case of Shabbat they are obligated in this *mitzvah*. As men and women are equally obligated to hear *kiddush*, a woman may recite *kiddush* for a man. Despite the fact that it is *halachically* permissible for a woman to recite the *kiddush* for a man, this is not commonly practiced in Modern Orthodox homes. This is due to the fact that we still cling to the stereotype of the man as the head of the household, and the image of the man reciting *kiddush* is part of our normative experience of Shabbat. While it is important for men and women to retain separate roles within a household, we need be certain that men and women are equally viewed as the *baalei habayit* (heads of the household). Thus a man should not consistently sit at the head of the table with the woman on the side, and the recitation of the *kiddush* can be equally shared between men and women.

The *halachik* logic of *hamotzi* is very similar to that of *kiddush*. Women are obligated in the positive commandment to partake of the *lechem mishneh*, the two loaves which recall the double portion of manna the Jews received for Shabbat in the desert (*Ramban* on Shabbat 117b). Being that the obligation of a woman is equivalent to that of a man, a woman may recite the *hamotzi* for a man. Rabeynu Tam (*Sefer Hayashar* 70d) gives another reason why women are obligated in *lechem mishneh* - women as well as men benefited from the miracle of the manna. In Modern Orthodox homes it has become increasingly more common for women to recite the *hamotzi* at the Shabbat table, most likely because this does not offend our traditional sensibilities as to who is the head of the household in the same way that a woman reciting *kiddush* would. Before *hamotzi* comes to be known as a “women’s” *mitzvah*, and *kiddush* is left to retain its status as a “men’s” *mitzvah*, we should consider alternating these two responsibilities within our homes.

The case of *havdalah* is sufficiently more complex than that of *kiddush* or *hamotzi*. The ambiguity lies in where exactly the obligation of *havdalah* stems from. The *Maggid Mishnah* (*Hilchot Shabbat* 29,1) offers two opinions as to the source of the obligation. The *Magid Mishna* interprets the *Rambam* as saying that *havdalah* is a *deoraita*, or Torah law, included in the group of positive commandments pertaining to Shabbat. If this is the case, then as with other positive commandments of Shabbat, women would be obligated on an equal level with men. Women would thus not only have an obligation to recite *havdalah*, but also would be permitted to recite it for men. Alternatively, the *Magid Mishna* writes that *havdalah* may in fact be a rabbinic commandment which was appended to a biblical verse (see also *Archot Hayyim Hilchot Havdalah* 18) If that is the case, women would not be obligated in *havdalah*, as there is no longer any reason to exempt them from this time-bound commandment, and therefore women would not be allowed to recite *havdalah* for men. The *Mishna Brurah* (35,36) writes that even according to the opinion that women are not obligated in *havdalah*, women may still accept this *mitzvah* and recite *havdalah* for themselves, as is the case with other time-bound *mitzvot* that women have accepted. Likewise, if men have already heard *havdalah*, they should not repeat *havdalah* for women, as the women are capable of reciting *havdalah* for themselves.

WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN TEFILA: ACCESS AND VOICE

by Pam Scheininger

With the rising popularity of *Women's Tefilla* groups, we often forget the importance of increasing the involvement of women in general *tefilla* services. While *Women's Tefilla* presents an important opportunity for women to join in prayer, lead services and read from the Torah, new opportunities must also be created for women within general synagogue services. Most *Women's Tefilla* groups do not meet on a weekly basis, and women should not be forced to separate from the congregation in order to feel included within it. The following article is not intended as a discussion of the *halachik* issues surrounding women's participation in *tefilla*, but instead outlines some of the ways in which women's participation can be increased. The suggestions are based primarily upon practices which have been adopted or seriously entertained in Orthodox and traditional *minyanim*.

In discussing ways of increasing women's involvement in *tefilla*, we must focus upon two key elements of participation; access and voice.

For women to be involved in *tefilla*, they can and should have access to the elements which comprise *tefilla*. They should be able to hear, see, and feel a part of the proceedings. Additionally, women can and should have access to the hub of *tefilla*, the physical space from which the activity is directed and to which others direct their attention. In many synagogues this area is located on or around the *bimah*. Finally, women can and should have access to the ritual objects which are the center of *tefilla*.

Women's access to *tefilla* can be achieved by ensuring that elements of *tefilla* originate from the women's section and take place in that area. Equally important, there should be central physical space in the synagogue in which women can be visibly active.

