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From Our President

Modern Marriage, the Jewish Way



By Blu Greenberg

So this is our June bridal issue. And why not, for as Orthodox feminists we have a lot to say about marriage and all that it should signify: traditional values, *halakha*, ritual, equal dignity, covenantal relationships and new beginnings.

Judaism advocates marriage. Barely out of the womb, the child hears our wistful formula, "... may she [he] enter into Torah, the marriage canopy and good deeds..." Life confirms tradition: for most individuals, though perhaps not every last person, marriage is the optimal way to live, has the most integrity, is sexually appropriate to continuity of life, and is the unit best geared to raising children. No marriage is perfect, but imperfect marriage is still full of great joy, companionship, intimacy, caring, and love. And love.

Yet today we are offered new paradigms: that some people are happier single; that the demographics of monogamous cultures means that some won't find a mate; that not everyone was created with a hetero-

sexual impulse; that equality may be more just and fulfilling than the complementary models of yesteryear. We also know that marriage may be more difficult in a divorce culture, as per the droll New Yorker bridal salon cartoon: Mother, looking on, says dreamily to Seamstress fitting Daughter's gown, "Oh I want her first wedding to be so lovely..."

What then is our message as we navigate between old and new?

1. A long-term, faithful marriage remains a primary and overarching community value for the generations. Yet, we must find ways of articulating this value without being callous to those who live other models. This is difficult, especially on the college campus, but language needs to be developed to communicate this value, yet be fine tuned to the dignity of all.

2. The community should provide practical resources that shore up marriage (like the six-month marriage preparation course the Catholic Church offers), so that couples enter marriage with their eyes open, and with their techniques for speaking values and negotiating impasses in place.

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Something Old, Something New

By Beverly Gribetz and Ed Greenstein

Within the traditional *halakbic* framework it is only the *chatan* who fulfills the active role of effectuating *kiddushin*, only men who serve as witnesses and, by custom, only men who speak aloud. For our wedding

thirteen years ago in New York, at which an Orthodox rabbi was our *mesader kiddushin*, we sought ways to give the *kalla* and women more active roles in the ceremony. For reasons of *halakha* these functions were to be of a more rhetorical nature, but their effect was to be significant.

After a lengthy process of study-

My Wedding: The Choices I Made

By Idana Goldberg

"Ani mekabelet tabaat zu, v'harei-ni mekudesbet lecha kedat moshe v'Yisrael, I accept this ring and I am thereby sanctified to you according to the laws of Moses and Israel." With those words, I became an active participant in my wedding ceremony.

Moments before, Rabbi Saul Berman, our *mesader kiddushin*, had instructed the witnesses that they would be witnessing a two-step process performed by my husband, Michael, and me, the groom and the bride. Michael would offer me a ring as an indication of his offer of marriage and would accompany that with the traditional "*barei at mekudesbet li*." Rabbi Berman then continued, "Idana will receive the ring from him [and] her visible acceptance of the ring will be accompanied by her verbal indication of her acceptance of his offer of marriage."

Both Michael and I believe that the Jewish wedding should demonstrate the ways in which Jewish women are

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ing the sources and consulting scholars and rabbis, we discovered that some of what we found and which was approved by our *mesader kiddushin* - such as a *kalla's tish* and a pre-nuptial agreement - we were able to incorporate into the ceremony.

For the *kiddushin*, we wanted to

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Thirteen ways to enrich your wedding

1. **At Alita Al Koolam** - Have an *aufruf*. On the *Shabbat* before her wedding, Rachel Anisfeld received an *aliya* and *layned* the *haftorah* during *shacharit* services at the women's *tefilla* group in her synagogue.

2. Turn the Tables - Have a *kalla's tish*. Before her *bedeken*, Bracha Leah Shapiro and her friends gave *divrei Torah*, *berakhot* and joined in song.

