Fall 2013 | Kislev 5774 | Volume XI, Issue 2

THE JOFA journal

www.jofa.org

FROM OUR PRESIDENT

"LEANING IN" TO OUR RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL LIVES

By Judy Heicklen

Earlier this year I met with two people from the Career Center at Yeshiva University. We were discussing my firm's campus hiring programs and how YU could channel more graduates to us. They wanted to know what we were looking for in students: Was it specific coursework? Work experience in finance? A certain GPA? "Well, there is a minimum GPA we look for," I replied, "but after that, the single most important factor is leadership." We don't want a candidate who belongs to fifteen different clubs; rather, we want someone who is passionate about one, who has dedicated himself or herself to that cause, and has stepped up to lead it. And it doesn't even matter what the cause is—it's the leadership itself we are looking for.

The same calculus applies to our religious/communal lives and commitments. For the past twenty-five years, I have been involved in various boards of my *shul*, my children's school, Jewish educational institutions, and Jewish advocacy groups. I enjoy the camaraderie of the boards, I feel good about giving back to my community, and the causes are ones I believe in. Then, four years ago, some of my co-board members of JOFA asked me to consider taking on the presidency. "Eek!," I blanched. How could I? I already had so much on my plate. I could certainly never measure up to my predecessors, Blu Greenberg and Carol Newman. But how could I not?

At the Yeshivat Maharat graduation in June I saw three young women who had faced that same question. How could they not step up to serve the Jewish people? How could they not use the gifts that God has given them? Thus, a new chapter has opened in our collective history. It is a chapter whose prologue was written by Susan B. Anthony in 1848 at Seneca Falls and Sarah Schenirer in 1917 in Poland. And as women have grown in Torah learning and in secular opportunities, this day was perhaps inevitable.

Halakhic discussions of the permissibility of women's leadership often start with the story of Deborah the Judge. The rabbis ask how it could be that a woman judged

continued on page 3

The Maharat Moment: Why Yeshivat Maharat's Ordination Matters

By Sara Hurwitz

Before examining the historical significance of Yeshivat Maharat's recent ordination ceremony, I want to acknowledge and thank the courageous women who have heretofore demonstrated spiritual leadership in the Orthodox community. Reb Mimi Feigelson, *mashpiah ruchanit* of American Jewish University and a Yeshivat Maharat advisory board member, and Rosh Kehillah Dina Najman, spiritual leader of Kehilat Orach Eliezer, both received private *semikha* and are serving the Jewish people with strength and integrity. Elana Stein Hain and Gilah Kletenik, graduates of Yeshiva University's GPATS program, teach, preach, and tirelessly help lead major New York City congregations. Many other women, too numerous to name, working in many different contexts, perform acts of spiritual leadership daily, touching and inspiring lives, acting as role models to girls and boys. They have laid the foundation on which we now build.

Yeshivat Maharat has now taken a great leap forward. The ordination ceremony of June 16 inaugurated a new era in the advancement of female religious leadership in the Orthodox community. For two reasons, this event has changed the conversation about women serving as clergy.

Institutional *Semikha*

The graduation ceremony marked the first time that institutional *semikha* was granted to Orthodox women. It

continued on page 3

IN THIS ISSUE:

"Leaning In" to Our Religious and Spiritual Lives *by Judy Heicklen* 1

The Maharat Moment: Why Yeshivat Maharat's Ordination Matters *by Sara Hurwitz* 1

Meet the Maharats 5

On Being *Marta d'Atra*, the Spiritual Leader, of My Congregation *by Dina Najman* 7

Models of Empowerment *by Sharon Weiss-Greenberg* 9

What's in a Title? *by Sara Tillinger Wolkenfeld* 10

***Serara* and Women: Who May Wear the Crown?** *by Barry Freundel* 12

***Heter Hora'ah:* From Women Pleaders to Women Leaders** *by Shlomo Riskin* 17

Neither Headmaster nor Rabbanit: On Being a Female Head of School *by Rivy Poupko Kletenik* 22

On the Verge of Real Change: Women in Jewish Communal Leadership *by Shifra Bronznick and Joanna Samuels* 24

What I Learned from Interfaith Dialogue *by Rori Picker Neiss* 26

My *Yoetzet Halacha*: A Religious Resource for the Community *by Debby Graneviz* 28

On Leading a Partnership Minyan *by Allie Alperovich* 29

Making History, Without Making Waves: On Becoming a *Shul* President *by Phyllis Shapiro* 30

***Manhigot:* Models of Women's Torah Leadership in Israel** *by Karen Miller Jackson* 31

Women in Communal Leadership—A View from the UK by Nicky Goldman . . . 33

Emerging Voices: *Leyning* Out of Love: How Learning to *Leyn* Deepened My Connection to Torah *by Leah Slaten* 34

Emerging Voices: How Teaching a Friend to *Leyn* Taught Me More Than I Could Have Imagined *by Ricki Heicklen* 35

Book Corner *by Miriam A. Cope, Bat Sheva Marcus, Rachel Levmore, Israel Drazin, and Roselyn Bell* 36

JOFA NEWS

JOFA Conference 2013 to Highlight Changing Role of Women in the Community 19

New Video Webinar Series on Social Change in Orthodoxy 19

First JOFA UK Conference 20

Launch of the Joan S. Meyers Torah Lending Project 20

JOFA Holds Historic *Agunah* Summit 21

JOFA at the Kolech Conference 21

THE JOFA Journal

A Publication of the
Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance
Volume XI — Issue 2
Fall 2013—Kislev 5774

The JOFA Journal is published by the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, a 501(c)(3)organization.
All correspondence should be mailed to:
JOFA, 520 8th Avenue, Fourth Floor, NY, NY 10018.
We can be reached by phone at (212) 679-8500
or email jofa@jofa.org

From Our President, *continued from cover*

Israel. Various understandings are brought forward. Maybe she didn't actually judge, but just publicized the laws. Maybe it was OK because the people accepted her leadership voluntarily. Maybe that was what was needed "*ba'eit hahi,*" at that time. And what is needed in *our* time? It seems that now is the moment to capitalize on the talents of half our population.

In truth, the part of the Deborah story that I find even more interesting than her ability to judge is her response to Barak when he asks for her help in leading the warriors into battle. She readily acquiesces, but tells him that the glory of winning the battle will not be his, because Sisera will be delivered into the hand of a woman. The commentators see this as a rebuke of Barak; Deborah is ridiculing him for needing a woman's help. I read it differently. In the next verse, it does not say that Barak protested or changed his course; he simply mustered the troops and set off for battle. He recognized that a woman could lead, that a woman could get credit for the victory, and that he could work together with her for the greater good of the people. Barak—the first feminist ally!

We need—and we have—such allies in our time. On the day I wrote this article, I attended the installation of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah's new president, Rabbi Asher Lopatin. At the roundtable preceding the installation, Rabbi Elka Abrahamson of the Wexner Foundation emphasized the need to train for leadership skills formally and explicitly as a key component to developing and enriching the larger Jewish community, across all denominations. As Rabbi Lopatin takes on his new role as leader and as the new maharats take on theirs, I wish them all *hatzlahah rabbah* in leading the Orthodox community forward.

My book club in Teaneck is reading *Lean In* by Sheryl Sandberg this month. As most of you know, it encourages women at all points of their professional lives to "lean in" to their careers—to be ambitious, to speak up, to take risks. We are expecting a very lively discussion when we next meet. One of JOFA's goals is to engender a parallel discussion about leaning in to our religious and spiritual lives, whether we express our commitments through ritual participation, lay leadership of communal institutions, deeper learning, or professional involvements. I hope you will join me at the JOFA Conference December 7 and 8, to add your voice to the conversation.

Maharat, *continued from cover*

was an historic moment because previously women with a passion to serve had to carve out their own path to spiritual leadership. Institutional *semikha* formalizes spiritual leadership as a viable career path for women to pursue.

In addition, Yeshivat Maharat has set the standard for the requisite skill set necessary for women to succeed as a member of the clergy—bringing a combination of in-depth textual knowledge and hands-on experience in various pastoral roles. Yeshivat Maharat's curriculum is modeled on traditional rabbinic training programs, in which students learn the laws of *niddah*, Shabbat, *kashrut*, life-cycle events, and issues pertaining to daily living (the laws of *Orach Chaim*), with the intention of becoming *poskot,* decisors of Jewish law.

As interns in synagogues, communal organizations, and university Hillels, our students have gained first-hand experience dealing with some of the sensitive issues that arise in the work of a pastoral caregiver. Our graduates have trained for the past four years to teach, lead, and guide people through their most difficult and joyous moments. They have passed rigorous oral and written examinations administered by the ordaining rabbis and have been mentored to become sensitive pastoral guides and halakhic decisors.

The degree of *semikha* confirms the powerful role that female spiritual and halakhic leaders will play in Jewish communal life. Now the community can draw from 100 percent of the Orthodox population to serve as religious leaders, committed to *halakha,* while at the same time being open and sensitive to the daily struggles that the Jewish people face.

Community Advocacy

Four years ago, when I was ordained, I was accused of weakening and fracturing the Orthodox community. It was a lonely time, with our detractors overshadowing the voices of righteousness and justice. This time, the voices of integrity and courage have prevailed because the community has rallied behind us.

Over the past four years, Yeshivat Maharat has been building a community of supporters and advocates for women in spiritual leadership. We have traveled to *shuls* and institutions all over North America to develop recognition of the beneficial effects of female leaders. We have built an experienced advisory board made up of Orthodox rabbis and female leaders, and created an executive board of talented and accomplished lay leaders who support women in the role of clergy. Students and faculty travel to communities across North America as scholars-in-residence, painting a picture of a new kind of rabbinic model, with men and women working in partnership to serve the community. The placement of each of our graduates in pulpits and educational institutions confirms that our message has been received. Communities are ready for the new, diversified face of Orthodoxy.

Rachel Kohl Finegold is serving as clergy at Montreal's Congregation Shaar Hashomayim alongside Rabbi Adam Scheier. Ruth Balinsky Friedman is serving as clergy at Ohev Sholom—the National Synagogue, in Washington, D.C., alongside Rabbi Shmuel Herzfeld. Abby Brown Scheier is principal of the Hebrew school at Congregation Shaar Hashomayim in Montreal and a Jewish educator in the larger Montreal community. In addition, Rori Picker Neiss will be completing her fourth

continued on page 4

Maharat, *continued from page 3*

year of study while serving as a member of the clergy at Bais Abraham Synagogue in St. Louis. The landscape of leadership is, indeed, changing.

Looking to the 2013–14 academic year, Yeshivat Maharat students will be interning in synagogues, as chaplains, and on university campuses. Yeshivat Maharat has received more requests from sites looking to host interns than there are available students to fill these positions. This, too, indicates that the community is ready for female Jewish leadership and has begun to turn to ordained Orthodox women for spiritual and halakhic guidance.

Some will say this is not the time to install women in positions of authority—that we are pushing an agenda for which the Orthodox public is not ready. I respectfully disagree. Men and women have left Orthodox Judaism because of a feeling that it lacked a place for them. I believe that scholarly Orthodox women with a passion for Torah are essential role models who will keep communities engaged. Jews are thirsting for spiritual guidance, and for those who feel uninspired or lost, Yeshivat Maharat offers a renewed opportunity for serious, genuine Orthodox leadership—steeped in Jewish texts and learning, but open to meeting people where they are. Yeshivat Maharat is changing hearts and minds—one community at a time, one individual at a time.

Halakha: Paskening and *Serara*

Granting the degree of *semikha* certifies that our graduates possess the authority and ability to excel as spiritual leaders. Indeed, there is no *halakha* that bars a woman from assuming this role.

Women already possess textual literacy. The next logical step is that they make halakhic decisions for others based on their knowledge. The Talmud states the principle that all who are unfit to serve as witnesses cannot serve as judges.[1] Because women cannot serve as witnesses, it would follow that women cannot serve as judges.[2] However, the *Pitchei Teshuva Choshen Mishpat* 7:5 rules that "even though a woman is disqualified from being a judge, a woman who is wise and learned is fit to render a ruling."[3] The implication is that, if women are well versed in law, they can become authorities on any subject matter.

In addition to being a disseminator of Jewish knowledge and a pastoral counselor, a rabbi is a public figure. From Miriam, who taught the women in the desert,[4] to Deborah, who led the Jewish people,[5] women have been exceptional leaders. Moreover, we live in a world today where women have attained significant positions of public leadership. It is no longer exceptional to see a female head of a corporation or occupant of political office.

On the other hand, the ruling of the Rambam,[6] which states that women cannot fulfill a position of authority (*serara*), even non-rabbinic leadership, came to bear on the public discourse when the State of Israel was forming its first Knesset. Rav Uziel, the Sephardic chief rabbi of Israel (1880–1953), adjudicated that women could serve in leadership roles in the Knesset if they were elected to this role democratically "through voting," as "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."[7]

In 1993, Rav Bakshi Doron, the Sephardic chief rabbi of Israel, added that "the law is in accordance with the majority of the later and earlier authorities, who conclude that the prohibition to appoint to authority and *serara* only applies to a case where the judge forces the litigant to abide by his decision."[8] He ruled unequivocally, therefore, "Women can be of the *gedolim* [great leaders] of the generation and serve as halakhic decisors."[9]

A More Inclusive Jewish Community

Serving as clergy is one of the highest honors a Jew can fulfill; it is a calling that brings with it a tremendous responsibility. The presence of female clergy standing next to women mourners reciting *Kaddish,* teaching from the pulpit, or leading some of the communal prayers engages and includes women in the ritual experience of communal life. Young girls can now look to female spiritual leaders as their role models, perhaps inspiring them to pursue a similar career path.

This is the beginning of a new era when men and women serve in partnership to inspire a more inclusive and committed Jewish community. It will be an era when women are trained and ordained as clergy, and consequently will be counted on for their spiritual guidance and halakhic scholarship. It will be an era when women can finally use their God-given talents to pursue their calling to serve the Jewish community as full members of the clergy. The time has come.

***Rabba Sara Hurwitz** was ordained by Rabbi Avi Weiss in 2009 and serves at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale. She is the dean of Yeshivat Maharat in New York.*

[1] Talmud Bavli *Nidah* 49b, Talmud Yerushalmi *Yomah* 6:1.
[2] *Shulhan Arukh, Hoshen Mishpat* 7:4.
[3] See also *Sefer Hahinukh Shmini* 152.
[4] See Rashi's commentary on Micah 6:4, in which he states that Miriam taught Torah to the women of her generation.
[5] Judges 4:4.
[6] Rambam, Laws of Kings 1:5: "Do not appoint a woman to reign, since the verse [Deuteronomy 17:15] states, 'a king and not a queen.' And so too, all positions in Israel—do not appoint anyone but a man."
[7] Responsa *Piskei Uziel Siman* 43 (Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel, 1880-1953). "The law refers only to appointments made by a Sanhedrin, but in our case [permitting women to run for government office] 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."

שלא נאמרה הלכה זאת אלא במנוי הנעשה ע"י סנהדרין, אבל בשאלתנו אין כאן מנוי אלא קבלה, שעל ידי הבחירות מכריע רוב הקהל את דעתו הסכמתו ואמונו לאותם הנבחרים, ..., ועל זה אפילו הרמב"ם מודה שאין כאן שום שמץ של אסור.

[8] Responsa *Binyan Av*, 1:5.
[9] Responsa *Binyan Av*, 65:5.

Meet the Maharats

Rabba Sara Hurwitz, left, with (from left to right) Maharats Ruth Balinsky Friedman, Rachel Kohl Finegold, and Abby Brown Scheier.

Rachel Kohl Finegold

I came to Yeshivat Maharat out of a desire to gain the training that would allow me to do my job more effectively. When I entered the program, I was already serving in a clergy capacity without formal credentials. As the education and ritual director of a Modern Orthodox synagogue, Anshe Sholom B'nai Israel Congregation in Chicago, I have spent the past six years being a religious resource for our members. In addition to my work organizing educational programming for youth and adults, as well as running our new *mikvah*, I delivered *divrei Torah* from the pulpit, fielded halakhic questions from congregants, and served in a variety of pastoral capacities.

I stepped into this role without formal clergy training, which meant that it was harder to do my job. When I received halakhic questions, I wasn't always sure that I was qualified to answer them. Congregants themselves would sometimes ask a question with the caveat, "Maybe you or your husband can answer this for me." (I happen to be married to a rabbi.) People would not know how to introduce me to their visiting friends or family: "This is Rachel. She is our… What do we call you?" I felt that enrolling in Yeshivat Maharat would allow me to formalize my religious leadership role, allowing me to answer the questions that came my way more confidently while also creating greater clarity for those whose religious needs I served.

The learning at Yeshivat Maharat was different from the studying I had done previously at Drisha Institute and in other settings. There I had engaged in Torah study *lishma*, learning for its own sake, but this learning was for the sake of leading—and it felt different. As I recently stepped into a new position as part of the clergy team at Congregation Shaar Hashomayim in Montreal, the maharat credential allowed me to embrace my role as a religious leader and has helped others accept me in that role.

During the months leading up to the Maharat graduation, people often asked me who my role models have been and what propelled me into taking this career path. The truth is that even though I have had some wonderful educators and inspirational role models, I never encountered an Orthodox woman in synagogue leadership and never imagined a career that would look like my own. In the early years of my career, I simply put one foot in front of the other, looking for a role in Jewish education and leadership that was right for me, and I stumbled onto this path. However, the creation of Yeshivat Maharat means that young women will now see spiritual leadership as a viable career option. It will allow them to point to me and my colleagues and say, "*That* is what I want to do." It is a privilege to be part of this important sea change.

Ruth Balinsky Friedman

My path to Yeshivat Maharat was both direct and winding. My father is an Orthodox rabbi, and I grew up watching him serve in this capacity—teaching, giving *drashot* on Shabbat, counseling people, and answering halakhic questions. He would share tidbits of his wisdom, such as how to properly run a program or the best ways to teach a text. So, on the one hand, I grew up intimately

continued on page 6

acquainted with the world of the rabbinate. On the other hand, I was an Orthodox girl who did not see Orthodox women serving in these capacities. I learned the skills of how to do the job, but I never once thought that I would ever actually have that job.

That all changed in the summer of 2009. I had graduated from Barnard in 2007, and, not knowing what I wanted to do professionally, I decided to spend the year studying Jewish texts at Drisha Institute for Jewish Education. I instantly fell in love, and decided to stay another year. Toward the end of my second year at Drisha, in March 2009, I attended Rabba Sara Hurwitz's conferral ceremony at Hebrew Institute of Riverdale. I remember the incredible energy in the room, and all of the Orthodox women who were currently working in synagogues gathered to celebrate the momentous occasion. When Rabba Sara and Rabbi Avi Weiss reached out to me a couple of months later to ask if I might be interested in attending their new school, Yeshivat Maharat, I knew that I had found my calling. Here was a program that would provide me the textual knowledge that I needed, as well as internships and leadership training. People looked at me warily when I said that I planned to attend the school, wondering whether the risk would be worth it. But I knew that it was the right thing to do, and I jumped right in.

What makes Yeshiva Maharat unique is that it explicitly trains women to serve as spiritual leaders in the community.

Part of what attracted me to Yeshivat Maharat was that it was a program that would train women to serve in a leadership capacity in the Orthodox community. There are many fantastic programs for Orthodox women's higher education, but what makes Yeshivat Maharat unique is that it explicitly trains women to serve as spiritual leaders in the community. An important part of this mission is bestowing a title on the graduates. Having the title of maharat enables me to be recognized as a member of the clergy in the United States, and to be formally recognized within the Jewish world as well. It conveys that I have completed rigorous training and that I am equipped to serve the Jewish community. But, most importantly, having a title teaches future generations of Orthodox Jews that *all* can serve as spiritual leaders for their community, and that positions of leadership are not reserved for only half the population.

I have always wondered whether it would have taken me the first twenty-four years of my life to realize what I wanted to do had I seen other women serving the Orthodox community in a capacity of leadership. Had I known as a child that I could be a maharat, would I have spent all of college wondering what I would be doing with my life? Or would I have intentionally pursued this path from the moment I graduated from high school? With this new model of leadership, we will no longer have to ask that question. Instead we can maximize the talent in the Orthodox community and therefore enable it to continue to thrive. The rest, as Hillel once said, is just commentary.

Abby Brown Scheier

My path to Yeshivat Maharat must have been preordained. I grew up in a house that was saturated with Jewish learning. My parents were both knowledgeable and passionate Jews. My mother was an educator in Jewish schools and in Jewish camps. She was also a fantastic cook, so our Shabbat and holiday table was always filled with good food and interesting conversation. My father was a rabbi and a professor of Jewish studies and involved on various Jewish community boards.

It never occurred to me to be a rabbi, as this was never an option for a women educated in the Orthodox system. Furthermore, my initial stabs at a career path avoided the option of Jewish education: I began university as a biology major, and later had plans to attend law school. However, my passion for *Tanakh* and Jewish texts won out. I found myself planning programs in Jewish summer camps and teaching *Tanakh* in a Jewish day school.

