

J O F A Journal

JEWISH ORTHODOX FEMINIST ALLIANCE

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Our New Look!

Evoking Miriam's tambourine and the waters of her well, our new logo celebrates Jewish women's leadership. The waves emerging from the logo remind us of our dedication to Torah, often compared to water, and illustrate our commitment to continually moving forward while remaining connected to our past.

From Our President

For the Sake of the Righteous Women: Leadership Then and Now

By Carol Kaufman Newman

Our tradition is filled with wonderful examples of women who were leaders. In fact women have held positions of respect and responsibility in Judaism since biblical times. They took the risk. They took the initiative. They mentored others. Today's women must do no less.

It is Sarah, our first matriarch, who sees that Isaac is the one to follow after Abraham. And it is Rebecca who knows that Jacob should receive the blessing and not Esau. We can look to Esther on Purim and Judith on Hanukah. We have the wonderful example of the daughters of Zelophehad. When their father died without male heirs, these women stood before Moses and the leaders of the community and asked for their inheritance. "Why should the name of our father be taken away from the midst of his clan (just) because he has no son?" (Numbers 27:4) And God told Moses: כן בנות זלפחד דברת "Rightfully speak the daughters of Zelophehad" (27:7).

The נשים צדקניות—righteous women—fill the pages of our Jewish texts. It is because of these women, we are told, that Israel was redeemed from Egypt. Miriam, who crosses the Red Sea and leads the women in song is, along with Moses and Aaron, one of the liberators of the people of Israel. In his Schocken Bible commentary, Everett Fox writes: "...the enterprise of deliverance from Egypt began with a little girl at the Nile, watching through the reeds to make sure her baby brother



would survive; it ends with the same person, now an adult, a 'prophetess' celebrating the final victory at the Sea..." (page 336).

Throughout our modern history we have also had women leaders as role models: Henrietta Szold, the founder of Hadassah; Sarah Schenirer, the founder of Bais Yaakov Schools for Girls; Golda Meir and many others. These women, like their Biblical sisters, were not afraid to step forward. They did not wait to be invited to join the community of leaders. They simply took leadership upon themselves.

Over the years many have used *halakha*, Jewish law, to deny women access to leadership positions. A thorough review of the sources, as we have within these pages, shows that there is no reason to prevent women from having leadership roles. However, the force of custom is very strong, and sadly, many women have internalized this secondary role.

And God told Abraham: כל אשר תאמר אליך שרה שמע בקלה "in everything that Sarah says to you, hearken to her voice..." (Genesis 21:12). JOFA's mission is to create the opportunities for women to have their voices heard within the Jewish community. Women comprise fifty-one percent of the population. How wonderful it will be when these women take their rightful place alongside men using their talents and professional skills to help shape Jewish life by sharing communal responsibility.

Orthodox Women and Leadership: The Journey Continues

By Blu Greenberg

To'anut, yo'atzot, madrichot ruchaniot, congregational interns, shul presidents, torah layners, executive directors, day school principals, mashgichot, gabbaiot, scholars-in-residence, contributors to *halakhic* journals, megillah chanters, tefillah organizers, ketubah readers—titles we never imagined, words that did not appear in our lexicon barely a decade ago. And the list grows day by day, with new roles moving onto the community agenda and into the communal psyche with little fanfare. Last year, as I strolled across a college campus with my old friend Barbara, she spoke of her 25 year old daughter who aspires to be a *rahmit*, a title new to my ears. (A *rahm* [masc.] is the acronym for *Resh Metivta*, one who teaches Talmud and other texts to young men studying at a yeshiva.) "Ironic, isn't it?" Barbara said, commenting on her daughter's need to distance herself from Orthodox feminism and the young woman's rejection of any possible connection between her aspirations and the groundwork laid by her mother's generation. For an instant, I wondered whether she wanted to be a *rahmit* at a men's yeshiva or a women's; that the question even entered my mind was to me an indication that the facts on the ground are fast outpacing the ideological debates over these new roles. I call this the era of 'credentializing' women in Orthodoxy, and we are poised at the beginning of an incredible new process.

All of this new leadership activity is more than the sum of its parts. Taken together, the new titles and positions for women constitute a fundamental redefinition of women's roles in traditional Judaism. For the better part of Jewish history, women were considered as "inside persons." Indeed, the Psalmist's phrase, *kol kevuda bat melech prima* (the honor of the daughter of the king is 'within') was applied by Rabbis of every generation...continued on next page

The issues of this year's JOFA Journal are made possible through the generosity of Zelda Stern and The Harry Stern Family Foundation.

Leadership

...continued from page 1

tion to explain the exemption or release for women from duties that would propel them into communal space. *Kol kevuda* contained elements of modesty and taboo; while it honored women's role in family life, it set women far back from the public eye in matters of religious ritual, community participation and spiritual leadership. Today, all of that is changing.

And yet... Though a host of titles are new to Orthodox women, leadership roles, in fact, are not. Many of us tend to think hazily of Orthodox women of yesteryear as, at best, behind the scenes; at worst, wholly uninvolved in communal leadership. But a good look at the history of Orthodox women in America over the last two centuries gives quite a different picture. In researching the subject, I was surprised to learn how fundamentally these women changed the quality of Jewish life, a definition of leadership if ever there was one. They took initiatives, assumed responsibilities, and helped bring our community to where it is today.

How many people know that it was a small group of women of the newly formed Women's Branch of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations that created the Kashruth Division in the early 1920's and gave us the OU label, a community institution upon which much of the Jewish world now depends? Those women hired one rabbi, then several others; they supervised them and paid their salaries from the Women's Branch coffers; they negotiated with major food companies; they created the idea of labeling the kosher products; and they advertised and promulgated the observance of *kashrut*,

which they themselves had made easier in the new land.

It was the Orthodox women's groups that largely created the Jewish burial system in this country. On a visit to Beth David cemetery in Elmont, Long Island, where my parents-in-law and maternal grandmother are buried, the dry historical documents I had been reading suddenly came to life. The majority of burial societies in the huge graveyard, many of them dating back to the 19th century, had been created by ladies' auxiliaries. The women purchased the community plots, kept the records, formalized the structures, and did everything other than public, rabbinic rites.



Blu Greenberg addresses the First JOFA International Conference.

Similarly, the major religious Zionist institutions—social welfare and educational alike—were the product of women's groups such as Mizrahi (now AMIT) and Emunah. To read the record of how a young Bessie Gotsfeld firmly held her ground in a controversy over who decides how funds raised by women are allocated, is to read a modern feminist treatise on women's leadership. In the 1920's the rabbinic leaders of Mizrahi insisted that the funds be turned over to them for distribution. Bessie, with great civility and dignity, refused. Then, as representative and

founder of Mizrahi Women's Organization, she traveled to Israel to see for herself where the greatest need lay.

