

CHOOSING LIMITS LIMITING CHOICES

WOMEN'S STATUS AND RELIGIOUS LIFE

Brandeis University

Hassenfeld Conference Center

March 13 — March 14, 2005

Conference Sponsors



**HADASSAH
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WOMEN'S STATUS AND RELIGIOUS LIFE

Explore the complex choices and issues that women face as they balance their love for and loyalty to tradition with their desire for individual determinism and self-expression.

Conference Program

Sunday Evening, March 13, 7:30 – 9:00 PM

LOYAL DAUGHTERS AND LIBERATED WOMEN: AN INTERFAITH DISCUSSION

In an age in which women have many choices, why do otherwise modern Jewish, Christian and Muslim women choose to order their lives according to ancient religious traditions? How do religiously observant women incorporate feminist change into their lives and communities? Three leading scholars offer a thoughtful overview of religious change and stability.

Welcome

Shulamit Reinharz, Founding Director, HBI

Introduction

Carol Newman, President, JOFA

Riffat Hassan, University of Louisville

Sister Mary C. Boys, Union Theological Seminary

Tova Hartman, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem

Moderator: Bernadette Brooten, Brandeis University

Monday, March 14, 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM

TRADITION AND TRANSFORMATION IN ORTHODOX JEWISH LIFE

9:00

Welcome

Annie Sandler, Chair, HBI

Introduction

Idana Goldberg, Vice President – Programming, JOFA

9:15 – 10:45 AM

Is Jewish Orthodox Life Threatened by Changing Gender Roles?

While some Orthodox feminists celebrate promising new developments, others voice concern that traditional gender roles may be inextricably linked to the survival of Jewish public religious life. Are traditional Jewish lifestyles fragile and vulnerable, or are they resilient, responding to change with greater vitality?

Sylvia Barack Fishman, Brandeis University
Blu Greenberg, Founding President, JOFA
Tamar Ross, Bar Ilan University
Moderator: Rabbi Benjamin Samuels, Congregation Shaarei Tefillah

11:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Educated for Change — or Changelessness?

The past decades have seen an explosion in Jewish women’s classical text study. Will this trend lead to growing activism or greater conservatism? Three scholars share their analyses of the education revolution.

Esther Krauss, Founding Principal, Ma’ayanot High School
Devora Steinmetz, Jewish Theological Seminary
Devorah Zlochower, Drisha Institute for Jewish Education
Moderator: Gloria Greenfield, Hebrew College/ Combined Jewish Philanthropies

12:30 – 1:30 PM

Lunch

1:30– 3:00 PM

Fundamentally Faithful

Women who define themselves as Orthodox range from “envelope pushers” to highly traditional loyalists. What social and psychological factors attract women to Orthodoxy and determine their movement in and out of religious communities?

Michelle Friedman, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School
Stephanie Wellen Levine, Tufts University
Debra Kaufman, Northeastern University
Moderator: Debbie Kram, Bureau of Jewish Education

3:15 – 4:45 PM

Agunot and the Powers That Be

Three top scholars and activists examine Jewish women’s efforts to resolve the plight of agunot (women denied a divorce by their husbands) and the struggle of Orthodox feminists to reconcile this issue with their adherence to halakhic lifestyles.

Norma Baumel Joseph, Concordia University
Susan Weiss, Center for Women’s Justice
Susan Aranoff, Agunah, Inc.
Moderator: Sharon Shenhav, International Jewish Women’s Rights Project

4:45– 5:00 PM

Closing

Sylvia Barack Fishman, Conference Chair

Speakers

SUSAN ARANOFF

Dr. Susan Aranoff teaches economics and political science at Kingsborough Community College and Yeshiva University's Stern College. She has been an agunah activist for well over a decade and her articles dealing with halakhic remedies for freeing agunot have been widely published. Dr. Aranoff has held numerous leadership positions in the New York UJA-Federation campaign and is well-known for her classes on Bible, Talmud and political affairs. She is a founding board member of Agunah International Inc., the International Committee for Women at the Wall, and JOFA.

MARY C. BOYS

Sister Mary C. Boys, Skinner and McAlpin Professor of Practical Theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, is the author or editor of seven books, including two on relations between Jews and Christians. A member of the Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations, she is also the editor of their forthcoming collection *Seeing Judaism Anew: Christianity's Sacred Obligation*. She earned her doctorate from Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary and served on the faculty of Boston College for seventeen years. She has been a member of the Sisters of the Holy Names for over thirty years.

SYLVIA BARACK FISHMAN

Dr. Sylvia Barack Fishman is professor of contemporary Jewish life in the Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies at Brandeis University and co-director of the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute. Professor Fishman has written extensively on Jewish education, the American Jewish family, changing roles of Jewish women, and American Jewish literature and popular culture. Her latest book, *Double or Nothing? Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage*, has been the subject of lively discussion among scholars and practitioners. She is also the author of *Follow My Footprints: Changing Images of Women in American Jewish Fiction*, *A Breath of Life: Feminism in the American Jewish Community*, and *Jewish Life and American Culture*.