I didn't set out to become a rebbetzin—but I fell in love with a rabbinical student. Suddenly, I was thrust into a position of leadership when my husband was engaged as senior rabbi of Montreal's Congregation Shaar Hashomayim. Congregants would ask me questions and were looking for answers from me. A referral to my husband wasn't always the best response.

I was deeply inspired by Rabba Sara Hurwitz's conferral ceremony, and was intrigued by the creation of Yeshivat Maharat. In the summer of 2009, my husband and I spent time in Jerusalem. I attended a Kolech conference, and the conversation—both at the formal sessions and in the informal hallway chatter—was about the need for female spiritual and religious leadership. It seemed that all these influences were moving me in the direction of study at Yeshivat Maharat.

I jumped at the opportunity, and my husband and I somehow figured out how I could study at the yeshiva in New York, live in Montreal, continue to teach my classes, and be a mother to my four young children (two of whom were born while I was a student at YM).

The four years that I spent studying at Yeshivat Maharat were both exciting and challenging. I loved the intense learning and the practical training. My learning energized the teaching that I continued to do throughout my course of study. Learning moved me to want to contribute more—to take on more students and teach more classes.

Now, upon graduating, I'm not sure what the future will hold. I continue to teach both adults and youth. Being a maharat makes me feel more confident in my teaching and leadership. I feel more capable of fulfilling a role that, in some ways, I married into. Most importantly, I know that our four daughters will grow up in a world where they will truly know firsthand that they, too—if they choose—can grow up to be Jewish spiritual and religious leaders.

On Being *Marta d'Atra*, the Spiritual Leader, of My Congregation

By Dina Najman


Dina Najman

Eight years ago, I was privileged to become the *marta d'atra* (halakhic authority) of Kehilat Orach Eliezer (KOE) on the Upper West Side of New York City. The congregation refers to me as *rosh kehillah*—"head of the congregation." In this role, I deliver *drashot* on Shabbat. Throughout the week, I am available to answer halakhic questions (on *kashrut, niddah*, *hilkhot Shabbat*, etc.). I prepare the community for the *chaggim*, and offer Gemara and *halakha shiurim*. When necessary, I coordinate life-cycle events, counsel members of the community, and work with the board and lay leadership to sustain the congregation financially and meet the needs of its various constituents. I have the ultimate responsibility to ensure that there is a *minyan* present to begin *davening* on time with competent *ba'alei tefillah* and *kri'ah*.

As I reflect on my time as the spiritual leader for KOE, I acknowledge my deep gratitude for the institution that appointed me as their leader: first, for the courage to hire a woman as their *marta d'atra*; second, for the value the congregation has placed on my service to the *kehillah*; and third, for how the position itself has served to help me develop professionally and gives me hope for the future of *klal Yisrael* and the pursuit of *Torat emet*.

About My Congregation

Throughout its nearly two decades, the members of KOE have understood the importance of creating a community of Jewish men and women dedicated to Torah, *mitzvot*, and *gemilut hasadim*. The welcoming environment that they have established, along with their support for learning, *tefillah*, and service to others, serve as a model for any Jewish institution. KOE's membership recognized that, rather than being an obstacle to a community's cohesion or an indication of religious passivity, appointing a communal leader is a necessary and integral part of a vibrant and religiously committed community.

They recognized there are times in people's lives that necessitate the advice and guidance of a spiritual leader for halakhic questions and life-cycle events. They understood the value, both on a communal level and on a personal level, of having a specific individual available to aid its members in working through personal and familial problems, existential dilemmas, and questions related to understanding the Torah, rabbinic texts, and Jewish thought.

The fact that a community has appointed and hired a professional to attend to its needs, and the implicit understanding that this individual has a commitment and dedication to the membership and the wider community, fosters the bond I have merited to have with my community. At times, members of other communities that did not have a spiritual leader in place have called on me for halakhic guidance for their community, asked for guidance for life-cycle events and for personal questions, and requested my assistance in selling their *hametz* before Pesach. These are the functions of a *mara d'atra*, which often go unnoticed and unappreciated.

My community understood that there is precedence for women's communal leadership. They recognized that there was a pool of professional women who were not being considered, who would be able to serve in the role of leader for their *minyanim*. I do not take this role for granted. Although there have been women in our *mesorah* who have served in positions of leadership, both in communal life and in *yeshivot*, I am fully aware that my appointment as *marta d'atra* of KOE provided me with an opportunity that no Orthodox woman in modern history had previously been given: to be the leader of an Orthodox community for which I am empowered to set the halakhic standards.

My position has involved working with the synagogue board, the membership, and other Orthodox communities, in order to strengthen a connection to *Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu*, to adhere to His Torah, and to reinforce commitment to *halakha*. The position of *marta d'atra*, which KOE created, has given support to other women seeking professional opportunities in the field of synagogue leadership within Orthodoxy. Furthermore, KOE has served as a model for communities to think about possibilities of women serving in communal leadership positions.

No Compromise Due to My Gender

Never, during the years that I have served as the leader of KOE, have I ever felt compromised in my role because of my gender. The feedback and devotion of my *kehillah* have inspired me and brought me to places of greater growth and development. On a personal level, this position has created a venue in which I could actualize my potential and gain a measure of fulfillment that I had not previously had. This professional path was not something I ever envisioned for myself or thought possible to consider as an Orthodox Jew. No Orthodox institutions of advanced study presented this as a possibility, and there were no *kehillot* bold enough to extend such a position of leadership. When I was approached to apply for this position, I had already been teaching Torah and answering halakhic questions in many venues, including scholar-in-residence speaking engagements, and advising *rabbanim* on issues of bioethics and *halakha*. I recognized that this would be an opportunity to serve the community through teaching Torah, guiding the membership in the area of *halakha*, and providing pastoral care. I also understood that it was a unique chance to actualize my potential in the Jewish community.

continued on page 8

Marta d'Atra, *continued from page 7*

Ironically, with all the fanfare and debate about women in communal leadership roles, this issue almost never comes up in my day-to-day involvement with my *kehillah*. As is the case in many small congregations that have only one employed clergy member, I am something of a *kol-bo* (all-around "jack of all trades"). The *kehillah* needs its leader to put her head, heart, and soul into all facets of the congregation to enable it to succeed. The pressure of this job is not about gender; it is about finding extra hours in the day to ensure that every person is taken care of, that questions are answered, that the *minyan* gets organized, that the concerns of the *kehillah* are addressed.

Over the past few years, in conjunction with the KOE board, I have had to shift gears and work hard to raise funds to keep the *kehillah* going and to meet the needs of a changing population demographically. The Upper West Side is a transient community, and this has presented a great challenge: to grow the KOE population while ensuring that every member can participate, regardless of financial status. KOE always has made Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur services free of charge. There was a strong desire to make people feel welcome and comfortable, but the *kehillah* was struggling financially. I had to learn fund-raising (initially, not an easy task for me). Fortunately, a number of individuals who valued the *kehillah* and had the means to support it financially came forward. Over my eight years with KOE, the congregation has always rented space for Shabbat, *Yom Tov,* and for storage, and twice the community needed to relocate due to rising rental costs. These shifts have been a very serious blow to the sense of community and the continuity of an Orthodox *kehillah*.

Functioning within an Orthodox Framework

One of the disappointments for me in my role as *marta d'atra* was that there were people outside my *kehillah* who had a difficult time acknowledging that this position was within Orthodoxy. Even though it was clear to me and many other Orthodox *rabbanim* that my position was within an Orthodox framework (the synagogue functions in accordance with Orthodox halakhic standards and process), there were individuals who tried to delegitimize it and made untrue statements about my position, my congregation, and me personally. Malicious comments on the Internet, often anonymous, have been nearly impossible to correct and refute.

Contrary to the claims of these detractors, when it comes to Jewish spiritual leadership, the precedents have already been set in Jewish history. Beyond the biblical and rabbinic leadership of Miriam, Devorah, and Bruriah, we have had leaders such as Dolce of Worms, Eva Bacharach, Osnat Mizrahi, and Hannah Rachel Webermacher, who provided models of how a community of learned people chose those best suited to serve based on skill, not gender. I saw my own position as enabling me to pursue what has been true in our incredible *mesorah*.

I have tremendous gratitude to *Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu* for all the *berakhot* given to me in my life, including a supportive family; an extraordinary husband, James Licht; and three remarkable children, as well as wonderful congregants with whom I've shared meaningful relationships. I have benefited from the vision and courage of others in the advancement of women's Torah education and leadership: Rabbi Saul Berman, Rivka Haut, Esther Krauss, Reb Mimi Feigelson, Blu Greenberg, Rabbanit Chana Henkin, Rav Yehuda Henkin, Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rabbi David Silber, Dr. Haym Soloveitchik, and Rabbi Avi Weiss. Were it not for their efforts, positions like mine would not be available to Orthodox women. Today, women serve as heads of learning institutions, thanks to institutions like Drisha, Nishmat, Yeshivat Maharat, and others that prepare women for leadership roles in Jewish communities. In addition to the scholarship they have acquired, these women are enabled to care for the needs of our communities at the highest level.

I encourage our communities and institutions to open their communal leadership positions to all those who are proficient in areas of Torah scholarship and *halakha*. In this way, we will widen the pool of talented and passionate individuals who can inspire an increased commitment to Torah and *Am Yisrael*. Moreover, women and men working as colleagues will create mutual respect, which strengthens the quality of the education.

I am encouraged by institutions hiring women as well as men to teach Judaic subjects on the highest level. These professionals are educating girls and boys based on skill rather than on gender. I am also encouraged that Rabbi Shlomo Riskin has begun—through his yeshiva, Midreshet Lindenbaum—to give a *sh'tar* (document) of *morot hora'ah* and *manhigot ruhaniyot* to women, and that Yeshivat Maharat is giving a *sh'tar* with the title *maharat* to women. Drisha Institute continues to enable women to become true *talmidot hakhamot* through their rigorous learning programs. Nishmat and Matan enable women to master specific areas of *halakha*.

Ultimately, empowering women and giving them a legitimate voice facilitates more leadership and learning within our community. More people being engaged in Torah observance and learning needs to be seen as an advancement and achievement for all of *Am Yisrael*. Beyond this, a community benefits from the increased sensitivity and acknowledgement of the various roles that people can play and a heightened sense of respect for one another.

It has been my unique privilege to be a part of Kehilat Orach Eliezer, a religious community that acknowledges that true leadership should be based on competence and character, not gender. I serve my *kehillah* with tremendous gratitude and devotion. It is my hope that the example of KOE can serve as a model for other institutions to create the possibility for qualified women, as well as men, to serve in senior positions of leadership.

Dina Najman *is the* rosh kehillah *of Kehilat Orach Eliezer of New York City and the head of the Gemara department at the SAR Middle School in Riverdale, NY. She lectures widely on bioethics and halakha.*

Models of Empowerment

By Sharon Weiss-Greenberg

Before I became engaged to my husband, I went home to spend Pesach with my family in Boca Raton. My mother always takes out books that she thinks I might enjoy from the library, and for this visit she insisted that I read *The Rabbi's Wife: The Rebbetzin in American Jewish Life* by Shuly Schwartz.[1] Ben, my future fiancé, was in his third year of rabbinical school at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah (YCT), and I found it fascinating to learn more about the role that the wives of rabbis had played as leaders in shaping the Jewish community.

Historically, rabbis' wives and daughters have been among the handful of women, such as Bruriah, who were singled out in the Talmud and other halakhic works as learned scholars. They were considered the notable exceptions. Even though the role of these women was impressive, given the context of the times in which they lived, I was not prepared to forgo my many years of education and experience to accept a position tied to my husband's role as rabbi without receiving recognition or compensation. Even though I have learned a great deal of Torah from my rabbi husband, most of my Torah knowledge has come as a result of my own study in a classroom or *beit midrash*.

The JLIC Experience

During the third year of my doctoral program in Education and Jewish Studies at NYU, my now-husband, Ben, and I made the move to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to serve as the OU JLIC (Heshe and Harriet Seif Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus) couple at Harvard Hillel. The JLIC program is a partnership between the Orthodox Union and Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, which brings rabbinic couples to serve as educators on campus. Initially, I was intimidated to share words of Torah, to counsel, and to educate these great minds. Nervous during all the firsts—the first *drasha*, the first *shiur,* the first *chavruta*—I soon realized how fortunate I was to be serving in this capacity and what an impact my role had on the students and community. It is difficult to put into words the empowerment I experienced delivering a *drasha,* seeing both men and women listening and questioning the lessons I drew from the week's *parsha*. It is difficult to express the vibrancy in the room as I watched the eyes of the audience attending a woman speaking from the pulpit. I felt both challenged and motivated by the difficult questions students asked regarding gender in Orthodoxy and other complicated topics. I was extremely grateful for the ability to make an impact on the community, but, more important, for the impact that the community and my position had on my personal growth and development.

The engagement and empowerment I felt during the first two years of my employment was undercut by a change in policy that came into effect just before I gave birth. During my ninth month of pregnancy, Harvard Hillel instituted a new policy vis-à-vis babies, whereby my future child would not be allowed to enter the Hillel building. I applaud the OU for its strong efforts to assist me in dealing with this situation, but under pressure of the time constraints of our impending birth, we had to settle for a policy whereby my child would not enter the building between 9:00 AM and 5:00 PM. This policy was in direct contradiction to one of the main stated objectives of our job description: to model Jewish family life on campus. Indeed, Harvard Hillel is the only partnering Hillel among the fifteen JLIC campuses throughout North America to institute this policy.

The policy proved detrimental to our ability to perform our jobs. The issue of parental leave policies and flexible work arrangements is one for men and women alike. To make Jewish communal leadership positions truly accessible to women, work environments need to adapt to the reality that many men and women have families to care for. After having left the campus, I was not sure who was most missed: Ben, myself, or adorable Yehuda.

This situation motivated my husband and me to leave Cambridge and look for a new position, despite the strong connection we still felt with the Harvard Hillel community. Nevertheless, I must acknowledge the groundbreaking nature of the JLIC program. It recognizes the need for both men and women to serve as leaders and role models for college students. In this model, the women who have the opportunity to exercise leadership must be married to rabbis. Despite this limitation, I believe it is a vast improvement over the rebbetzin model of the past.

Recruiting for Yeshivat Maharat

I completed my Ph.D. at NYU as I began a new position at Yeshivat Maharat. I believe that Yeshivat Maharat is the model of the future: training women to serve as spiritual, halakhic, and pastoral leaders on their own merits.

In my role as director of recruitment, I look for women who are passionate, committed, personable, and dedicated to learning. Yeshivat Maharat is the only institution in the world that prepares women for the many challenges faced by clergy. Maharat prepares students to be there for constituents when they have a question about *kashrut* in the kitchen, when they are ecstatic yet overwhelmed about an upcoming marriage, when mourning the loss of a loved one, or when struggling in a failing marriage. Maharat equips students for the technical halakhic questions and for the emotional highs and lows that occur during times of *smachot* (happy occasions) and *tzarot* (sad occasions).

Women are recruited for the yeshiva using social media tools, including Facebook and emails. I travel to college

continued on page 10

[1] Schwartz, S. *The Rabbi's Wife: The Rebbetzin in American Jewish Life.* New York and London: New York University Press, 2006.

What's in a Title?

By Sara Tillinger Wolkenfeld

When my student followed me out of the room after class, I assumed she had a question about the *shiur*. Instead, she said, "I saw something interesting on your source sheet. Can I call you 'rabbanit'?"

She was referring to what I had assumed was the least important item on the handouts: In the top left-hand corner, I had recorded my name as "Rabbanit Sara Wolkenfeld." Like so many women with no formal path to professional recognition, even after years of learning, I struggled to make my professional role clear. As the only non-rabbi on the educational team of the Center for Jewish Life–Hillel at Princeton University, I had initially hoped that we might all drop our titles, at least on printed materials, as an egalitarian gesture. But that change was not forthcoming, and so on any class brochure or staff roster with a list of names, mine stood out. In an effort to be reassuring ("Don't worry! I know Torah, too!") I began typing "Rabbanit" in front of my name for all official purposes. After all, my husband is a rabbi, so I figured I could get away with it.

But I said no to my student that day. I felt it was unnecessarily self-promoting, as well as excessively formal. Since then, however, I've changed my mind.

It is unfortunate that neither my six years of post-secondary yeshiva study, nor my years as a teacher in various settings, nor even my two-year synagogue internship, qualified me for any particular title. I was drawn to learning Torah and eventually to teaching. I find Orthodox life inspiring, and I have always wanted to share that inspiration with others. I knew that mine was not a path to a particular degree, but during the years when I was a full-time student, I did not realize what the implications of having no title would be in terms of workplace treatment, nor did I realize how much discomfort it would lead to for my students and colleagues.

Empowerment, *continued from page 9*

campuses and summer camps to spread the word about Yeshivat Maharat and to make individual connections to young adults who are choosing their career paths. I want perspective candidates to know that this is a viable, rewarding, and also challenging career. The best marketing tool for recruitment is the women who attend the yeshiva. They live the mission and the vision of the yeshiva. Their speaking and teaching opportunities are publicized in the e-mails sent by the yeshiva, and Yeshivat Maharat is always mentioned in their bios. The 100 percent placement rate of the first class underscores the need for the school and the recognized value of its graduates in serving *am Yisrael*.

Leadership as a Halakhic Obligation

As part of my recruitment pitch, I have delivered a *shiur* for the college students titled "Ms. President: The Halakhic Obligation for Women to Serve the Jewish Community in the Public Sphere." The *shiur* traces the history of the halakhic development of women and *limmud Torah*. It begins with the earliest Mishnaic source, Rabbi Eliezer, quoted in *Sotah* 20a as saying that teaching one's daughter Torah is as if you taught her "*tiflut*" (immorality or triviality). The *shiur* concludes with modern *poskim* (decisors) who require women to learn Torah. For example, Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan (the *Hafetz Hayyim*) endorsed Sarah Schenirer's Bais Yaakov school[2] and clearly stated that it was a mitzvah to teach Torah to women in our times.[3] In another time and place, Rabbi Mayer Twersky explained that Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik had asserted that even the study of Oral Torah is obligatory in today's world.[4]

The same reasons that *halakha* now requires women to study Torah are why the *halakha* should also require or at least encourage women to serve as communal leaders. Women today are as knowledgeable, talented, and well-trained as men, and currently exercise leadership in their careers and in the general community. Our communities suffer when we do not ensure that half of our population is fully engaged, contributing to and benefiting from all that serving the Jewish people has to offer. The need for women to serve as leaders is no longer a question; it is a reality. Although the modes of leadership may vary depending on the norms and comfort levels of the community, I believe that it is critical for every Jewish community to have women exercising leadership. Whether in a yeshivish community, a Chabad community, or a centrist Orthodox community, although the models may differ, the need for a structure that empowers women to have a key seat at the table and to be active partners in their community is constant.

Sharon Weiss-Greenberg *currently serves as the director of recruitment for Yeshivat Maharat and teaches at Denver Academy of Torah (DAT) High School. She earned her Ph.D. in Education and Jewish Studies at New York University. She previously served as an educator and advisor at Harvard Hillel, as well as the first woman Orthodox chaplain for Harvard University.*

[2] Ross, T. *Expanding the Palace of Torah: Orthodoxy and Feminism*. Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2004.

[3] Kagan, I.M. *Likkutei Halakhos*. Warsaw: Piamant, 1922.

[4] Genack, M.D. *Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik: Man of Halacha, Man of Faith*. Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1998.

Being Part of a JLIC Couple

The Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus (JLIC) offers rabbinic couples the opportunity to serve together as leaders and educators in campus communities. We teach classes, learn one-on-one with students, host Shabbat and holiday meals, and provide rabbinic and pastoral guidance. I was fortunate to also take on the role of director of education at Princeton's Center for Jewish Life, which allowed me to think more broadly about the Center's curriculum for all Jewish students interested in studying with our staff.

By the time I had spent several years at Princeton, I was answering halakhic questions, teaching *shiurim*, delivering *divrei Torah* in various settings, and offering pastoral guidance. I was functioning in a way that felt a lot like clergy to me and to everyone else. My student saw what I couldn't see: Titles aren't just about the people who hold them, but are a reflection of the knowledge amassed and the job being performed. The students who introduced me as their teacher to their friends and family, who invited me to speak at campus events and on panels, who referred their friends to me in times of crisis—all of them wanted some succinct way to acknowledge who I was and how I functioned in their lives. It was their vision of me as a leader that pushed me to take on the title.

Sara Tillinger Wolkenfeld enjoying a light-hearted moment while studying with her husband, Rabbi David Wolkenfeld.

The world of the university is a world of titles; professors, doctors, and yes, rabbis, are all around me. Prestige, and of course salary, rise with every additional degree earned. I was comfortable being "just Sara," but it did not serve my students well, who sought a way to honor the Torah that I had taught them, nor did it always serve me well in a professional context. Although my husband and I had the same job description, I had to fight for a pay rate equal to his. After working alongside him for five years, I am still not qualified for any of the jobs to which he applied during his recent, successful search for a new position. Even educational positions at non-Orthodox institutions were often open only to rabbis and Ph.D.s.