As the reader has noticed, there clearly are differences between then and now: then, women exercised leadership through the formation of women's groups, rather than in gender-mixed institutions; they carried no titles other than those conferred upon them by their friends and cohorts in synagogue sisterhoods and women's organizations; and they played no leadership roles in the liturgical life of the community or in the significant worlds of *halakhic* education and rabbinic authority. That is what is changing, and that is what we celebrate today. Women are newly expected to be in the *Bet Midrash*, the synagogue, and the courts of law; and not only to be present in these places but to exercise formal leadership roles.

Yet, as we chart new paths and create new expectations, it behooves us to remember that we of this generation are the next link, continuous with Orthodox women of the past who took initiative and exercised the collective

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Salome Alexandra, 139-67 B.C.E.

The wife of Alexander Jannai, Hasmonean king of Judea, who designated her as his successor, Salome Alexandra was the first woman to rule Judea and its last independent ruler. A skillful diplomat, she dealt astutely and successfully with foreign powers. During her nine-year reign, Judea was generally at peace, though she was prepared to mobilize troops when necessary and indeed doubled the size of the army. At home, she brought the Pharisees into the government, reversing her husband's policy, and appointed Shimon ben Shetach, the Pharisee leader, (and possibly her brother), as joint head of the Sanhedrin. According to the Talmud, which regards her very favorably, Salome was responsible for rescuing seventy elders who were condemned to death, and for the reinstatement of the tradition of the study of the Oral Law. Evidence for her strength as a leader comes from the disparaging comments of Josephus who considered her "a woman greedy for power" and "a woman who showed none of the weaknesses of her sex." For those readers who learn Jewish history from street names in Israel, Salome Alexandra was also known as Shlomtzion Hamalkah.

From Under the Palm Tree: The Model of Devorah

By Laura Shaw-Frank

One can scarcely do justice to the topic of Jewish women and leadership without discussing Devorah, perhaps the most famous female leader of the Bible. The Book of Judges tells us that Devorah was a judge and a prophet.¹ She led the Children of Israel during a time of war, and under her leadership, the Children of Israel were victorious over an enemy power. Clearly, Devorah was a strong and powerful leader. She is the only female judge ever mentioned in the Bible, and the Rabbis teach us that she is one of only seven female prophets.² Surely we should look upon her as the paramount Jewish female leader. Yet, Devorah was also, in many ways, a total anomaly for her time—a woman who somehow made it in a man’s world and seemingly existed only in that male world. Was Devorah a female leader or simply a leader who happened to be female? Can her style of leadership inform us as Orthodox Jew-

ish women striving for change in the mainstream Orthodox community?

The text does not tell us very much about Devorah. Aside from the fact that she was a prophet and a judge, we learn that she was a war strategist. She tells Barak Ben Avinoam that God commanded that he take an army and fight Sisera and his army, enemies of the Jews. When Barak tells Devorah he will not go without her, Devorah goes with Barak to fight Sisera. The Israelite forces defeat Sisera’s troops, and Sisera himself escapes on foot to the tent of Yael, the wife of Hever the Kennite. Yael murders Sisera by driving her tent pin through his temple, and thus ends the battle.

Given these bare facts, one could easily look at Devorah as the stereotype of a hardened career woman. Indeed, at first glance, the text seems to want us to have this impression. It gives us little to no detail regarding her personal life—only her professional one. We do not even know if she was married. The text tells us that she was *eshet lappidot*³ a phrase whose meaning is unclear. Some commentators say that the phrase *eshet lappidot* means that she was married to a man named Lapidot,⁴ but others interpret the word *lappidot* to be a descriptive word about Devorah’s personality. The Hebrew word *lappidot* literally means torches, and some commentators have explained *eshet lappidot* to mean that Devorah was a woman of torches or a “fiery woman.”⁵ As her marital status is unclear, it is unsurprising that the text makes no mention of any children.

On the other hand, as noted above, the text is fairly detailed about Devorah’s professional accomplishments. For her time, Devorah seems quite un-

usual. To be a public figure, the leader of a nation, a war hero, and possibly unmarried and childless to boot flies in the face of everything we know (or think we know) about women of Devorah’s time. Perhaps, we think, the text is trying to tell us that Devorah’s femaleness is merely coincidental. Perhaps, like the first waves of women entering the upper echelons of corporate power in our own times, she was a woman forced to fit herself into a male mold. Indeed, when Barak tells Devorah that he will not go to war without her, she replies, seemingly with a sneer in her voice, “I shall surely go with you; you will not gain glory from your path, for into the hand of a woman will the Lord deliver Sisera.” Despite her own gender, she seems to intimate that delivery into the hands of a woman is the ultimate insult.

But, as we all know, stereotypes are dangerous because they narrow our thinking and prevent us from seeing others as three-dimensional human beings. Scratching the surface of the text of Chapters 4 and 5 of Judges shows us that to stereotype Devorah is to miss out on a complex woman who has much to teach us as Orthodox women and leaders in 5764.

Our first clue into Devorah’s unique persona is the text’s appellation of her as an *isha neviah*, a woman prophetess.⁶ At first glance, this phrase seems redundant. Why does the text need to tell us that she was an *isha* (woman) if it also tells us that she is a *neviah* (prophetess)? *Neviah* is a female term—a man cannot be a prophetess. I am convinced that the word *isha* tells us something crucial about Devorah’s character. First and foremost, the text is telling us, Devorah saw herself as a woman—and the fact that she was a woman influenced everything she did, whether it was

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Detail from French manuscript showing Devorah riding into battle (probably Paris) c.1250. MS. M.638, f.12.

The Pierpont Morgan Library/Art Resource, NY.



James Jacques Joseph Tissot (1836-1902)
Deborah Beneath the Palm Tree
The Jewish Museum NY/Art Resource, NY.



Avner Moriah, Jerusalem 2001

Devorah/Leadership from the Women's Zodiac

Courtesy of the artist. The Women's Zodiac wall mural is on permanent display at the Jewish Theological Seminary. Further information on the artist is available on www.jofa.org.

Devorah sings after the victory over Sisera and his army contains other examples of her female way of looking at the world. In describing the history of Israel before the war with Sisera, Devorah sings, "The open cities ceased, in Israel they ceased, until I Devorah arose; I arose as a mother in Israel."⁷⁷ Rashi explains that "the open cities ceased" means that the Children of Israel were no longer able to inhabit cities without walls because of the threat of their enemies, so they retreated to walled cities for protection. The *Me'am Lo'ez* comments that like a mother, Devorah prayed for and worried about the Children of Israel. Like a mother, Abравanel writes, she had pity on them. Devorah's view of her role vis-à-vis the Children of Israel was not only that of a political leader, but additionally a maternal role—with all the intimacy and nurturing that the mother-child relationship provides.