3. Wrap it Up - Put a *tallit* on your *chatan* at the *bedeken*. At Avital Ellis-Rech's wedding, where Rabbi Nosson Shaffer was *mesader kiddushin*, the women danced her and the men danced her husband to a central location in the room. After the *chatan* placed the veil over her face, Avital placed a *tallit* on her *chatan*.

4. To Everything Turn, Turn, Turn - Have your *chatan* walk around you at the *bedeken*. At Aleeza Nemirovsky Wadler's wedding, her *chatan* circled the *bedeken* chair seven times.

5. **Ooph'ros Alecha** - Have women hold the poles to your *chuppa*. At Debby Koren's wedding, for which she consulted with Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, she had her two daughters from her previous marriage and her husband's daughters from his previous marriage hold the poles to their *chuppa*.

6. Honor Thy Father **and** Thy Mother - Have your mother's name in your *ketuba*. At Noa Hochstein's wedding in Israel, she wanted her mother's name to appear in the *ketuba* along with her father's. This request found its way to the Chief Rabbinate of Israel. Their answer was that it was unusual, but they could not find anything *halakhically* wrong with it.

7. Finding Our Voices - Have a woman read the *ketuba*. At Rahel Berkovits' wedding, where Rabbi Dov Berkovits from Israel was *mesader kiddushin*, a woman read part of the *ketuba* and another woman read the *tnai ketuba* that Rahel and her husband had written themselves. Rahel's mother and mother-in-law also read the welcoming statements for the bride and groom respectively.

8. Word For Word - Have a woman translate the *sheva berakhot* under the *chuppa*. Rabbi Dale Polakoff was the *mesader kiddushin* at a number of weddings in which a man would say one of the *berakhot* and a woman would then be called up to the *chuppa* to translate the *berakha* into English.

9. A Woman's Wisdom - Have a woman give a *d'var Torah* or preside under the *chuppa*. Laura Shaw-Frank presided at the wedding of her friend Rabbi David Kalb at which Rabbi Avi Weiss was the *mesader kiddushin*.

10. **Kol Kalla** - Respond under the *chuppa*. Shelley List, whose *mesader kiddushin* was Rabbi Herschel Cohen, said, "I accept from you this ring of *kiddushin*" after her husband placed the ring upon her finger.

11. Bring in the New - Give a ring to your *chatan* after *kiddushin*. At Diana Newman's wedding, where Rabbi Abraham Levy from London was the *mesader kiddushin*, she gave her *chatan* a ring after *kiddushin* while reciting a verse from the Song of Songs.

12. Put Your Foot Down - Break the cup. At Frannie Pollack's wedding, at which Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard was *mesader kiddushin*, both she and her husband each broke a glass at the end of the *chuppa* ceremony.

13. Share the Blessing - Have a woman say *sheva berakhot* at the meal. At Amanda Newman's wedding, at which Rabbi Shlomo Riskin was the *mesader kiddushin*, she had her aunt say the sixth *sheva berakha*. ■

NOTE: For further clarification of these innovations and for halakhic references, readers should call the JOFA office at (212)752-7133 or email jofa@rcn.com.

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Modern Marriage, The Jewish Way

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3. For those who are ready for marriage, others - individuals even more than community institutions - should be involved in matchmaking.

4. Inasmuch as marriage based on equality is both more just and more likely to succeed, whatever can enhance equality should be instituted. Marriage entry and exit rituals, currently imbalanced, create a tension felt by many young Orthodox women. *Halakhic* accretions to the marriage ceremony and full res-

olution of the *aguna* problem will communicate a greater sense of equal value and equal standing that will echo throughout the marriage.

Rabbi Soloveitchik wrote that "the very validity of the covenant rests upon juridic-halakhic principles of free negotiation, mutual assumption of duties, and full recognition of the equal rights of both parties concerned with the covenant." The suggestions made in this newsletter are steps on the road to achieving that goal in the Orthodox covenant of marriage. ■

Women's Participation in Sheva Berakhot

By Joel B. Wolowelsky

This discussion is excerpted from the author's Women, Jewish Law and Modernity: New Opportunities in a Post-Feminist Age (Ktav Publishing House), which has a more extensive presentation of the halakhic arguments.

