



JOFA Journal

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A publication of the
Jewish Orthodox
Feminist Alliance

*Our Best Wishes for
a Happy, Healthy
and Sweet New Year*

From Our President Our Spirits Rising

By Blu Greenberg



In recent years, there has been a great deal of conversation about women's spirituality.

I have often wondered what this new term means, finding little discussion of it in the sources. Traditional definitions of women as interior and men as communal seem to reflect neither innate truth nor current reality. So what is women's spirituality and what does it mean for Orthodox Jewish women?

Spirituality is feeling connected — a sense of nearness to God, sensations of identity with community,

awareness of the moment as something beyond the moment, the self beyond itself. *Halakha* formalizes and engenders these connections through prayer, ritual and learning. The Rabbis instituted blessings that transform the piece of fruit in your hand to a miraculous creation of God that grew from a tiny seed, nurtured by soil and rain. The words of the *berakha* open your eyes to sacred distinctiveness of the fruit and help you taste its special flavor and texture. Classic Judaism found incredible ways to elevate the mundane and the physical, to put the Wow! of life on our lips and in our hearts.

Are women different from men spiritually? Though social scientists have not yet turned their attention to spiritual matters, intuitively, the answer seems to be both yes and no. The "yes" imposes on Orthodox fem-

inists a great task of creativity, the "no" the task of expanding access.

A woman's biology is different from a man's. Though some rituals already exist, there ought to be more that reflect a woman's unique life experiences. We also now know that women have different cognitive ways of relating to the world, and our liturgies should reflect such. Women have long benefited from men's religious experiences; so now should men be uplifted by women's expressions.

Yet, we also understand that women have similar existential needs and gifts of the soul. This calls for all Orthodox Jews to seek to win women greater direct access to the rich spiritual storehouse of Judaism. Proof that expanded access will benefit all of us lies in the explosion of women's learning. As every woman

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Teshuva Towards Our Mothers, Sisters, Spouses and Daughters

NOTE: Teshuva, repentance, is an incredible tool. It is not only about guilt, but also about repair.

In order to begin the healing process — for self, community or the world — one must first acknowledge one's shortcomings. In a brave step, a refreshing departure from the denial and apologetics often heard on the subject of women and tradition, former Chief Rabbi Rene Samuel Sirat of France calls for teshuva towards women. We reprint excerpts from his public lecture on the subject of teshuva for it serves as a model of how those in positions of religious authority can respond.

Our sisters, our spouses, our daughters have achieved by sheer willpower their legitimate place in society. They have become influential political leaders and leading personalities of civil society, respected researchers, doctors and surgeons of international rank, talented lawyers... But in the synagogue, what place — in the literal meaning as in the figurative one — is kept for them? Did the Chief Rabbis climb up even once, to the *Ezrat Nashim*, the mezzanine where our sisters are confined? Have these rabbis once prayed at the *Kotel*, the Wailing Wall, the last remnants of

our Temple, next to the "storehouse" intended for women, where they cannot hear anything, cannot see anything, and cannot take part in the service in any way?

In my double career, as a rabbi and as an academic, I have had to adopt an attitude that verges on schizophrenia. As the director of the greatest department of Jewish studies in Western Europe, I have helped the careers of my women colleagues as much as possible, God is my witness. On the other hand, as Chief Rabbi of France and as President of the Board of Directors of the Rab-

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Our Spirits Rising

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involved knows, Jewish learning is a spiritual exercise, even more than an intellectual one. Similarly, rituals and prayers that women have added to their lives have energized their Jewish souls.

Of course, serious issues arise in relation to both tasks. Creating new spiritual forms is difficult, even tricky. Good ritual must feel authentic, be seamless with tradition and balance individual needs with community sensibilities. Good liturgy must make connections between historical experience and personal expression. Some new forms will not last. But in the spirit of tradition we ought take up the challenge. Not intimidated by the claim that the book of *avodah* is closed, we should plan for an expansive religious life for women in a deeply spiritual world of the emerging future.

