



FIFTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON FEMINISM & ORTHODOXY

**“Zachar u’Neqevah Bara Otam”:** Women and Men in Partnership

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2004

**8:00–9:00 Tefillah, Breakfast and Registration**

**9:00–10:30**

**Welcome:**

*Carol Kaufman Newman, President*

*Gail Katz, Program Co-Chair*

**Opening Plenary:**

**Judaism as a Gendered Experience**

*Dr. Tamar Ross*

Judaism divides roles very clearly and deliberately according to gender. Recent feminist thinking, on the other hand, relates to gender as a social construct which men and women would be better off without. What can Orthodox feminism contribute to this discussion? Is there any feminist value to keeping Judaism as a gendered experience? Is there any Jewish value in breaking gender differences down? How do we decide?

**10:45–12:00 Workshops:**

**Raising an Orthodox Feminist Child: An Interactive Dialogue with Mothers**

*Dr. Adena K. Berkowitz and Devorah Preiss-Bloom*

How do mothers teach their children to be sensitive to issues of gender? How much do sons and daughters model their behavior and attitudes after those of their mothers or fathers? How much influence do Rabbis, teachers, and peers have on children’s understanding of gender and gender roles? Is the dynamic different with girls than with boys?

**Raising an Orthodox Feminist Child: An Interactive Dialogue with Fathers**

*Rabbi Dov Lerea and Dr. Chaim Trachtman*

How do fathers teach their children to be sensitive to issues of gender? How much do sons and daughters model their behavior and attitudes after those of their mother or father? How much influence do Rabbis, teachers, and peers have on children’s understanding of gender and gender roles? Is the dynamic different with girls than with boys?

**Scenes from the Classroom: Gender Education in Action**

*Rabbi Aaron Frank*

This participatory workshop will focus on a high school seminar in gender identity

currently being offered at an Orthodox day school. This session will discuss the goals of the seminar and reflect on its successes and failures. Videotaped excerpts of the class will highlight the challenges that gender educators face.

**Shattering the Silence: Childhood Sexual Abuse**

*Vicki Polin, Michael Salamon and Na'ama Yehuda*

The Orthodox community often downplays the occurrence of child sexual abuse and sometimes even discourages reporting acts of abuse to secular authorities. This “silence is golden” attitude leads to the misperception that abuse simply does not occur in the Orthodox community. Several key indicators and techniques to help the community recognize and diminish cases of abuse will be reviewed.

**Beyond and From the Synagogue Balcony: Women's Role in the Shaping of American Judaism**

*Karla Goldman – Jewish Women's Archive*

This session will analyze the ways in which women, in their changing roles, have been central to the shaping of American Judaism and Jewish ritual practice even when they were excluded from public and leadership roles. How have women managed to shape religious expression in America since the early eighteenth century? How do women play a continued role in forming the American Jewish landscape?

**That's Not How We Did It in The Old Country**

*Rabbi Asher Lopatin*

How, precisely, is minhag determined? When is it considered a change? When is it acceptable to change it? When is change in practice considered reintroduction, innovation, or invention? Does the definition of change affect our understanding of minhag and the evolution of minhag?

**‘You Shall Call Me My Man and No Longer Call Me Thy Master?’**

**(Hosea 2:18)**

*Dr. Susan Aranoff*

Beginning with the Mishnah and through contemporary times, Halachic scholars have put forward solutions aimed at preventing men from chaining their wives to impossible marriages. This session will explore these solutions as well as discuss the halakhic basis for divorces granted by the Rackman Beit Din. Although no nationally or internationally recognized Orthodox rabbinical body has sanctioned divorces granted by this beit din, women continue to seek divorces from this body. What are the issues involved? What are some other solutions that have also not been widely adopted and implemented? Why are many Orthodox Rabbis reluctant to embrace these solutions?

**Mikvah, Sexual Desire, and the Emotional Tango**

*Ofra Shalev*

How does halakha, which dictates the physical relationship between men and

women, impact the emotional state and sexual desire? What is the correlation

between Orthodox family purity laws and the sexual and emotional desires of individuals in marriage? How do the beliefs and assumptions of rabbis correlate with common attitudes and practices? Can women and men find relevance in ritual purity laws?