It is strange to become a leader almost by default. Not having a formal course of study or an institution that would train me to be clergy contributed to my ongoing sense of not knowing what I wanted to be "when I grew up;" there was no model, no job title, to which I could point and say: "That is what I want to be." My role models were women who led and taught through the sheer power of their Torah knowledge. I aspired to something more for my students; I want all of them, men and women, to feel that their love of Judaism could set them on a professional path, no less than their academic studies. The student who challenged me that day is in many ways inspirational, poised to acquire more knowledge and a greater command of Jewish law. It was clear to me that to downplay my own role would be to fail to provide her with the role model she deserves.

Naming Women's Leadership

I believe that identifying and naming women's leadership is one of the single most effective changes we can make in the Orthodox community. Our communal inclination to ignore the contributions of women starts at a young age: when we laud men for their davening abilities, compliment and encourage their synagogue attendance, push them to further develop their talents in yeshiva—and yet too often do not do the same for women. Through my teaching at Drisha, I have seen amazing high school girls who deserve to go on to teach Torah themselves in schools, communities, or synagogues. As someone who has spent time in many synagogue women's sections reciting *kaddish* for my parents, I have encountered middle-aged and older women who are a regular presence at *minyan*, whose presence provides reassuring and informed company in the women's section, and who could easily be considered "*gabbai'ot.*" In my years at Princeton, I have seen the women of our community deliver *divrei Torah*, organize *shiurim*, and coordinate *chessed* with an energy and ability that would be the envy of any young pulpit rabbi. It is crucial that we find a place of honor and a way to give recognition to these women in our communities.

When I leave Princeton this summer, my title may not follow me. I will not be stepping into a clerical role in my new home. What I have learned from my student that day is that I know how to step up and be a leader even without a title. What I have learned from my professional experiences, however, is that we will be richer as a community when we can openly name and honor the leadership abilities of all of our members. I look forward to celebrating the many and diverse talents of the men and women in my new community.

Sara Tillinger Wolkenfeld *is the director of education and community engagement at Sefaria.org. She has taught Talmud and Jewish law at the Drisha Institute for Jewish Education and served as JLIC educator and director of education at the Center for Jewish Life–Hillel at Princeton University for five years. She lives in Chicago with her husband and four children.*

Serara and Women: Who May Wear the Crown?

By Barry Freundel

I want to thank the *JOFA Journal* for the invitation to discuss the important issue of *serara* as it pertains to women. A few introductory remarks are in order.

First, *serara,* or holding a position that allows for coercive power, while considered by most of us to be desirable in the course of one's career path, has never been viewed that way in the totality of Jewish sources. In fact, a large number of texts that discuss *serara* either advise against pursuing it at all or speak ill of it once achieved—because of the toll it takes on the individual placed in that position; because of the possibility of corruption, both purposeful and accidental; or because of the damage it inevitably does to one's reputation to be "in charge."[1] Perhaps it all goes back to the biblical and rabbinic ideal that we are all servants to God and not servants to other people, who, after all, are also the Creator's servants.[2] Occupying a position that stands between God and His people makes the person with *serara* into someone whose existence, by its very nature, contains elements of idolatry, as it inserts a new power into the universe other than that of the Creator.[3] I hasten to add that these sources are not a collection of apologetic texts written to explain away the possible halakhic limitations on women, but are about anyone (and frequently specifically about men) occupying or thinking of taking on *serara*.[4]

Certainly *serara* is necessary in some instances for society and religion to function appropriately, but as we discuss the halakhic parameters of *serara,* we should keep in mind that our tradition approaches this concept with something of a jaundiced eye. Before embracing any halakhic approach that allows for *serara*, or any professional or voluntary position that grants some measure of coercive power, one should take at least a moment's pause to reflect on the hesitations that our tradition expresses about the entire enterprise.[5]

Second, it is worth noting that the issue of *serara* and women was joined in earnest with the coming of the contemporary State of Israel. From women's suffrage[6] to the political leadership of Golda Meir[7] to the desire of some women to serve on regional governing councils,[8] the very immediate question of women's substantive involvement in the political process in the Jewish state made this a real-time concern. Unlike most of the experiences of our ancestors in the lands of their dispersion, where Jews (and certainly Jewish women) were often precluded from holding positions of power, with the birth of the State of Israel, a new reality, of necessity, brought a great deal of halakhic discussion in its wake.[9] As so often with hot-button issues, this led to a great deal of creativity in the analysis of our sources. Some of this was well situated within the parameters of earlier discussions of woman's roles in positions of power, while others, though well meaning, went far beyond the bounds of earlier sources—some in presenting restrictive positions[10] and some in presenting more permissive approaches.[11]

Biblical and Rabbinic Texts

Moving now to the substance of our inquiry, I would observe that historically, in the opinion of the vast majority of *poskim*, women may not occupy a position involving *serara* as part of its job description or performance. Despite some attempts to interpret the oldest sources on the subject as not objecting to *serara* by women,[12] the weight of our jurisprudential tradition has been very heavily on the side of seeing a prohibition against women being allowed to exercise *serara*. I do not believe that attempting to undermine the existence of that

[1] Cf. M. *Eduyot* 5:6, J. Yoma 5:2 (42c), *Avot Derabbi Nathan* version B; ch, 32, *Bereishit Rabbah* 79:20; and see particularly R. Moshe b. Shimon Margalit, commentary *Mareh Panim*, J. *Berakhot* 2:3 (4c), who in discussing things that may not be in one's proximity while praying likens the word *serara* (for anyone) to a pig and to excrement. See also Rabbi Joseph ben Solomon Colon, *Responsa Maharik*, 117.

[2] Cf. B. *Kiddushin* 22b, B. *Bava Kamma* 116b, B. *Bava Metziah* 10a.

[3] Cf. Rambam, *Hilkhot Yesodei Hatorah*, 1:6–7, R. Moshe b. R. Jacob of Coucy, Sefer Mitzvot Gadol, Negative Precepts 1, *Sefer Hahinukh* (authorship debated), commandment 417. See also R. Elazar of Worms, *Peirush Seder Hatefillah Larokeah, Az Yashir*, p. 231, who, in commenting on Exodus 15:7, takes the Mekhilta's explanation ad loc. that those who rise against the Jews are actually rising against God and adds the word *serara* to the comment, meaning that those who take on *serara* are, in a sense, rising against the Deity.

[4] Cf. *Horayot* 10a tells of Rabban Gamaliel attempting to persuade R. Eleazar Hisma and R. Johanan b. Gudgada to take positions of leadership by telling them that it will not really be *serara* but *avdut* (servitude).

[5] Cf. M. *Avot* 1:10, *usnah et harabbanut* (hate the position of authority), and cf. Rambam's commentary ad loc. predicting dire outcomes for one who pursues a governing position.

[6] Zohar, Zvi M., "Traditional Flexibility and Modern Strictness: the Halakhic Positions on Women's Suffrage" in Harvey E. Goldberg, ed., *Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewries*, 1996, 119–33; Weissman, Deborah R., "Women's Suffrage: A Halakhic Perspective," in Rachel Elior, ed., *Men and Women; Gender, Judaism and Democracy,* Jerusalem: Van Leer Jerusalem Institute; Urim Publications, 2004, 70–78; Two Public Letters of Rav Abraham Ha-Kohen Kook and the Responsum of Rav BenZion Uziel on Women's Suffrage," in *Edah* 1:2, 2001.

[7] Eldor, Erin, הדרת נשים ראשונה בישראל: גולדה מאיר מול הסיעות הדתיות, כיוונים חדשים 26, 1972, 762–652; and see Responsa *Igrot Moshe, Yoreh Deah* 2:45.

[8] Ellenson, David Harry, "Gender, Halakhah, and Women's Suffrage: Responsa of the First Three Chief Rabbis on the Public Role of Women in the Jewish State," in Walter Jacob and Moshe Zemer, eds., *Gender Issues in Jewish Law,* Berghahn Books, 2001, 58–81.

[9] See Broyde, Michael and Brody, Shlomo, "Orthodox Women Rabbis? Tentative Thoughts that Distinguish Between the Timely and the Timeless," *Hakirah, the Flatbush Journal of Jewish Law and Thought* 11, Spring 2011, 25–58, http://www.hakirah.org/Vol%2011%20Broyde.pdf. See also Rav Ben Zion Meir Hai Uziel, Responsa *Mishpitei Uziel*, *Hoshen Mishpat* 4:6.

[10] Virtually all authorities today would see Rav Kook's anti-women's suffrage stance as unnecessarily restrictive.

[11] Cf. R. Chaim Hershensohn, *Malki ba-Kodesh* II:4, discussed below.

[12] See Hershensohn, loc. cit., discussed in more detail below.

prohibition is a legitimate Orthodox halakhic approach to this question.[13]

That said, the parameters and criteria that define *serara* and, consequently, which professions and/or volunteer opportunities in today's society—e.g., rabbi, synagogue president, head of state, CEO, committee chair, or *mashgihah* (*kashrut* supervisor)—are actually closed to women are very much an issue on which different positions can and do exist. It is here that one may find legitimate opinions allowing for women to occupy a number of these roles.

Ultimately, these decisions will depend on which elements are intrinsic parts of the halakhic conceptualization of *serara*. Once these elements are determined, they can be used as measuring rods to see what does and does not evoke concerns of *serara*. As always, the analysis of this question must be done as objectively as possible, before taking into account the feelings of women and others who might be limited in their *serara* roles and then determining how they might be accommodated within the structure of *halakha*.[14]

Turning to our earliest sources, we read in the Bible in Deuteronomy 17:15, 20 (the underlined words are critical to our analysis):

שׂוֹם תָּשִׂים עָלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְקֹוָק אֱלֹהֶיךָ בּוֹ מִקֶּרֶב אַחֶיךָ תָּשִׂים
עָלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ לֹא תוּכַל לָתֵת עָלֶיךָ אִישׁ נָכְרִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא אָחִיךָ הוּא
לְבִלְתִּי רוּם לְבָבוֹ מֵאֲחָיו וּלְבִלְתִּי סוּר מִן הַמִּצְוָה יָמִין
וּשְׂמֹאול לְמַעַן יַאֲרִיךְ יָמִים עַל מַמְלַכְתּוֹ הוּא וּבָנָיו בְּקֶרֶב יִשְׂרָאֵל

You shall set him king over you, whom the Lord your God shall choose; one from among your brothers shall you set king over you; you may not set a stranger over you, who is not your brother…

That his heart be not lifted up above his brothers, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left; to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel.

The Sifrei, in commenting on these verses, says:[15]

שום תשים ... מלך, ולא מלכה... מיכן אמרו האיש ממנים פרנס על הציבור ואין ממנים האשה פרנסת על הצבור.

You shall set him … king but not queen … from here they said that a man may be appointed to a position of authority over the community while a woman may not be appointed to a position of authority over the community.

The Babylonian Talmud adds:[16]

דאמר מר שום תשים עליך מלך, כל משימות שאתה משים - אל יהו אלא מקרב אחיך! האי כיון דאמו מישראל, מקרב אחיך קרינן ביה

As the Master said: You shall set him king over you, all appointments that you make shall only be from the midst of your brethren. This one, since his mother is from Israel we still refer to him as "from among your brothers."

This text, which appears in two places in the Gemara, suggests a connection between women and converts such that the restrictions on serving in *serara* positions for one is the same as for the other, as the same verse provides the limitations for both.[17] Included in the positions prohibited by these texts for converts and women are tax collectors, town administrators, charity trustees, and similar appointments.[18]

Rambam codifies this and says:[19]

אין מעמידין מלך מקהל גרים ... עד שתהיה אמו מישראל, שנאמר לא תוכל לתת עליך איש נכרי אשר לא אחיך הוא, ולא למלכות בלבד אלא לכל שררות שבישראל, ... ואין צריך לומר דיין או נשיא שלא יהא אלא מישראל, שנאמר מקרב אחיך תשים עליך מלך כל משימות שאתה משים לא יהו אלא מקרב אחיך
אין מעמידין אשה במלכות שנאמר עליך מלך ולא מלכה, וכן כל משימות שבישראל אין ממנים בהם אלא איש

We do not appoint a king from a community of converts … until his mother is a Jewess, as it says: You may not place a foreigner who is not from your brethren over you. And not just kingship alone, but also any authority position in Israel … certainly a judge or a patriarch must come only from Israel, as it says from among your brethren place a king upon you. All "placings" that "you place" shall not be except from among your brethren.

We do not establish a woman in the position of ruler as it says, a "king and not a queen," and so too any "placings" in Israel, we only appoint a man.

It is very difficult, in view of these sources, to deny that there are at least some restrictions on women and converts when it comes to their occupying positions of authority.[20]

Nonetheless, challenges to an absolute prohibition in this regard appear from as early as the *Tanakh* itself. Most of us are familiar with Deborah the Prophet,[21] who is introduced in biblical literature with the words:[22]

continued on page 14

[13] The idea of elevating minority or even singular opinions to the status of *halakha lema'aseh* (the active halakhic position that is to be followed), in other than the most extreme moments of need, is not something that fits with Orthodox halakhic epistemology.

[14] This is the implication of the talmudic passage (B. *Hagigah* 16b) that tells of the rabbis allowing women to lay their hands on an animal about to be sacrificed to calm their spirits, but only in ways that conformed with *halakha*, which meant their not doing it in precisely the same way that the men did it. In other words, *halakha* comes first, followed by accommodating women to the extent possible.

[15] *Sifrei Devarim* 157.

[16] B. *Yevamot* 45b; B. *Kiddushin* 76b. See also B. *Yevamot* 102a.

[17] Cf. Rambam, *Hilkhot Melahim* 1:4–5, Rabbi Moses ben Joseph Trani, *Kiryat Sefer*, ad loc, R. Moses Feinstein, *Igrot Moshe, Yoreh Deah* 4:26.

[18] See B. *Kiddushin*, loc. cit.

[19] Loc. cit.

[20] R. Chaim Hershensohn, loc. cit., focuses on this line from the Sifrei not cited above:

מת! מנה אחר תחתיו. מלך, ולא מלכה

Should he die! Appoint another in his stead. A king but not a queen.

He suggests that this source does not prohibit a woman from

Serara, *continued from page 13*

וּדְבוֹרָה אִשָּׁה נְבִיאָה אֵשֶׁת לַפִּידוֹת הִיא שֹׁפְטָה אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּעֵת הַהִיא
And Deborah, a female Prophet, the wife of Lapidot, she judged Israel at that time.

So, too, in two places in *Tanakh* we read about Athalia, a female ruler:[23]

וַעֲתַלְיָה מֹלֶכֶת עַל הָאָרֶץ
But Athalia rules over the land.

This challenge to an absolute prohibition of women as rulers is compounded in rabbinic literature by the mention, without any indication of a halakhic problem, of Shlomzion the Queen,[24] Hilni the Queen,[25] and Barzila the Queen,[26] all of whom served in positions that the halakhic texts would seem to preclude.

Dealing with the Contradictions

Beginning with the medieval period, important Jewish scholars have attempted to deal with the contradictions posed by these sources and the presence of these women of power. Generally, they have explained the contradiction by saying that *serara* involves something that these women (usually the conversation is about Deborah) did not have, which is why they were accepted in their positions. These discussions open the door to analyzing whether contemporary positions of authority meet these criteria and, therefore, whether women and converts may occupy them.

We begin with the most obvious item, given our working definition of *serara* as coercive power: the definition of *serara* as "coercive power" itself. Assuming that women are precluded only from a position that grants them the ability to compel people to act, then one can easily say that positions such as synagogue presidents or committee chairs may be women—as, often to their chagrin, synagogue presidents and committee chairs do not have the power to compel anyone to do anything. A head of state, on the other hand, would seem to be different. Certainly most heads of state can order at least some people under some circumstances to do their bidding, even in a democratically constituted state with constitutionally limited powers. For example, the president of the United States is called the "commander in chief" for reasons of his or her substantive authority over the military, not just as some ceremonial honorific. At first blush, it might appear, then, that women should be precluded from that type of position.

R. Moshe Feinstein uses this criterion of coercive power in his permissive discussion of a women serving as *mashgihah* or *kashrut* supervisor.[27] Even though a person in that position appears to be able to compel a store owner to remove a questionable item from the store, that power exists only because she serves as the agent for the rabbis who run the kosher supervising agency. Further, she has no discretion in enforcing that power; she cannot, for example, legitimately decide to allow the store owner to make an exception and sell a particular questionable product. This lack of discretion makes the *mashgihah* different from the Talmudic tax collectors or charity administrators, who derived their power from the government or the community, respectively, but had considerable discretion in applying that power. Therefore, even though a woman cannot be a Talmud-era tax collector, she can be a contemporary *mashgihah*.

R. Feinstein's analysis necessarily raises the question of women being ordained as rabbis. For him, the coercive power in the *kashrut* situation lies with the rabbis; although the *mashgihah* could be a woman, the rabbis who stand behind her could not. This is supported by the very words that traditionally are used to grant *semicha* or ordination. The words *Yoreh yoreh be'issur veheter* (he may direct people in the laws of prohibited and permitted) imply that the rabbi's word is law when he decides a question of *halakha*.[28] (Although the very complex discussion of women being ordained as clergy or occupying quasi-clergy positions is beyond the scope of this article, we will point out where the question of *serara* either challenges or supports those steps.) Here, R. Feinstein's approach clearly provides an impediment to women's ordination.

That said, it would seem that R. Feinstein would not, in general, characterize the issue of *serara* as simply a question of who holds the coercive power. I say that in part because of other of his responsa[29] and because the earlier authorities who discuss this question use additional criteria to measure whether the exercise of power can be considered "coercion."[30]

For example, the most frequent explanation for why Deborah could occupy the position she held is that the people of Israel accepted her as their judge,[31] as reflected

---

serving as monarch. It only tells us that should the king die there is a requirement for immediate replacement; whereas if the queen dies, there is no such requirement. Read this way, not only does this source not preclude women from serving as regent – it endorses the idea. Unfortunately for Rav Hershensohn, no one else of halakhic moment reads it this way. This is particularly true because some Sifrei texts end this very same section with the words:

האיש ממנים פרנס על הציבור ואין ממנים האשה פרנסת על הצבור
A man may be appointed leader over the community but a woman may not be appointed leader over the community.

[21] Judges 4–5.
[22] Judges 4:4.
[23] 2 Kings 11:3 and 2 Chronicles 22:12.
[24] Cf. B. *Shabbat* 16b; her name appears with several variant spellings in different sources.
[25] Cf. M. *Nazir* 3:6.
[26] Cf. *Masekhet Geirim* 2:3.
[27] Responsa *Igrot Moshe, Yoreh Deah*, 2:44; and see ibid., 4:26.
[28] Cf. *Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh Deah* 245:22; Rabbi Yechiel Michel HaLevi Epstein, *Arukh Hashulhan*, ad loc., 29 and 242:29; R. Menachem ben Shlomo Meiri, *Beit HaBehirah, Horayot* 14a; R. Yaacov Shimshon Shabtai, *Shabbat shel mi, Shabbat* 81b; R. Dov Berish Weidenfeld, *Dovev Meisharim* 3:38.
[29] See Yoreh Deah 2:45 and 4:26.
[30] R. Feinstein mentions that fact in 2:45; also see the discussion that follows here.
[31] *Hidushei ha-Ramban*, Shavuot 30a. R. Moshe mentions this as well.

in the biblical verse that reads:[32]

וַיַּעֲלוּ אֵלֶיהָ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לַמִּשְׁפָּט

And the Jews went up to her for judgment.

This suggests that because the Jews went to her, they affirmatively accepted her rule.[33] The claim being made here is that only when power and authority is involuntarily imposed, as in the verse:

שׂוֹם תָּשִׂים עָלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ

You shall place upon you a king.

is such a position precluded from being held by a woman. However, if there is willing acceptance by the community, if there is general agreement to recognize the individual as duly occupying the position, and/or if the power of the position is limited by a constitution or by-laws that structure its authority, then the position does not involve *serara*.

Using these criteria, women would not be precluded from any elected position, particularly if its powers were constitutionally limited. As such, heads of democratic states, synagogue presidents, and committee chairs would all be acceptable tasks for women.