As women have increasing access

to inherited ritual, the question of distinctive gender roles must be added to that of *halakhic* permissibility for innovation. I believe that there can be spiritual equality for men and women without identical roles, and not every differentiation deserves a cry of sexism. Yet, I am also learning — from Orthodox women bolder than I, from women in other denominations, and from younger Orthodox women who have grown up with different conditioning and are examining everything — that there is still more leeway, *halakhic* and psychic, for women to access spiritual experiences heretofore reserved for men. I also know that there is really no way of feeling something in your heart until you do it yourself. Women who take on daily prayer or annual rituals such as

arba minin (the *lulav* and *etrog* of Sukkot) testify that regularity and discipline deepen their lives. Performance engages our spirit and connects us to God and community.

That is the theory on which mitzvot are predicated; that is what has long distinguished Judaism from other religions.

JOFA was created as a forum for wrestling with these matters, which need to be addressed within a community. We are in the throes of a profound revolution in human history, expressed not only in our self-perceptions and interpersonal relationships, but in our faith and spirituality. We are all privileged to be at the cutting edge, as we prepare for the next 4000 years of Jewish life. *Lesbana tova tikateivu vetebatemu!* ■

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

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Call For Papers

JOFA invites the submission of abstracts for the Third International Conference on Feminism and Orthodoxy which will take place in New York City, February 20th to 21st, 2000. The working title of the conference is:

Social Change and *Halakha*: Tensions, Contradictions, and Accommodations. As we look back, we see that there have been any number of social changes in the secular world — in our values, in our institutions (economic, political, religious, family) and in gender roles. As a result, traditional Jewish women are facing the dialectic of changes that, on the one hand, may be perfectly compatible with *halakha*, but on the other, may create tensions, contradictions, and conflicts for those who are grappling with the impact of feminism on their lives as Orthodox women. Please send abstracts to: JOFA 459 Columbus Avenue Suite 329 New York, NY 10024 Fax: (212) 753-6054 Email: jofa@rcn.com

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Ushpizot

By Esther D. Kustanowitz

When the holiday of Sukkot approaches each year, we focus on mechanics: coordinating the meals, building the frame of the *sukka*, making sure that decorations are spaced evenly, covering the roof with *skbakh* (leafy branches that cover the top of the *sukka*), assembling the *arba minim* (The Four Species including *lulav* and *etrog*). By the time candles are lit, it has become a challenge to transcend mechanics and approach the holiday with spiritual enthusiasm. For this reason, the tradition of inviting the *ushpizin*, some of the most prominent and distinguished male Biblical figures, sometimes seems less important. Perhaps we, as women, would view the tradition as more integral if the list of *ushpizin* included some of the heroic women of the *Tanakh* (Hebrew Bible).

According to the mystics who wrote the *Kabbalah*, each guest (*ushpiz*) represented a specific manifestation of God, or *sefira*. There are seven *sefirot* in Kabbalistic tradition. Sixteenth century mystic Menachem Azariah (The Ramoh of Fano) suggested that these female figures be invited into the *sukka* as *ushpizot*.^{*} Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah and Esther. Other traditions include Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.

Ma'yan, the Jewish Women's Project of the JCC of the Upper West Side, accepted the implicit challenge, creating a meaningful ritual to link Jewish Biblical heroines to the established heroes of the *ushpizin* tradition.

Sarah and Abraham represent *Hesed* (grace or loving-kindness).

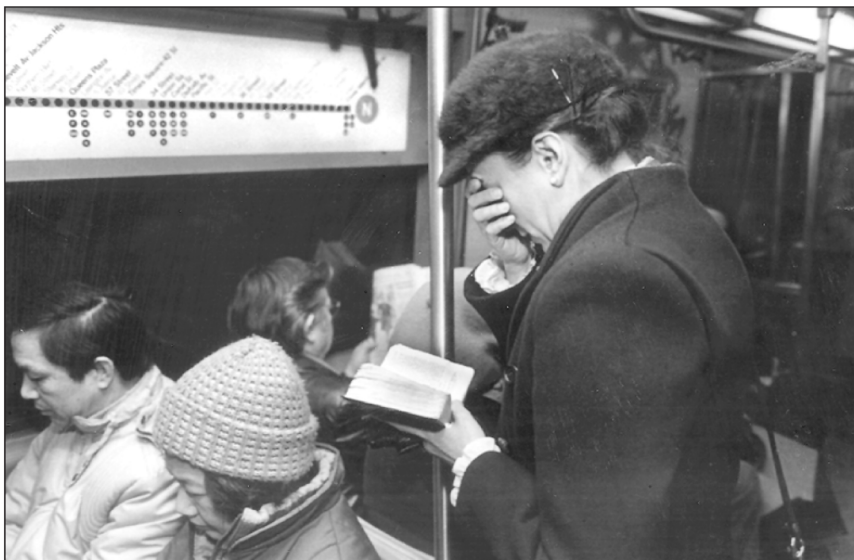
Miriam, Rebecca and Isaac manifest *Gevura* (strength or bravery).