There is a widespread custom of arranging special meals in honor of a new bride and groom during the first week of their marriage so that *sheva berakhot*, the series of seven special blessings added to *birkhat hamazon* after each meal, may be recited. In modern religious homes, we are used to hearing women deliver *divrei Torah* at these events and, as we shall see, there seems to be little reason to exclude women from reciting some or all of the *sheva berakhot*, if a *halakhic minyan* of ten men and someone who has not previously heard the *berakhot* recited (*panim badashot*) are present. (The discussion here concerns only *sheva berakhot* said at a meal and not those said under the *chuppa*. In addition, it does not apply to a woman leading the *zimmun* at a *sheva berakhot* meal.)

The Talmud (*Berakhot* 6a) records the dictum of R. Helbo in the name of Rav Huna that "Anyone who takes pleasure from a marriage feast and does not cheer him [the groom] has a fivefold violation." Maharsha notes that Hazal enacted the seven *birkhot batanim* in this regard; that is, although there are many ways of cheering the bride and groom, the Sages decreed that it be done by reciting the *sheva berakhot*. As anyone who takes pleasure from the feast is thereby obligated in *sheva berakhot*, at this stage there seems to be no rea-

son for excluding women from this obligation.

Radbaz ties this obligation of those who participated in the wedding feast to the more general ruling of Rambam concerning everyone's responsibility to the new couple. Rambam (*Mishneh Torah Hilkhos Avel* 14:1) rules:

It is a positive commandment of the Sages ... to cheer the bride and groom and provide for all their needs. And these are acts of kindness done by oneself and which have no set quantities. Even though all these *mitzvot* were promulgated by the Sages, they all fall under the rubric of "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Here, too, there seems to be no reason to exclude women from this obligation, and, with all due respect,

Halakha is clear that women are fully obligated in *birkhat hazimmun* if they eat with three or more men.

the suggestion by the late Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli that women are not obligated in the *mitzva* to cheer the bride and groom is a lone opinion that goes against generally accepted arguments.

Rambam (*Mishneh Torah Hilkhos Berakhot* 2:1-11) records the obligation to say *birkhat batanim* in his discussion of the laws of *birkhat hamazon*. After recording the general laws of *birkhat hamazon* and the extra paragraphs to be added on Shabbat, Hanukkah and Purim, the Festivals, as a guest in someone else's home, and when in the home of a mourner, Rambam rules that *birkhat batanim* (which he

later defines as "*Asher Bara*," the last of the *sheva berakhot*), is added in the home of a newly married groom, and adds that if a *minyan* of ten [adult free men] is present and some did not yet hear the recitation of all *sheva berakhot*, then all seven blessings are recited for them.

Most significantly, after noting that *birkhat batanim* is added by the individual in *birkhat hamazon*, Rambam adds: "Neither slaves nor minors recite this blessing," which is a meaningful departure from his usual triad of "women, slaves and minors." Unquestionably, the simple meaning of Rambam's ruling is that a woman may say "*Asher Bara*" as part of her individual *birkhat hamazon*.

But an important shift is made by the Shulhan Arukh (*Even HaEzer* 62:4-7) in summarizing these *halakhot*. Ten adult males must be present to say *birkhat batanim*, whether said at the marriage ceremony or after *birkhat hamazon*. "If only the *Asher Bara* blessing is said after *birkhat hamazon*, the presence of ten is not necessary." Ramo's gloss there is that "but three are necessary," as Beurei HaGra explains, this is "so that there be a *zimmun*." *Birkhat batanim* is no longer simply part of an individual's *birkhat hamazon*; it is now dependent on the existence of a *zimmun*. Indeed, in responding to the question of whether one may leave a wedding before *sheva berakhot* are said, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein rules that those obligated to hear *birkhat hazimmun* must hear the *sheva berakhot*, and the way to free oneself from the obligation of the latter is to exempt oneself from the obligation of the former.