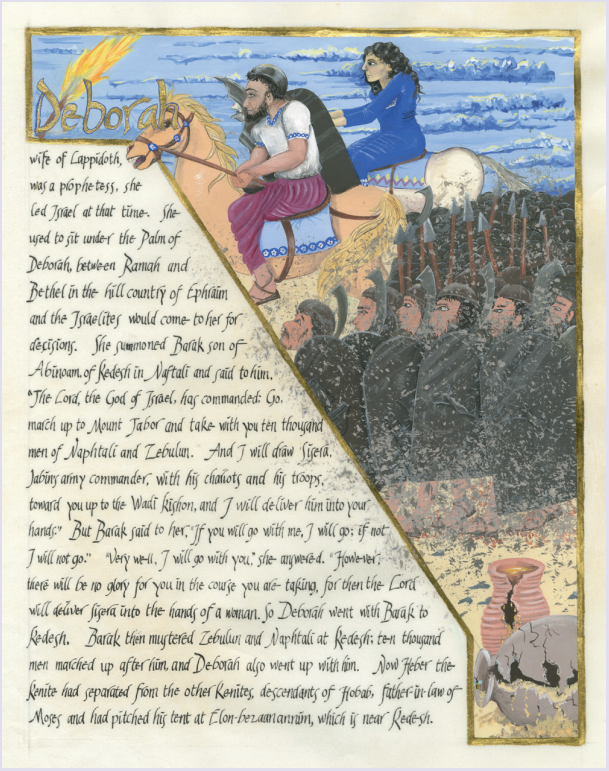
Again, using these criteria, rabbinic ordination would seem to be a bit more problematic. Although it is true that rabbis are "elected" to their positions in synagogues in that they are chosen among candidates, their ordination is not by popular election. In addition, once in the position of *mara d'atra* (halakhic guide of the place), the rabbi's halakhic authority is unlimited and is not dependent on an election or on rules democratically decided by the congregation.[34]

The Adjudicative Function

Tosefot (in four places)[35] and Radbaz[36] offer the most narrowly defined explanation for Deborah's acceptability. They claim that Deborah did not actually judge the people with the coercive power of the judiciary. Instead, she taught Torah, and people agreed to follow her teachings. As such, this approach suggests that it is the adjudicating role that creates the problem of women and *serara*, a problem that Deborah avoided by simply teaching.

In that regard, we should remember that kings were originally appointed to be judges as part of their essential tasks.[37] For example, Solomon's first moment of fame as a king was his adjudicating the case of two women each claiming to be the mother of the same baby.[38] King Solomon's role in the story was clearly that of a judge. As virtually all lay leadership and many religious leadership positions do not involve adjudicating disputes, they do not pose a problem of women exercising *serara*.

But, again, adjudication is the essence of *semikha*.[39] The two classic examples of ordination today, *yoreh yoreh* and *yadin yadin*, both grant adjudicatory powers to the one so ordained.[40] Even in the case of the lesser catchall *semikha*, *rav umanhig*, rabbis with this ordination are expected to arbitrate disputes that occur in their congregations and



Deborah, Illumination 4, from *Arise! Arise! Deborah, Ruth and Hannah*, Debra Band, 2012.

may well be asked to serve on rabbinic courts or help with conversions. All of these activities are halakhically considered the purview of judges, not of teachers.

One might suggest that, at least in the congregational setting, members could agree to accept the Torah taught by a woman and follow whatever she said. But such a utopian arrangement is something that rabbis barely dare to dream about and does not reflect the current realities of the life of a communal spiritual leader.

This discussion raises the question of a convert becoming a pulpit rabbi, because, as noted earlier, the

continued on page 16

[32] Judges 4:5.

[33] See *Hidushei ha-Ritvah*, Shavuot 30a.

[34] See the sources in n. 28; also see Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, Responsa *Yachel Yisrael*, 107.

[35] *Yevamot* 45b, s.v. *Mi lo Tavla le-Niddata; Nidah* 50a, s.v. *Kol Hakasher Ladun*; *Shavuot* 29b s.v. *Shevuat Haedut*; *Gittin* 88b, s.v. *Lo Lifnei Hedyotot*.

[36] Radbaz, *Hilkhot Melahim* 1:5.

[37] Cf. 1 Samuel 8:5–6.

[38] 1 Kings 3:16–28.

[39] Cf. R. Zerachyah Ha-Levi, *Hamaor Hagadol, Sanhedrin* 11b; Rabbenu Tam, *Sefer Hayashar*, Novella, 259; *Sanhedrin* 5b. Ordination not only allows the judge to adjudicate cases, but even if he makes a mistake in judgment, he is exempt from liability. This is a clear indication of coercive power. Even in contemporary times when the classic ordination no longer exists, we adjudicate cases because we act is the messengers of the Sanhedrin (עבדינן שליחתייהו); cf. R. Yom Tov ben Avraham Ashvili, *Hidushei Haritvah*, *Gittin* 88b; R. Jacob ben Joseph Reischer, *Responsa Shevut Yaakov* 1:134.

[40] Cf. the *locus classicus* for the discussion of ordination, B. *Sanhedrin* 5a.

Serara, *continued from page 15*

serara limitations on women are the same as on converts. I am aware, for example, of a convert who recently sought ordination from Yeshiva University and was told that if he were pursuing employment in the pulpit rather than in education, they would not ordain him.[41]

Hereditary Positions

Another halakhic criterion for *serara* can be found among medieval scholars. *Sefer Hahinukh* bases his understanding of *serara* on the phrase in the biblical law of the king that says:[42]

> לְמַעַן יַאֲרִיךְ יָמִים עַל מַמְלַכְתּוֹ הוּא וּבָנָיו בְּקֶרֶב יִשְׂרָאֵל
> *In order that he lengthen his days in his rule, he and his sons in the midst of Israel.*

Sefer Hahinukh argues that *serara* manifests itself in the fact that the position of king is hereditary. Sons follow fathers, and grandsons carry the dynasty on from them. In contrast, lay leadership and even contemporary government positions in democracies do not usually follow that pattern, so there would seem to be a great deal of leeway for women's leadership here.

Nonetheless, before we see this opinion as granting broad license to women to serve in virtually all communal positions, three points must be made. First, *Sefer Hahinukh* says that at one time all appointed positions in Israel were dynastic.[43] It is not clear that, with a change in the practice of passing down leadership positions, the *halakha* necessarily follows suit. In other words, positions that were once hereditary may still be closed to women, even if our current practice is not to pass the position from generation to generation.

Second, the rabbinate still retains some elements of hereditary preference. Many chassidic dynasties carry forward from generation to generation, and several Modern Orthodox synagogues have seen the pulpit passed from father to son.[44]

Third, given that the large majority of medieval *poskim*, many of whom are authorities of greater stature than *Sefer Hahinukh*,[45] reject this view, it is difficult to simply embrace this position and reject all others.

A Modern Responsum from Rav Uziel

Finally, a responsum of Rav Ben Zion Meir Hai Uziel, the Sephardic chief rabbi of Israel from 1939 to 1954, is quite important to our discussion.[46] Rav Uziel discusses the question of women holding office in the newborn State of Israel. He insists that a halakhic prohibition against women holding a position of *serara* is in force and rejects any attempt to find readings that abrogate its existence. His argument is particularly based on the Rambam's clear halakhic statement cited earlier that unequivocally records a prohibition.

He does, however, take the position that an election—which represents a choice and acceptance by the people—mitigates these halakhic concerns. Further, he says that women are precluded only from appointed positions, meaning positions appointed by the Sanhedrin, for example, but elected positions simply do not raise any concern.

Rav Uziel also discusses whether a woman in a leadership position violates proper modesty standards. He rejects that idea completely and points out that women and men routinely gather for discussions of serious matters and modesty standards are appropriately maintained.

In short, Rav Uziel stands where many thoughtful *ba'alei halakha* (halakhic thinkers) in the modern era stand. He recognizes and respects that the push for women to assume positions of authority in contemporary society is very strong. He also recognizes that there are legitimate halakhic opinions that allow women to fill a good number of these positions. At the same time, he acknowledges that there is a halakhic prohibition that may make some positions unattainable by women, at least without modification of the role.

Finally, he challenges those on either extreme. In this regard, he is equally willing to take on those who raise modesty as an issue and those who cite obscure manuscript readings—the former for being too stringent and the latter for being too liberal in their attempt to deal with the question of women and *serara*. I believe that, like Rav Uziel, we must remain squarely in the mainstream of *halakha* as we pursue the question of which positions of authority women may occupy and which are closed to them.

***Rabbi Dr. Barry Freundel** is the rabbi of Kesher Israel, the Georgetown synagogue; associate professor of religion at Towson University; and vice president of the Va'ad of Washington.*

[41] Both the institution and the candidate might have been better off if he had been able to pursue an ordination with limitations. Rabbis Broyde and Brody (see note 9) mention historical precedents for such arrangements.

[42] Deuteronomy 17:20.

[43] Ibid.

[44] The issue of whether a rabbinic post is in fact hereditary is a major debate in halakhic literature; cf. Rabbi Simeon ben Tzemach Duran, Responsa *Tashbetz* 4:1:7, Rabbi Abraham Bornstein, Responsa *Avnei Nezer, Yoreh Deah* 312, R. David ben R. Baruch Kalonymus Sperber, Responsa *Afarkasta De-Anya, Hoshen Mishpat* 4:304 and 305, R. Bezalel Ze`ev Safran, Responsa *Haravaz* 1:109, R. Moshe Sternbuch, *Teshuvot Vehanhagot* 2:719. The implication of that debate's outcome for our discussion is clear and significant.

[45] Most of the sources referenced here cite the Rambam quoted earlier. Only a very few refer to *Sefer Hahinukh.*

[46] Responsa *Mishpitei Uziel, Hoshen Mishpat* 4:6.

Additional Sources on Women and *Serara*

Aryeh Frimer, "Women in Communal Leadership Positions: Shul Presidents," June 2010, at http://text.rcarabbis.org/women-in-communal-leadership-positions-shul-presidents-by-aryeh-frimer/.

Daniel Sperber, "On Women in Rabbinic Leadership Positions," *Meorot 8* (2010) at http://www.yctorah.org/component/option,com_docman/task,doc_view/gid,1393/.

Heter Hora'ah: From Women Pleaders to Women Leaders

From Women Engaging in Halakhic Discussion to Women Making Halakhic Decisions

By Shlomo Riskin

In my lifetime, I have been privileged to witness a veritable sea change in observant women's participation in ritual Jewish life, especially with regard to the synagogue, but also with regard to the *beit midrash* (study hall). We have come a long way from the era when Lincoln Square Synagogue was called "Conservative" by a local Young Israel rabbi because we had allowed *hakafot* for women on Simchat Torah in a space completely closed off from men—and my rebbe, Rav J.B. Soloveitchik, *z"l,* responded by giving a *shiur* in our *shul*, declaring, "Now let anyone dare say that this synagogue is Conservative!" (Simchat Torah, 1972).

The women who had originally requested the *hakafot* had studied in a "*Kollelet*" for women (where they learned Gemara and *rishonim*) opened under the auspices of Lincoln Square Synagogue in the summer of 1969, which, at that time, was the only game in town. Today, of course, women at Yeshiva University's Stern College study Talmud on a very high level, as do women in manifold yeshiva high schools and seminaries throughout the United States and Israel.

Thus it seemed a natural progression to read a moving article by Rachel Kohl Finegold (*Jerusalem Post*, July 7), a recent graduate of Yeshivat Maharat in New York, in which she wrote of her own course of dedicated study of rabbinic texts and issues—and of the increasing demand in the Orthodox Jewish world for qualified women's leadership. She was correct in pointing to a growing continuum of innovative programs that promote women's advanced talmudic and halakhic study, including Nishmat's Keren Ariel Yoatzot Halacha program and Ohr Torah Stone's Monica Dennis Goldberg School for Women Advocates.

Admirably, Rachel spoke moderately and respectfully of corners within Orthodoxy where certain domains of women's leadership remain outside their comfort zone—including the large rabbinic organization, the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA), which called Yeshivat Maharat's ordination of women a "violation of our *mesorah*."

Israeli Reality Prompts a Different Response

Here in Israel, far from the American Jewish scene where the synagogue remains the uncontested center of religious experience (even though this was not true of Jewish life historically and probably has much to do with Christianity being constituted as a church-centered religion), our religious life takes a different path. We are not caught up in the RCA's concerns regarding halakhic "slippery slopes," and don't have to confront the situation that occurs in many middle–American Jewish communities, where the rabbi is often the only Jew capable of reading the Torah scroll and leading the prayer services. Therefore, I believe that the Israeli reality calls for a slightly different—and, perhaps, additional—advancement on the part of women, one that involves the whole of Israeli society and not just the observant, synagogue-going community.

In the first sovereign Jewish political and social entity in close to 2,000 years, we face numerous challenges: religion versus nationality in determining critical personal status issues such as conversion, marriage, and divorce; integrating *olim* (new immigrants) from cultures separated from the mainstream of Judaism for centuries; organizing Shabbat in the public space in such a way that protects citizens' rights not to work on Shabbat while not engendering coercion and resentment on the part of secular Jews and non-Jewish Israelis—to mention just a few. And because Judaism represents both a religious and a national identity for us, as expressed in our literature, our festivals, and our life-cycle celebrations, each of our unique challenges affects women existentially as equal citizens of our Jewish state.

Midreshet Lindenbaum students exchanging ideas.

To give the most salient example, there are no secular marriages or divorces in Israel at the present time. This means that, although a person of paternal Jewish descent—someone who is not halakhically Jewish, but who would have been sent to Auschwitz under Hitler's government—is entitled to immediate Israeli citizenship, he or she may not be married in Israel without undergoing a halakhically acceptable conversion. Furthermore, secular Jews can hardly be expected to understand why women cannot sue for divorce in the same way men are able to. Hence, the need for learned women's halakhic voices in areas of conversion and divorce is even more important to be heard in the religious court, the *beit din*, than in the synagogue or study hall.

Heter Hora'ah, a Time-Honored License

To be sure, women's leadership in any meaningful Jewish institution concerned with Jewish tradition requires profound knowledge of the Jewish traditional library, including the Talmud and the Codes. Hence, for the past seven years, Ohr Torah Stone's Midreshet Lindenbaum has been training women with rich prior backgrounds in Talmud and *halakha* in an intensive five-year program

that leads to "*heter hora'ah,*" the time-honored license to answer questions in areas of *kashrut*, Shabbat and festivals, family ritual purity, and mourning practices.

Two years ago, Rav Yehoshua Reich and I certified our first two graduates, Anat Novoselsky and Idit Bartov, who are now teaching, lecturing, and writing halakhic responses. Idit is active in the new Israeli rabbinic organization Beit Hillel and participates in its *beit midrash* forum. Anat, who additionally holds a B.A. and M.A. in psychology, also functions as a pleader (advocate) in the rabbinical divorce courts.

We refer to our graduates as *morot hora'ah* and *manhigot ruhaniyot* (spiritual leaders), as these titles reflect the areas in which they have been trained. We opt, however, not to use the title "rabbi" for our graduates because, especially in smaller congregations throughout the Diaspora, the rabbi is expected to read from the Torah and lead the congregation in prayer, functions that we believe women may not discharge for congregations consisting of both men and women.

Halakha, if understood profoundly, is the ongoing attempt to take the rich and multivocal talmudic tradition of law and custom and the voluminous, wide-ranging responsa literature, and to confront all these texts with the nuances of an ever-changing social, political, economic, and sometimes even psychological–personal reality. *Halakha* is, at its core, a great, ongoing conversation—a dialogue with the ages for the present age, in all of its complexities.

Women as Active Agents in Rabbinic Courts

The Israel Democracy Institute recently published a magnificent policy paper titled "The Status of Women in the Rabbinical Courts" (Jerusalem, June 2013), written by Eliezer Haddad, which documents the integration of women into the rabbinical court system: first as litigants for their own rights as property owners (when industry took over agriculture in Ashkenaz), then as witnesses (when "women's *shuls*" developed), and most recently as pleaders or advocates. This third advance was initiated by Ohr Torah Stone's creating a program of study in 1991 before women pleaders were allowed to appear in religious court, and came to fruition when formal status was finally granted to women pleaders by a Supreme Court decision in 1993 (*Bagatz* 6300/93).

We believe the time has come for women judges, especially in areas of women's conversion and divorce. To this end, this year we opened at Midreshet Lindenbaum a program in *dayanut* for matters of conversion, which we hope to expand to include marriage and divorce as well. (In the meantime, we can guarantee a degree in Women's Advocacy.) The halakhic infrastructure certainly exists. In addition to being based on biblical, talmudic, and medieval precedents of great women halakhists, judges, and spiritual leaders, the move to train women *poskot* (halakhic decisors) and *dayanot* has been recognized as legitimate and desirable by contemporary authorities as well. Rav Bakshi Doron, a former Sephardic chief rabbi of Israel, wrote in *Binyan Av* (65:5, p. 287), his book of responsa, that women may be "*gedolei ha'dor*, great halakhic leaders of the generation, serving as decisors, teachers of Torah and dispensers of halakhic rulings."

Additionally, the recent, well-received publication of the *Shulhan Arukh Hoshen Mishpat,* published by the Ariel Institute of Rav Sha'ar Yashuv Cohen, former chief rabbi of Haifa, with the imprimatur of former Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Avraham Shapira, affirms that a woman is "qualified to render halakhic judgments (to be a *dayan*), if she is accepted by the litigants or by the leader of the municipal government, as long as she is learned and expert in laws of the Torah (*halakhah pesukah, Hoshen Mishpat,* Laws of Judges, 7,1*)*.

It is truly heartwarming to see the large number of women exercising religious and halakhic leadership in the Israeli communities today:

- There are now more than 120 functioning women advocates in the Israeli divorce courts, and our own lobbyist group of Yad L'Isha has obtained more than fifty divorces in difficult cases since January 1.
- A number of women have positions on local communal rabbinical councils, specifically for the purpose of answering questions relating to family ritual purity, as well as lecturing on philosophic and halakhic issues, especially on the night of Shavuot.
- A significant number of women are serving as *mashgihot* for *kashrut* in many places in Israel, including our own city of Efrat.
- Many of the *matnasim* (JCCs) have full-time cultural facilitators teaching Jewish culture and renewal; among the twenty-five facilitators currently functioning, four are women (the other twenty-one are rabbis).
- Within the new halakhic movement of Beit Hillel, many women are involved in leadership roles and four women are part of the Beit Midrash halakhic discussions.
- In the Diaspora, as well as in Israel, a number of synagogues have women interns, teaching Torah and serving as role models for women religious leaders.

When we began our School for Women Advocates, we had not yet received recognition from the Israeli Chief Rabbinate. The recognition came, however, and our women are being accepted even in the *hareidi* religious courts. I believe the same thing will happen with our women religious judges in the areas of conversion and divorce. These issues affect women too deeply for us to exclude them from the area of decision making, and the biblical precedent of Deborah is too powerful a model to be avoided. Perhaps only the voice of loving-kindness that will emanate from women will finally remove the blot from the escutcheon of our religious establishment, which still has refused to invoke the necessary solutions to free our sisters from the bonds of impossible marriages.

Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin *is the chief rabbi of Efrat and the chancellor and rosh yeshiva of the Ohr Torah Stone Institutions; he is the author of seven books, including a halakhic study,* Women and Jewish Divorce.

JOFA Conference 2013 to Highlight Changing Role of Women in the Community

Join us on Saturday night, December 7, and Sunday, December 8, for the 2013 JOFA Conference: ***Voices of Change***. The conference will take place at a new venue, John Jay College, 524 West 59th Street, New York, NY.

Voices of Change will focus on the changing role of women in our community, the developments that have taken place in the past few years, and how we envision change taking shape in the years to come. The opening plenary will highlight the views of four individuals representing different generations and decades: a JOFA college fellow, a new maharat, the president of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, and a longtime activist and JOFA founder. There will be, as always, a wide diversity in the types of sessions, including a mix of "old favorite" speakers and new voices.

Program Highlights:

- More than 800 Orthodox feminists gathering for change
- More than 40 sessions on Sunday, including experiential workshops, lectures, panels, and films
- Sessions include: Halakhic Innovation, Gender in Jewish Day Schools, Slut-Shaming, Gap Year Programs in Israel, *Leyning* Workshops, LGBTQ and Orthodoxy, Men and Feminism, The Status of Women in Israel, Women and Money, Balancing Work/Life/Ritual Obligations, Fasting for Pregnant Women, Women Reading *Megillat Esther*, Gender and Timebound Mitzvot, and *Agunot*
- Performances from eight musical artists on Saturday night, including a cappella groups, contemporary bands, storytelling, slam poetry, and a kumsitz
- Special track for high school students, with sessions on *tefillah* and feminism's impact on sexuality and relationships
- Brand-new track for educators, with discussions on *tefillah*, gender dynamics in class, and teaching difficult texts
- Networking opportunities at lunch
- Action-oriented programming to help you bring JOFA's message back to your community

Register today at www.jofa.org/2013conference.

For information about sponsorship opportunities, call 212-679-8500 or e-mail conference@jofa.org.

New Video Webinar Series on Social Change in Orthodoxy

JOFA is offering a new series of video webinars to provide networking and resources for Orthodox feminists around the world who are looking to create change in the role of women in their communities. In these webinars, we will hear from people transforming their communities—in advancing women's ritual roles, creating positions for women in leadership, and engaging men in feminism. The webinars will offer real, practical examples of change and provide participants with ideas, skills, and inspiration for advancing change in their own communities.