Deborah, Rachel and Jacob symbolize *Tiferet* (harmony, compassion, beauty).

Hannah, Leah and Moses are linked with *Netzah* (victory, ambition and lasting endurance).

Abigail and Aaron represent *Hod* (a Divine splendor or majesty).

Huldah and Joseph are paired with *Yesod* (foundation).



Spirituality manifests itself everywhere — even the New York City subway.

Esther and David represent *Malbut* (royalty and sovereignty).

We can welcome the *ushpizot* using this adaptation of the traditional Aramaic formulation for welcoming the *ushpizin*:

USHPIZOT Blessing, written by Tamara Cohen

Enter, holy guests from on high; enter, hallowed mothers of our people, sisters, wise women and prophets. Take your place with us under the protecting canopy of the *Shekhina* (God's Presence), in this *sukka* of peace. Enter Sarah, Miriam, Hannah, Deborah, Abigail, Huldah, Esther.

Enter _____
(add names of others whom you would like to honor with an invitation). Enter all those whose names we don't even know because you have been lost to us.

We are ready to fulfill the ancient words which call us still: "You shall dwell in booths seven days, all that are Israelite born shall dwell in booths, in order that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt (the land of narrow places)."

As we welcome you today into our *sukka*, may we soon wel-

come into our communities all women who, like you, have voices, visions and leadership much needed in our communities.

Take your place, take your place, guests from on high. Take your place, take your place, hallowed guests. May we all join you in taking our own places and in making places for others under the protection of the *Shekhina*.

The expansion of this ritual to include women has tremendous potential for us as women and as members of a family and/or community. Discussion can be expanded to include the whole family. What does each *sefira* mean? Can we provide textual examples of how each *sefira* is a representation of the behavior of God? How does each hero embody the quality/*sefira* with which he or she is paired? How do the heroes and the heroines relate to each other? If we had to pick contemporary guests for our *sukkot*, who would they be and why?

The complete *Ushpizot* program can be viewed on Ma'yan's website: www.mayan.org. For more information on women's approaches to Jewish spirituality and lifecycle events, contact Ma'yan at (212) 580-0099, extension 232, or via email at: mayanjcc@aol.com. ■

^{*}Please note that Menachem Azariah did connect these seven neviot with seven sefirot (as did earlier sources), but did not actually suggest that they be invited as *ushpizot*.

Women and the Fulfillment of Positive Time-Bound Commandments

By Noa Jeselsohn

The *mishna* in the Talmudic tractate of Kiddushin, page 29a, states “...and all positive, time-bound commandments (*mitzvot aseh shebazeman gerama*), men are obligated [in] and women are exempt [from].”¹ The *gemara* acknowledges that there are exceptions to this rule when the Torah (either explicitly or through the interpretation of the Oral Law) states that women are obligated. However, the *gemara* accepts the *halakha* of the *mishna* as Biblical in origin, and — in the absence of a statement obligating women in specific positive time-bound commandments — women are considered exempt from the majority of such *mitzvot*.

A positive time-bound commandment is defined as one that could be physically fulfilled at any time, but that the Torah has mandated is to be done only at specific times: if not fulfilled at that specific time, there is no way to “make up” the *mitzva*.² This category includes all holiday-related *mitzvot* (*shofar*, *sukka* and *lulav*, etc.), as well as *mitzvot* that need to be fulfilled during certain parts of the day or week (such as *tzitzit*, *k’riat Shema*, and *tefillin*). *Matza* on Pesah and *kiddush* on Shabbat are exceptions in which the Torah specifically obligates women.