Most significantly, the Shulhan Arukh notes after this formulation that *birkhat batanim* is not to be recited by slaves and minors, again not excluding women. Helkat Mehokek explains there that the slaves and minors are excluded because they cannot be included in the three required for the *zimmun*. But the *halakha* is clear that women are fully obligated in *birkhat hazimmun* if they eat with three or more men. (They have the option of doing so if they eat alone or

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The Third International Conference on Feminism and Orthodoxy February 20-21, 2000

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My Wedding: The Choices I Made

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vibrant and essential parts of the greater Jewish community. Throughout our wedding, Michael and I included women in ways that would have both personal meaning and *halakhic* integrity. My female friends and family are as much a part of my Jewish community as the parade of male witnesses and officiants whose voices typify a traditional Orthodox wedding ceremony. I did not think that asking my friends to walk down my aisle as bridesmaids was the only way to honor them. Instead, I wanted them to share the meaningful aspects of my wedding with me.

Yet this was a much more difficult undertaking than we had imagined it would be. Resistance to any type of change or innovation, on both *halakhic* but mainly social grounds, accompanied our requests to rabbis and family. As an Orthodox feminist I could not fathom enacting a wedding ceremony which not only left me unfulfilled religiously and spiritually, but also reinforced women's passivity in ritual. What struck me in speaking to close women friends was the way that many felt disconnected from their own wedding ceremonies. It saddened me deeply that women who are committed to Torah learning and *halakhic* observance and who interweave Judaism into the daily fabric of their lives accepted a wedding ceremony which they believed silenced their voices and excluded the participation of other women. I was determined that I would not allow myself to become alienated from what should be one of the most important ceremonies of my life.

I began my wedding with a *kalla's tish*. Seated at a table in a room adjoining the smorgasbord, I greeted our guests surrounded by my women friends who were singing wedding songs and giving *divrei Torah*. Rabbi Berman arrived to supervise the signing of those official documents, which needed what he called "*non-halakhic*" witnesses. The first document I signed, witnessed by two women friends, was a rabbinic prenuptial agreement, which is an important way of protecting women from becoming *agunot*. Next, I

signed the civil wedding contract witnessed by two other women friends. My mother then escorted me to the chair where the *bedeken* would take place. After Michael placed the veil over my head, I received *berakhot* from both our fathers, my grandfather and also from both of our mothers, which enhanced the ritual and created a continuity of female generations.

Although it is clear from the sources that a woman cannot be married against her will and must accept the *kiddushin* for the marriage to take effect, traditionally that acceptance has been understood through the bride's silence. The rabbis posited *shtika k'bodaah dami*, silence is affirmation, and if the bride does not vocally object to the marriage, her silence indicates acceptance. Michael and I wanted to make explicit what is already implicit in the *kiddushin* - that it is a partnership enacted only with both the bride's and groom's participation. It also gave me the opportunity to have my voice heard in a ceremony normally reserved for male voices.

We also chose to include our mothers' names in our *ketuba*. In declaring that we were children of our fathers and of our mothers, we recognized the pivotal roles that all of our parents have had in making us who we are today. To complement the men who witnessed our *kiddushin*, read our *ketuba* and blessed us with the *sheva berakhot*, we invited two close women friends to participate in our *chuppa*. One delivered a *d'var Torah* and another concluded the *chuppa* with a wedding prayer from the ninth century *siddur* of Rav Amram Gaon. This blending of tradition and innovation was especially significant for us.

When our women friends were invited to the *chuppa*, my brother called them with the word *mekhube-det*, the female form of the Hebrew word for "honored." I had not thought about how my friends would be called to the *chuppa*, but he understood what I was saying in asking them to stand with me under the *chuppa*. These women were my witnesses, who honored me with their

presence as much as I honored them by asking them to be there. By adding other women's voices to mine, and recognizing our mothers, Michael and I tried to create a ceremony which honored women's knowledge, creativity and participation alongside men's and which enhanced a valued tradition in *halakhic* and meaningful ways. ■

Idana Goldberg is a doctoral candidate at the University of Pennsylvania in modern Jewish history and women's history.

