



Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**JOFA Celebrates New Orthodox Female Clergy**

New York, NY – JOFA celebrates an historic moment for the Jewish people - the ordination of Sara Hurwitz as a full member of the Orthodox clergy followed by the establishment of a new school to ordain female rabbinic leaders. We are grateful to Rabbi Avi Weiss who has recognized the need to formally acknowledge the growing learning and assumption of communal and synagogue responsibilities by women today.

Sara Hurwitz's appointment as Mahara"t– leader in halakhic, spiritual and Torah issues – recognizes her position in the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale as a rabbi with the authority to answer questions of Jewish law. She has passed the same *semikhah behinot* (tests required for rabbinic ordination) that entitle men to be called Rabbi. We trust that Yeshivat Mahara"t will offer this same opportunity to other qualified women so that they can take their rightful position in Orthodox leadership.

This milestone did not occur in an historical vacuum. It is another step forward on a long road traveled by many outstanding women before Sara Hurwitz. It goes back in time to Devorah the prophetess, Bruriah, Nechama Leibowitz, Sarah Schneirer and countless other women through the centuries who learned and taught Torah. Sara Hurwitz's accomplishment underscores the realization that the continuity of the Jewish people requires learned women who can contribute to the leadership and education of our communities. Yeshivat Mahara"t is a

natural outgrowth of many excellent institutions of higher learning that exist today for women all over the world. This latest stage in the evolution of Orthodox leadership follows many firsts - the first female congregational interns, *to'anut, yo'atzot halakhah*, women teachers of Talmud, *Rosh Kehillah* and *Rosh Beit Midrash*. We look forward to the day when more female rabbinic leaders join Sara Hurwitz as full members of the Orthodox clergy.

The new position of Mahara"t challenges us to ensure that all female teachers and congregational and communal leaders have the same opportunity as Sara Hurwitz. We applaud the establishment of a yeshiva which will offer an institutionalized system of learning and *behinot*, so that women who qualify receive the title of Mahara"t. Our fervent hope is that as we travel further along the path of spiritual growth in Torah, more women will fulfill the traditional *yeshiva* requirements of *semikhah* and be accorded the same respect for their achievement as men. We will reach another milestone when the official title of Rabbi, that truly reflects what they have learned and how they will serve, will be bestowed equally upon all qualified men and women.

For more information about JOFA's advocacy efforts, please contact Robin Bodner, Executive Director, at [robin.bodner@jofa.org](mailto:robin.bodner@jofa.org), or 212-679-7813.

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***About JOFA (Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance)***

Founded in 1997, JOFA's mission is to expand the spiritual, ritual, intellectual, and political opportunities for observant Jewish women within the framework of *halakha* (the collective body of Jewish law). JOFA's commitment is rooted in the belief that fulfilling its mission will enrich and uplift individual and communal life for all Jews. It enjoys the support of scholars and leaders throughout the Jewish world. Membership is open to women and men. For more information, visit [www.jofa.org](http://www.jofa.org) or call 212-679-8500.