And, by the way, I personally don't think Devorah meant to belittle Barak when she told him that Sisera would be delivered into the hands of a woman. I think she had a prophecy that Sisera would end up slain by Yael and not by him. She shared her prophecy with Barak at that moment in

order to calm him down. "Don't worry, Barak," she was saying, "I see by the fact that you will not go to war without me that you are afraid of what is expected of you. I am here to tell you that you need only fight the battle you know how to fight. God will deliver Sisera into the hands of another, a woman as it happens. You do not have to be scared."

In fact, far from being the pseudo necktie-wearing career woman of decades past, who virtually had to be a man in order to succeed, Devorah is an intensely female character, one who enters the realm of men and injects into that realm a woman's sensibilities and a uniquely female way of looking at the world. While we do not know as much as we would like about how this special quality of Devorah influenced her leadership and judging of the Children of Israel, we do know that it did.

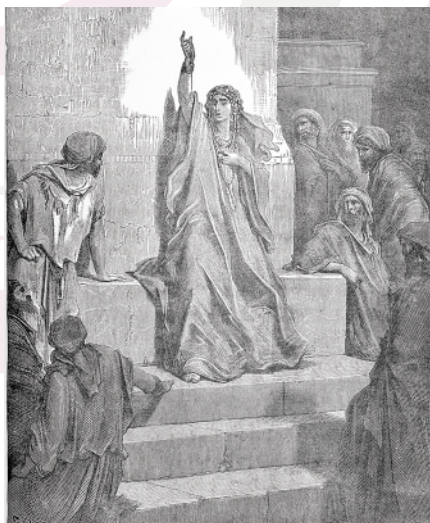
Devorah has much to teach us today. As in Devorah's times, the public realm of today's Orthodox Judaism is still controlled by men and by male sensibilities. We as women have much to add to that world with our voices. Devorah's example shows us that our voices can, and should, be heard in the public realm, and that the unique female nature of our voices can transform the discourse in that realm. By internalizing the spirit of Devorah, may we be privileged to witness the growth of Orthodox Judaism into a more inclusive, nurturing and understanding spiritual and religious home for us all.

Laura Shaw-Frank is an attorney and founding board member of JOFA. She teaches adult education classes in Women and Halakha, Bible and Midrash. She lives in Baltimore with her husband, Rabbi Aaron Frank, and their three children.

prophesying, leading or judging.

As the story continues, we begin to see hints as to how Devorah injected an essence of femaleness into her actions. Perhaps the most poignant example is the place she chose as her headquarters. The text tells us that she "sat under the palm tree of Devorah." Abравanel tells us that the Devorah referred to here is the matriarch Rebecca's nurse who was buried under this palm tree. I find this interpretation incredibly touching because it speaks to Devorah's connection to her foremothers and her intuitive ability to understand and incorporate their influence into her life and work. Perhaps she felt that by sitting atop the grave of Rebecca's nurse, Devorah, she would be imbued with the spirit of that holy woman who did all her work behind the scenes, yet who influenced the very destiny of a nation by raising Rebecca to be the mother of Israel that she became.

In addition, *Shirat Devorah*, the song



*Gustave Dore
Deborah
France, 1866.*

Courtesy of The Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary.

1. Judges 4:4.
2. *Megillah* 14a. The other female prophets are Sarah, Miriam, Hannah, Abigail, Hulda and Esther.
3. Judges 4:4.
4. See for example Rashi on *Megillah* 14a; *Yalkut Shimoni Shoftim* 42.
5. See for example *Abavat Yonatan* (cited in *Maayanah Shel Torah*) who considers that Devorah was referred to as a torch because she was inflamed with determination to mete out judgment on the wicked. She was not excessively lenient or indulgent, but she wished to see justice done.
6. Judges 4:4.
7. Judges 5:7.

Pursuing Justice: Notes from an *Agunah* Activist

By Sharon Shenhav

I have been an “*agunah* activist” since 1979. That is the year I came on *aliyah* to Israel after practicing law in a public interest law firm in Washington, D.C. for 10 years. I did not know about *agunot* and the problems of Jewish divorce when I arrived in Israel, but I did know about injustice, inequality and human rights from my US experience. In fact I chose to study law in the 1960’s (one of three women in a class of 280) because I believed that lawyers could “right wrongs” and eliminate injustice.

In Jerusalem, after being admitted to the bar, the American Jewish Congress asked me to write a monograph on Women’s Rights in Israel. As I researched the subject, I was shocked to learn about the problem of *agunot* and the fact that the rabbinical courts in Israel had exclusive jurisdiction over marriage and divorce. I decided that I would devote the rest of my professional life to the restoration of justice and fairness for women in the religious divorce process. I offered to set up a legal service for the women’s division of the *Histadrut* Labor Federation in Jerusalem (*Na’amat*). The legal service opened in 1980 and was flooded with cases of *agunot*. Since I was a salaried lawyer, the women did not have to pay for representation and I began taking the difficult cases to the rabbinical courts. As an experienced, professional, American-educated lawyer appearing in the Israeli rabbinical courts in the early 1980’s, my experiences were incredible, often bordering on the absurd. In those days the courts operated like a souk, with everyone yelling at once, including the *dayanim* (judges). There was no decorum, no rules of evidence and no ethical standards of behavior. My legal colleagues, who considered the field of divorce to

lack prestige and the rabbinical courts a joke, were surprised that I would consider representing women there. Until 1993 I represented hundreds of women in the rabbinical courts and someday (when I have time) I’ll write a book about some of my more humorous and tragic experiences in the *batei din*.

The Israeli press picked up on some of my more bizarre cases and with the attendant publicity I began to receive invitations to lecture—first to Israeli audiences and then abroad. Articles began to appear regularly in the Hebrew and English press about the shameful situation of *agunot*. As public criticism grew, women’s organizations in Israel, as well as Jewish communities worldwide, began to focus on the *agunah* issue. New organizations were formed, conferences were held, and women demonstrated publicly to protest the injustice against women in religious divorce. Articles and books were published on the plight of *agunot*, and I began to travel abroad to speak to Jewish audiences including women’s organizations, community organizations, professional organizations of lawyers and judges, and human rights organizations.

By the early 1990’s, the *agunah* was a household word! Even popular US television sit-coms like *Ally McBeal* and *L.A. Law* had segments on *agunot* and the blackmail rampant in the Jewish divorce process. The Jewish press worldwide was featuring regular articles about the injustice and inequality that existed in the religious divorce process. Jewish community leaders began to pressure the Orthodox establishment, and many compassionate and courageous rabbis responded to the need for solutions. As Orthodox women’s organizations joined the campaign, some

leading rabbis began turning to activists like me to join them in seeking solutions. I found that the rabbis and *dayanim* were concerned that they were being “demonized.” Suddenly my role as gadfly became transformed into one of respected colleague! I was asked to assist in difficult cases involving recalcitrant husbands outside of Israel. Rabbis and *dayanim* abroad turned to me for assistance in the Israeli rabbinical courts.