In order to give women more access to the proceedings that comprise *tefilla*, individual synagogues can set up the *tefilla* space so that the room is divided in half, with women on one side and men on the other, so that women are not situated behind the men or on a balcony, where they are "viewers," rather than "participants." The *mechitza* should be constructed in such a way so that women are still able to hear and see what is transpiring. The *chazan*, the *bima* and the *aron* can be situated midway between the men's and women's sections to afford women and

men equal access to *tefilla*. To ensure that women have access to the hub of *tefilla*, the central space (traditionally found within the men's section and preserved for men) can be set aside as a neutral space, separate from both the men's and women's sections. Women can then have access to that space to publicly participate in and direct *tefilla*, be it through delivering *Divrei Torah*, or conducting parts of the *tefilla* itself. Additionally, women can have access to the ritual objects which are central to *tefilla* by having a woman carry the *Sefer Torah* through the women's section, and by inviting women to participate in the *petichah* of the *aron*.

In addition to increasing access, we must ensure that women's voices are heard within the general *tefilla*, and not just reserved for a *tefilla* populated solely by women. This objective can be achieved both by enabling the collective voice of women to be heard during *tefilla*, and by making it possible for individual women's voices to play a role in *tefilla*.¹

The collective voice of women will be an audible element of *tefilla* if women are sufficiently close to the proceedings, and can be heard by both men and women. While it is widely accepted that it is problematic for women to lead prayer which involves *davar sheb'kdusha*, there is room for inclusion of women's voices within a traditional *tefilla* service. Women may deliver *Divrei Torah*, and introduce or explain the *aliyot* during the *Torah* reading. They can lead various *tefillot* which do not contain *davar sheb'kdusha* (holy statements), such as the *tefilla* for the State of Israel, the United States, the Israeli or American armies, and *misheberachs*. Women can also read *megillot* for the congregation, recite *kiddush* Friday night or Shabbat day, or lead *kabbalat shabbat*, all of which contain no *davar shb'kdusha*.²

It is only through providing women with access and voice that we will be able to ensure their participation within the Congregation of Israel.

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¹ There is a great deal of discussion about *kol isha* and its role in matters concerning liturgy and/or *tefilla*. Such a discussion is beyond the scope of this article, but my outline of the ways in which women's voices may be heard in the course of *tefilla* will hopefully provide useful suggestions considering the range of opinions with respect to this issue.

² Arguably, *pesukai d'zimra* could fall into the same category as *kabbalat shabbat*, and could also be lead by a woman, but I am not aware of any traditional synagogue which has implemented this practice. This issue requires more investigation.



Woman lighting Shabbat lights. *Philologus Hebraeus* by Johannes Leusden, Basel 1739. Courtesy of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

A SPECIAL MITZVAH: SHABBAT CANDLES

by Jennifer Breger

Perhaps the most powerful image of Shabbat is of lighting candles, a ritual which has historically been reserved for the woman of the house. When we light Shabbat candles, we are reenacting God's creation of light recorded in the first chapter of *Bereishit*. According to our Rabbis, Shabbat itself is the generator of light in the world, "And God blessed the Sabbath day. How did God bless it? With light. When the sun set on the night of Shabbat, the light continued to function" (*Bereishit Rabbah* 11,2). The radiant light of Shabbat is a theme of Jewish sources through the ages. Not only does one's house shine on Shabbat but one's face is said to have a special radiance.

The *Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah* 18,8) states that the *mitzvah* of lighting candles was given to women as a *tikkun* — a rectification for Eve's sin. As Eve diminished the light of the world through her sin, women return light to the world through their Shabbat candles. In Kabbalistic tradition, however, women are viewed as the bearers of life and light to the world, and thus are granted the special *mitzvah* of Shabbat candles. As Shabbat is "*zecher l'ma'asei bereishit*," a remembrance of creation, so a woman lighting Shabbat candles recalls God's creation of the first light - the "*ohr haganoz*".