Rabbi Shmuel Herzfeld

In the first webinar, which took place on October 7, JOFA Executive Director Dr. Elana Sztokman interviewed Rabbi Shmuel Herzfeld of Ohev Shalom, the National Synagogue in Washington, D.C. This *shul is* a remarkable model of social change: Only ten years ago, women were not even allowed to vote as members, and today women lead aspects of the services and serve in half the positions on the board. The *shul* is one of the communities that has hired a member of the first graduating class of Yeshivat Maharat to serve as clergy. This is a phenomenal example of change in action, and will set the tone for the rest of the series.

The next video webinar, on "How (and Why!) to Start a Partnership *Minyan*," will feature Dr. Chaim Trachtman, editor of *Men and Women in Communal Prayer,* along with partnership *minyan* activists from around the world. It is scheduled for Wednesday, December 18, 2013, 8:00 PM EST.

To find out more, go to www.jofa.org/webinars.

First JOFA UK Conference

The first-ever JOFA Conference in the UK took place on June 9 in London and marked the launch of JOFA UK, thanks to the remarkable efforts of JOFA UK ambassador Dina Brawer. Here is how the event was described in the *Jewish Chronicle*, the UK's most widely circulated Jewish paper:

JOFA UK Ambassador Dina Brawer

There was a whiff of revolution in the air in north London on Sunday when a group of women and men gathered to challenge the Orthodox establishment. "Today, we are witnessing a decentralisation of Jewish halachic authority," announced Professor Tamar Ross, of Bar-Ilan University.

She was speaking at the inaugural UK conference of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA), an American organisation aiming to increase women's role in Orthodox religious practice.

Around 120 people had been expected to attend but more than 200 turned up. They heard Professor Ross declare that women wielded considerable influence over religious authorities, perhaps more than they realised.

"The power of the rabbis depends very much on women," she said. "The fact that women are asking questions that have never been asked before forces *poskim* [rulers on Jewish law] to think in new directions."

To read the rest of the article, go to http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/108593/inaugural-uk-conference-jewish-orthodox-feminist-alliance.

For more media coverage, go to http://www.jofa.org/UKpress.

JOFA UK ambassador Dina Brawer can be contacted at dina.brawer@jofa.org.

Launch of the Joan S. Meyers Torah Lending Project

Many Orthodox girls who would like to read from the Torah for their bat mitzvah find themselves inhibited by an important detail: They are unable to obtain a Torah scroll to use. JOFA has launched a new program to resolve this problem. Thanks to the support of Leon Meyers and his family, JOFA is now able to offer a Torah scroll for use by bat mitzvah girls and other celebrants. The Torah was generously provided for this program by Nathan and Shari Lindenbaum, and is being graciously housed by Rabbi Nathaniel Helfgot's synagogue, Netivot Shalom, in Teaneck, New Jersey.

Sara Meyers Sadinoff shared the following touching words at the launch of the project on June 9 at Netivot Shalom:

Belda Lindenbaum lifts the Torah and Carol Newman ties it at the inauguration of the Joan S. Meyers Torah Lending Project

My mother, Joan S. Meyers, *z"l*, was the product of a Jewish day school education. As was par for the course in her generation, there was no communal celebration of her bat mitzvah.

I am the product of a Jewish day school education. For my bat mitzvah, I gave a *d'var Torah* in *shul* after services Shabbat morning. My mother's nine grandchildren are students in Jewish day schools. For my niece Devorah's bat mitzvah four years ago, she *leyned* from the Torah at a women's *tefillah* in her *shul* on Shabbat. My mother, her "Nana," sat in the front of the *shul* beaming at her granddaughter and in awe of her accomplishment.

My mother died on the Shabbat of my daughter's bat mitzvah. The Wednesday preceding, we brought a Torah to my parents' house for my daughter to practice her *leyning* for her *Nana*. After Gabrielle finished reading from the Torah, with tears in her eyes, my mother said the *Shehecheyanu* prayer.

My mom was so moved by her granddaughter's accomplishment that she wanted to ensure that any Jewish girl who wished to read from the Torah to celebrate her becoming a bat mitzvah should have the opportunity to do so.

My family wishes to thank JOFA for developing the Torah Lending Project and Shari and Nathan Lindenbaum for lending a Torah to JOFA to help my mother's wish become a reality.

For more information on the Torah Lending Project, go to www.jofa.org/tlp.

JOFA Holds Historic *Agunah* Summit

Highlighting an issue that has long been at the top of the Jewish feminist agenda, JOFA partnered with the Tikvah Center for Law and Jewish Civilization of New York University to present an Agunah Summit on June 24, 2013, at NYU. The conference drew more than 200 people, including an international group of distinguished rabbis, scholars, and *agunah* activists—among them—Rabbis David Bigman, Aryeh Klapper, and Shlomo Riskin; Israeli Justice Minister Tzipi Livni; former Israeli Supreme Court president Dorit Beinisch; and Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz. As Sharon Shenhav, an international women's rights lawyer, noted in a *JPost* op-ed:

> While there have been many conferences, workshops and meetings organized by women's organizations during the past three decades, this is the first time a conference on the subject of *agunot* was sponsored by a prestigious secular academic institution. The participation of high-level political and judiciary figures was also a first.

A number of suggestions were presented for systemic change, including creating a new *beit din* to deal with *agunot,* using existing mechanisms such as retroactive annulment, suing *get* refusers for compensation, and disbarring lawyers who represent recalcitrant husbands. Unique to this conference was, in the words of JOFA's Blu Greenberg, that "this time around [there] is the strong cohort of rabbis calling for a shift in the way the *agunah* issue has been framed, from a tragic situation to a human rights injustice."

A particularly moving moment came when Tikvah director Joseph Weiler read aloud the names of the *agunah* activists who have been fighting this battle "in the trenches" for decades.

For more on the Agunah Summit, including relevant articles on proposed solutions, go to http://www.jofa.org/Summit_Proceedings.

JOFA at the Kolech Conference

JOFA had a very strong presence at the Kolech Conference on Orthodox Feminism in Israel on September 16. JOFA founding president Blu Greenberg spoke about *agunot,* and JOFA Executive Director Elana Sztokman led a discussion group on women's leadership and Israeli-American collaboration. JOFA sponsored the production of English-language materials and simultaneous translations of sessions. A follow-up meeting between Kolech and the JOFA leadership was hosted by Suzanne Hochstein following the conference.

Elana Sztokman (center) and Hannah Kehat (right) leading a discussion circle at the Kolech conference.

JOFA WHERE YOU **BELONG**

JOFA means so much to you. JOFA is the place where you share ideas with like-minded people. JOFA is where you find the tools for advancing social change in your community. JOFA helps you connect with feminists who are on the same journey that you are on. JOFA is YOU. It's who you are. It's your identity, your voice, and your community.

Become a member of JOFA to ensure that you are part of the community of JOFA members. JOFA membership provides you with:

- Exclusive live access to JOFA video webinars on social change
- Discounts on JOFA events and merchandise
- Entry into online discussions about Orthodox feminism
- Free subscription to JOFA publications

The cost of membership for one year is $100; $90 if you sign up before December 8, 2013.

For more information, go to www.jofa.org/membership.

Neither Headmaster nor Rabbanit: On Being a Female Head of School

By Rivy Poupko Kletenik

Late Winter 2006

Rivy Poupko Kletenik

"Rebbetzin, there has to be another school. You are a woman, a radical feminist, and you teach Gemara to other women." It was hard not to have a raw, visceral reaction to the voice on the other end of the phone, shouting harshly from the command-central of a national Jewish educational organization. Why I attempted to argue with this person could only be attributed to my utter bafflement at his reasoning and my genuine surprise at his support for the creation of an alternative school, which had been generated by the announcement of my recent appointment as head of school of our centrist Orthodox yeshiva.

Call me naïve, but I did not see that coming. Yes, I knew that I would be the first non-rabbi and the first woman in the fifty-nine-year history of the school to be the head. And yes, by-laws had to be adjusted to allow for such an innovation. But was a new school truly necessary in our moderate-sized Jewish community of Seattle?

Halakhic Issues

What were the halakhic issues around a female head of school? Was this an issue of gender or a response to a specific person and her outlook? Both points were raised. A halakhic argument was constructed around issues of *serara*, the prohibition against women taking a position of authority, based on the Sifra's teaching, "*melekh, ve'lo malkah,*" that the king must be a man, not a woman. Thus a woman taking on a position of authority would not be fitting.

Ironically, the *teshuvah* cited as indicating the problematic nature of a female in the role of head of school was a *teshuvah* of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein responding to a *she'eilah* from my own father, Rabbi B. Poupko, about whether a woman could serve as a *mashgihah* for *kashrut*. Its relevance to the issue of head of school was tenuous at best. The response from Rav Moshe was that a *mashgihah* is permitted because it is not considered to be a position of authority in that she reports to the *rav hamahshir*, the rabbinic authority for whom she is working.

In the case of a head of school, no matter the gender, the person is always answerable to the board of directors of the school. Thus the role does not constitute *serara*. When the question arose at our school, a nationally known halakhic authority from outside of the city was consulted, because the local rabbis were not comfortable making the decision. This highly respected, widely recognized, and by no means liberal-leaning figure offered an official halakhic statement of approval. Nevertheless, his response was clearly not enough for those who felt that a woman should not be in the role of head of school or, perhaps, that I should not be the woman in that role.

In the lengthy list of trials and tribulations of Jewish communal service, this one quickly took top tier for heartache. I felt a smidgen of injury for my own bruised ego ("What, they don't like me?"), but much more upset for what this split would mean for the community. I felt concern for those who had supported me, a female candidate, not to make any grand gender statement but simply because they saw me as the best person to do the job. After all, I had been in this early-childhood-to-eighth-grade school for two years, first as director of Judaics and then as Judaic principal, and had co-led the school along with the general studies principal, the early childhood director, and the finance director—parenthetically, all women. They saw me as the best person for the job. Why, then, should there be this kind of contention?

Soul-Searching

Then came the self-flagellation and soul-searching. That long-distance phone call had packed a potent punch. Seemingly, it was on my account that we were engulfed in tumult and a swirl of controversy, causing a concomitant needless deflection from the critical issues at hand. What we really needed to be paying attention to was the much-required work of ensuring an excellent school for our children.

My attraction to Jewish education began back in second grade. I had lived, hoped, and dreamed of growing up to become a *Humash* teacher since then. Everything that had happened since—that early thrill of asking the right question, anticipating Rashi's comment, mastering the reading of a Ramban, figuring out how to detect the subtle nuances of *parshanut*—was all about bringing this very same excitement to future classrooms.

My teaching philosophy was to make sure that every Torah lesson was imbued with challenge, student engagement, and *hiddush* (new ideas), so that our precious Torah would continue to thrive in the lives of every student. I wanted every student to love learning as I did. I wanted each of them to rush home with a desire to share the learning of the day and work on moving it forward. I wanted them to have the insatiable hunger for Torah that I have.

Behind me were years of rigorous learning from incredible teachers in Jerusalem and New York—years of working on what an effective and engaging lesson should look like. There were hours dissecting the appropriate homework sheet, fine-tuning the questioning in class, scrutinizing what is written on the board, and modeling all the critical moves that a teacher makes to draw out students' unique wisdom.

Did that voice on the other end of the phone know that I had been working toward this opportunity to lead

a school where the teachers could make up a community of learners? Did he know how desperately I sought to fashion a school where we could bring a true affection and respect for children into every crevice of the building? Could he not see that I was poised to direct a school that was less about hierarchy and more about empowerment, less about divisive practices and more about authentic deep, rich Jewish experiences?

The challenges facing the head of school are not primarily around gender. They are more about the standard tasks, trials, and tests that this kind of job presents.

Here I was, fresh from ten years in an aggravation-free position working for the entire Jewish community as director of Jewish education services for our Federation's Jewish Education Council, a Covenant Award winner, and a sought-after speaker across the country. I had spent years coaching teachers, working with education directors, planning conferences, and teaching adults. Now, at the urging of others to serve my own community, I had returned to day school life and found myself in this precarious place.

"No good deed goes unpunished" was a phrase that often crossed my mind at the time. But in spite of the drama, the timing here was perfect. I would never have been prepared to enter the challenging role of head of school had it not been for the wealth of experience and training built into those ten years, being part of the Mandel Foundation's Teacher Educator Institute, spending a year at the Hebrew University as a Melton Senior Educator, and being a participant in the Visions of Jewish Education Project. These were years of thinking about what good Jewish education looks like and sharing those ideas with educators worldwide. I was truly poised to make a meaningful contribution to our community.

Was Talmud Teaching the Issue?

Yet here I was on the receiving end of such harsh criticism. Was it because I was not a rabbi or because I was a woman or because I was a Talmud teaching-woman? What was really the issue here?

What of this Talmud teaching? I heard myself formulating a defense, and then a split-second later, a ripple of delicious irony zigzagged through my mind. This *sheitel*-wearing, balcony-sitting rebbetzin was now a radical feminist? Oh, how the perceptions shift!

"Sarah Schenirer was a woman. She established and headed a lot more than one school," I not-so-calmly countered.

"Fine but you are different," I was told. "You teach Gemara to women."

"My grandmother taught Gemara," I argued. "My other grandmother taught Hebrew in Odessa. This is my *yerusha*, my inheritance, my family legacy. This is no newfangled fad. This is a love for Torah."

This Talmud class had been ongoing—summer, winter, spring, fall—and was now set to begin its twentieth year. It had been bringing together women from across the vast spectrum of the Seattle Jewish community every Thursday night, through the entire year. These women seek to connect with the real and the authentic. This learning is *l'shem Shamayim* (for the sake of Heaven).

My Talmud teaching was the result of a modest proposal to a teacher many a year ago: "Give us, the women of this college, a share in the portion of our brothers." My love of Talmud and experience of its study is a work in progress—one Thursday at a time, leading up to an exultant and triumphant *siyyum* on Masechet Berachot after eleven years of study.

Suffice it to say, neither the grandmothers defense nor the evidence of continuous study *lishma* worked. "That was different," he insisted. I got off that phone call quickly; shortly afterward I found the JOFA website and sent in my first membership dues. If this was the charge, then so be it. I was clearly a feminist—and one who taught Talmud. So there!

September 2013

Years have passed, and 20/20 hindsight reveals the inevitability of communal growth. Choice is good. The challenges facing the head of school are not primarily around gender. They are more about the standard tasks, trials, and tests that this kind of job, with its daily demands, presents. The ongoing efforts to work toward serving every student, family, and staff member and to be responsible to supporters and board members—a delicate daily balance—grip my time and mental space.

The conversation around a female head of school is, to my mind, a thing of the past. In spite of this, there are moments when I wonder about the public persona of a female head of school in our Orthodox Jewish world. Although I am still introduced every now and then as headmaster, I am not a man. I do not hold the Torah on Yom Kippur next to my male colleagues on the *bimah*, nor do I receive the honorary *aliyah* on holidays, nor do I step up for a *kibbud* under a former student's *huppah*. But I have proudly chanted a chapter of Megillat Esther at a women's *megillah* reading, as well as leading Kabbalat Shabbat at our women's Friday night *tefillah*. I have spoken at the *tish* of a *kallah*. I have offered many a word of Torah and given many a *shiur*. Blessedly, for our generation of youngsters, this is the new normal. My grandmothers would be proud. And as for me, I am deeply grateful for my portion.

***Rivy Poupko Kletenik**, a 2002 winner of the Covenant Award for Exceptional Jewish Educator, is the head of school of the Seattle Hebrew Academy and was a researcher this past summer at the Centropa Summer Academy in Berlin.*

On the Verge of Real Change: Women in Jewish Communal Leadership

By Shifra Bronznick and Joanna Samuels

What are the decisive indicators of progress? That's an important question for people who care deeply about social change—especially about advancing gender equity and shared leadership.

For a long time, we felt confident that because of the large numbers of accomplished women staffing the communal sector, inevitably the glass ceiling would shatter and women would rise into the leadership structure in numbers comparable to their presence in the field.

Yet even today, the annual salary surveys of the large legacy organizations—tracked by the *Forward*'s editor-in-chief, Jane Eisner—display a gaping gender gap in positions and salaries. Only nine of 76 Jewish organizations in 2011—less than 12 percent—were headed by women.

Signs of Progress: Remap the Landscape

Although substantive progress of women into leadership is hard to see if we look in just one corner or another, when we survey the entire landscape, we can identify positive change for women *and* the Jewish community.

A few big cracks have occurred in the glass ceiling at veteran organizations.

First, a few big cracks have occurred in the glass ceiling at veteran organizations: Women now lead two large-city federations and are heading some of the largest and most successful JCCs, cultural institutions, and social service agencies.

Among Jewish national publications, Jane Eisner is the editor-in-chief of the *Forward;* Susan Berrin edits *Sh'ma* [the publication in which this piece originally appeared]; *Moment* is published, edited, and owned by Nadine Epstein; and *Tablet* is edited by Alana Newhouse. Some of the community's most influential foundations are headed by women, including the Wexner Foundation and the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation. Ruth Messinger, president of the American Jewish World Service, is no longer alone at the top of Jewish social justice groups; superb women leaders now run MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger; AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps; JOI: The Jewish Outreach Institute (now Join for Justice); and Just Congregations. *Slingshot: A Resource Guide to Jewish Innovation*, the guide to the fifty most innovative initiatives in Jewish life, reveals that more than half of the initiatives are headed by women. Spiritual communities led by women are receiving national recognition, from IKAR, to the Kavannah Initiative, to The Kitchen. And Modern Orthodox women such as Rabba Sara Hurwitz belong to a growing cohort of transformative leaders who are changing the face of traditional Judaism.

How did these changes happen? Despite the temptation to believe that the prominence of so many female leaders is the inevitable transfer of power from one generation and gender to another, we must conclude that the transfer of power is the result of advocacy, research, education, rabble-rousing, and courage.

Over the past eleven years, we identified what held women back, and we learned what works to dismantle gender bias and promote equitable workplaces that attract, retain, and advance women professionals.

Changing Work-Life Policies

For the first time, organizations—large and small, veteran and startup—are acknowledging the undeniable influence of work-life policy on career paths. More organizations are adopting flexible work arrangements and paid parental leave, and they are seeing the benefits—from reduced turnover to increased effectiveness on everyone's part. Most important, professional ambition is not viewed as inevitably in conflict with a commitment to caregiving.

Several additional factors play a role in this workplace transformation.

Negotiation is becoming an essential component of the leadership toolkit. Ample research from Linda Babcock at Carnegie Mellon University and Hannah Riley Bowles at Harvard University indicates a gender divide in the use of workplace negotiation. Women have to navigate differently in the process, by explicitly linking their aspirations and requirements to organizational success. Gaining tools and tactics enables women professionals to negotiate successfully for promotions, salary increases, workplace flexibility, and resources on the job. Advancing Women Professionals and the Jewish Community (AWP) has offered trainings and individual coaching for many years, and we see the impact of women utilizing this skill set across our community.

More women are entering the public square as thought leaders. Increasingly, communal events that feature all-male plenaries and panels are seen as out of step. Accomplished female academics, rabbis, activists, organizational leaders, and volunteers are now leveraging their expertise in many venues. And our ongoing partnership with the Op-Ed Project has helped to bring the voices of many more women into prestigious publications, which is changing the perception and experience of women as public intellectuals in our community.

Men and women are allies in this change. To create progress for women, we need the partnership, support, and advocacy of men. To date, seventy prominent male thought leaders in our community have accepted AWP's pledge to refrain from participating in or organizing all-male panels. Explaining to conference organizers that a female colleague must appear alongside them, or in their

place, makes a powerful statement about the importance of colleagueship, equity, and their own values. A significant result of taking and acting on this pledge is that many men have deepened their own commitments and actions around gender equity in their workplaces and local communities.

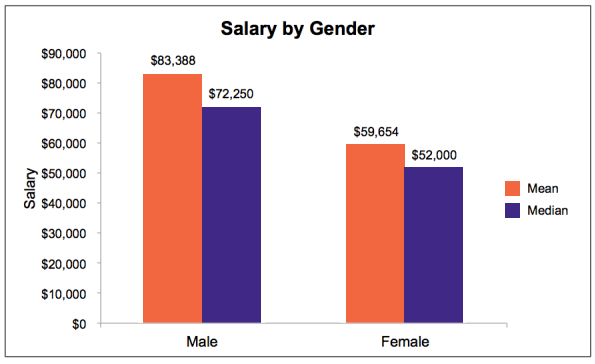
These efforts move our vision of a more equitable Jewish workplace from the theoretical to the practical. As a result, we are building a community where women and men know how to fuel change. We hope that this progress will grow and deepen, and will build a cadre of leaders who are change-ready and capable of redefining their organizations for the twenty-first century.

We also believe that our work on gender equity is catalyzing a conversation that rethinks leadership itself. We envision a community that promotes greater opportunities for shared leadership and new models of collective decision making in organizations. These less hierarchical models, where professionals bring their talents and passions to address collectively the major challenges we face as a community, will certainly result in better solutions and more sustainable leadership experiences.