Perhaps the most exciting and challenging event has been my recent election by the Israel Bar Association as its representative to the Commission to appoint *dayanim*. As the only woman on this 10 person commission, which includes the two Chief Rabbis, Minister of Justice, Minister of Religious Affairs, *dayanim* from the *Bet Din Hagadol* and two religious MK’s, I am finding that there are many leading rabbis who agree with my criticism of the system. However, they feel constrained by religious politics from “going public” with their views, and see me as a powerful ally who can use the commission to discipline and remove unsuitable *dayanim* as well as appoint more competent, compassionate and knowledgeable new *dayanim*. This is a new and quite interesting role that apparently contains more power than I had realized. Based on my almost 25 years of experience as an *agunah* activist, I now intend to use my three year term on the Commission to obtain justice for women in Jewish divorce.

Sharon Shenhav is the Director of the International Jewish Women’s Rights Project in Jerusalem.

Dulcia of Worms, ?-1196

Dulcia of Worms was a teacher of women and leader of prayer in Worms in the twelfth century. Dulcia, whose husband Rabbi Eliezer was the author of the *halakhic* work *Sefer ha-Rokeach*, was murdered during the Crusades together with her two daughters by armed marauders. We know of her activities from the moving elegy her husband wrote after her death in a paraphrase of *Eshet Chayil*. Apart from supporting her husband and family through her activities as moneylender and banker, she “in all towns, taught women to sing praises,” “composed songs and prayers,” and “organized the regular services, morning and evening, coming early to the synagogue and staying late.” “She opened her mouth in wisdom and was knowledgeable in all the prohibited and permitted,” and on Shabbat (at least according to one of the manuscripts of the elegy), would herself give scholarly dissertations. Learned and knowledgeable in Torah, she would purchase books with her earnings. It is obvious from her husband’s tribute that Dulcia took a public role in the community. Interestingly, we also know of a 13th century tombstone that marks the grave of Urania of Worms, another leader of prayer and of a Richenza, murdered in 1298 in a pogrom in Nuremberg, who did the same.

Risk and Reward

By Belda Kaufman Lindenbaum

The JOFA mission statement speaks about effecting change in the status of Orthodox women in their personal and communal lives. Change does not occur in just one place, nor is it accomplished by one person, and it does not happen overnight. That is why the contribution of each one of us, wherever we may live, has been and will continue to be, so important. Assuming leadership, which is really about making this contribution, cannot always be the role of someone else. Each of us must take on the task and lend our own special talents to accomplish a larger goal.

Twenty-five years ago, the Drisha Institute for Women was the kernel of an idea in the mind of Rabbi David Silber. I chose to share his vision and have had the joy of watching it realized in a school that has completely changed the face of Jewish education for women. It has also been a catalyst for other programs in many parts of the United States.

JOFA itself was born out of the vision of Founding President Blu Greenberg, for a conference that would allow women and men to tackle the difficult questions and issues facing Orthodox Jewish women today. Blu, and those who came together to make her dream a reality, chose to lead despite the many obstacles encountered along the way.

These are two examples of larger institutions created to effect change. However, there is a great deal that each of us can do in our own, local communities. By participating in my synagogue and creating an open dialogue with my rabbis, I have helped to create more awareness of the importance of ceremonies surrounding *Bat Mitzvah*, *Simchat Bat*, and have fostered, with the help of others, a better environment for women at prayer. While I have been working in my own community, many others have done similar or other creative tasks in theirs.

Leadership is demanding and hard work, and too often we find it difficult to envision ourselves playing such a role. It requires risk, courage and perseverance to change the status quo. The reward for such labor is enormous. Together, we have the power to create a more perfect community for ourselves, for our families, and for generations to come.

Belda Kaufman Lindenbaum is Vice President of JOFA. She is President of the Drisha Institute.

Dona Gracia Nasi, 1510-1569

Dona Gracia Nasi was a sixteenth century Jewish leader, international banker and philanthropist whose life took her from Lisbon to Antwerp, to Venice and other cities in Italy, and finally to Constantinople. Born as a *converso* or New Christian in Lisbon, it was only in Italy that she returned to Judaism openly. She left Portugal as a wealthy widow and used her fortune to organize an underground railroad to bring thousands of *conversos* from Spain and Portugal. As a banker and international businesswoman, she established connections with rulers and statesmen throughout the world, using these connections to improve life for Jews in many countries. On arriving in Turkey she became a leader of the community, supporting synagogues and schools throughout the Ottoman Empire, and was known as *La Signora* or *Hagevira*. She initiated a boycott of the port of Ancona in retaliation for the burning at the stake of 24 Jews. She persuaded Suleiman to grant her a long-term lease in Tiberias which was under Ottoman control, and which she envisioned as a prototype for an independent Jewish state. She died before she could occupy the palatial mansion that was prepared for her there. A new museum and hotel in Tiberias called the *House of Dona Gracia* commemorates the activities of this unique Renaissance figure.

To Join Or Not To Join: Guidelines for Considering Board Membership

By Zelda R. Stern

It is a great privilege to serve on the board of directors of a not-for-profit organization. Board membership provides the opportunity to shape an organization and thus effect change in the larger community. As board members, we are accountable for the successes and failures and, in a broader sense, for the ethical behavior of the organizations we serve. It is a responsibility that should be taken with great seriousness.

There are a number of issues to consider before agreeing to join a board:

- What is the mission of the organization, and how does the mission reflect your values? Ask for the mission statement, as well as for the by-laws, articles of incorporation, and board policies. This material will not only provide a fairly clear understanding of the history, philosophy and goals of the organization, but will also help you formulate questions.
- Read minutes of some board meetings from the current and previous years. You will ascertain the issues that have challenged the board and how (or if!) they are being or have been resolved.
- Who is on the board? This is, after all, a family you are joining. You will be spending time with the members, working through problems, trying to compromise and to reach consensus. Are there women on the board? If not, why not? Are you to be the token woman? Are there women officers? Are women even allowed to become officers? Has there ever been a woman president? And if not, why not?
- What are the organization's expectations vis a vis time and money? What are you willing and able to commit?

How often are board meetings held? What are the requirements for serving on committees? What level of financial contribution is expected? Will you be required to solicit gifts?