May a woman choose to fulfill a *mitzva* from which she is Biblically exempted? If so, what is *halakha*’s attitude toward that fulfillment? May she say the *berakha* that accompanies the act of the *mitzva*?

The first question is explicitly addressed in a comprehensive *mabloket* (disagreement) in the *gemara* between R. Yehuda, who forbids women from fulfilling certain *mitzvot* from which they are exempt, and R. Yose and R. Shimon, who allow it. This *mabloket* originates in the tractate of *Hagiga 16b* where the

gemara discusses whether a woman may perform *semikha* on a *korban* (the placing of one’s weight on one’s sacrificial animal before it is sacrificed), a *mitzva* in which the Torah only obligates men. R. Yehuda does not allow women to practice *semikha* whereas R. Yose and R. Shimon do. The *gemara* applies this *mabloket* to three other *mitzvot* and assumes that the same disagreement would apply. In the tractate of *Rosh Hashana 33a*, the *gemara* states that R. Yehuda would not allow a woman to blow *shofar* on Rosh Hashana whereas R. Yose and R. Shimon would. *Eruvin 96a-96b* applies this *mabloket* to the issue of permitting women to wear *tefillin* and perform *aliya la-regel* (ascent to Jerusalem to bring sacrifices on Pesah, Shavuot, and Sukkot). This *gemara* posits that the rabbis didn’t prevent King Saul’s daughter Mikhal from wearing *tefillin* or the wife of Jonah from performing *aliya la-regel*, therefore the rabbis clearly agreed with R. Yose and R. Shimon against R. Yehuda.

What is the conceptual difference between the two sides of this *mabloket*? Rashi (*Rosh HaShana 33a*) suggests that R. Yehuda thinks that performing a *mitzva* from which one is exempt is a violation of “*bal tosif*,” the prohibition against adding *mitzvot* to the Torah. Most opinions reject this suggestion since “*bal tosif*” is understood as a prohibition against adding a 614th *mitzva* or adding detail to an existing *mitzva* (such as a fifth species to be taken on Sukkot), and not against one’s fulfillment of an existing *mitzva* despite a Biblical exemption.³

The Talmudic commentaries known as the *Tosfot* (*Eruvin 96a*) offer a different conceptual basis for the *mabloket*. They suggest that R. Yehuda specifically forbids women from fulfilling *semikha*, *shofar*, *tefillin* and *aliya la-regel*, because their fulfillment of each of these

mitzvot would violate a rabbinic prohibition, and a woman who is not obligated cannot be allowed to violate the rabbinic prohibition in order to perform the *mitzva*. For example, it is rabbinically prohibited for anyone to blow a *shofar* on Shabbat and Yom Tov (all holidays including Rosh Hashana). A man, however, may disregard the rabbinic prohibition against blowing *shofar* on holidays to fulfill his Torah obligation to hear *shofar* on Rosh Hashana. R. Yehuda would not allow a woman to disregard the prohibition to fulfill a *mitzva* in which she is not obligated. According to the *Tosfot*, even R. Yehuda would allow women to fulfill *mitzvot* from which they are exempted if no rabbinic violations occurred (such as sitting in a *sukka* or taking *lulav*).

How then, can R. Yose and R. Shimon allow women to violate rabbinic prohibitions to fulfill *mitzvot* from which they are exempt? The *Tosfot* don’t provide the answer but other authorities explain that the Torah was given to *B’nei Yisrael*, to the people of Israel as a community that included men and women. Despite the fact that women were subsequently exempted from particular details, the whole Torah retained its significance for women. Therefore, women still have a “*kiyyum d’oraita*” (Biblical fulfillment of a *mitzva*) when a woman fulfills a *mitzva* from which she is exempted even though she has no “*biyyuv d’oraita*” (Biblical obligation). This *kiyyum d’oraita* allows a woman to violate the rabbinic prohibition involved in the *mitzva*’s fulfillment just as a man may, for example, violate the rabbinic prohibition of blowing a *shofar* on the *yom tov* of Rosh Hashana in order to Biblically fulfill the *mitzva* of *t’kiat shofar*.