Shifra Bronznick *is the founding president of Advancing Women Professionals and the Jewish Community (advancingwomen.org), and the co-author, with Didi Goldenhar and Marty Linsky, of* Leveling the Playing Field: Advancing Women in Jewish Organizational Life.
Rabbi Joanna Samuels *works at the Educational Alliance as the executive director of the Manny Cantor Center in New York. Prior to this position, she served as the director of strategic initiatives at Advancing Women Professionals and the Jewish Community.*

Reprinted with permission from *Sh'ma* (www.shma.com) November 2012, as part of a larger conversation on the Jewish workplace.

Gender Pay Gap among Jewish Communal Professionals



Adapted from data in "Toward Transparency," by Mordecai Walfish, Avi Herring, Justin Rosen Smolen, Tamar Snyder, Ruthie Warshenbrot, and Naomi Korb Weiss, *Journal of Jewish Communal Service,* Winter/Spring 2013.

How AWP Works for Systemic Change

Rather than focus solely on individual advancement, AWP is a catalyst, accelerating systemic change. We translate research and initiatives on gender equity and women's advancement from other arenas—the corporate sector, academia, and the professions—and customize them to the Jewish communal context. We also innovate to create signature programs—Action Learning Teams; the Better Work, Better Life Campaign; and Men as Allies—that equip individuals and organizations to align Jewish values with communal behaviors.

At the heart of AWP's strategy is our action-research approach. We embrace an experimental spirit to help individual women and men move toward gender equity and shared leadership within their own institutions, from wherever they sit in the organizational hierarchy.

Our Better Work, Better Life Campaign has enlisted 78 organizations, including JOFA, in improving their policies on paid parental leave and formal flexible work arrangements, with a goal of reaching 100 agencies in our sector. Ultimately, we hope that the Jewish community will influence change in our country as a whole.

Action Learning Teams help women professionals advance in their careers, diagnose their organizations, develop strategies for change, monitor the outcomes, and establish professional networks that lead to strategic alliances, personal support, and mentoring.

Since 2010, our six Action Learning Teams—Wexner Graduate Fellowship alumnae, assistant rabbis, middle managers at Jewish social justice organizations, CEOs, senior level executives, and Orthodox spiritual leaders (co-founded with Michelle Sarna)—have delivered impressive results, including promotions, salary increases, improved parental leave, and workplace flexibility. Participants also have published op-eds and joined key decision-making tables. Their successes are not only local, but global. Rather than focus on negotiating one better salary, or securing paid leave for one executive, AWP coaches team members and alumni to change policies for all staff, leading to greater transparency in the work place.

AWP's Action Learning Teams, combined with our Men as Allies Initiative and our Better Work, Better Life campaign, have widened the circle of activists and created a culture of mutual accountability while strengthening our potential for long-term change.

In October, AWP convened our network of allies and ambassadors to explore the next stage of impact and influence. Stay tuned.

—Shifra Bronznick

What I Learned From Interfaith Dialogue

By Rori Picker Neiss

"My question is for the rabbi," the woman said into the microphone.

"She's not a rabbi," the moderator emphatically interrupted. As I listened to her words echoing through the loudspeakers to reach the 300 Muslim women in the convention center in Malaysia, I smiled awkwardly from the stage, thinking that this would not be the last time I would be the subject of such an exchange. As an Orthodox Jewish woman studying to be a religious leader in the Jewish community, I would forever be the "not-a-rabbi."

"I am from Palestine," the questioner continued, and my awkward smile turned tense as I braced myself for the impending question. "And I want to know how you, as a woman of faith, respond to the injustices that are taking place in my homeland."

As I looked out into the sea of faces, I saw hundreds of women—ranging in age from eighteen to eighty, from more than fifty countries—staring back at me with bated breath, awaiting an answer that they all knew could turn explosive. I began to wonder how I had reached this point. Three flights and two days of travel only made the reality more unbelievable. How had I become the only Jewish woman—and an Orthodox Jewish woman at that—sitting in a room with 300 Muslim women, on a stage next to a Christian pastor and a Hindu academic?

The answer, I realized, was the very question that had just been posed to me. I had been asking myself that question for as long as I could remember, but had never quite put it to words. How do I, as a woman of faith, respond to injustice?

Bringing Together Religious Leaders

This was the question I asked myself as I brought together religious leaders from across the globe to the United Nations to discuss the dangers of climate change. This was the question I asked myself as I worked to create a toolkit to help religious communities combat violence against women. This question followed me to Japan, where I met other young people of faith to discuss conflict resolution; to Hungary, where I discussed the role of religion and civil society; to Costa Rica, to launch an interfaith campaign for nuclear disarmament; to Mexico, to learn a Jewish language for global poverty. This question sat with me on all three flights to Malaysia, and it continues to sit with me today.

The answer I gave that day was unsatisfactory. Four years later, I do not know that my answer today would be any more meaningful or impactful. What I do know, though, is that after that panel, when that very same woman approached me to challenge me on my response, I found myself surrounded by a circle of women. They stood behind me and beside me. They touched my shoulders. They linked their arms in mine. Most had not met me before that day, and none had met me before that week, yet they were determined to ensure that I did not feel intimidated for even a minute. They, too, were women of faith. They, too, felt compelled to stand against injustice—or, in this case, even against potential discomfort.

The moment when I felt the touch of so many women—physically, emotionally, and spiritually—is what inspires me and continues to give me strength to do this work each day.

Beginning to Study at Yeshivat Maharat

That, coincidentally, was also the summer I had chosen to begin my studies at Yeshivat Maharat, the newly launched institution training Orthodox women for the clergy as spiritual leaders and halakhic authorities.

My decision to join Yeshivat Maharat was initially quite practical. As a woman working in interfaith relations, most of my colleagues and all of my supervisors were ordained clergy in their respective traditions. I recall vividly one particular job interview at which my not-yet boss said to me, bluntly, "You know that everyone who has ever held your position has been a rabbi, right?"

Rori Picker Neiss (second from right) at a conference of Muslim women in Malaysia.

The implication was not subtle: The job for which I was interviewing was as high as I would go.

However, the benefits of my decision to study at Yeshivat Maharat were far deeper. As a woman of faith, compelled by that faith toward action, it was imperative that I be able to speak from that faith. The more I immersed myself in my studies, the more I was able to bring of myself and my community to the dialogue. Still more profound, however, was what I was able to bring from my dialogue to my studies. As my classmates and I delved into the complex laws of *niddah*—the laws around uterine bleeding, most often referred to as menstrual

purity laws—and unpacked articles that read the *Talmud Bavli* (Babylonian Talmud) in the broader context of the Persian society in which it emerged, I was able to call Zoroastrian colleagues and ask them about their community's current rituals and practices surrounding menstruation and then share that knowledge with my colleagues. When Rabbi Jeffrey Fox, the *rosh yeshiva* of Yeshivat Maharat, asked about the similarities and differences between our laws and Muslim menstrual rituals, I coordinated with a speaker who was able to teach us directly from the sources. My colleagues and I discussed concerns and challenges to female religious leadership with a Catholic nun and a female Methodist minister. We learned about the richness of culture and history of the Hindu, Jain, and Sikh faiths.

How do I, as a woman of faith, respond to injustice?

Paradoxically, and yet not surprisingly, often the best place for dialogue across denominations in Judaism is in an interfaith setting. For example, when faced with questions from a Christian friend about the "Jewish attitude" toward the afterlife, my co-religionists and I are forced to turn to each other to forge an answer that is true to ourselves and, at the same time, coherent to our partners in dialogue. It is in those moments that we confront our differences head-on and gain new understanding of ourselves, of one another, and of our complex tradition, and can appreciate the richness of the diversity within our own faith.

Interaction with an "Other"

Despite fears and misconceptions, interaction with an "other" does not necessitate giving up any part of oneself. An encounter between individuals, by definition, requires each of them to come as their full selves. To leave any part of themselves at the door would be disingenuous to themselves and disingenuous to the dialogue. Encounter does not have to end in agreement. Moreover, it should not.

There is an inherent value in interactions between individuals of diverse belief systems and worldviews—a value not based on conversion to the other's way of thinking. Those who believe that the world holds multiple truths believe that one needs to interact with others to access all facets of truths to gain a deeper understanding of the ultimate Truth. Those who do not espouse a philosophy of multiple truths still see value in interactions to create political alliances. Examples of such alliances include Jewish communities partnering with Evangelical Christians to build greater support for Israel, or Jewish organizations writing amicus briefs in support of the right of religious groups to perform animal sacrifice (because to allow animal sacrifice to be criminalized for one group, even if one believes that act to be based on an incorrect belief, would infringe on religious freedom for everyone).

However, there is a deeper inherent value to interactions between individuals of different faiths or different manifestations within the same faith community, one not based on a belief in pluralism or a legal or political agenda. Simply put, there is an inherent value to dialogue because there is an inherent value to dialogue itself. Period. Dialogue need not lead to alliances, new understandings, or even friendships. More often than not, it does. But any tangible results of dialogue are an added benefit to the dialogue. The value—and, indeed, the importance—of dialogue is simply in the engagement with another person as a fellow human being. As people of faith, we can do no less than to engage fully with God's fellow creations. As citizens of the world, we can do no less then to interact with our compatriots.

Bringing the Lessons into Our Communities

To be sure, I believe strongly in the power of interfaith dialogue among faith leaders. I believe in the efficacy of representatives of religious communities sharing their traditions. I believe in the significance of change that takes place at the doctrinal level. If not, my studies at Yeshivat Maharat and my job as a clergy-member of Bais Abraham Congregation in St. Louis, Missouri, would be for naught.

Yet if we are not able to bring the lessons we have learned into our communities, and to bring our communities into our dialogue, then all of it is for naught.

Paradoxically, often the best place for dialogue across denominations in Judaism is in an interfaith setting.

It is not my leadership in the Jewish community that propelled me to engage in interfaith relations, but rather, my work in interfaith relations that forged me into a leader. Let us not leave interfaith dialogue in the sole hands of the leadership. Let us not leave it to high-level statements and unknown resolutions.

In Malaysia I stood amid dozens of women who recognized the importance of one woman asking a question, but also the overarching importance of a stranger feeling welcome. It was then that I recognized that the true power of interfaith dialogue is not in the impressive titles of participants or in the statements promulgated, but in the ability to link arms with the women standing at one's side.

Rori Picker Neiss *is a third-year student at Yeshivat Maharat and was recently hired as the director of programming, education, and community engagement at Bais Abraham Congregation in St. Louis.*

My *Yoetzet Halacha:* A Religious Resource for the Community

By Debby Graneviz

"If I had known, I would have had more children."
"Why didn't you know?"
"Because I never asked."
"Why not?"
"Because there was never anyone to have a conversation about it with."

This conversation took place between an Orthodox woman and a *yoetzet halacha,* a halakhic advisor trained in the laws of family purity. Sadly, the woman was already beyond childbearing years when Nishmat, the Jeanie Schottenstein Center for Advanced Torah Study for Women, launched its *yoetzet halacha* initiative in 2000, with the graduation and certification of its first class of *yoatzot*.

In conversation with a *yoetzet* about a routine *niddah* question, she realized that had she been informed of this matter earlier, she might have been able have more pregnancies. There were many months when she had been more stringent than halakhically required in her observance of the laws of *niddah* (ritual purity) and had waited too long before going to the *mikvah*. Consequently, she often passed her ovulation period and missed opportunities for becoming pregnant. Most surprising was that she realized that she had never had a halakhic conversation about *niddah* with anyone.

Hearing this story as a Modern Orthodox woman of childbearing age, I found this woman's dilemma shocking and disturbing. Fortunately, growing up in an era when women's *yeshivot* and learning programs have been readily available to me, I have had many opportunities to study Torah sources, particularly on issues that have a practical impact on my halakhic life.

A Community Resource

For me, it is a given that there should be a community resource to address my need for the highest levels of halakhic knowledge, offered in a comfortable, user-friendly environment. In short, a *yoetzet halacha* is not only a vital component of my halakhic knowledge and observance, but it is also something I have come to expect as a feature of contemporary Orthodox life.

Speaking to a woman only a few years older than I am, I realized that her experiences were very different. She had had occasion to speak to rabbis about her fertility challenges and had found those conversations frustrating, leaving her in tears and angry. For her, being able to speak with a woman about the extremely sensitive issues of *niddah* and fertility was absolutely life-changing. She was able to open up, express herself clearly and with greater nuance and detail, to somebody who was able to relate personally to what she was feeling and experiencing. The *yoetzet,* based on both personal experience and her training in relevant medical factors, was able to ask follow-up questions that a rabbi might not explore. The answers that the *rav* and the *yoetzet* would give the woman might or might not be the same, but the experience of speaking with the *yoetzet* would never leave her in tears and feeling misunderstood.

Giving women the opportunity to speak with experts who empathize with the travails of family planning, know the feelings of excitement and disappointment, and have experienced the physiological and hormonal cycles accompanying the monthly cycle can completely change their relationship with the *halakhot*. The ability to have a conversation with a woman who was understanding, compassionate, and knowledgeable has completely changed the experience of observing *niddah* for many women. It has made them feel like an important part of the process. Going to a *yoetzet* turned a difficult experience into a wonderful one for the woman mentioned at the beginning of this article, who was eager to tell her sisters and her friends about her experience and convince them also to use the resources of the *yoetzet halacha*.

Importance of the Program

This is the importance of the program to a community: empowering women to seek halakhic guidance along with enabling couples to expand their families through appropriate application of the halakhic requirements. Thus, having a *yoetzet halacha* available to a community not only helps individuals, but also acts to strengthen the community as a whole. Each woman can decide for herself whom she feels more comfortable speaking to—a rabbi or a *yoetzet*. That is a personal decision, but the community must support and demand that the resources be there for those who need them. For many women, turning to another woman to answer questions related to *taharat hamishpaha* entails a different level of understanding, empathy, and connection.

A community that recognizes the importance of enabling a large segment of its population to have its religious needs and concerns understood and addressed is a community strengthened in its commitment to Torah and *halakha*. After all, it wasn't the woman's failure to identify reliable halakhic guidance that caused her to be overly *machmir* (stringent) and to miss her ovulation dates, but it was the community's responsibility to provide her with a venue where she felt comfortable enough to speak to someone who was fully educated in matters of *niddah* and who could understand what she was going through and talk with her about it.

Orthodox Judaism has always recognized that men and women are not the same. Educated women answering women's intimate questions will serve to strengthen our Jewish community and its joy and commitment to observing *halakha*.

Debby Graneviz *lives in Teaneck, New Jersey, with her husband and two children and works at Congregation Bnai Yeshurun. She makes use of resources provided by the local* yoetzet halacha.

On Leading a Partnership Minyan

By Allie Alperovich

A few months into my tenure as co-chair of Darkhei Noam, a lay-led partnership *minyan* that meets on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, I asked my husband whether I was projecting loudly enough when I made announcements so that those sitting farther in the back could hear me. He responded that he had never actually heard me make announcements because as soon as I made it to the front of the *shul,* our two-year-old would start crying for Mommy and he would need to leave. Thankfully, as I progressed through the two-year term, both of my daughters became happy to stand next to me (or hide behind me) while I spoke.

From its founding, Darkhei Noam's bylaws provided that the co-chairs of the *minyan* would be a man and woman, ensuring gender balance among its leadership. Therefore, unlike the situation in most Orthodox synagogues, my serving in a leadership role was expected, rather than an innovation. However, as our *shul* developed over ten years from a monthly *minyan* with few children to a *shul* full of families that met every week, having co-chairs who were also parents of young children shifted from the exception to the norm. I had been in charge of youth programming and quite involved in the *chesed* committee prior to taking on the role of co-chair. While my youth-programming role often meant I was running up and down the stairs to check on the youth activities (and finding youth coverage on Friday morning due to last-minute cancellations), I had never before taken on such a public role in *shul*.

In a completely volunteer/lay-led *shul,* the role of co-chair is a fairly intense and hands-on responsibility, and it was a challenge to balance those responsibilities with my busy professional life as an attorney and with the needs of my two young daughters. My role as co-chair involved much work during the week, but this work could be done on my own schedule (typically when the girls were asleep). While the occasional weekday emergency—such as a *shiva minyan* that needed to be organized at the last minute—would mean I'd need to scramble a bit, in general, as a group of volunteers and lay leaders, we were all respectful of one another's time.

Challenges of Shabbat *Tefillah*

However, Shabbat *tefillah* did pose a challenge, as the established role of the co-chairs was to be the first to arrive to help set up and ensure that the *minyan* started smoothly and to be the last to leave, ensuring that the *shul*'s items were put away. There were certainly weeks when I wished that I could leave for *shul* on time and have my husband and children follow, but typically our kids were insistent that they come with me, and my husband (understandably) was not interested in coming to *shul* in the middle of *leyning* for two years. His on-time arrival was also helpful, in that it ensured that we had a *minyan* on time, and there were a handful of weeks when I'd send him ahead of me and our girls if I thought that getting a *minyan* that week would be tricky.

Needless to say, we continued to host many Shabbat meals during my time as co-chair, which was wonderful, but also made getting to *shul* on time harder. I will admit that were our roles reversed (i.e., if he were serving as co-chair while we had two young daughters), it's quite likely that the girls would have happily gone to *shul* later with me and, similarly, mostly stayed with me once we arrived at *shul*.

During my tenure as co-chair, I was also blessed with co-chairs who were incredibly understanding and willing to pick up the slack if my kids needed attention or made my getting to *shul* on time difficult. Part of their flexibility—and the willingness of the entire board to pitch in as needed—certainly arose from our culture, which was more and more family-friendly, but was also a result of the entire leadership structure being lay-led.

Typically, the co-chairs of the *shul* would also greet congregants as they entered and be available for the inevitable issues that needed attention in "real-time" during davening. Although Darkhei Noam has always had childcare and youth programming for all of *tefillah,* there were never any guarantees that our girls would be willing to attend groups, nor any assurance that they would sit quietly in *shul*. None of this is surprising to any parent, but it did make Shabbat mornings more stressful. As a parent, I could have certainly had my husband deal with all child-related issues during *shul* while I was "on duty," but as a busy professional, I felt that *shul* was an important time for me to spend with my kids, and I didn't want them to feel they couldn't come to me or that they couldn't *daven* together with me.

After My Term Was Over

Once I completed my term as co-chair, I expected that the girls would happily ask to come to *shul* on the later end and enjoy relaxing with me at home. But instead they continue to insist that we come on time (and continue to resist going to groups). Having grown up spending many hours each Shabbat morning in *shul*, my older daughter enjoys putting away *siddurim* and *humashim* with her friends, as well as leading *Adon Olam*. My younger daughter spends her time at home practicing taking out the Torah, as she clearly aspires to do the same.

Shabbat mornings are certainly more relaxing now that I don't have formal responsibilities at Darkhei Noam, but I am grateful for the opportunity to have served our *shul* during a time of growth. I hope I have inspired my daughters to be willing and eager to take on public leadership roles as they grow up, while also communicating to them that these leadership roles sometimes need to be adapted to their personal circumstances.

***Allie Alperovich** is counsel at Ropes and Gray LLP in New York, and is a member of the board of JOFA.*

Making History, Without Making Waves: On Becoming a *Shul* President

By Phyllis Shapiro


Phyllis Shapiro

My story of becoming the first woman president of an Orthodox *shul* in St. Louis, Missouri—and perhaps only the second in the Midwest—is not a story of resistance. It is not a story of fighting the old guard. Rather, it is a story of welcome and delight, of the convergence of events that I thought then were simply fortuitous, but now see as quite deliberate and crucial in laying the foundation.

Bais Abraham, founded in 1894, was by 2011 a place open to women's participation in many aspects of synagogue life. From as early as the 1980s, we had an active monthly women's *tefillah* group. Women's *hakafot* with a Torah on Simchat Torah were taken for granted, girls delivering bat mitzvah *divrei Torah* from the *bima* had become commonplace, and women took leadership roles in the running of the *shul* (for programming, building, etc.) without restriction.

In August 2011, when our then-president's end of term was in sight and a new candidate was needed, it happened quite naturally that I was asked to assume the job. I had been active in the *shul* for years. After my initial serious reluctance to take on the responsibility, I finally accepted, mostly out of a desire to support our rabbi in his leadership.

An Unusual Happening in Orthodoxy

We barely realized that we were making history—that I would be the first woman president of an Orthodox *shul* in St. Louis. To me, it seemed surprising that this was newsworthy: Was the idea of a woman in a role of authority still that novel? The local Jewish newspaper, ever poised for a story, covered my installation. But it was not until I received a congratulatory email from JOFA (then-JOFA Executive Director Robin Bodner was an old acquaintance) that I understood that this was an unusual happening on the national level. Only when a highly secularly educated and modern young woman in our *shul* came up to me after the first time I "did announcements" from the *bima* on Shabbat, with a big hug and tears in her eyes, telling me what an important role model I was for her, did I understand that this was an unusual occurrence in Orthodoxy anywhere. (This woman has since assumed an important leadership role in the Orthodox community.)