Although one candle would be sufficient to enable *oneg shabbat*-enjoyment of Shabbat, and the *mitzvah* of candle lighting can be fulfilled with one candle, we generally light two or more candles. The two candles represent the two *mitzvot* to "keep the Sabbath," and to "remember the Sabbath." In Kabbalistic tradition, the two candles reflect the masculine and feminine aspects of God's creation. Just as Shabbat is a queen and represents the *Shechinah*, so the woman is seen as the Shabbat Queen who brings light and Torah into her house and into the world. According to the *Zohar*, as a woman lights Shabbat candles on earth, candles are kindled in the divine realm, symbolizing the union and harmony of the *sefirot* (divine emanations) that occurs on Shabbat.

Many of the women's prayers through the ages reflect the significance of candle lighting. The time of candle lighting is considered to be a very personal time, appropriate for expressing innermost feelings. Many *tchinas* (personal prayers) have been written for this special time.

In a number of the *tchinas*, the candles represent the children of the house, and the lighting of the candles is meant to symbolize the bringing of learned children into the world.

While many of the *tchinas* present the image of a self-effacing woman who repeatedly says that she lacks merit and deserves nothing for herself, there is another side to the *tchinas* which stresses self confidence and the belief that women have the ear of God. In the *tchina* printed below, the woman declares that her *mitzvah* is equivalent to the *mitzvah* of the high priest who lit the candelabra in the Temple. The woman of this *tchina* is truly empowered to see her role as bringing light, blessing and holiness into her house and into the entire world.

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TCHINA FOR LIGHTING SHABBAT CANDLES

Excerpted from the original Yiddish version of *Shloshah Shearim, The Tchina of the Three Gates*, written by Sarah bas Tovim in the eighteenth century. Translation courtesy of Chava Weissler.

Lord of the World, may my observance of the commandment of kindling the lights be accepted as the act of the High Priest when he kindled the lights in the dear Temple was accepted. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps. 119:105). This means: Your speech is a light to my feet; may the feet of my children walk on God's path. May my kindling of the lights be accepted, so that my children's eyes may be enlightened in the dear Torah. I also pray over the candles that my observance of the commandment may be accepted by the dear God, be blessed, like the light which burned from olive oil in the Temple and was not extinguished.

A TCHINA FOR PUTTING CHALLAH IN THE OVEN

If we were asked to reflect on our experience of religious ritual on Shabbat, most of us would immediately conjure up images of the synagogue. We tend to associate ritual with community, with grand events reaching beyond our homes, beyond our selves. As we struggle for increased participation of women in public ritual, such as synagogue services, we should not neglect the beauty of private rituals which have been observed by Jewish women for centuries.

As early as the sixteenth century, Ashkenazi women recited *tchinas*, devotional prayers which focused on the religious lives of women. Many of these *tchinas*, written in the Yiddish vernacular, are centered around rituals which occur in the home, enabling women who did not participate in public ritual to express their spirituality. The *tchinas* show that acts we may otherwise view as mundane, such as the baking of *challah*, are indeed opportunities to beseech God for our needs, and declare our commitment to God's commandments. As the *tchinas* served as vehicles of religious expression for our foremothers, may they inspire us today to view all aspects of ritual as holy and meaningful.

The following is a *tchina* for putting *challah* in the oven.

Translation from the Yiddish courtesy of Chava Weissler. Originally published in an anonymous collection entitled *Tchinas*, Amsterdam, 1648.

This the woman says when she puts the Sabbath loaf into the oven:

Lord of all the world, in your hand is all blessing. I come now to revere in your holiness, and I pray you to bestow your blessing on the baked goods. Send an angel to guard the baking, so that all will be well baked, will rise nicely, and will not burn, to honor the holy Sabbath (which you have chosen so that Israel your children may rest thereon) and over which one recites the holy blessing- as you blessed the dough of Sarah and Rebecca our mothers. My Lord God, listen to my voice, you are the God who hears the voices of those who call to you with the whole heart. May you be praised to eternity.

PERSONAL CHOICES: WEARING A TALLIT

by Batya Levin

I deliberated at length before deciding to wear a *tallit* on Shabbat at my *Women's Tefilla*. I considered it radical for a woman to wear a *tallit*, not because of *halachik* objections, but rather, because most of us identify *tallit* with “maleness,” and therefore it didn't feel right.

Women come to wearing a *tallit* for different reasons. Some, as I did, hope it will enhance their *kavana*; some seek to commit to greater observance of *mitzvot* in general, others believe that they too are “*met-zuveh*” — commanded. Our different motivations notwithstanding, every woman who is moved to wear a *tallit* has undergone a period of soul-searching.