MICHELLE FRIEDMAN

Michelle Friedman, M.D., majored in religion as an undergraduate at Barnard College. After graduation from the New York University School of Medicine, she completed an internship at St. Vincent's Hospital and her residency at Mt. Sinai Hospital, where she is now assistant clinical professor of psychiatry. She earned a certificate in psychoanalysis at the Columbia University Institute. Dr. Friedman's chief clinical interests are the interface between psychiatry and obstetrics/ gynecology and between psychiatry and religious life. In addition to her private practice, she is director of pastoral counseling at New York's open Orthodox rabbinical school, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah.

BLU GREENBERG

Blu Greenberg is the founding president of JOFA, the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance. She is the author of *Black Bread: Poems after the Holocaust*, *How to Run a Traditional Jewish Household* and *On Women and Judaism: A View from Tradition*. She serves on numerous boards and commissions, including the Jewish Book Council, the Federation Commission on Synagogue Relations, and the Jewish Women's Leaders Consultation, and on the editorial boards of *Hadassah* and *Lilith*. She holds an M.S. in Jewish History from Yeshiva University, an M.A. in Clinical Psychology from City College, a B.R.E. from Yeshiva University's Teachers Institute, and a B.A. from Brooklyn College.

TOVA HARTMAN

Dr. Tova Hartman is a lecturer at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, where she received the Keren Koret post-doctoral fellowship. Before teaching she worked as a clinician at the Jerusalem Women's Counseling Center. The author of many articles on gender, religion and education, her most recent is *Between Being and Doing: Gay Identity among Orthodox Jews in Narrative Studies* (February 2005). She is the author of *Appropriately Subversive: Modern Mothers in Traditional Religions* (Harvard University Press). Dr. Hartman received a Masters in Jewish Philosophy from Hebrew University, a Masters in Counseling Psychology from Boston College, and holds a Ph.D. in Psychology from Harvard University.

RIFFAT HASSAN

Dr. Riffat Hassan is adjunct professor of Islamic studies and religions of India at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Her areas of specialization include Iqbal studies, women in Islam, inter-religious dialogue, human rights in Islam and Qur'anic ethics. Dr. Hassan serves on numerous boards, participates in international conferences and programs, and has worked extensively with NGOs. Currently, she is directing "Islamic Life in the U.S.," a two-year exchange program sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. Dr. Hassan is the author of eight books and many articles.

NORMA BAUMEL JOSEPH

Dr. Norma Baumel Joseph is associate professor and chair of the Department of Religion at Concordia University, director of the women and religion specialization, and an associate of the Concordia Institute for Canadian Jewish Studies. Dr. Joseph lectures widely and publishes on many topics. Her current research interests are Jewish law and gender, and food, identity and gender. In 1990, Dr. Joseph successfully worked with the Jewish community and the Canadian government to pass a law that would protect Jewish women in difficult divorce situations and aid them in their pursuit of a get. Her communal activism in this and other arenas is ongoing.

DEBRA RENEE KAUFMAN

Dr. Debra Renee Kaufman is professor of sociology and a Matthews Distinguished Professor at Northeastern University. She founded the Northeastern Women's Studies Program and was for ten years its first director. A widely-published author, she has written numerous articles, reviews, and media pieces, including her frequently updated and reprinted chapter "Professional Women: How Real Are the Recent Gains?" Over a decade ago, her research and writing focus turned to ethnic and religious identity issues. She is the author of *Rachel's Daughters* and is currently working on post-Holocaust Jewish identity among twenty to thirty-year-olds in the United States, England and Israel.

ESTHER KRAUSS

Esther Krauss' career in Jewish education for women spans over forty years. She holds a teacher's certificate from Beth Jacob Teacher's Seminary, a B.A. in English Language and Literature from Brooklyn College, and an M.S. in Bible from Yeshiva University. Ms. Krauss has been involved in founding several educational institutions including a day school in Utica, NY; Block Yeshiva High School in St. Louis; and Shalhevet Torah Institute for Women in Queens, NY. Most recently she served as founding principal of Ma'ayanot Yeshiva High School for Girls in New Jersey. She is currently studying Talmud and Jewish Law at Drisha Institute.

STEPHANIE WELLEN LEVINE

Dr. Stephanie Wellen Levine holds an A.B. from Brown University and a Ph.D. from Harvard University. She is a lecturer at Tufts University. Her first book, *Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers: An Intimate Journey Among Hasidic Girls* has attracted considerable attention, including a starred review in *Publishers Weekly*. Dr. Levine has spoken about the book in various public forums and on several radio and television shows and the book was one of four non-fiction titles selected for the Spring 2005 Hadassah Book Club. She is currently finishing a coming of age novel set in a Hasidic community.

TAMAR ROSS

Dr. Tamar Ross teaches in the Department of Jewish Philosophy of Bar Ilan University and at Midreshet Lindenbaum in Jerusalem. She is currently serving as the Blaustein visiting scholar in residence in the Department of Religious Studies at Yale University. She has published widely in scholarly journals on various topics related to Jewish philosophy and mysticism, the Musar movement, Hassidism and Mitnaggedism, and the thoughts of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook. One of her major interests is in theological issues arising from the interface between Judaism and modernity, the subject of her recent book *Expanding the Palace of Torah: Orthodoxy and Feminism* (Brandeis University Press).