I see now that my seemingly simple nomination as president was preceded by many small steps over many years. Each step—such as bringing the women's *tefillah* group into the *shul* from private homes—was, indeed, met by some resistance, but because each step was small, things moved along relatively quietly. I attribute our success in large part to the two rabbis who led "Bais Abe" over the past forty years. Rabbi Abraham Magence, who occupied the pulpit from about 1973 to 2003, was educated in the yeshivas of Europe before the war and never lost his Old World manner, but he had a remarkably open mind when it came to issues of women and Orthodoxy (and other issues as well, such as conversion). He supported the women's *tefillah* group when it was a new concept and went with us to speak to the chief rabbi of the city when we were challenged. His successor, our current rabbi, Rabbi Hyim Shafner, is a great supporter of women's participation in Jewish learning and ritual life. So the culture at Bais Abe allowed my nomination as president to be supported unanimously.

Do we owe this phenomenon to being a small "out-of-town" Orthodox *shul* where every Jew matters? Perhaps. During my two-year term, I was a very hands-on president. I viewed my role as enabling Rabbi Shafner as much as possible to see to the religious and spiritual growth of our diverse *shul* community. I was, after all, the president of a *shul*, not a commercial company.

It was a happy two years. I did enjoy being a minor local celebrity. And in January 2013, I was happy to officiate at the installation of our new president, a very capable man.

***Phyllis Shapiro** is an attorney living in St. Louis and is a member of the JOFA Board of Directors.*

Manhigot: Models of Women's Torah Leadership in Israel

By Karen Miller Jackson

"*From Zion will go forth Torah*" (Isaiah 2:3).

Today, a new kind of Torah—women's Torah—is coming out of Israel from an impressive array of high-level *batei midrash* (study halls) for women. Over the course of Jewish history, only a handful of women have been cited as interpreting Jewish law. The daughters of Zelophehad, who requested an inheritance in the land of Israel because their father had died and left behind no sons, were called by the Talmud (BT *Bava Batra* 119a–b) "*darshaniyot*," or biblical interpreters, because they derived a law from the Bible that even Moses had been unable to find. Today, unlike the daughters of Zelophehad, women educated in Torah and *halakha* are no longer historical exceptions to the rule. But what roles await them beyond the *beit midrash*?

Several new programs in Israel are training female leaders for the *dati leumi* (national religious) community and are raising women's halakhic education to ever greater heights. Beit Morasha of Jerusalem and Midreshet Lindenbaum have programs that have graduated a small coterie of female Torah leaders, and Matan has announced a new course. What is different about these programs from what has been offered before? And in what venues will these female leaders be active?

Evolution in Women's Learning over the Past Decade

The opportunities for women to learn Torah have expanded greatly over the past decade. I participated in this development of women's learning when, more than a decade ago, I studied Torah, Gemara, and *halakha* full-time for three years at three different institutions. On one hand, I was incredibly grateful to live at a time when young women had the opportunity to study texts that had not been taught to my mother's generation. On the other hand, I didn't realize how limited my choices would be when I left the *beit midrash*. After completing our studies, my contemporaries and I went on to teach, studied for degrees that would command greater recognition, or built careers in other fields.

I worked for a year as a congregational intern, as the job title was called back then, in a synagogue—a position I now see as a step on the path toward the leadership opportunities now becoming available to women in North America. After that, I made *aliyah,* with a growing family. Eight years later I am still thrilled to be in Israel, but frustrated by the limited leadership opportunities available to learned women. However, that may be changing.

The first institution to create a comprehensive, structured program in Talmud and Jewish law was the Drisha Institute for Jewish Education in New York. The Drisha Scholars Circle, with a three-year *halakha* curriculum paralleling that of rabbinical school, was launched in 1992. In Israel, a year earlier, Midreshet Lindenbaum had created a program to train women to become rabbinic court advocates (*toanot)* to help women seeking a divorce in Israel.

The next major breakthrough for women and halakhic leadership came in 1997 from Nishmat, the Jeanie Schottenstein Center for Advanced Torah Study for Women in Jerusalem with the creation of its *yoetzet halacha* program. This two-year course of study trains women specifically in family purity law. At the end of the course, candidates take an oral exam given by rabbinic examiners and, if successful, are certified as *yoatzot halacha*. Significantly, Nishmat has taken an active role in placing these women in jobs in Israel and North America.

The next stage in the evolution of women's learning was a surge in the number of women teachers. When I was learning in Midreshet Lindenbaum and Matan in the late 1990s, the Gemara *ramim* (heads of rabbinical studies) were mostly men, even if the heads of some of the programs were learned women, such as Nishmat's Rabbanit Chana Henkin and Matan's Rabbanit Malka Bina. Today in a growing list of higher learning institutions, including Midreshet Lindenbaum, Matan, Nishmat, Beit Morasha, Midreshet Ein Hanatziv, and Migdal Oz, women teach Gemara and *halakha*. The women have acquired the title *ramiyot*, the feminine equivalent of *ramim,* the title used for men teaching Talmud in yeshivas.

Emphasis on Leadership

Today the *midrashot* are focusing more and more on women's leadership. Last year, Beit Morasha gained notice for honoring its first cohort of women learning in its *halakha* program. The women study and are tested in the same areas of *halakha* taught to men in rabbinical schools. The program is headed by Rabbanit Michal Tikochinsky, who holds a law degree from Bar-Ilan University, has studied Talmud at Matan, and is a doctoral candidate in the Talmud department at Bar-Ilan. Beit Morasha has attracted very impressive women, most of whom already work in some form of Jewish education/leadership. Unfortunately, the program does not yet give much guidance or support to graduates as to new ways to use their knowledge. Nevertheless, these women are beginning to be viewed as halakhic experts. Rabbanit Devora Evron, head of the Elga Stulman Women's Institute for Jewish Studies at Hamidrasha in Oranim, has completed more than half the program and is already being asked halakhic questions by her students.

Midreshet Lindenbaum has graduated two women to date, both of whom received a *heter hora'ah* (license to deliver *piskei halakha,* halakhic decisions) based on five years of serious talmudic and halakhic study and exams. The curriculum is impressively well thought out to impart pedagogical, pastoral, and educational skills. The heads of the Lindenbaum program are dedicated to helping place their graduates in creative positions that until now have been open only to men, such as school "rabbi," authority on *kashrut* and family purity laws, and facilitator of life-cycle events. Matan, known for its satellite programs in

continued on page 32

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

After reading Rabba Sara Hurwitz's article, "Summon the *Mekonenot* and They Will Come," in the last *JOFA Journal* issue, I thought to point out that it was not without a fight that the rabbinate in Israel is now allowing women to deliver eulogies at funerals.

In 2005 the Ber, Liebman, and Lubitch families turned to the Supreme Court (*Bagatz*) in Israel after the *hevrah kadishah* in Petach Tikva did not allow me to deliver a eulogy at the funeral of my father (Charles Liebman, recipient of the Israel Prize) in 2003, and a year later did not allow Assaf Ber's mother's friends to deliver a eulogy at her funeral. Represented by attorneys Dr. Aviad Hacohen and Assaf Ber himself, we claimed that women should be allowed to deliver eulogies, to walk at the head of the funeral just after the body (and not be sent to the back), to stand side by side with men at the ceremony, and to be comforted by a *shura* of *menachamim* (two parallel lines) at the end of the ceremony, as men are. Although Petach Tivka was not the only city in Israel where the *hevrah kadishah* prohibited women from eulogizing at funerals, there are many cities where women deliver eulogies.

Before turning to the court, Dr. Aviad Hacohen wrote to the rabbinate asking what its policy is concerning women delivering eulogies. In answer, Chief Rabbi Yona Metzger wrote a somewhat *pareve* ruling saying that since it is not prohibited for women to deliver eulogies, each *hevrah kadisha* should keep to its ancient custom. The *Bagatz*'s decision in 2007 was that, although the *hevrah kadisha* may tell women that it is not the custom for women to eulogize, it may not prohibit them from doing so.

Since some *hevrei kadisha* had not been adhering to this decision and were still not allowing women to deliver eulogies, we were looking into going back to court. In the meantime, much talk of the exclusion of women from the public arena brought on a committee discussion in the Knesset on the topic. Finally, in February 2013, the Office of Religious Services announced that it had accepted Rabbi Metzger's ruling and sent out a notice guiding all *hevrei kadisha* to allow any person, man or woman, to deliver eulogies, to be allowed to follow the body at the funeral, and not to enforce any separation between men and women at any stage of the funeral.

The rabbinate in Israel and the *hevrei kadisha* know and understand that women are allowed to deliver eulogies and take part in all the proceedings of funerals. It just took a little bit of help from active and powerful women and men to get them to say so and to actually adhere to it. This process of change, through court and politics, reflects the dynamics of change in Israel, where religion and state are so entwined together.

***—Rivkah Lubitch**, Toenet Rabbanit, Nir Etzion, Israel*

Manhigot, *continued from page 31*

cities around Israel, has just announced the launch of a program for women's higher halakhic learning.

Another significant step forward for women's leadership in Israel has occurred within the relatively new rabbinic organization Beit Hillel, which has brought together mainstream and moderate voices within the religious Zionist camp, including women among their ranks. Beit Hillel decided to give its female members the title *rabbanit*, which classically has meant *rebbetzin*, the wife of a rabbi, but has taken on a new meaning as more learned women use the title and infuse it with status and respect. Beit Hillel convenes committees made up of learned men and women and publishes literature on *halakha* and Jewish thought, composed together by its *rabbanim* and *rabbaniyot*.

Unique Aspects of Women's Leadership in Israel

One of the challenges, and a possible advantage, in the advancement of women's Torah leadership in Israel is that Jewish communal life in Israel does not always revolve around the synagogue. Whereas in the United States the rabbinic role is very much community- and synagogue-based, in the *dati leumi* community in Israel the rabbinic role is more diverse. Israeli rabbis almost always work part-time for their synagogues, with very little or no salary and almost always supplement their synagogue commitment with work in an educational institution or a nonprofit organization. Communities that want to have female leadership may have to struggle with how to fund such a role. However, other rabbinic positions exist in schools and organizations that may be more adaptable to women's participation.

For example, as I write, a group of women trained through Emunah to become *kashrut* supervisors (*mashgihot*) in restaurants and the like have been featured in the news. They finished their course of study following the curriculum recognized by the Chief Rabbinate, but are not being certified to work in their profession, even though several prominent rabbis have backed the program and there are no halakhic barriers to women working as *mashgihot kashrut*.

Women graduating from new leadership programs will certainly possess a wealth of knowledge—not just in a particular area, like Nishmat's *yoatzot halacha*, but in broader terms. However, it is not yet clear where these programs will lead in terms of career paths for these soon-to-be Orthodox female leaders in Israel. What is truly needed are real job opportunities and sources of funding for talented women, so that their Torah will spread in Israel and beyond.

***Karen Miller Jackson** has completed an M.A. in rabbinic literature from NYU and is a member of the* JOFA Journal *editorial board.*

Women in Communal Leadership—A View from the UK

By Nicky Goldman

According to the 2011 census of England and Wales, the Jewish community of the United Kingdom numbers around 263,000 and has a staggering 2,200-plus Jewish organizations.

The mainstream UK Jewish community has long devoted many resources to youth leadership development, through substantial investment in the Zionist youth movements, the Union of Jewish Students (UJS), and synagogue-based bodies. These funds have enabled young people to take responsibility as *madrikhim* (leaders) on a local level (at age 15 or 16), lead camps (at ages 17–20), lead Israel tours or local Jewish student societies (at ages 20–21) and become youth movement or UJS leaders for a year or two after university, with responsibility for large budgets and for the well-being of thousands of young people.

Notwithstanding all this, only a handful of the hundreds and thousands of former youth movement and UJS leaders—both men and women—find their place in the wider community once they leave their movements. Some do not seek a way in, skeptical that they will ever find another role with such level of empowerment or for which they have the same passion. For those young men and women who do seek to affiliate, can they find true leadership responsibility only outside the mainstream, or can the mainstream community find gateways to bring them in?

The growing realization that the UK Jewish community needs ongoing development and nurturing of its current and future leaders if it is to survive led the community to respond with two initiatives in 2011.

New Initiatives for Leadership

In June 2011, the Commission on Women in Jewish Leadership (CWJL) was launched in the UK by the Jewish Leadership Council (JLC), the body that brings together the major British Jewish organizations to work for the good of the entire UK Jewish community. The aim of the commission was to suggest ways of advancing more women into senior voluntary and professional roles in the community.

In the autumn of 2011, the CWJL produced an initial review, titled "Gender Imbalance: the Status Quo," which revealed that women were underrepresented at the leadership level. This document laid the foundation for the community consultation that followed. The CWJL published its recommendations in July 2012, under the headings of Governance, Personal Leadership Development, Networking, Communications, and Other. At the heart of the recommendations was a recognition that change needs to come from women themselves, both individually and collectively; from the Jewish community's organizations and institutions; and from our youth and, potentially, from their schools.[1]

To implement the recommendations of the report, Women in Jewish Leadership (WJL) was created in March 2013 as a project of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, supported by the JLC. The Equality Support Group of WJL is currently focusing on introducing standards of gender equality into Jewish communal organizations through the presentation of an Award for Change to communal organizations that encourages them to set and work toward standards for improving gender equality. The Leadership Development Group of WJL is implementing and monitoring the personal development and networking recommendations made by the CWJL and has established an ongoing program of communications to maintain the momentum and keep awareness of the issue high.

Changes in the Community as a Result of the CWJL

In my view, there have already been some notable changes in the community in terms of women's leadership since the CWJL commenced its work. These are not necessarily all a direct result of the CWJL's work, but are undoubtedly a result of a changing awareness about the issue.

For example, in 2012 when the CWJL was still meeting, for the first time in UK history, 25 percent of the selection committee for the next chief rabbi were women. The Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue community amended its governing document so that women could be chairs of local synagogues and that women could be trustees. The new chair appointed to the Movement for Reform Judaism was a woman, and women compose about 30 percent of their board. At least one more woman has been appointed to the board of Liberal Judaism.

New developments in 2013 have included the passing of a motion by United Synagogue (the UK's Orthodox body) to appoint female chairs of synagogues, which were previously not allowed. There are now nine women chairs of synagogue boards out of sixty-two, as well as nineteen vice-chairs. The Leeds community has launched a women's network: Jewish Women Mean Business. In August, more than fifty lay and professional leaders and event planners signed a statement to the WJL opposing "all-male panels" and encouraging others to consider not participating in all-male panels.

On a professional level, there have been numerous women CEOs of smaller Jewish organizations, but only one (but soon to be two) female heads of the larger ones. This has not been the case in Jewish day schools, where many of the heads have been women. Now, however, the pendulum is swinging back and, increasingly, school head teachers are men.

continued on page 36

[1] A copy of the report can be found at http://www.thejlc.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Inspiring-Women-Leaders-Advancing-Gender-Equality-in-Jewish-Communal-Life.pdf.

EMERGING VOICES:

Leyning *Out of Love: How Learning to* Leyn *Deepened My Connection to Torah*

By Leah Slaten

My bat mitzvah was a glorified birthday party with little religious significance. It was an opportunity for me to show that my gown could be as pretty as my friends' gowns. The closest I got to the *bimah* was on the needlepoint of a girl reading from the Torah, which my grandmother stitched for me, not realizing its religious significance. Even if my parents had accepted the idea of a girl *leyning* at her bat mitzvah, I would not have accepted the offer. To my eleven-year-old mind, learning to *leyn* my bat mitzvah *parsha* would have robbed me of valuable time otherwise spent with my friends. It was far easier to learn *Pirkei Avot* and call it a day. Why would I want to take on an unnecessary burden?

During high school, *Tanakh* (Bible) became one of my favorite subjects. I sought the ideal way to connect to this ancient book. I studied *parshanim* (commentators) on *Tanakh*. I spent hours on Shabbat analyzing the *parsha* with my friend. Robert Alter's translation and commentary gave me a greater appreciation of the dialogue between different stories and an understanding of the linguistic origins of certain words. I examined archaeological artifacts from the biblical time period. In Israel, I was amazed to see the seal of Gemaryahu, an officer from the end of the First Temple period, about whom I had been learning in *Tanakh* class. Yet the words of the *Tanakh*, no matter how much I learned about them, were still just words.

A few months ago, my *Tanakh* teacher asked me to read a *pasuk* (sentence) out loud during class. I stumbled through it, pronouncing the *nekudot* properly (I had practiced diligently in second grade), but emphasizing the wrong syllables and not pausing at all for the *etnachta*. (Back then, I didn't even know what an *etnachta,* the cantillation sign that marks the end of the first half of the sentence, was.) My teacher corrected me for not articulating the *pasuk* properly; if only I knew *trope*, she told me, I would not have made so many mistakes. She asked the class who did not know how to *leyn,* and I was the only one to raise my hand. It was no longer a question of whether I wanted to *leyn*: I had to *leyn* to redeem my dignity.

My friend Ricki Heicklen agreed to teach me. (Luckily, she owed me a favor after stealing my Gemara notes.) We sat down with a *tikkun* one night, and she showed me the chart of *ta'amim* (cantillation signs). "*Kadma,*" she sang, and I followed, using the same notes that have been used for thousands of years. The dark side (a term that still invariably reminds me of *Star Wars*) of the pages awed me. With the elaborate crowns above the letters, I could hardly make out what the words were, but at the same time, I felt more connected to them than I ever had before. When I *leyned*, I was participating in a Jewish tradition that had existed long before me and that will continue to exist long after me. By serving as an active link in that chain, I felt that *Tanakh* became more than a historical account or interesting literary work. I no longer had to rely on someone else's interpretations to feel connected to the text. *Leyning* the words took them out of the page and brought them to life.

After weeks of preparation, I *leyned* for the first time in a women's *tefillah* at Shabbat *mincha* during the Drisha High School Winter Seminar. It was the first *aliyah* of the book of *Shemot*; to me, the new book represented a new beginning. For the first time, I gazed into a *sefer Torah*. In the handwritten words, I could feel the painstaking effort of a *sofer* (scribe) meticulously writing the words into the Torah scroll. As I peered into the Torah, my friends surrounding me disappeared from my thoughts, and I was alone with the Torah in my hands. If I hadn't made a concerted effort to contain my emotions, I would have been unable to make my lips and vocal chords work in synchrony to recite the necessary words of *leyning*.

Despite my newfound passion for *leyning*, I am grateful that I did not read from the Torah at my bat mitzvah when I was twelve. I would have been unable to appreciate the skill had I learned it back then, and similarly, I would not cherish the skill as much now if it had existed with me for many years. I never would have been able to experience the rush I felt as I *leyned* for the first time. I am proud that I accepted the "burden" of *leyning* at a time that was right for me, as my own developmental journey led me to the decision on my own.

Maybe some day I'll have a make-up bat mitzvah in which I do *leyn*. At that time, though, it will not be about showing off (my singing voice is far from spectacular), but about cultivating my personal relationship with *Tanakh* and with Judaism. And I will approach the *bimah*, rising off my grandmother's needlepoint, ready to pronounce the words of the precious Torah.

Leah Slaten graduated from SAR High School in 2013 and is currently studying at Midreshet Ein Hanatziv in Israel.

EMERGING VOICES:

How Teaching a Friend to Leyn Taught Me More Than I Could Have Imagined

*By **Ricki Heicklen***

"*Ta'amod Rivka Pazit bat Avraham Chaim v'Yehudit Rachel.*" The complete pride and worthiness that shot through me when I heard my name called out, the *gabbait's* voice as feminine as my own, were paralleled only by what I felt moments later when my friend Leah Slaten began to read from the *sefer Torah*. We had been learning together every Monday, with me teaching her the significance of the *ta'amim* and the sound each makes, and Leah readily absorbing everything I taught her. Our diligent learning culminated in her perfect recitation of the beginning of *parshat Shemot* on a cold Shabbat afternoon in late December. And I could not be prouder to stand by her side, as she sang out the *trope* I had imparted to her.

I learned to *leyn* when I was eleven years old, in preparation for my bat mitzvah. The motivation behind *leyning* was external; I was making a feminist statement. I wanted to show society that I, as a woman, could *leyn* as well as any man.

And *leyn* well I did. From the first *passuk*, "וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ שְׁנָתַיִם יָמִים," to the end of *parshat Miketz*, I knew my *leyning* perfectly. I had spent countless hours preparing, and they paid off. I stood before the *bimah*, dignified and satisfied, having claimed my right to read from the *sefer Torah*.

I felt personally responsible to "prove" my right to feminism through *leyning*.

In the years that followed, I often *leyned* at local partnership *minyanim* and women's *tefillot*. *Leyning* was a source of satisfaction, but it was also a burden: I felt personally responsible to "prove" my right to feminism through *leyning*. I had to show I was deserving of a spot at the *bimah*, and I had to keep going back to maintain that spot.

This obligation began to quench my passion for reading from the *sefer Torah*. I felt the need to take on *aliyot* when I was busy or disinterested, the preparation process was a bore, and my *leyning* often ended up botched and rushed. Ironically, even though the one reason I wanted to *leyn* was to prove my competence and worth, I ended up doing an incompetent job.