In retrospect, the process I underwent before deciding to wear a *tallit* was one which helped me pray with increased devotion. What drew me to consider wearing a *tallit* was the observation that a *tallit* allows its wearer to be part of a congregation, yet still engage in private prayer. The *tallit* creates a private domain within a larger community of worshippers. I felt that this mixture of individual and community was a necessary ingredient for meaningful prayer. However, the importance which I attributed to the ritual did not lessen the sense of self-consciousness I experienced when I first began wearing my *tallit*. This created a paradox; though I wore a *tallit* to increase my devotion in prayer, the consciousness of doing something perceived as “different” interfered with my ability to pray. The paradox resolved itself with time, as I became increasingly less self-conscious and the *tallit* became assimilated as part of my normative experience of *tefilla*.

When I first experimented with wearing a *tallit*, I donned a “congregational” *tallit*, similar to the type most men wear in synagogues. After studying the laws of *tzitzit*, I decided to follow the ruling of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein who stated that a woman's *tallit* should not look like that of a man. Finally, I determined to make my own *tallit*. The entire exercise, moving from the desire to pray with devotion, to consideration of how to do so, to trial, study, and creation of the *tallit* was very meaningful, and amplified my connection with the ritual. In many ways, the process was paradigmatic to that of prayer, in that prayer takes consideration, preparation, study, devotion, and finally, the act of praying itself.

Now, when I pray *tefillat shacharit*, I begin with *Ma Yakar* (Psalm 36:8-11), the meditation said when donning a *tallit*. I say this whether or not I am wearing a *tallit* (if I am wearing a *tallit* I begin with the *bracha*) because it has become a reminder of the form and substance of prayer in general:

“How dear is Your compassion God, humankind takes refuge in the shade of Your wing.”

To pray wrapped in a *tallit* is to be in a refuge, if only for a short while. The psalm continues:

“They will be satisfied with the abundance of Your house and You will allow them to drink from the delights which flow in Your brook, because You are the source of life and You illuminate our ways. Extend Your kindness to those who would know You, and Your righteousness to the steady of heart.”

The beauty of the images of this psalm and the donning of the *tallit* truly set the mood for prayer. The images of the psalm are essentially feminine; wrapping, enfolding, abundance, comfort, sustenance, light, life-source, kindness. The act of wrapping ourselves in a *tallit* can bring women, as well as men, into a more intimate and direct relationship with God.

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HALACHOT OF WOMEN AND TALLIT

by Haviva Ner-David

While the issue of *tallit* is not specifically related to Shabbat, an increasing number of women have begun to wear a *tallit* in synagogue on Shabbat. The following is a brief discussion of the *halachik* issues surrounding the wearing of *tzitzit* — including both *tallit gadol*, the prayer shawl, and *tallit katan*, the fringes worn under garments.

The *mitzvah* of *tzitzit* is found in two places in the Torah: *Bamidbar* 15:38-40, and *Devarim* 22:12. In these passages there is no reason to

understand the *mitzvah* as applying only to men. However, later, in the Tanaitic period, the idea that women are exempt from this *mitzvah* arose.

A source in the *Midrash Halacha* (*Sifre* 115) explains that “even the women are implied” in the *mitzvah* of *tzitzit*, but “Rabbi Shimon exempts women from *tzitzit* because women are exempt from positive time-bound commandments.” In *Menachot* 43a this position is explicated. There the rabbis teach that women are exempted from *tzitzit* because the commandment is to “see” the *tzitzit*. The *mitzvah* must therefore be performed during the day, and women are exempt from this *mitzvah* as they are from other time-bound commandments.

In general, women are not only allowed to perform *mitzvot* from which they are exempt, but are encouraged to do so. The disagreement arises on the issue of whether or not they should recite a blessing. For instance, the Rambam (*Hilchot Tzitzit* 3:9) writes that women who want to wear *tzitzit* may do so without a blessing. Ravad, when commenting on the Rambam adds that there are those who do allow women to recite the blessing when wearing a *tzitzit*. It seems that the disagreement falls on Sephardi/Ashkenazi lines, with Sephardim following Rambam, and Ashkenazim following Ravad.