- Board members have legal and fiduciary responsibility for their organizations. Ask about liability. Do the board members have Directors and Officers Liability insurance? Has the organization (and thus the board members) ever been sued? Why? Did the insurance fully cover any liability? What was the final disposition of this lawsuit?

- Assess the organization's finances. Ask to see recent annual reports and financial statements. Request budget and audit information. Ask for anything that will help you evaluate the fiscal health and integrity of the organization.

- It is enormously valuable to attend a board meeting before making a final decision. Observe the interaction, participation and leadership. Do things indeed get done? Or is there just a lot of talk?

Board membership is a sober and wonderful undertaking, one that affords great opportunities to make a difference. View it with care and concern. Board membership is more than a title; it is a trust. It is an honor and not an honorific.

Zelda R. Stern, a psychotherapist and donor-activist, is a board member of The Harry Stern Family Foundation and a founding board member of JOFA. The original version of this piece appeared in Journey, a publication of Ma'yan: The Jewish Woman's Project of the JCC in Manhattan.

A King...and Not a Queen

By Rachel Dulitz

The recent proliferation of educated female Orthodox scholars and professionals has brought the *halakhic* issue of women in leadership positions to the forefront. Women hold high level positions of responsibility in every possible business and profession, are CEOs of their companies, and yet Orthodox Jewish society is slow to accept them as presidents of synagogues. This article examines the biblical and rabbinical sources that underlie this issue as well as several modern day responsa dealing with specific situations of women in leadership.

The biblical source upon which all further discussion is predicated is God's commandment to Moses in Deuteronomy, "Appoint for yourself a king..."¹ The *Sifrei* (*Midrash Halakha*) comments on this verse, "A king, and not a queen."² The obligation is specifically to appoint a (male) king; a woman may not be appointed to reign over the people. *Rambam* takes this logic one step further and writes, "Do not appoint a woman to reign, since the verse states, 'a king and not a queen.' And so too, all positions in Israel—do not appoint anyone but a man."³ For *Rambam*, the *Sifrei's* injunction is expanded to preclude a woman from any position of leadership.

Several early commentators discuss this issue indirectly while analyzing the case of Devorah the Prophet. They invoke the law that women are not allowed to serve as judges and ponder how it is possible that the *Tanach* records that "Devorah judged Israel in that time?"⁴ The "problem" of Devorah is brought up in several different *Tosafot* throughout the Talmud. In Tractate *Niddah*,⁵ *Tosafot* resolve the problem by maintaining that Devorah did in fact judge, but this case was exceptional, since God had appointed her. Alternatively, it is suggested that she did not judge; she simply taught the Israelites the law. While Devorah's specific role of judging would seem to run counter to the prohibition of women serving as witnesses and therefore judges,⁶ it is clear that Devorah is viewed as a powerful leader. Additionally, it is worth noting that the very defense *Tosafot* give for Devorah is that she was "merely" teaching law to the entire Jewish people.

The *Rosh* in *Shavuot* cites the same explanation for Devorah's judicial role and notes that Devorah was, "teaching the laws of Israel."⁷ The *Ran* on the same passage says even more explicitly, "that which is written about Devo-

rah...is not to say that she judged, but rather that she was a leader. That which the *Sifrei* states, that you should appoint for yourself a king and not a queen is not a problem, because they did not appoint her, they simply behaved according to her word."⁸ Two important points can be observed from the *Ran's* statement. First, he contends that she did serve as a leader of the Jewish people, giving us a clear precedent of female public leadership. Furthermore, the *Ran* introduces a notion that later *halakhic* authorities develop—there is a distinction between *appointing* a woman and abiding by her word.

This debate in the sources has clear implications for modern-day rabbis who have to deal with many practical questions of women and leadership. Does the injunction against appointing a woman as king extend to other positions of leadership? Is a distinction made between various types of leadership? One interesting case of leadership that we can examine is that of a *mashgiach* (supervisor) who oversees *kasbrut* standards. Rav Moshe Feinstein was asked if a woman was *halakhically* permitted to serve in this capacity. The woman in question was more than qualified for the position and had worked in the field with her husband before his death. She was now a widow with several children and no means of supporting them. Rav Feinstein's answer is lengthy and complex, but several points he makes are helpful in defining the parameters of leadership.

First, he states that the only forbidden leadership for a woman, is where she is in a position of *serarah*—ultimate authority. At first glance, he says, the position of *mashgiach* seems to fall under this rubric since the word of the *mashgiach* is final. The employer is unable to disregard his word and if the *mashgiach* declares a food unfit, it may not be eaten. For *Rambam*, who maintains women should not be appointed to any positions of leadership, it appears that a woman cannot be a *mashgicha*. But, upon closer inspection, R. Feinstein explains, it becomes apparent that the position does not really entail absolute leadership. In any *kasbrut* organization, the rabbi in charge is the ultimate authority. The various *mashgichim* who go to restaurants and establishments are simply the rabbi's workers. The owner of the restaurant is in essence paying the rabbi for the service of maintaining a kosher establishment. Rav Feinstein asks, "Is it not the case that the responsibility that the owner is relying on is on the *rav*, and she is viewed simply as carrying out the will of the rabbi? She is considered a general worker and he [the *rav*] can choose to employ a woman."⁹ This responsa helps to limit *halakhically* forbidden leadership roles to those that entail ultimate, non-revocable authority.

Another distinction that is made by the *poskim* (religious authorities) revolves around the notion of appointment. In analyzing the sources quoted

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Rebecca Gratz, 1781-1869

Rebecca Gratz was born and spent her life in Philadelphia where she was a philanthropist, communal worker and founder of many institutions, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Within the Jewish community she established the Female Hebrew Benevolent Society, which was the first Jewish charity not attached to a synagogue. She later established the first Hebrew Sunday school in the United States for both girls and boys. She hired only female teachers both to teach and to write curricula, which was unprecedented. This school became a model for many others in different cities. She herself acted as Superintendent of the school for over twenty-five years. She also established a Jewish foster home to help with social issues stemming from the increasing German Jewish immigration. As executive secretary of each, she remained active in the institutions that she founded, maintaining her leadership role by writing the annual reports that were then published, as well as keeping the records. She was painted by many famous artists, and conducted an active correspondence with literary figures in America and England. She was considered to be the model for the character of Rebecca in Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*.