The *halakhic* authorities overwhelmingly rule like R. Yose and R. Shimon, partly because of the

gemara in *Eruvin* that states that the rabbis ruled against R. Yehuda, and partly because R. Yose and R. Shimon's position is more logical⁵. There is a Talmudic concept that one who is commanded in a *mitzva* receives a greater reward for one's fulfillment of that *mitzva* than one who is not commanded⁶, indicating that a reward also exists for the exempted one. (If exemption meant prohibition, there would be no reward at all⁷. The Rambam (*Laws of Tzitzit*, Chapter 3) states that despite their exemption, women may choose to wear *tzitzit* "...and likewise, [all] other positive commandments from which women are exempt, if they want to fulfill them...we do not prevent them." The *Shulchan Arukh* in *Orach Chayim* 589:6 rules that despite their exemption, women may blow *shofar*. In fact, a man who has already fulfilled his *mitzva* can blow *shofar* for a woman; her *kiyyum d'oraita* is important enough for someone else to violate a rabbinic prohibition so she can fulfill the *mitzva*.⁸ It is interesting to note that there is later rabbinic opposition to women fulfilling the *mitzvot* of *tzitzit* and *tefillin*, despite the fact that *tefillin* is one of the paradigms of the *mabloket* between R. Yehuda and R. Yose/R. Shimon where we rule like the latter and the Rambam uses *tzitzit* as his paradigm for allowing women to fulfill all *mitzvot aseh she-*



Why did the chicken...? A woman shows her child how to "shlug kapparot," a high holiday ritual in which one symbolically transfers one's sins to a chicken (alternately to some coins) which is later slaughtered and given to charity.

bazeman gerama. This issue is beyond the scope of this article.

May a woman make *berakhot* on *mitzvot* which she may, but is not obligated to, fulfill? Here there is a split between most⁹ Sephardic decisors¹⁰, based on the Rambam¹¹, who do not allow women to make these *berakhot* and Ashkenazic decisors¹², based on Rabbeinu Tam¹³, who do. The Sephardic decisors maintain that to say "...*asher kidde-shanu bemitzvotav v'tzivanu* (who has sanctified us through his commandments and has commanded us)" in the *berakha* is an untruth

since women are not commanded to fulfill these *mitzvot*.¹⁴ Besides being an untruth, this *berakha* could be a real problem of *bal tosf* (i.e., maintaining that women are Biblically obligated in *mitzvot aseh shebazeman gerama* would add a detail to the original Biblical command)¹⁵. This *berakha* would also create problems of *berakha l'vatala* (a *berakha* that invokes God's name to no purpose)¹⁶. Ashkenazic decisors would agree that although stating that women are obligated in *mitzvot aseh shebazeman gerama* would be

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New and Noteworthy

NEW YORK CITY

Drisha Institute for Jewish Education is presenting a High Holidays lecture series September 14-16, addressing topics such as the process of *teshuva*, the role of the *shofar*, and repentance and religious development. Contact (212) 595-0307.

A Women's Intergenerational Learning program, co-sponsored by the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance and Drisha Institute for Jewish Education, will take place on chol ha-moed Sukkot, the evening of

Tuesday, September 28. For more information, please call the JOFA office at (212) 752-7133.

CHICAGO

The Hillel Foundation received a grant from the Women's Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago to support Jewish Women's programming at the William and Mildred Levine Hillel Center at the University of Chicago. The grant will fund a monthly Rosh Chodesh study and discussion program and expand their third night Women's Seder.

AUSTRALIA

The Sydney Women's Tefila group presents *shiurim* on Rosh Chodesh. Topics have included prayer and the *aguna*. Contact Gael Hammer at hammerg@tmx.com.au.

ISRAEL

The first international conference sponsored by the Religious Women's Forum and Bar Ilan University, *To Be a Jewish Woman: A Public Dialogue on Problems and Goals Facing Us Today*, was held in Jerusalem on July 14-15.

JOFA's New Executive Director

This new year also marks new transitions for the JOFA office. Former Administrative Director Tamara Charm, who was instrumental in establishing JOFA as a successful organization, has left her position to pursue a graduate degree in business at M.I.T. We thank Tamara for her significant contribution to JOFA and wish her well in her new endeavors. It is our pleasure to announce that she will remain in-

volved as a member of JOFA's Board of Directors.