SHARON SHENHAV

Sharon Shenhav, J.D., an international women's rights lawyer and an expert on marriage and divorce in Jewish law, has represented hundreds of women in the rabbinical courts in Israel. She is the founding director of the International Jewish Women Human Rights Watch, a project of the International Council of Jewish Women. Ms. Shenhav has lectured in over 25 countries, has served as a consultant to lawyers, judges, rabbis and legislators worldwide, and was a member of the Israeli delegation to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. She serves as the sole woman on Israel's Commission to Appoint Dayanim (rabbinical court judges).

DEVORA STEINMETZ

Dr. Devora Steinmetz is assistant professor of Talmud and Rabbinics at the Jewish Theological Seminary. She is the founder of Beit Rabban, an innovative day school in New York City. Dr. Steinmetz is the author of *From Father to Son: Kinship, Conflict, and Continuity in Genesis*, as well as scholarly articles on Bible and rabbinic literature.

SUSAN WEISS

Susan Weiss, J.D., is the founding director of the Center for Women's Justice and a fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. She has worked as a divorce attorney in Israel since 1985 and has initiated various projects to advance the status of agunot: Yad L'Isha, a legal aid center which she founded in 1997; *The Law and Its Decisor*, a summary of rabbinical court decisions published in conjunction with the Rackman Center of Bar Ilan University; and a series of tort cases filed in the Israeli family courts against husbands for refusing to give their wives a get. She has published widely on the subject of Jewish women and divorce.

DEVORAH ZLOCHOWER

Devorah Zlochower is director of full-time programs and an instructor of Talmud and halakha at Drisha Institute in New York. She is a graduate of the Scholars Circle, the institute's three-year advanced program in Talmud and halakha. Ms. Zlochower has published numerous articles related to halakha and Jewish women's leadership. She is a member of the board of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance. Ms. Zlochower was named one of "The Fifty Who Point the Way Forward" by *The Forward* in 2001.

Moderators

BERNADETTE J. BROOTEN

Dr. Bernadette J. Brooten, director of the Feminist Sexual Ethics Project, is the Robert and Myra Kraft and Jacob Hiatt Professor of Christian Studies and a professor of women's studies at Brandeis University, and a former MacArthur Fellow. She has held fellowships from Harvard Law School, the Fulbright Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Dr. Brooten is currently writing a book on early Christian women who were enslaved or who were slave-holding and editing a volume on slavery's long shadow over the lives of girls and women. She is the author of the award-winning book *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism*.

GLORIA GREENFIELD

Gloria Greenfield directs the Adult Learning Collaborative, a joint initiative of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies and Hebrew College. Along with workplace study, synagogue-based learning and community forums, the collaborative offers a comprehensive Jewish women's studies program for adult learners. Ms. Greenfield has been a leader in the field of adult Jewish learning for the past 15 years, and is a recipient of the Bureau of Jewish Education's Keter Torah Award.

DEBBIE KRAM

Debbie Kram is family education consultant at the Bureau of Jewish Education of Greater Boston, and is a faculty member of the Mandel Center for Studies in Jewish Education's DeLeT program at Brandeis University. Ms. Kram served as the co-founder and director of Ma'ayan, an award-winning program offering women intense engagement with Jewish texts. She has served on the boards of several community and regional organizations that support Jewish life and learning, and has lectured in the U.S. and in Israel. She is an alumna of the Mandel Jerusalem Fellows.

RABBI BENJAMIN SAMUELS

Rabbi Benjamin Samuels is rabbi at Congregation Shaarei Tefillah in Newton, Massachusetts. He is an officer of the Vaad Harabonim of Massachusetts, a member of its Beit Din, and he represents the Vaad as a member of the executive board of the Synagogue Council of Massachusetts. Rabbi Samuels is a member of the Wexner Graduate Fellowship Alumni Board and a member of the executive committee of the Rabbinical Council of America. He teaches widely throughout the Greater Boston area. Rabbi Samuels is a graduate of Yeshiva University, where he received semikhah from the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological seminary.

Conference Sponsors

The Hadassah-Brandeis Institute

The Hadassah-Brandeis Institute develops fresh ways of thinking about Jewish women and gender issues worldwide by producing and promoting scholarly research and artistic projects. Founded in 1997 at Brandeis University by Hadassah, the Institute provides research resources and programs for scholars, students and the public.

Annie Sandler, Board Chair

Shulamit Reinharz, Founding Director

www.brandeis.edu/hbi



JOFA, the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance

The mission of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance is to expand the spiritual, ritual, intellectual and political opportunities for women within the framework of halakha. We advocate meaningful participation and equality for women in family life, synagogues, houses of learning and Jewish communal organizations to the full extent possible within halakha. Our commitment is rooted in the belief that fulfilling this mission will enrich and uplift individual and communal life for all Jews.

Carol Kaufman Newman, President

Robin Bodner, Executive Director

www.jofa.org



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