Rebecca Gratz, Portrait by Thomas Sully. Courtesy of American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio and Jewish Women's Archives

...and Not a Queen

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above that preclude the appointment of a woman to the position of king, some authorities say that it is only forbidden for women to hold positions of leadership which involve an actual appointment. Rav Uziel (the Sephardi Chief Rabbi contemporary with Rav Kook), points this out in his responsum addressing the issue of permitting women to run for government office. He posits, "The law refers only to appointments made by a *Sanhedrin*, but in our case there is no appointment. Rather, it is acceptance—through voting, the majority of the community has chosen this person...and in this case, even *Rambam* would agree that there is nothing at all which is forbidden."¹⁰

Rav Uziel also states that Devorah was certainly allowed to be a judge in the sense of teaching and instructing, and quotes the *Ran's* proviso that Devorah was a leader and not a judge, which is perfectly acceptable. After making many cogent *halakhic* arguments, the last point in this responsa is not a *halakhic* one, yet it reveals an important philosophy behind the author's methodology in deciding legal rulings. He writes, "Perhaps there is still room to say that although from a *halakhic* perspective their accepting her [into office] is all right, from the perspective of *mus-sar* and modesty there still remains something forbidden."¹¹ He then dismisses this possibility, stating, "*Mussar* and the Torah are one thing, and we can say about this topic that after we learn the Torah does not forbid anything except explicit appointment, we can assume that there is nothing forbidden in terms of *pritzut* (licentiousness)."¹² The message of this statement is quite clear. There is no room to make a new moral code independent of *halakha* even if something feels uncomfortable.

What about the case of a woman serving as president of a synagogue board? In America many congregational rabbis have allowed women to sit on synagogue boards. Numerous Orthodox congregations have women officers: in some congregations all offices are open to women, in others women can hold most offices. A few Orthodox synagogues have had female presidents. It was almost thirty years ago that Rabbi Seymour Turk wrote in *Ha-Darom*¹³ that there is no reason why a woman cannot fulfill the role of synagogue president. He pointed out that even according to *Rambam* the only problem is appointing a woman to a position which involves autonomy and the ability to force others to do her will. Our synagogues today in no way fit this

Hannah Rochel Verbermacher or "Maiden of Ludmir," 1815-1892/5

The story of Hannah Rochel Verbermacher is one of the most extraordinary and controversial in Jewish history. She was a nineteenth century charismatic leader who had her own followers. Though the sources are somewhat unclear, she was born in Ludmir in Russia in 1815, and had an unusually strong Jewish education. After a mystic vision at her mother's grave at an age of 12, and particularly after the death of her father for whom she said *kaddish* when she was 19, she developed a following among Jews in the town and became known as the "Maiden of Ludmir." Using an inheritance from her father, she built her own synagogue or *beit midrash*, ("A Shteibel of One's Own" in Virginia Woolf's terms) where she preached, led prayers and received written requests from her followers. From an early age she wore *tzitzit*, and a *tallit* and donned *tefillin*. On Shabbat she wore a *gartel*. Under pressure from local Rabbis and at the persuasion of an eminent Hasidic *rebbe*, she married, but the marriage apparently did not last. She emigrated to Palestine after the age of 50 and probably re-established herself there as a "holy woman." She died in Palestine, leaving no writings.

description. In fact he wrote, "In our congregations, the president is simply putting into action what the congregation decides. This is not authority, rather it is doing their work [bidding]."¹⁴ Furthermore, Rabbi Turk explained, when the people vote a woman into office they are clearly accepting her, thereby precluding the problem of the *halakhic* definition of appointing a woman. He also added some additional dimensions to the concept of *serarah*. According to Rabbi Turk, "ultimate authority" only applies when leaders can hold on to their positions until the day they die and pass those positions on to their children. This is clearly not applicable to the case of a woman who serves as president of a synagogue.¹⁵

Thus, while a rabbi has to seriously consider the weight of "A king and not a queen" and the extension of its application to different positions of leadership and public office in rabbinic sources, it is clear that few public roles are closed to women today on the basis of *halakha*. Many *poskim* have concluded that if a woman is accepted as leader rather than being appointed, this is not the type of absolute authority that the earlier authorities intended to forbid. They have also maintained that if a woman has to answer to someone else such as a rabbi or fellow congregants, this too is not absolute authority. Thus, the analogy with kingship is not relevant to our modern-day synagogues. One should not use the issue of modesty to extend the *halakhic* limitations on a woman holding public office. Discomfort with change should not prevent women from serving in many of the leadership positions available in religious life today.

Rachel Dulitz has a B.A. in Psychology from the University of Pennsylvania, and is completing the Drisha Scholars Program in New York.

1. Deuteronomy 17:15.
2. *Sifrei Devarim*, Piska 157.
3. *Rambam*, Laws of Kings 1:5.
4. Judges 4:4.
5. *Niddah* 50a, "All those who are fit to judge are also fit to testify."
6. There is a principle that all who are unfit to serve as witnesses, cannot serve as judges. Women cannot serve as witnesses (as stated in *Shavuot* 30a), therefore Devorah's position as a judge is problematic.
7. *Rosh*, *Shavuot* 4:1.
8. *Ran*, *Shavuot* 13a.
9. *Iggrot Moshe*, *Yoreh De'ah* Section 2:44.
10. Responsa *Piskei Uziel siman* 44.
11. *Ibid*.
12. *Ibid*.
13. *Ha-Darom*, *Nisan* 5735 p.66. This issue is also discussed by Rabbi David Bleich in "Contemporary Halakhic Problems Volume II," Chapter 12, "Women on Synagogue Boards," pp. 254-267 reprinted from *Tradition*.
14. *Ha-Darom*, op.cit.
15. Other rabbis consider that some positions such as president or treasurer—the latter because of the "power" to levy and collect dues—still do involve the notion of *serarah*, and thus exclude these positions while allowing women to fill all others.

2004 JOFA INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

JOFA's Fifth International Conference on Feminism & Orthodoxy will be held Sunday and Monday, February 15-16, 2004, (Presidents' Day weekend) at the Grand Hyatt Hotel, Park Avenue at 42nd Street, New York City.

Entitled "*Zachar u-Negevah Bara Otam: Women and Men in Partnership*," the conference aims to explore the roles that Jewish ritual, *halakha*, and culture play in relationships and interactions between women and men, paying particular attention to the implications of changing gender roles in Jewish families, institutions, synagogues and schools.

For further information on both the conference and on availability of childcare, visit www.jofa.org, call the Conference Hotline: 1-888-550-JOFA or email us at: conference@jofa.org

Online registration is available on our website.

FIRST JOFA FILM FESTIVAL

Award-winning Israeli filmmaker, Anat Zuria participated in the panel discussion that followed the screening of her controversial documentary, *Tehora* (Purity). The event took place on November 6th at the JCC in Manhattan which co-sponsored the evening with JOFA. Subtitled "Breaking the Code of Silence," the film follows the lives of three women as they confront issues of marriage, family purity and *mikvah*. The moderator of the evening was noted Brandeis professor, Dr. Sylvia Barack Fishman. Devorah Zlochower, Director of Full Time Programs at Drisha, Dr. Sarah Sternklar, a psychologist and Katie Green, one of the women interviewed in the film, also participated in the panel discussion. The evening succeeded in opening a dialogue on this very central issue in the lives of Jewish women and men. Due to the early sell-out of the event, the film was shown again on Saturday night, November 8th at Kehilath Jeshurun. JOFA plans to show *Tehora* at its conference in February.