Beginning in the fourteenth century we find sources that discourage women from wearing *tzitzit*. The Maharil writes in his *New Responsa* 7 that women are excluded from the 613 *mitzvot*, and therefore the *mitzvah* of *tzitzit*, which serves as a reminder of the *mitzvot*, is of no relevance to them. Furthermore, he writes that women who take this *mitzvah* upon themselves do so out of arrogance (*yohara*), and “they are called fools.”

One way to understand this idea of *yohara* in connection with women and *tzitzit* is that since the *mitzvah* of *tzitzit* is only obligatory for someone who is wearing a four cornered garment, and since today we no longer regularly wear four cornered garments, even men are not obligated in this *mitzvah* in the manner that we keep it (which is to purposely wear a four cornered undergarment in order to perform this *mitzvah*). Therefore, a woman taking on this *mitzvah* is doubly performing a *mitzvah* from which she is exempt — once because she is a woman, and once because she is not even wearing a four cornered garment. By choosing to perform this *mitzvah*, she is expressing an attitude of excessive piety, which is seen as arrogant by the Maharil and other *halachik* decisers after him.

The Maharil’s approach, however goes much deeper than this. His position is that women have no business performing this *mitzvah* because what it represents—acceptance of *mitzvot* in general—has no significance for women. Although the Maharil’s approach to women and *mitzvot* is not shared by most *poskim*, this idea of discouraging women

from performing the *mitzvah* of *tzitzit* is brought by the Rema (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Hayyim 17:2) and is engrained in the minds of most Jews today, consciously or unconsciously. A woman wearing a *tallit gadol*, or even a *tallit katan* underneath her clothing is often perceived as somehow acting immodestly. Her motivations are questioned.

For instance, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, in his responsum on religious feminism (Iggerot Moshe, Orach Hayyim 49) writes that a woman may wear *tzitzit* only if her motivation is to fulfill the *mitzvah*. The fact that he suspects a woman who wants to wear a *tallit* of motivations other than the performance of the *mitzvah*, itself is testimony to the fact that there are those who perceive a woman in a *tallit* as guilty of inappropriate motivations—whether it be *yohara* or something else.

Bearing in mind all of these sources, a woman who is interested in performing the *mitzvah* of *tzitzit* should remember that the earlier sources see no problem with a woman performing this *mitzvah*. It is not until the period of the Rishonim that the notion of discouraging women from performing the *mitzvah* comes into play. We need to read these sources, written in a specific time and place, with a critical eye as we make contemporary decisions about women and *mitzvot*. As Aviva Cayam has written in her thoughtful article on women and *tzitzit* (see bibliography): “The social environment, common practice, and tone of the times all factor into the rabbinic determination of arrogant religious behavior.”

Today, more and more women are adopting the *mitzvah* of *tzitzit*. It is becoming more acceptable for women to wear a *tallit* in some liberal Orthodox synagogues. And there are even women who wear a *tallit katan* under their clothing. So with changing assumptions and attitudes about women and the performance of *mitzvot* that they have not traditionally performed, *yohara* may no longer apply, at least in certain communities and contexts.

Although it is troubling that a woman’s motivations are suspect when she wants to perform more *mitzvot*, in the final analysis, even according to the ruling of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein a woman is permitted to wear a *tallit*—as long as her motives are pure. But no one but the woman can know her own motives. If the impetus for her desire to wear a *tallit* is to draw closer to God, she is permitted to do so.

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WOMEN AND ZIMMUN

by Jennifer Breger

This article draws heavily on Ari Z. Zivotofsky and Naomi T.S. Zivotofsky, “What’s Right With Women and Zimmun,” *Judaism* (1993) and Ari Z. Zivotofsky, “What’s the Truth about Women’s Zimmun,” *Jewish Action* (Fall 1999).

In our busy lives and rushed schedules, it is often only on Shabbat and holidays that we get an opportunity to sit down together to eat with friends and family. For many of us it is therefore only then when *zimmin* for women really becomes an issue. Although at the very least women are *halachically* allowed to form a *zimmin*, it is still not a common practice among Orthodox women and girls.