### **Feminist Satire in the Book of Judges**

***Rabbi Aryeh Klapper***

The often horrifying but also darkly comic narrative of the Concubine of Giv'ah opens a window into Judges' conception of the role of women in Jewish society. This session will explore that narrative to discover that Judges is concerned with the physical safety and societal voice of women. At the same time, Judges demonstrates a realistic understanding of power distributions and the nature of masculinity and develops a sophisticated theory of gendered politics.

### **Love, Learning and Laundry: Gender Roles Within Jewish Marriage**

***Dr. Tamra Wright and Rabbi Dr. Michael J. Harris***

This session will explore a number of texts that present different models of gender roles within Jewish marriage. It will then attempt to identify the factors which shape the perceptions of contemporary Orthodox women and men concerning gender roles, and will discuss how modern Orthodox couples might live their married lives in light of the issues examined thus far. Finally, the session will briefly consider and discuss the role of extra-halachic considerations in several areas relating to the topic of women and Judaism.

### **Sharing Life-Cycle Events: Inclusive Ceremonies and Roles for Women**

***Rabbi David Kalb***

Can there be an equivalent pidyon ha'ben ceremony for first-born girls? Is there a place for a women's voices in traditional life cycle events? Learn about potential roles women can play in life cycle events such as simchat bat, brit milah, bat/bar mitzvah, auf-ruf, weddings, funerals and more. This session will examine relevant texts and discuss ways to incorporate some of these new practices into synagogue services and everyday living.

### **Continuing the Conversation with Dr. Tamar Ross**

***Shani Offen***

If the morning's lecture left you with more questions than answers about the role of gender in Orthodox Judaism, join a facilitated discussion about Dr. Ross's earlier talk and about the issues raised by her presentation. Dr. Ross will be present as an observer in the discussion.

**12:15–1:15 Lunch**

**1:15–2:00 Afternoon Plenary**

***“Zachar u'Neqevah Bara Otam”*: Women and Men in Partnership**  
***Rabbi David Silber***

The right of women to equal access and participation in our tradition and practice is not a women's issue but a human one and should concern our entire community. Men and women are necessary collaborators in the process of taking an honest look at our communities and engaging in tikkun olam. Feminism affords us the opportunity to re-examine our assumptions and maximize our potentials as Jews.

## **2:15–3:30 Forums:**

### **Rabbis and Change**

*Rabbi Asher Lopatin, Rabbi Yosef Kanefsky and Dr. Nechama Liss-Levinson*

*Moderator: Tamara Charm*

How do women and men work together to effect change in our synagogues? Must the initial impetus for change originate from women? If women are not vocal about the need for more inclusion in synagogue ritual practices, should Rabbis be proactive in initiating change? Should we challenge the assumption that rabbinic approval is required for change to take effect? Is it a forgone conclusion that as women gain access to Jewish ritual practice, men must abdicate some control over those practices?

### **Orthodox Day Schools: Can We Do Better?**

*Elana Sztokman, Dr. Elie Holzer, Rabbi Aaron Frank*

*Moderator: Chaya Gorsetman*

How do we educate young girls and boys to understand their relationship to gender and gender roles? How early do we need to start? What do Orthodox day schools do right in this regard and how can they do better? Are girls and boys spoken to differently in class? Are there different expectations for behavior and different rationales for certain actions between girls and boys? Are there differences in the types of achievements rewarded or noted? Do curriculum materials present women and men in comparable ways? What are some of the unique issues Orthodox day schools face when it comes to the subject of gender (i.e., the role of tradition/ritual, dress codes, special school events, and mixed messages around societal roles)?

### **The Tension Between Looking and Leering: Does the Talmud Allow Men to Appreciate Female Beauty and Sexuality?**

*Rabbi David Bigman*

The session will examine this subject through a survey of source materials. These range from the Tanaic period up to the later Amoraic redaction of the Talmud with an emphasis on the differences between the Palestinian/Jerusalem Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud. The later development of this subject will also be explored, as it is played out in Middle Age texts such as Responsa and the Shulchan Aruch.