Leadership

...continued from page 2

leadership that has significantly shaped our entire community.

Such affirmation is a decidedly Orthodox thing to do, for what truly distinguishes Orthodoxy is that we bring the whole tradition forward with us—the entire religio-historical experience. Orthodoxy means to leave not one stitch of the past behind as we move forward through history, including those parts which may be less meaningful or less appropriate to us now. That is how we have been able to keep a sense of the Commanding Voice of Sinai throughout our long history.

Just as in *halakhic* and ritual matters

we bring the entire past forward, so here too, in areas of community building and leadership, we take our past models forward. We do not reject those models but rather acknowledge the great good they accomplished. There is a tendency in the Western world at large to measure every society and culture by the standards of modernity, or the latest "ism." As Orthodox Jews, we cannot fall prey to easy dismissals of the past in areas of community building and leadership.

All of us can learn lessons from the unfolding of future from the past; 'all of us' includes our *rahmit* and her post-feminist sisters, as well as those who struggled in recent decades to change the arc of women's leadership, as well as those who believe that Orthodoxy is safe

only when nothing changes. As we celebrate the new accomplishments and new challenges of living more fully as Jewish women leaders today, we can join the efforts of all those women before us who worked on behalf of the Jewish people and Jewish community. It makes for a more grounded, richer experience all around.

Blu Greenberg is Founding President of JOFA and author of On Women and Judaism: A View From Tradition.

NEW WEBSITE

Everything you always wanted to know... and didn't know where to go or whom to ask...

It is with great pride that we announce that January 1 marked the launch of our new website: www.jofa.org—a comprehensive resource center for *halakhic* and societal issues pertaining to women and Orthodoxy.

MEGILLAT ESTHER CD-ROM

In memory of our beloved founding member Esther Farber ל"ר, JOFA has produced an interactive CD-ROM to teach the cantillations for reading *megillat Esther*. The CD, entitled *Blessed Be Esther*, is recorded with women's voices, and JOFA hopes to encourage more women to increase their participation in the *mitzvot* of Purim by learning to read the *Megillah*. The CD (for use with either a computer or audio CD player) will be available for purchase at the Conference and online.

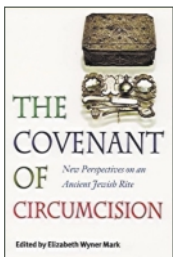
SHABBAT T'LAMDEINI

Has *Shabbat T'lamdeini* come to your Synagogue? This year, *Shabbat T'lamdeini* falls on May 8th, 2004 (*parashat Emor*). Join the many synagogues across the county and the globe who have dedicated a Shabbat to celebrate the contributions that women make to our communities through Torah learning and leadership. Become a contact person for your synagogue for *Shabbat T'lamdeini*. For more information, call the JOFA office at (212) 679-8500 or email jofa@jofa.org.

The Covenant of Circumcision

Edited by Elizabeth Wyner Mark
Brandeis Series on Jewish Women
 Brandeis University Press, 2003 \$26.00

Jewish women are used to the traditional statement made by people who should know better that circumcision is the mark of Jewish identity. *The Covenant of Circumcision: New Perspectives on An Ancient Jewish Rite* is composed of sixteen essays by a variety of authors studying the history, cultural interpretations, and contemporary significance of *Brit Milah*. Several of the essays that put the ceremony into psychoanalytic and *kabbalistic* perspectives are somewhat difficult reading. Orthodox readers may find especially challenging the group of essays written by Jews who are genuinely ambivalent or negative about having their sons circumcised. That said, there is much in this book that is fascinating, such as the discussions of the role of Zipporah as *mohelet*, the exploration of the influence of Christian baptism customs on Jewish circumcision in the Middle Ages, when women were eliminated from previous active participation in the ceremony, and the analysis of the work of the twelfth century commentator, *Bechor Shor*, who, in response to Christian polemicists who used the non circumcision of girls as an anti-Jewish argument, equated circumcision in men with menstruation in women.

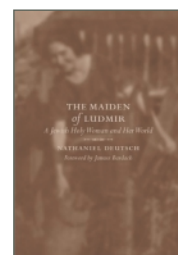


do not examine the religious lessons of the *megillah*, but rather, use the text as a guide to success in the modern business world. Each chapter begins with an excerpt from the *megillah* and is followed by practical strategies for the contemporary woman. Esther's participation in the beauty contest leads to a discussion on making a good first impression. Other chapters lead to discussions about finding a mentor; learning "palace" or company protocol; the usefulness of knowing "palace" or company gossip; making alliances and building useful relationships; fighting for what you believe in; always doing your homework; risk-taking and having a back-up plan. A very useful book, in fact, for leaders and potential leaders in all fields!

The Maiden of Ludmir: A Jewish Holy Woman and Her World

By Nathaniel Deutsch
 University of California Press, 2003 \$34.95

This remarkable book explores the story of Hannah Rochel Verbermacher, who functioned as a rebbe or charismatic leader in the nineteenth century. Her story has long been entangled in legends, and Deutsch carefully analyzes the available written sources and oral evidence, including the memories of former residents of Ludmir to introduce us to this fascinating woman in both religious and cultural context. The book gives us wonderful insights into the role of holy women in Judaism, the role of women in *Hasidism* and the lives of women in nineteenth century Eastern Europe and Palestine. Deutsch takes seriously Gershom Scholem's view that there have been no women *kabbalists*, analyzing it in relation to what is known about Hannah Rochel. This volume reads like a gripping detective thriller as Deutsch skillfully pursues his goal of unraveling the story of the Maiden of Ludmir and her spiritual leadership.