Because there are seeming conflicts between the Talmudic sources, authorities differ in their views about women and *zimmin*. Whereas the Talmud in *Arachin* 3a states that “all are obligated in *zimmin*,” in *Berachot* 45b it says that “women form a *zimmin* for themselves,” but also that “women may not have a *zimmin* said over them” (45a). *Halachists* throughout the ages have argued as to how to reconcile the different statements. The *Rosh*, the *Rokeach* and the *Gra* all obligate women to join an existing *zimmin* of men, and also obligate three women who eat together to form an independent *zimmin*. Rabbi Yosef Caro in the *Beit Yosef*, and the *Shulchan Aruch Harav* both rule that women must respond to a men’s *zimmin* if there is one, but that there is no obligation to form their own. The *Tosafot*, giving weight to the custom that women do not form a *zimmin*, say that women’s participation in any *zimmin* is optional.

Practical situations vary. If there are three or more women eating together without men, they can form a *zimmin* and many would say they must. Women and men cannot form a *zimmin* of three together—i.e. two men and one woman or one man and two women. There are actually some early sources that say that men and women can form a *zimmin* together, but these are rejected by most authorities and by all the *Acharonim*. This is probably because there is a view that women’s and men’s obligation for *Birchat Hamazon* is different.

If there is a *zimmin* of men, most authorities would say that one or two women must join and respond, and may not say *Birchat Hamazon* individually. If there are three or more women and between three and nine men, then the women may either join in the men’s *zimmin* or form

their own *zimmun*. If there are ten or more men, women have to join the men in their *zimmun*, because this *zimmun* adds the word *elokeinu* and becomes a *davar shebekedusha* (holy statement). Maimonides and all the *Acharonim* rule that women cannot say *zimmun* themselves with God's name because they do not constitute a *minyan*.

What if there is a *zimmun* of women at the table and one or two men? There is an unfortunately prevalent view that men must leave the table during the women's *zimmun*. This is not the case. Numerous authorities including Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach say that they should remain and answer. For girls from Sefardi families, who count a boy over six as a third or tenth person in a *zimmun*, it would seem logical that a girl before *Bat Mitzvah* could complete a female *zimmun*.

What should the introduction to women's *zimmun* be? Although many use the term *chaverotai* (friends), others consider that *givirotai* (colleagues) is more appropriate. Thus the leader could start *Birshut imi morati* or *ba'alat habayit, givirotai nevarech*. There is no *halachik* need for a leader of a men's *zimmun* to ask permission of the hostess present to start the *zimmun*, or for a leader of a women's *zimmun* to ask permission of the host or her father, etc. On the other hand, many now consider it simple courtesy that a male leader of a *zimmun* should say, when appropriate, *birshut ba'al habayit u ba'alat habayit* or *birshut ba'alat habayit* even though most *bentshers* do not contain this formula. The same logic of courtesy applies to a female leader including the *ba'al habayit* when appropriate.

Printed *bentshers* also usually do not include a *harachamon* for a wife to say for her husband, while there is one for the husband to say for his wife. There is great flexibility with what may be recited as a *harachamon*, and no *halachik* limitations to adding a *harachamon* for a woman to say for her husband. There is indeed a famous manuscript *hagaddah* written for Sarah, wife of the *Chatam Sofer* and the daughter of Akiva Eiger the Younger, where the *Birchat Hamazon* reads only, "*harachamon hu yevarech et ba'ali*." Now many women prefer the word *ishi* because of the connotation of *ba'al* as master.

What is most important today is for girls and women to practice leading *zimmun* and to learn to feel comfortable in the role. The *Mishnah Berurah* actually explained the Rabbis' exemption of women from *zimmun* if there were less than three men, by saying that women weren't educated enough to recite it. But this is clearly not the case today. As women are becoming increasingly more educated Jewishly, women's *zimmun* should be more commonly practiced.

WOMEN AND SHABBAT ON A COLLEGE CAMPUS

by Abi Dauber

A college campus is often the best place to observe current trends and practices and to view those that will unfold in the next generation. As a junior at the University of Pennsylvania, I have observed the impact which developments in feminism have had on the Orthodox community on a college campus. Perhaps the easiest way to gauge women's participation in religious life on the college campus is through a consideration of Shabbat, a time when the entire community joins together in rest and religious observance.