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with one or two men.) Women therefore are not excluded from saying *birkhat batanim*.

An additional issue to be considered is that of *tzeniut*, modesty. In general, the tradition takes the view that a woman should not project herself publicly. In circles where, for example, it would be considered immodest for a woman to deliver a *d'var Torah* at a *sheva berakhot* meal, it certainly would be inappropriate for her to say one of the *berakhot*. Of course, many groups within the *halakhic* community are quite comfortable with women teaching men, assuming leadership roles in *yeshivot*, and working as professionals. Saying a *berakha* aloud before men is hardly more immodest.

Women can recite *birkhat hagom-mel* publicly, either in shul at the time of the Torah reading or at a specially convened celebration. Some might feel that this is immodest behavior, noted Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, Rishon LeTzion and former Chief Rabbi of Israel, "but I say that the evil inclination is not to be found for such a short matter ... especially nowadays when women regularly go out to public places among men [Similarly, under these circumstances] one need not be concerned about the issue of *kol zemer shel isha erva* (a woman's voice is sexually arousing)." This ruling cannot be applied haphazardly, but it certainly seems to apply to our

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Pre-Nuptial Agreements: A Factor In Preventing Cases Of Aguna

By Rivka Haut

About ten years ago, my husband and I, then married 26 years, signed a post-nuptial agreement. The GET (Get Equal Treatment) organization asked married couples to sign their newly written agreement as part of a campaign to encourage the use of pre-nuptial agreements. It was apparent that, despite the best efforts of many, too many young couples were not using them. Some of these couples just didn't realize they had the option; others were refusing to use them. A prevailing attitude among some of these young couples was that they shouldn't be thinking about divorce while entering a marriage, but, of course, this argument is specious, for the *ketuba* does exactly that. However, the *ketuba* merely provides monetary recovery in the event of divorce; it does not penalize those who refuse to give a *get*.

Since then, many couples use pre-nuptial agreements and more rabbis are insisting that they be signed. Recently, an agreement prepared by Rabbi Mordechai Willig has been adopted by the Rabbinical Coun-

cil of America, and its member rabbis are encouraged to insist on its use by all couples.

Just last week I was approached by an *aguna* who needed help. She had not signed a pre-nuptial agreement when she was married. Would it have helped her obtain a *get* now if she would have signed an agreement? Well, that depends.

Pre-nuptial agreements require a husband and wife, upon termination of their marriage civilly, to participate in *get* proceedings. The agreements differ in the types of enforcement procedures used to achieve that result; some impose sanctions, others impose monetary obligations on the party who refuses to give or accept a *get*. Some agreements require the intervention of a *beit din* before sanctions or monetary obligations are imposed, while others leave the enforcement of the agreements to the civil courts. But if a *get* is not forthcoming, there will be sanctions or monetary obligations imposed. In those instances where there is a desire to extort money from the wife, this is a very powerful deterrent. Of course, if a man is willing to accept financial penalties while yet withholding a *get*, or if the husband

has no assets, then the agreement cannot help.

Thus pre-nuptial agreements do not solve the underlying problem of husbands having the power to keep wives imprisoned in dead marriages. And an Orthodox pre-nuptial agreement has never been tested in a civil court, so it is unclear whether its contract will be upheld.

But while these agreements are not a cure-all, they have helped many women obtain a *get* and their use must be encouraged. I personally am aware of quite a number of cases where the *get* was given because of the agreement. And that is not even counting the many examples of *gittin* being granted, cases that never attain the status of *aguna*, because an agreement had been signed.

Anyone entering a marriage today without signing a pre-nuptial agreement is making a major error. It's like an insurance policy: you hope you never need it, but it is good to have, just in case. ■

Rivka Haut is co-editor of Daughters of the King: Women and the Synagogue, and is an aguna activist.