What Queen Esther Knew: Business Strategies from a Biblical Sage

By Connie Glaser and Barbara Smalley
 Rodale, Distributed by St. Martin's Press, 2003 \$19.95

Many of us have defended Esther against her negative characterization as a passive personality who was totally manipulated by others. We have pointed out her astuteness, her growth in a leadership role, and her ability to initiate decisive and effective action when the time was right. This short and entertaining book takes this approach further. The authors



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Bertha Pappenheim, 1859-1936

Bertha Pappenheim was the founder of the Jewish feminist movement in Germany. Born in Vienna, she moved to Frankfurt with her mother and became actively involved in promoting equal career opportunities and equal political rights for Jewish women. She was both a writer and translator, translating into German, among other things Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication for the Rights of Women*, the diary of Glukel of Hamlin and the *Tze'enuh U'Re'ena*. She established a national network of Jewish social workers with the goal of protecting and emancipating women. In 1904, she founded the *Judischer Frauenbund* and served as its President for twenty years. By 1929 it had 50,000 members. Under her leadership the organization participated in the general German feminist movement. She worked to bring to public attention problems of unwed mothers and illegitimate children within the German Jewish community. She assiduously promoted increased opportunities for education and job training for girls. She also strove to persuade rabbinic leaders to make changes in the status of women by modernizing marriage, divorce and inheritance laws to help prevent the vulnerability of *agunot*. Seeking to influence individual Jewish communities, she encouraged women to learn to speak in public, to lead meetings and draft constitutions. She believed that if Jewish women took on more leadership roles, they could help to solve the prevalent problems of Jewish women and girls. Her book *Sisyphus* dealt with the issue of white slavery—the traffic of women—that she saw as a serious problem involving Jewish prostitutes and Jewish traffickers. Apart from her active lobbying on this issue in both German and international Jewish bodies, she also set up a rescue home and rehabilitation center for unmarried mothers, delinquent girls and illegitimate children, which she ran herself for 29 years.

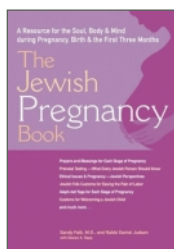
The Jewish Pregnancy Book: A Resource for the Soul, Body & Mind during Pregnancy, Birth and the First Three Months

Sandy Falk M.D. and Rabbi Daniel

Judson with Steven A. Rapp

Jewish Lights Publishing, 2004 \$16.95

This book aims to provide the pregnant woman with medical information and spiritual nourishment from the Jewish tradition. While the material is not exclusively Orthodox, there are many prayers and *techinot* that will be familiar to the reader, as well as a discussion of traditional Jewish folk customs. Also included are prayers and meditations to be said before an ultrasound, before an amniocentesis, before a C-section, on visiting one's babies in the NICU, on getting a baby to sleep, and after a miscarriage. There is serious discussion of pre-natal testing and fetal development, and potential pregnancy problems as well as discussions on issues such as selective reduction and home birth. The last third of the book contains what is termed "Pre-natal Aleph-Bet yoga, a unique blend of yoga and spirituality inspired by the letters of the Hebrew alphabet."

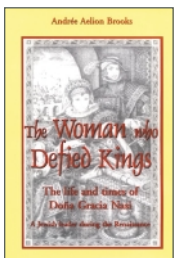


The Woman Who Defied Kings

By Andree Aelion Brooks

Paragon House, 2002 \$19.95

Many of us know of Dona Gracia Nasi from the elegantly written volumes by the eminent English historian Cecil Roth. This is a new biography by a former New York Times journalist who based her research on hitherto unpublished sixteenth century documents including diplomatic dispatches, interrogation records, wills and letters in royal archives. She both explains the



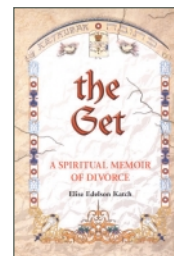
economic patterns of the sixteenth century that contributed to Dona Gracia's business success, and conjures up the life of *conversos* in the different cities in which Dona Gracia lived. The book, which was a finalist in the 2002/3 National Jewish Book Awards, creates a wonderfully nuanced picture of this exciting figure whom Brooks considers as significant a sixteenth century female leader as Elizabeth I or Catherine de Medici.

The Get: A Spiritual Memoir of a Divorce

By Elise Katch

Simcha Press 2002, \$10.95

While we have many memoirs that describe the marriage ceremony, it is rare to find one that describes the ritualized and formal steps that constitute the giving and receiving of a *get*. This book is a very personal story of a woman's experiences as her husband leaves her, and she undergoes the period of separation leading up to the moment when she receives her *get*. Elise Katch is a clinical social worker in Denver who writes movingly about her feelings and experiences, while also providing useful information on the actual process and technicalities of Jewish divorce. She describes her profound feeling of isolation when she was finally in the room with a panel of emotionally distant Rabbis and her husband. "I suddenly felt as though I were an American citizen alone in Iraq and government officials were walking me down to a dark basement room." She chooses to recite *kaddish* after receiving the *get* to mark the end of her shared life. Although the *get* was difficult for her in so many ways, she also experiences closure after receiving it and considers that the ritual enabled her to move beyond her pain and anger.



New Leadership Training in Israel

A ground-breaking new course is being offered this year at Bar-Ilan University in conjunction with Kolech, designed specifically to develop the leadership skills of Orthodox women and prepare its students for effective communal and political leadership activity. The course, which will consist of 128 weekly hours of study, meeting on Sundays between 3 and 8pm, combines theory and practice. Lectures cover topics such as feminism and religion, the status of women in society; women in the political arena; leadership in religious education; aspects of organizational leadership; women in communications, action strategies etc. The practical parts of the course will include supervised participation in projects of Kolech. Twenty two women have been accepted to take the course in this academic year. Tuition for the course is partially subsidized by the Rackman Center and the Fanya Gottesfeld-Heller Center of Bar-Ilan.

Sarah Schenirer, 1883-1935

Sarah Schenirer revolutionized the field of Jewish education. She founded the *Bais Yaakov* network of girls' schools in Poland, rejecting the traditional view that Jewish girls should only be educated at home. Born in Cracow in 1883 to a *hasidic* family, she herself attended a Polish elementary school for eight years but devoted herself to the study of Jewish texts. When her family encountered economic difficulties, she became a seamstress, but continued to spend her free time on Judaic studies. After living in Vienna during World War I with her family, she returned to Cracow and set up study groups and a small library for Jewish women. In 1918, after obtaining support from leading rabbinic figures, including the Belzer *Rav*, the *Gerrer Rebbe*, the *Hafetz Hayyim*, and R. Hayim Ozer Grodzinski, she enrolled 25 girls in the first *Bais Yaakov* school. The name was taken from the expression in Exodus 19:3 which, according to Rashi, referred to Jewish women. Sarah Schenirer saw the need for vocational training for Orthodox girls so they would have a livelihood, but also realized that there had to be religious institutions to compete with the secular schools that were attracting many Jewish girls. The school grew and *Bais Yaakov* was transformed into a vast network of schools throughout Europe. Before World War II, there were 250 schools with 35,586 students in Poland alone. She also started a teacher training college and two youth organizations.

Mission Statement of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance

The Alliance's mission 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.

Yes! I want to support JOFA's work in expanding the spiritual, ritual, intellectual and political opportunities for Orthodox women within the framework of *halakha*.

Enclosed is my gift of: \$1,000 \$500 \$100 \$50 Other \$ _____

\$360 or more includes Life Membership

\$36 or more includes Annual Membership

All contributions are tax deductible to the extent permitted by law. Thank you.

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