## **3:45–4:15 Mincha**

## **4:30–6:00 Chavruta Time and Text Shiurim:**

### **Mordechai and Esther: Partners in Salvation**

*Karen Miller*

The title of the megillah suggests that the hero of the book is Esther herself. However, some suggest that the real hero who emerges from Megillat Esther is Mordechai and that Esther is portrayed as a passive character who merely follows Mordechai's commands. Together we will study some midrashic and biblical sources which characterize Mordechai and Esther as equal partners, who work together to save the Jewish people.

### **Esther, the First Female Soferet: An Exploration of Halakhic Possibilities for Women in Safrut**

*Rabbi Ross Singer*

Despite a number of Akhronim who write that a megillah written by a woman would be invalid, there is a strong trend in halakha to permit women to do so. Given the number, stature, and compelling reasoning of these Akhronim, the weight of the halakhic discussion inclines toward permitting women to write megillot for communal ritual use, provided that they are competent in the requisite halakhot. At least two of the positions articulate responses to actual cases of women writing megillot.

### **Katlanit: The Killer Wife**

*Channa Lockshin Bob*

According to the Talmud, a woman who has been widowed (by ostensibly natural causes) two or three times is to be considered dangerous and is therefore forbidden from remarrying. This session will examine the passage in the Talmud that introduces this idea, and then it will study some of the medieval and modern halakhic works that discuss the fate of these women, called "katlanivot." These texts address male fear of women and depict an understanding of women and of marriage in general.

### **Biblical Husbands and Wives: The Quest for Fertility and Spirituality**

*Judy Klitsner*

When the biblical woman finds herself infertile, to whom does she turn for help? This session will examine the interplay between husbands and wives, and whether the biblical male acts out of a sense of empathy or of apathy. Does man's involvement bring woman closer to God, the ultimate source of healing, or does man's involvement drive her further away? A progression in women's spiritual empowerment will be traced and a surprising interchangeability between male and female roles in several biblical narratives will be revealed.

### **ImaShalom: All in the Family**

*Wendy Amsellem*

ImaShalom, confounder of philosophers and revealer of secrets, is the wife of R. Eliezer and the sister of R. Gamliel. At times she works closely with the two men and at times she is caught in the middle of their conflicts. This session will study the four Talmudic texts in which she appears and it will discuss the power and

prerogatives open to women who lived in close contact with influential men.

**Polygamy versus Monogamy in the Book of Genesis**

*Deborah Rheingold-Klapper*

Why do some of our Patriarchs take more than one wife and others not? How do children and child-rearing practices play a role in the patriarch's choice to take more than one wife? Polygamy and monogamy in the Book of Genesis will be discussed.

**Deborah: The Power of Prophecy and Song**

*Rachel Freidman*

Deborah is the only woman in the Bible whose leadership role is defined with respect to no one other than herself. This session will explore and contrast the biblical and rabbinic portraits of Deborah as a leader, a woman, and a human being.

**Kol Kevudah Bat Melekh Penima**

*Laura Shaw-Frank*

All the Glory of the King's Daughter is Internal": This phrase from Psalms has traditionally been cited as a proscription toward modesty in Jewish women and as a proof text for the notion that women should remain at home and not in the public sphere. How can these views be squared with modern reality? Can the traditional interpretation of this phrase have meaning today? This session will discuss these questions through an examination of midrashic, talmudic, halakhic and biblical sources as well as modern rabbinic responsa.

**7:30–9:30 Screening of 'Tehorá' (Purity): Breaking the Code of Silence**

*Panelists: Dr. Devora Steinmetz, Devorah Zlochower and Blu Greenberg*  
*Moderator: Dr. Sylvia Barack Fishman*

**MONDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2004**

**8:00–9:15 Tefillah, Breakfast and Registration**

**9:15–10:30**

**Welcome:**

*Ronnie Becher, Conference Chair*

**Opening Plenary:**

**When Authority Breaks Down: The Abuse of Power**

*Rabbi Yosef Blau and Rabbi Mark Dratch*

*Moderator: Judy Heicklen*

What are the parameters of respect? What behavior is and is not acceptable? How do we teach those parameters to children and to the community in general? How should we train Rabbis and other authority figures in the proper boundaries? How do we train them to deal with a breach by their colleagues? How should we think about these issues in the Context of Orthodoxy, where authority figures are almost always male? What special mechanisms do we have to deal with abuse of power when women and girls are already disenfranchised? Do girls have sufficient role models within an all-male clergy?