Orthodox Feminism Around the World

BOSTON

Maayan, the women's Torah study initiative, will be running a summer program from July 6 through July 28. Rabbi Seth and Michelle Farber will be the scholars in residence. Contact (617) 739-1088.

NEW YORK

Drisha's summer program starts June 7 and runs for two 3-week sessions through July 30. Contact Drisha at (212) 595-0307.

Drisha and Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project of the JCC on the Upper West Side held a joint pre-Shavout *tikkun*, "Women on Revelation," on Sunday, May 16.

Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project and the JCC on the

Upper West Side are co-sponsoring the premiere screening of "Women of the Wall," a documentary film depicting the struggles of a women's prayer group fighting for the right to pray at the *kotel*. A panel of speakers addressing the issue of Jewish feminism and religious pluralism in Israel will follow. For tickets, contact (212) 580-0099. Those interested in having a screening in their community should contact Faye Lederman at (212) 865-4374.

The Beit Rabban Center will be sponsoring an evening seminar, "Body Image and Eating Disorders," on Sunday June 6 from 4:30 to 8:30 PM. The event will include a special workshop for teenage girls. For more information or to pre-register, contact

Beit Rabban at (212) 595-1386.

ENGLAND

Yakar, an Orthodox London-based synagogue and educational center, has begun its new women's learning program with classes on the development of *halakha*, Jewish philosophy and Talmud. Contact Yakar at (44) 181 202 5551.

ISRAEL

Women of the Wall had a successful hearing at the Supreme Court and are awaiting a final decision on their request to be allowed to *daven* with a Torah, *tallitot* and raised voices in the women's section at the *kotel*. The group is planning to have a Shavuot *tefillah* and a reading of *Eichah* on Tisha B'Av.

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enable the *kalla* to respond in a meaningful way to the act of *kinyan*, literally “acquisition,” by which the *chatan* consecrates the *kalla* as his bride. Had we opted to make use of the traditional formula, whereby the *chatan* says to the *kalla* that she is consecrated - *mekudesbet* - to him by virtue of the ring that he gives her, there would have been no way for the *kalla* to echo the *chatan*'s language. We did not want to modify in any way the *kiddushin* that is the *chatan*'s prerogative and responsibility to enact.

We therefore chose to dust off an ancient rabbinic formula that would enable us to have the *chatan*, and then the *kalla*, say it - but with a critical reversal of the phrases. In the *Talmud Bavli*, *Masechet Kiddushin*, page 5b as well as in the major codes: Rambam's *Mishneh Torah*, *Nashim*, *Hilkhot Isbut* 3:6 and the *Shulkhan Arukh*, *Even Ha'ezer* 27:2, one finds the Aramaic formula, *barei at li le'intu*, “You are hereby my wife.” Accordingly we had the *chatan* say (in Hebrew), *barei at li le'isha kedat Moshe v'Yisrael*. At this point the *chatan* presented the *kalla* with the ring that had belonged to him and effectuated the process of *kinyan* by which the *kiddushin* was made. For the sake of rhetorical reciprocity, we had the *chatan* add, *v'ani ishekh*, “and I am your husband,” which reinforced the formula the *chatan* had said.

Following the *chatan*'s act of *kiddushin*, the *kalla* responded, *ani ishtekha kedat Moshe v'Yisrael ve'ata li le'ish*, “I am your wife, by the laws of Moses and Israel, and you are my husband.” The phrases are reversed so that the *kalla*'s utterance cannot be interpreted as her acceptance of the *kiddushin* on condition - *al tenai* - i.e., that she would regard herself as *mekudesbet* only if the *chatan* were to agree to her proposal. By responding in the way that we arranged, the *kalla* only affirms the *kiddushin* that had taken place. But from a rhetorical perspective, she makes her voice heard on a par with that of the *chatan*.