Women's participation in Shabbat rituals at Penn is in many ways a natural outgrowth of a community in which people are leveled by their common goal of education. We are students, intellectual equals, interested in building and sustaining a religious community. For these reasons, women's participation in religious rituals on Shabbat has been a natural, accepted part of the Shabbat experience here. Friday night, Shabbat morning, and Shabbat afternoon, there are almost as many women *davening* with the *minyán* as men. Women deliver *Divrei Torah* to the entire community, both at *davening*, and during communal meals afterwards. At meals, women commonly recite *hamotzi* for those at the table. On Shabbat afternoon women are found learning in the *Beit Midrash*, and attending the women's *parsha shiur* which was created as an opportunity for women to observe Shabbat together through study.

While our successes are great, there have also been failures. We have tried to initiate a regular *Women's Tefilla* at Penn, but most female students have preferred to search for ways in which they could be included as part of the larger community. Interestingly, this reluctance stems from the sense of equality which women in the Orthodox community at Penn experience; a preference for being part of a community rather than separate from it. But nothing is written in stone. It is a community shaped and run by students, and every semester, with the arrival and departure of students the community reassess itself and often reshapes itself in some way, so that modifications occur as part of a natural evolution. New students bring new ideas. Sometimes the ideas are embraced, such as the women's *parsha shiur*, and other times they fail, such as the *Women's Tefilla* group. However, every semester there is the opportunity

to retry an old idea, to improve an already successful one, or to introduce a completely new one. There is always debate and discussion, which given the women on our campus the sense that they are the guardians and shapers of their own religious experiences.

Abi Dauber is a junior at the University of Pennsylvania. She has spent a year studying at Midreshet Lindenbaum in Israel. She is now a Religious Studies major and is expecting her BA and Masters in the Spring of 2001.

WOMEN'S TEFILA: COMING OF AGE

by Batsheva Marcus

Congratulate us. We are celebrating an emotional and communal *Bat Mitzvah*. It may have taken us more than the twelve prescribed years but as a movement we are noticeably moving from the infancy stage to a stronger, more complicated stage akin to adolescence.

The early years of *Women's Tefilla* groups were too often characterized by struggling new groups that could be counted on one hand. Consisting of women with little or no liturgical skills, we struggled month to month. If there were not enough women to *layen* did you *layen* only part of the *parsha* or from a *tikkun*? There were no blueprints, no precedents, little or no communal support and an underground hushed tone when new groups formed. There were new *halachik* questions and few, if any, rabbinic leaders willing to guide us. We struggled to walk, each new step an agonizing and painful development. Yet, like an infant, we took so much pride in our newfound skills and celebrated every moment of newfound mastery.

Well, it is nearly twenty years later and we have moved on to adolescence. Although there are still new groups struggling to stand, they have *halachik* guidance, precedents, support, and a plethora of skillful and knowledgeable women to turn to. It may be difficult at times but at least they are not completely alone. As adolescents our challenges are quite different. We move on from an era of survival to an era of self-definition. This is the time for us to redefine and focus our goals, our missions and ourselves. We need to quiet the internal turmoil and make sense of

the concerns and internal tensions which maturity often brings. Here then are what I believe to be some of the most critical questions facing *Women's Tefilla* as we position ourselves to move into full adulthood:

1. Do we need to resolve all *halachik* issues in a unified way? Now that we are nearly seventy strong, we include groups with different views on *halachik* issues. Does defining ourselves mean that we have to all agree? Agree to make *brachot* before the *Torah* reading or agree not to? Agree to call people up to the *Torah* as *Bat Cohen*, *Bat Levi* etc.? Can we remain a unified front with different protocols or will the smaller disagreements separate us? Is there an inherent imperative to create communal norms?
2. How do we inspire the next generation? Clearly the daughters of many of the most active members not interested in *Women's Tefillot* served only a transitional purpose, moving women forward to where we are today but will not stand as a long lasting solution? Or does it simply suggest that different women have different needs and involvement in a *Women's Tefilla* is not necessarily genetically linked. Your daughter may not be interested in *Women's Tefilla* but someone else's daughter might be. Then again, maybe there is merely a ten-year hiatus between adolescence and young parenthood where young women are difficult to engage?
3. Is the primary role of *Women's Tefilla* to educate or to provide a service which is spiritual and communal? Are *Women's Tefillot* created to give the largest number of women the opportunity to learn to *daven*, *layen*, give *Divrei Torah*, even if this means that the *tefilla* is choppy, stumbling or strained? Or should we devote energy to creating beautiful spiritual experiences that touch on elitism and exclusion? Can we develop a paradigm to do both?
4. Should *Women's Tefilla* emulate the traditional male service or create its own customs? Is maintaining a semblance of *chazarat hashatz* important or would the time be better spent on women's *tchinot*, singing, or new traditions? Or is the traditional *tefilla* so rich and so engrained in tradition that to move away would be to lose more than we gain?
5. Should primary efforts be to engage women in *Women's Tefilla* or should we be focusing our efforts and energies on the main shul? Does the future of Orthodox women lie within *Women's Tefilla* or is *Women's Tefilla* merely a stepping-stone to educate us, engage us and bring us back to the community? Can the main shuls be developed in such a way as to reconnect women and embrace those women who found no alternative to but create *Women's Tefilla*? What would we lose if *Women's Tefilla* was relegated to the past?