**10:45–11:45 Forums:**

**Halakhic Solutions to the Agunah Crisis: A Report From the Trenches**  
*Rachel Levmore*  
Agunah activists have influenced Knesset as well as Rabbis in the halakhic process. Currently there are several proposals underway that are the result of the cooperation of knowledgeable women and men. This session will examine the roles women have played in the process of developing proposed solutions to the agunah problem. It will include a first-hand description of Ms. Levmore's personal role as a Rabbinical Court Advocate.

**The Future of Jewish Leadership**  
*Rabbanit Malka Bina, Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rabbi David Silber.*  
*Moderator: Dr. Giti Bendheim*  
What will the next generation of leaders look like? How will women successfully rise to places of leadership in the Jewish community? What will the relationship be between male clergy and female leaders? How will the construct of future leadership affect the corpus of halakha? What mechanisms are in place to train male Rabbis to be sensitive to issues of gender?

**Who Owns Judaism?: Male Resistance to Role Equity**  
*Dr. Sylvia Barack Fishman*  
In the other wings of contemporary Judaism, women's assuming more frontal roles has been accompanied by dramatically declining interest in men toward taking those roles. Is there any indication that this would happen within Orthodoxy as well? Are we endangering the basic structure of Judaism as we strive to make our relationship with men more of a partnership?

**12:00–1:00 Lunch**

**1:00–1:45 Afternoon Plenary**

**Women and Men: Partners in Conflict**  
*Miriam Schacter*  
Many of us often experience conflict between our feminism and our Orthodoxy. These internal conflicts can spill over into our relationships as well. This session will explore various partnerships in which women and men are engaged - the nature of conflicts that arise within those relationships and possible outcomes. Emphasis will be placed on the practical: How do these conflicts affect everyday living? Are these conflicts caused by

external sources or are they internal struggles?

**2:00–3:10 Workshops:**

**Not For Women Only: Premarital Education**

*Elana Sztokman*

The Orthodox community has traditionally addressed premarital education through “kallah” and “chatan” classes. These classes, as well as accompanying contemporary and ancient text, construct roles for women and men within the marital relationship. This session will examine the process of socialization by looking at the content of traditional kallah classes and analyzing contemporary texts of authors such as Tehilla Abramov, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Miriam Adahan, and others. Some competing models for this type of education will be presented.

**The Solitude of a Woman Alone: In the Words of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik**

*Rachel Levmore*

“It is a metaphysical curse rooted in the feminine personality. She suffers incomparably more than the male in dire solitude. Solitude to the male is not as terrible an experience, as a horrifying experience, as solitude to a woman. This will never change.” These are the words of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, uttered in the year 1976. How can we understand this statement? What are its halakhic ramifications? Or, do we continuously live with metaphysical contradictions in the ultimate dialectic? What are some of the various interpretations of the principle of “*tav l'meitav tan doo*”?

**Sing a New Song: Creating New Prayer Communities**

*Dr. Tova Hartman and Dr. Elie Holzer*

The unfolding story of Shira Hadasha, the Orthodox-feminist synagogue founded in Jerusalem two years ago will be told. This session will concentrate on the religious and feminist impetus behind its decision-making process, and illustrate how the structure and goals of the synagogue demonstrate the interplay of halakha, meta-halakha and spiritual innovation. The discussion will address the issues of prayer, community building, religious leadership, and chesed.

**Non-Nuclear Families in a Traditional World**

*Joan Sadinoff Katz and Shoshana Bulow*

What is the Orthodox community’s reaction to non-nuclear family constellations such as single parents and blended families? What kind of experience do these families have in synagogue? What issues arise in day schools? Within the household, Orthodox life is often gender specific. How does that impact the family members (i.e., what is it like for a father to light Shabbat candles? What

is it like for a mother to recite Kiddush?) How are life-cycle events affected?