The ring that the *chatan* gives the *kalla* represents the valuable by which the *chatan* effectuates *kiddushin*. But outside the *chuppa* ceremony itself, the ring symbolizes the commitment of a wife to her husband. The commitment is surely mutual and we chose to have the *kalla*, now a married woman, present the *chatan* with the gift of a ring, a representation of love and not an instrument of *kiddushin*. This occurred following the reading of the *ketuba* - by a woman - which marks the boundary between *kiddushin* and the marriage, *nissu'in*.

In presenting the ring, the *kalla* recited the famous verse from Hosea 2:21, which may be translated: “I betrothe you forever; I betrothe you in righteousness and justice, in devotion and love; I betrothe you in good faith.” The fact that the Hebrew verse is framed as a male addressing a female makes it clear that the *kalla* is not performing an actual betrothal but is reciting the verse for rhetorical effect. We had the *chatan* respond by reciting the nearby verse, Hosea 2:18: “On that day, says Hashem, you will call out ‘My man’ and you will not call out ‘My husband.’” We read this verse midrashically as an assertion that marriage is an equal partnership between a man and a woman and not a relationship in which one party is dominant.

We knew we were doing something different, but we were also confident and reassured that everything we were doing was within *halakha*. *Halakha* is much broader than traditional practice which tends to preserve things as they are. Our process of study and application only confirmed our sense that *halakha* provides for developing traditions in directions that speak ever more meaningfully to the heart and mind of the Jew. ■

Dr. Beverly Gribetz is principal of Evelina de Rothschild Secondary School for Girls in Jerusalem. Dr. Ed Greenstein is professor of Bible at Tel Aviv University and teaches at Bar Ilan University.

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situation.

Thus the objection raised by Rabbi Moshe Halevi Steinberg to women saying *sheva berakhot* because of *kol isha* concerns is not convincing, especially when he compares it to a woman saying *kaddish* in the presence of a *minyan*, which is a well-established activity. Indeed, Rabbi Steinberg himself goes on to express his real concern:

If we allow women to say the *sheva berakhot*, it will be used as a precedent for other demands, including mixed seating in public prayer, as is done by Reform and Conservative [congregations].

But this logic can be argued for the opposite conclusion, as did Rabbi Aaron Soloveitchik regarding *kaddish*:

“Nowadays, when there are Jews fighting for equality for men and women in matters such as *aliyyot*, if Orthodox rabbis prevent women from saying *kaddish* when there is a possibility for allowing it, it will strengthen the influence of Reform and Conservative rabbis. It is therefore forbidden to prevent daughters from saying *kaddish*.”

This argument has obvious relevance to *sheva berakhot*. Indeed, women's full participation in the *sheva berakhot* is nothing but a natural extension of their increased participation in the full spectrum of Torah activities. ■

Rabbi Dr. Joel Wolowelsky is a member of the Academic Advisory Boards of Bar Ilan University's Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center for the Study of Women in Judaism, and the International Research Institute on Jewish Women at Brandeis University.

Congratulations to JOFA's president, Blu Greenberg, for being honored by Drisha, the Manhattan-based institute for advanced Judaic studies for women, at its 20th anniversary dinner.

International Conference in Israel

On July 14-15, 1999, *Kolech*, the religious women's forum in Israel, will hold its first international conference, *To Be a Jewish Woman*. The conference, which will be held at the Renaissance Hotel in Jerusalem, will examine the problems and goals facing today's religious leadership. Speakers will include Chana Kehat, chairwoman of *Kolech*; Blu Greenberg, president of JOFA; Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, Chief Rabbi of Efrat, and Rabbi Shmuel Sirat, former Chief Rabbi of France. Contact Ariel Braun at braun_z@netvision.net.il.



MAZAL TOV!

The breaking of the glass is an age old tradition at Jewish wedding ceremonies.

Kol hakavod to the following synagogues and universities which participated in JOFA's Shabbat T'lamdeini: Women, Learning, Leadership and Community

Synagogues

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