When Leah first asked me to teach her how to *leyn*, my initial reaction was "Great! Another feminist!" I immediately agreed, and I also talked her into adding her name to an ever-growing petition for women to *leyn* at our school (which we eventually did attain). I was excited to indoctrinate her with my feminist values and passion about women's roles in *tefillah*.

As we began to learn together, however, my focus moved away from the public statement I was making and toward the private connection Leah was forming with the text. She was legitimately inspired by the words and trope themselves, and *leyning* gave her a newfound connection to *Tanakh*. Her enthusiasm was infectious, and I began to see *leyning* not only as a political agent, but also as a medium for personal growth.

Our preparation reached its peak on the last weekend of December, when we spent Shabbat in Manhattan on the Drisha High School Winter Seminar. Leah did not *leyn* at a public partnership *minyan*, as I had done, where countless teachers, friends, and strangers could hear me prove my competence and assert my right to stand in a place previously dominated by men. Instead, her debut occurred in a claustrophobic back room at the Drisha center, with just fifteen other girls and a *sefer Torah*. The *hana'ah* (satisfaction) and the connection we both got at that moment illuminated the true value of *leyning*.

Through teaching Leah how to *leyn*, I initially saw myself passing on a talent and, simultaneously, a feminist message that I had to share with the world. I thought I was imparting an invaluable skill and an equally important agenda. But, in the end, I was the one who truly learned and gained so much more from Leah than a list of *ta'amim* and a women's rights sign.

In *Miketz*, the *parsha* I *leyned* for my bat mitzvah, the root word "עמד" (stand) is used repeatedly to signify power and pride. For me, *leyning* was always a source of power, a way to win back what should have always been rightfully mine. I would cherish the sound of the *gabbai's* voice calling out "*ta'amod*" and the experience of being called up to the Torah because of the "girl power" it gave me. But now, I am learning to gain pride, not just from the act of "*ta'amod*," but also from the *leyning* itself.

Ricki Heicklen is a senior at SAR High School in Riverdale, New York.

Communal Leadership, *continued from page 33*

Lead: Inspiring Jewish Leaders

The second communal initiative started in November 2011, when Lead: Inspiring Jewish Leaders was launched as the community-wide leadership development division of the JLC. Having been created and nurtured within the United Jewish Israel Appeal (UJIA), Lead's vision is to create inspiring and transformative Jewish community leaders by offering programs, support, and resources to lay and professional emerging leaders across the Jewish community. Lead is working on implementing some of the recommendations of the CWJL, as well as encouraging the community to open up lay leadership roles to younger people, men as well as women.

One of the community's longstanding gateways to leadership has been the Adam Science Foundation Leadership Programme, run by the Adam Science Foundation in partnership with Lead. Now in its twenty-first year of operation, the foundation is named in honor of a young lay leader, Adam Science, who was tragically killed in a car crash in 1991. Each year, the program enables ten to twelve young professionals in their mid-twenties to early thirties to acquire knowledge, understanding, and experience of the UK Jewish community in order to become its future leaders. There are now 230 alumni of the program who have subsequently become involved in a range of communal organizations, synagogues, day schools, Limmud, and other initiatives.

One of the new chairs of a United Synagogue community is Michelle Bauernfreund, who heads the Alei Tzion community. A graduate of the Adam Science program, Michelle said, "I was proud to take on this role as part of the first cohort of female chairs in the United Synagogue. I feel that as a woman I have a lot to bring which may have been missing previously, and I hope to use these 'female' skills to develop the life of my *shul* in the right direction."

Thus, the UK Jewish community is addressing the need to develop its current and future leaders, both lay and professional, and will work to harness the passion, skills, and enthusiasm of young adults coming into the community. Their participation will raise the bar in terms of leadership vision and capability for already existing lay and professional leaders. We are by no means where we wish to be yet. We have a long way to go before the community becomes gender-blind, but we have certainly started the ball rolling.

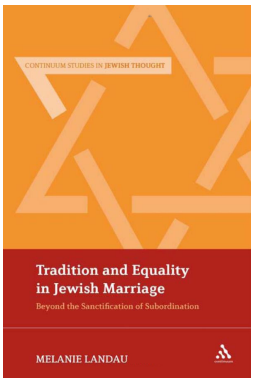
***Nicky Goldman** is the executive director of Lead: Inspiring Jewish Leaders, a division of the Jewish Leadership Council. She has worked in the UK Jewish community for twenty-nine years in a range of communal organizations, including Hendon Synagogue, the Agency for Jewish Education, the Community Development Department of the United Synagogue, and the UJIA. She holds an M.A. in Jewish communal service from Brandeis.*

bookCORNER

Tradition and Equality in Jewish Marriage: Beyond the Sanctification of Subordination

By Melanie Landau
Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012, $37.95 (paperback)

By Miriam A. Cope



Jewish marriage resides at the confluence of two ideologically oppositional commitments that modern Jewish women and men struggle to navigate in their everyday lives, and will not readily abandon: exclusionary religious practices and modern ethical systems, such as feminism. Gender inequalities embedded in religious authority, practice, and marriage per se further present a moral problem, not merely a halakhic one. Melanie Landau's book seeks to make these inequalities evident and to offer alternatives for Jewish partnership grounded in reciprocity and mutuality.

Landau's main thesis is that marriage in Jewish law is a "unique form of acquisition" and is non-reciprocal. Betrothal—through the halakhically specified three means of money, a contract, or sexual relations—invariably amounts to ownership of a woman in a manner that is "unparalleled" in other human relationships. Subsequently, the formalization of acquisition through words and blessings *acted upon* a woman in the wedding ceremony solidify for Landau the "non-reciprocal" marriage concept.

This form of traditional heterosexual Jewish marriage results in significant legal and social consequences for women, particularly in instances of divorce. According to most rabbinic authorities, a divorce is considered valid only if a man gives the divorce (*get*) through his own free will. Under specific circumstances, a *beit din* may compel a husband to give a divorce. Both mechanisms have the potential to release a woman from the marriage without the deleterious effects on the social structure of the Jewish family (i.e., *mamzerut*), but neither method invests women with their own authority to divorce their husbands. A married woman's exit options are *a priori* limited, and the process itself involves an unequal, gendered binary.

Landau's analyses of rabbinic authority, the legal effects of marriage, and presumptions

of intent to marry culminate in arguments for structural interventions to circumvent the legal effects of non-reciprocal marriage. In her final chapters, Landau discusses two halakhic constructs (also under debate) that do not have the same legal status as marriage: conditional marriage and *derech kiddushin*. These partnerships circumvent the requirement that a man issues a divorce of his own free will, which when not accomplished, further exacerbates the moral problem of *agunot*. In these and previous chapters, Landau exposes how rabbinic practice and interpretation are socially constructed and influenced by specific geographical, political, and social contexts. In so doing, she contends that rabbis have the power and historic standing to use contemporary social needs, patterns, and resources to modify *halakha* in ways that retain traditional authority but accommodate individual needs, particularly as they relate to women in marriage and divorce.

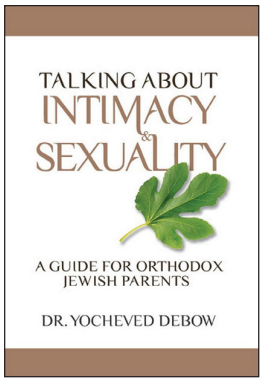
Tradition and Equality provides a solid resource for researchers and general audiences alike. Any shortcomings of the book have to do with the writing and organization of the material. At times, Landau over-explains her material in ways that unnecessarily impede a clear reading of her argument. There are also instances of poor organization. For example, concubinage is addressed multiple times in different chapters, yet could have had a section of its own, with section headers directing readers to the main ideas (e.g., "rebellious woman" or "licentious sex-exemptions").

Landau never promises to resolve tensions among feminist thinking, modern values, and traditional beliefs, yet more of her original interpretation on alternative partnered relationships would have been welcome. Landau is at her best when she unapologetically explicates the negative legal ramifications of halakhic marriage for religious and non-religious audiences alike and demonstrates, using primary sources, instances of subordination of women in Jewish law, reduced levels of autonomy, and the difficult situation of the *agunah*. Most importantly, for all readers, Landau makes known that these are moral issues to address, not solely halakhic problems with individuated solutions.

Talking about Intimacy and Sexuality: A Guide for Orthodox Jewish Parents

By Yocheved Debow
KTAV/ OU Press | Jewish Educational Publications, 2012, $26.95

By Bat Sheva Marcus



Yocheved Debow does a yeoman's job with a difficult, complicated, and complex topic: talking to your children about sex. Her book is thorough, straightforward, and practical. Unfortunately, it's also humorless and xenophobic.

There are issues any honest person would have to struggle with when writing a sex education book from an Orthodox perspective. There are conflicts among competing values of science, *halakha*, and practical reality. I feel saddened, though, that Debow feels the need to make those choices for all of us, rather than putting the issues out there and letting parents decide for themselves.

Debow makes the important point that communication between parents and children on the subject of sex is critical, that parents have to clarify their values in order to do so, and that these kinds of conversations are not "one-offs" but rather ongoing, evolving discussions. She does an amazing job of giving practical advice on how to have those conversations. Her example dialogues are real-sounding and reasonable. These sections can be particularly helpful for parents struggling with how to talk to their kids.

The author also outlines what is appropriate to discuss with each age group. She provides both the factual information children need and the ethical and practical questions that preoccupy children at different ages. She rightly points out that under no circumstances should poor choices made by a child undermine the relationship with the parent or be used to undermine the child's self-esteem.

Nevertheless, I wouldn't recommend this book to members of the Modern Orthodox community, and here is why.

The entire tone of the book is "us," the moral and ethical Orthodox Jews, against "them," the amoral *goyim* who do not have sound values when it comes to sex. I hate that dichotomy. I don't think Orthodox Judaism has a monopoly on good values when it comes to sex. As a professional in the field of human sexuality, I think some of our values are problematic. That doesn't mean I don't have to pay attention to *halakha*, but it does mean that I can appreciate other groups' values, learn from them, and make decisions accordingly. (The irony is that, in fact, the best ideas and data in this book are taken from secular scientists, educators, and therapists.)

I also think that when the author struggles with a conflict between what science tells us is good for us and what *halakha* tells us to do, she assumes that *halakha* is always good and right, and she needs to concoct a justification to make it seem so.

One can see this most clearly when reading what she has to say about masturbation and *shmirat negiah* (physical contact outside of marriage). Psychologists cite many problems that can result from boys and girls being told not to masturbate, problems that may follow them throughout a sixty-year sex life. Yet Debow solidly falls on the side of discouraging masturbation for both girls and boys and never acknowledges the downside. I would have less of a problem if she had said "masturbating is a problem

halakhicly and that's not necessarily a good thing, but halakha is halakha and we don't pick and choose." I might still disagree, but I would value her intellectual honesty. But she doesn't. Instead, she waxes poetic about sex being the purview of the married couple, or some such pabulum.

One area in which she hits a better note is when dealing with homosexuality. She says honestly that trying to change a gay person to make the person straight is damaging, and we should show understanding of those who cannot live a heterosexual lifestyle.

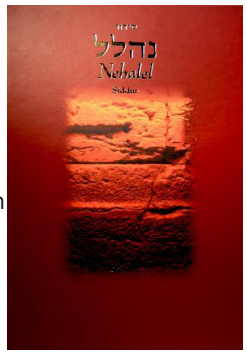
Finally, why do Orthodox books about sex have to be so serious? It's almost as if the authors were afraid that if they have any fun with the subject, people will think that they are not serious religious Jews—which just may be part of the problem. Jews need to lighten up when it comes to sex.

Bottom line, for a right-wing religious Jew, this book might work beautifully. For the Modern Orthodox crowd, go buy Justin Richardson and Mark Schuster's *Everything You Never Wanted Your Kids to Know about Sex (but Were Afraid They'd Ask),* and then, armed with all the necessary information, you can make your own decisions.

Nehalel beShabbat Siddur
Devised and English translation by Michael Haruni

Nevarech, 2013, $27
Distributed by KTAV and Urim

By Rachel Levmore



One cannot fathom the effect of this *siddur* until one actually prays with it. At first glance, the main innovation is immediately recognizable—stunningly beautiful photographs accompanying each prayer on almost every page. The deep relevance of these photos will grip even the skeptic who has years-long familiarity with the Shabbat prayers. Each photograph serves as a commentary to a single emphasized line on the page, thus sharply focusing the reader's thoughts on the intent of the words.

Moreover, the *siddur*, in its entirety, has a "natural" feeling to it, in more ways than one. First, it engenders a sense of reveling in God's world and our place it. Secondly, there is room for all in this world. The photographs naturally include girls and boys (for "and light up our eyes with Your Torah"), men and women (in a *beit midrash* for "we shall discuss your decrees"), and scenes of natural wonders in Israel and in the universe (a brilliant juxtaposition of a baby taking his first steps to astronaut Buzz Aldrin's 1969 walk on the moon for "Who engineers the stride of man."

The photographs also illuminate contemporary Jewish history and Zionism, as in an archival photo of the 1945 liberation of the Mauthausen concentration camp for "You emancipated us from a regime of slavery" and the classical shot of David Ben-Gurion declaring an independent Jewish state for "has made His redemption known."

Some may feel initial discomfort with a prayer book filled with photographs and would prefer to have the abstract words filled with meaning by the one who prays. Nevertheless, the photographs in this volume are simply inspirational and are filled with reverence.

The photographs are not the only way that Michael Haruni brings the ancient prayers into the mindset of the present-day Jew. His English translation is contemporary and succinct, serving itself as an elegant commentary. Prayers for the State of Israel, IDF soldiers, and captive soldiers are included, alongside those for the rulers of Britain and the United States. The excellent yet visually unobtrusive instructions firmly guide the individual in the practices of prayer alone or in the synagogue. The print is clean with a good-sized font. Furthermore, the Hebrew grammar and punctuation are consistently correct—an improvement over some other popular prayer books.

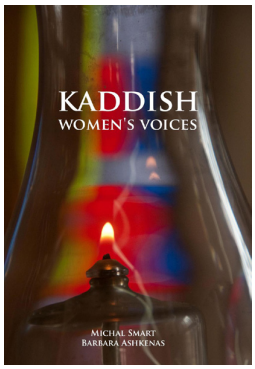
It is not only the spiritual quality of this volume that is impressive; the paper quality also adds weight to the *siddur* (bringing it to 2.4 pounds). *Nehalel beShabbat* may be heavy for a *siddur*, but it is heavy with meaning.

Haruni has added profound significance to the words chanted on Sabbath morning: "If our mouths were as filled with poetry as the hugeness of the ocean ... still we could not adequately thank You." Through the poetry and the photography of the *Nehalel siddur,* one can truly immerse oneself in prayer.

Kaddish: Women's Voices
Edited by Michal Smart, conceived by Barbara Ashkenas

Urim Publications, 2013, $25

By Israel Drazin



Michal Smart and Barbara Ashkenas have collected some fifty essays by articulate women of various Jewish denominations who tell poignant tales of relatives who died and their experiences in saying *kaddish* for them, what motivated their taking on the practice, and how they felt doing so. The women, on the whole, derived much that was positive from saying *kaddish* for eleven months, despite the fact that some of them received unfortunate responses from Orthodox men. The book also includes three short chapters by rabbis concerning the laws of mourning and of saying *kaddish*.

Many of the women writers felt that saying *kaddish* provided them with an opportunity to engage others in helping them heal. It also facilitated their creating new and lasting bonds of friendship in their communities. Some felt that the

kaddish aided them in keeping their relatives alive by making a special "time together" with deceased dads, moms, or kids. Some accepted the mystical idea that saying *kaddish* helps elevate one's relatives to a higher heavenly level.

The wife of a Conservative rabbi traveled long distances to say *kaddish*, while her husband, who usually attended the synagogue, stayed home to take care of the children. Several women received offers from male synagogue officials to say *kaddish* in their place, but they refused, saying this prayer was "the last thing I could do" for a beloved relative. One man was so inspired by seeing a woman saying *kaddish* that he brought his teenage daughter to meet her. Many women were initially the only females at services, but after a relatively short time, other women joined them. Quite a few women felt the presence of their departed loved ones as they said *kaddish*.

Some women wrestled with difficult questions: Should one say *kaddish* for a suicide? (She did.) Should one say *kaddish* for a hated parent? (She did—and the hate disappeared.) Tradition requires saying *kaddish* for parents for eleven months, but mandates only thirty days for nonparents. May a woman say *kaddish* for eleven months for her beloved son? (She did.) Should a mourner say *kaddish* praising God when she is angry at Him for taking her dad? (She said it, with interesting consequences.) What does one do when the men rush through the services? (Show them how to pray by example.)

Some women were hurt by the way Orthodox men treated them. A key element in saying *kaddish* is to have the congregation respond, "Amen" to the recitation, but many men refused to do so. They talked loudly when a woman said the prayer, to show their disapproval. They wouldn't turn on the lights in the women's section, and, in some Orthodox synagogues, even closed the women's section during the week and forced the women to "sit outside in the hall." Some synagogues didn't allow a woman to say *kaddish* unless a man was also reciting it and could drown her out. When the quorum of men was just over ten, some men walked out before the woman could say *kaddish*, so that there would not be a *minyan* needed to say the prayer. Quite a few women resented that a thirteen-year-old boy would be counted in the *minyan* while the women who were involved in a good deed for the sake of a departed one were not counted.

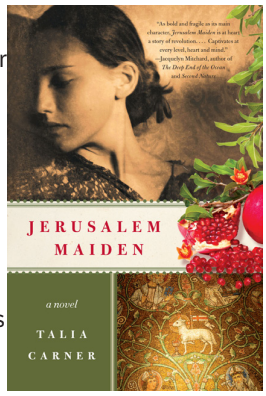
This book is worth reading to learn about the difficult dramas the women experienced and for, perhaps, the impetus it will provide for men to change.

Jerusalem Maiden

By Talia Carner
William Morrow, 2011, $14.99 (paperback)

By Roselyn Bell

The Jerusalem maiden of the title is Esther Kaminsky, a bright and willful eleven-year-old *hareidi* girl living in Meah Shearim and attending the Evelina de Rothschild School in the waning days of the Ottoman Empire. A French teacher discovers her prodigious artistic talent, but the pursuit of art, as either a career or a passion, is utterly at odds with the role she is being raised for: a religious wife and mother, meant to produce sons to bring the Messiah.



Not surprisingly, Esther faces major internal conflicts, but these are less of the sort chronicled in *My Name is Asher Lev,* and more those of a proto-Orthodox Jewish feminist. She is jealous of the attention given to her brother's bar mitzvah, while she is told that she will "get the honor of entering adulthood under a *chupah."* She fears for the arranged marriage of her best friend, Ruthi, and tries to avert the *shidduch.* She challenges the norm that an unmarried young woman may not work for money. She is even attracted to the non-Jewish (and illegitimate) son of her teacher—Pierre of the cerulean eyes, which she expends a great deal of energy avoiding.

Speaking of cerulean, the author is something of a painter herself, applying vivid color descriptions to the scenes of Jerusalem and its surroundings. So many historical and geographical details are faithfully executed, that it is a shame that she gets a few matters of religious observance wrong—such as suggesting that the bar mitzvah *parasha* is read on Friday night or that a married couple may resume sexual relations as soon as the cloths are white.

The plot takes many extraordinary turns, and Esther, after marrying a rich and somewhat modern man, finds herself in interwar France, reunited with her childhood teacher and living an artistic and bohemian life. Here the number of chance encounters and well-timed catastrophes begin to pile up in excess—turning a fine historical novel into something of a soap opera.

Despite the somewhat implausible ending, this novel is a good read, both for its depiction of life in the old *Yishuv* under Ottoman and British rule and for its portrayal of the inner struggles of a young woman truly seeking what *Hashem* wants of her while flying in the face of gender-based role expectations. Modern Jewish feminists can both enjoy and identify with this heroine.

520 8th Avenue, Fourth Floor
New York, NY 10018

HOPEFULS **ARTISTS** INTELLECTUALS SPIRITUALISTS LEADERS **EDUCATORS** HALACHAC

IT'S NOT JUST FOR FEMINISTS ANYMORE

IDEALISTS **VISIONARIES** QUESTIONERS INTELLECTUALS **QUESTIONERS** ARTISTS C

INTROSPECTIVES HALACHACISTS **DREAMERS** SINGLES HALACHACISTS CHALLENGERS COM

PARENTS CHALLENGERS NURTURERS PERFORMERS **CHANGE-MAKERS** CAREGIV

TECTORS THINKERS **INTELLECTUALS** HOPEFULS PROVIDERS EXECUTIVES **GIVERS** LIST

COUNSELORS INSPECTORS RELIGIOUS **STUDENTS** EXTRAVERTS INTROVERTS JUD

ISTS PRODUCERS PLANNERS **EXPLORERS** PROMOTERS RISK-TAKERS FIGHTERS READERS H

IT'S FOR YOU

VOICES OF CHANGE

JOFA CONFERENCE

DECEMBER 7-8, 2013 | JOHN JAY COLLEGE

FOR MORE INFORMATION JOFA.ORG