Like adolescents we agonize a great deal. And we look into our communal mirror constantly. Are we okay? Where are we going? What do we want to be? Can we synthesize our disparate needs and create a strong unified whole? But many of us are also parents, and perhaps in looking to our own adolescents we might find at least part of the answer. And this is what we might say: You come from the strongest stock; you bring to your struggles both two thousand years of a rich heritage and the best of modern day sensibilities; you have been a wonderful, thoughtful, creative child and you have what it takes to find the solutions you need. We have no doubt you will find the answers and take your place as a full-fledged adult among the Community of Israel. Perhaps then, like a parent, we can only give *Women's Tefilla* the *bracha*:

Ten Hashem Otach, k'Rachel u'chiLaya Asher Banu Shteiheim et Beit Yisrael May God make you like Rachel and Leah who together built the house of Israel.

Bat Sheva Marcus chairs the Women's Tefilla Network and is an active member of the Riverdale Women's Tefilla Group. She is currently Vice President of JOFA. Professionally, Bat Sheva serves as the Chief Operating Officer of M.A.Z.E. Laboratories.

DAY OF REST, DAY OF STUDY: WOMEN AND LEARNING ON SHABBAT

Shabbat, our day of rest, has also always been a time reserved for Jewish study. A time to reflect on our Creator, women today use this day of rest to engage in study of Jewish texts, be it *Mishna*, *Gemara*, or review of the weekly Torah portion with commentaries or guide-sheets printed from the internet. Whether women gather for classes in synagogues, or study individually at home, the holiness of Shabbat is marked with a return to the treasures of our heritage. While today women have many more opportunities to engage Jewish texts than ever before, we must not forget that as we embrace study on Shabbat, we are following in the traditions of our foremothers who for centuries have used this holy day as a time to reconnect with Jewish textual tradition.



Frontispiece of *Tze'ena Ure'ena* — Yiddish translation of the Chumash with commentary intended for Jewish women. Metz, 1768. Courtesy of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

Beginning in the seventeenth century, Ashkenazi women traditionally studied a text called the *Tze'ena Ure'ena* on Shabbat afternoons. Written by Yaakov ben Yitzchak Ashkenazi, the *Tze'ena Ure'ena* is a Yiddish translation of the Bible, Haftarot, and Five Megillot, complete with Midrashic and exegetical interpretations. The title is taken from chapter 3, verse 11 of the *Songs of Songs*, which enjoins the daughters of Zion to “go out and see.” Immensely popular, the work was reprinted over two hundred times in Yiddish and was translated into other languages. It was indeed known as the “Woman’s Bible,” and many women claimed it as their encyclopedia of Jewish knowledge. Through this work, Jewish women who couldn’t read Hebrew or Aramaic came to be familiar with midrashim, commentaries such as *Rabbeynu Bachya*, kabbalistic works, and many other traditional Jewish texts. While their husbands were in synagogue on Shabbat afternoon, many women took the opportunity to read from the *Tze'ena Ure'ena* to their children. These children write of the tremendous impact the work had on their religious development and knowledge.

The earliest existing edition of the *Tze'ena Ure'ena* was printed in Basel in 1622, but there were earlier editions. From the end of the sev-

enteenth century and through the eighteenth, editions of the *Tze'ena Ure'ena* were printed with woodcut illustrations. Some editions state that “these lovely pictures were added to attract the hearts of those who study the book, and through them they will understand its meaning.”

As we take time on Shabbat to connect with the texts of our tradition, we remember those women who came before us, who, without the educational opportunities and textual skills available to us today used this holy day to reaffirm their connection to God through study of Torah.

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