### **The Politics of Gender in Confronting an Abusive Rabbi**

*Judy Klitsner*

A personal account of a surreal journey: suffering abuse by a rabbi, struggling to find an appropriate reaction within the possibilities deemed acceptable by the system, confronting an entirely male religious establishment that works to promote and protect the abuser. How do male/female dynamics and politics affect the responses of victims of abusive rabbis? What role do these dynamics play in the responses of the abusers, and the abusers' protectors within our religious establishment? How do the religious educational messages sent to young women and to rabbis perpetuate and strengthen these responses?

### **Love, Learning and Laundry: Gender Roles Within Jewish Marriage**

*Dr. Tamra Wright and Rabbi Dr. Michael J. Harris*

This session will explore a number of texts that present different models of gender roles within Jewish marriage. It will then attempt to identify the factors which shape the perceptions of contemporary Orthodox women and men concerning gender roles, and will discuss how modern Orthodox couples might live their married lives in light of the issues examined thus far. Finally, the session will briefly consider and discuss the role of extra-halachic considerations in several areas relating to the topic of women and Judaism.

### **Mikvah, Sexual Desire and the Emotional Tango**

*Ofra Shalev*

How does halakha, which dictates the physical relationship between women and men, impact the emotional state and sexual desire? What is the correlation between family purity laws and the sexual and emotional desire of individuals in married, Orthodox relationships? How do rabbinic beliefs and assumptions correlate with common attitudes and practices? Can women and men find relevance in ritual purity laws?

### **Adam and Eve: Gender Distinction in the Garden of Eden**

*Beth Samuels*

The Torah provides two seemingly contradictory accounts of the creation of Adam and Eve in the beginning chapters of Breishit. Many commentaries interpret details in the stories as characterizing the separate natures of women and men. Through a close reading of the text and several commentaries, this session will attempt to reconcile these two versions of creation and explore the perspectives of gender distinction.

### **You're Single, You're Happy, Now Change**

*Dr. Nancy Dallek*

Is Judaism set up only for the structure of partnership, or does it have something to offer to single people as well? Halakha dictates the relationship between women and men in various ways. Does halakha's seemingly prescribed gender roles affect the way single people date? How does it affect the way people relate to sex and sexuality within and outside of the confines of marriage?

**3:25–3:55 Mincha**

**4:10–5:10 Forums:**

**Dealing with Tough Questions: A Framework for Psak Halakha**

***Rabbi Daniel Sperber***

What basic characteristics should p'sak halakha possess? What values should direct p'sak? How should a rigorous look at traditional sources be balanced with modern intuitions about ethics and morality? This session will examine contemporary issues that require halakhic answers and assess potential methods to respond to these tough issues.

**Lessons from Israel: Teaching Sex Education in Orthodox Schools**

***Dr. Tova Hartman***

What is the best way to institute formal sex education in Orthodox day schools?

How do religious teachers negotiate religious ideology that prohibits adolescent sexual behavior? How should the educational approach differ for boys and girls? What are the benefits and dangers inherent in balancing traditional ideals with modern realities? This session will explore these questions in the context of research done on sex education programs in Israeli religious schools.

**Says Who? Women, Men and (Jewish) Divorce: Whose Justice Is It?**

***Dr. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari***

Do men and women see things differently when it comes to questions of justice, equality, and equity in divorce? Can agunah advocates count on men understanding and cooperating in advancing solutions to inequalities in Jewish divorce laws?

**5:20–6:00 Closing Program**

**Orthodoxy, Feminism and Change: Who Decides?**

***Blu Greenberg***

How do we define the parameters, categories and conditions of a theology of “equal but distinctive” roles for men and women? As members of the class of women, as faithful Orthodox Jews, as feminists, and as women in relationships, how do we read and study problematic sacred texts with men? How do we deal with a gendered language in our liturgy and theology? How can we develop ways to speak to the right as well as to the left? How can we speak to the post-feminist generation as well as to the pre-modern psyche?