Marcy Serkin is our new executive director, and brings her own eclectic experience to the position. Marcy grew up in New York City and graduated from Stern College for Women with a B.A. in English. She received a Masters degree in Linguistics from City University Graduate Center, and taught English as a Second Language (ESL) for five

years at Yeshiva University, City University and Touro College. From 1988-1990, she was assistant director of the Writing Center at Y.U., and later directed an ESL program.

Most recently, Marcy has worked in the Development Department of the Jewish Theological Seminary. She is married and has three children. *Brukha haba'a u'v'batzlaba, Marcy!* ■

Teshuva

Continued from page 1

binical Seminary of France, I have failed miserably. My proposals towards a progressive change of our ways of thinking and of reacting were not followed by deeds.

As the spiritual leader of a large Parisian Orthodox community, I recently asked the architect entrusted with building a large Parisian synagogue to provide for a first floor space for women, with a separate entrance, that would enable them to follow every part of the service

without feeling pushed or herded into the background.

Once our sisters have become university professors, how can we deny them the right to preach in synagogues? Do we lack historical examples — Talmudic or medieval — of highly talented women personalities? When will we take up the noble challenge of the Bible where Deborah was named supreme judge in Israel? What should we say about the humiliation often experienced by our sisters when they must go to

the rabbinical seminary for matters of divorce, levirate, or conversion? Are we aware of the shame they suffer, of the feeling of rebellion that grips them? If Rabbenu Gershom, light of the exile, had hesitated for a moment when he initiated the interdict against polygamy, which still lasts nowadays, a thousand years after the decision, then nothing would have been accomplished. Will the *halakha* forever be against recovering those great principles? ■ (New York, October 1998)

Women and the Fulfillment...

Continued from page 5

untrue (and possibly a violation of *bal tosf*), that is not what a woman is saying when she recites the *berakha*. Rather, she includes herself in the *klal Yisrael* that received the Torah and was commanded as a whole -- if not as individuals -- to perform these *mitzvot*¹⁷. (It should be stressed, however, that the *berakha* is a rabbinic addition to the Biblical *mitzva*, and the inability of Sephardic women to make the *berakha* for these *mitzvot*, does not change how the *halakha* views a woman's fulfillment of the Biblical command or the value of that fulfillment.) Regardless of the detail of whether or not to make a *berakha*, all streams of *halakbic pesak* reject R. Yehuda's position, allowing -- and even seeing as exemplary -- the vol-

untary fulfillment of a woman's *kiiyyum d'oraita*. ■

Noa Jeselsohn is a graduate of the Drisha Scholars Circle. She teaches Talmud and Halakha at the Pelech School and Halakha at Midreshet Lindenbaum, both in Jerusalem, Israel.

¹ This article will not deal with the question of why women are exempt from mitzvot aseih shehazeman gerama. Some of the major traditional sources that deal with that question can be found in the 16th chapter of the Kuntras Petah HaBayit at the beginning of R. David Auerbach's *Halikhot Beita*.

² Turei Even, Hagiga 16b and Megilla 20b

³ Maharsha, Rosh Hashana 33a; Sefer Hahinukh, mitzva 454. Tosfot, Eruvin 96a has a pragmatic problem with Rashi as Rashi's position would necessitate R. Yehuda forbidding women from fulfilling all mitzvot that they are exempt from but he doesn't object when the gemara discusses Queen Helene sitting in a sukka.

⁴ Ran, Rosh Hashana 9b (in the Rif); Re-

sponsa Seridei Esh 3:104 in the name of the Ra'avad; Iggerot Moshe, Orah Hayyim 4:49

⁵ Ran, Rosh Hashana 9b (in the Rif); Rosh, Rosh Hashana 33a

⁶ Kiddushin 31a. Tosfot s.v. Gadol, and others, try to explain the logic of this position.

⁷ Ran, Rosh Hashana 9b (in the Rif); Mishna Berura Orah Hayyim 589:8

⁸ In such a situation, however, the woman should make the berakha herself (if she follows the Ashkenazic practice as discussed further in the article).

⁹ The Hida and those that follow his opinion allow women to make berakhot based on an unusual, non-halakhic source. See Birkei Yosef, Orach Hayyim 654:2.

¹⁰ Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 589:6; R. Ovadia Yosef, Yabia Omer 1, Orah Hayyim 40-42

¹¹ Laws of Tzitzit 3:9

¹² Rema, Orah Hayyim 589:6

¹³ Tosfot Eruvin 96a s.v. Dilmā,

¹⁴ Mishna Berura Orah Hayyim 589:10

¹⁵ Shiltei Gibborim, Rosh Hashana 33a; Sedei Hemed 40:136

¹⁶ Sedei Hemed 40:136; Responsa Yabia Omer

¹⁷ Iggerot Moshe, Orah Hayyim 4:49

International Women's Conference In Jerusalem

By Abigail Radoskowitz

Civilized discourse and the creative exchange of ideas set the tone for the First International Conference of the Religious Women's Forum, held July 14-15 in Jerusalem.

The 1000 *halakhically* committed women and 150 men who participated were encouraged by the changes that have already taken place in the Modern Orthodox landscape in Israel. These changes include the growing number of young women engaged in advanced Torah and Talmud learning and the new concern with ritual and ceremony focusing on women, such as the birth of a daughter and the *bat mitzvah*. Another innovation has been the emergence of women as the majority among rabbinic court advocates, a religious profession that only five years ago had been closed to them.

Rivka Lubitch, one of the many exceptionally poised and erudite women who presented at the Conference, observed, however, that while the first generation of women involved in Jewish learning might have been satisfied with the increased level of learning alone, the next generation will demand greater involvement in the performance of *mitzvot*.

Bar-Ilan University President Moshe Kaveh stressed that statutory changes far more revolutionary than any envisioned today have been made in the past, and many mandated by the Torah were suspended as economic and social circum-

stances changed. Rabbi Rene-Samuel Sirat, the former Chief Rabbi of France, noted that a woman's status, even regarding divorce laws, was higher in the time of the Bible, and even in the time of the Talmud than it is today.

"...while the first generation of women involved in Jewish learning might have been satisfied with the increased level of learning alone, the next generation will demand greater involvement in the performance of *mitzvot*."

Divorce is the one part of *halakha* which has not responded to a changing situation, Dr. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari pointed out in her pained description of the *halakhic* status of women in marriage. This issue

brought one of the only acrimonious notes to the two-day proceedings, when many in the audience protested Rabbi Yehuda Henkin's objections to Dr. Halperin-Kaddari's presentation. Yet Rabbi Henkin then proceeded to predict that it would not be long before the masses of women learning on the highest level would be producing *poskot* and *morot balacha* (arbiters). Chilling confirmation of Dr. Halperin-Kaddari's description was the poignant presentation by a young haredi divorcee of the contemporary abuse of divorce laws and of the abasement of women by haredi society, and particularly by its media.

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin provided an example of creative *halakhic* feminism in action, proposing that both men and women add the other's blessing to his/her morning blessing, thus maintaining the *halakhic* integrity of the text, yet enabling both sexes to express pride in the form in which God created them.

Neither proposals as far-reaching as Prof. Yehuda Gellman's for supplementing Torah readings with feminist texts, nor warnings by various speakers of the challenges posed by Orthodox feminism and the social price advanced textual learning might exact, diminished the courteous reception accorded by an audience representing a broader range than might be expected on the Orthodox spectrum. ■

Pinat Sefarim: The JOFA Book Corner

During the Yamim Noraim (High Holidays), we often find ourselves searching for deeper meanings and new readings of the prayers in the *Mahzor* (High Holiday prayer book). Toward that end, JOFA provides you with the following list of books recommended for High Holiday reading and reflection.

Moments of Transcendence: Inspirational Readings for Rosh

Hashanah and Moments of Transcendence: Inspirational Readings for Yom Kippur by Rabbi Dov Peretz Elkins, Jason Aronson Publishing Company, 1992.

Each of these two volumes features anecdotes and contemporary reflections on traditional themes and liturgy in pieces with titles like, "The Ten Precepts of Interpersonal Relationships", "Al Chet" and "Ashamnu".

Beginning Anew: A Woman's Companion to the High Holidays, edited by Gail Twersky Reimer and Judith Kates, Simon & Schuster, 1997. In illuminating commentaries on the Biblical texts read on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, a number of contemporary female writers offer a fresh perspective on Jewish history, tradition, and religion. ■

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