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From Our President

Surely Goodness and Kindness...

By Carol Kaufman Newman

In the synagogue in which I grew up the senior rabbi had a custom. Every year he would host a number of informal get-togethers in his home for men. During the evening he would obtain their pledges to the shul's annual campaign. The year my father died, my mother got a call inviting her to the rabbi's home. "No," she replied. "You didn't know I existed when my husband was alive and you can forget me now." That was almost 30 years ago.

This year I wanted to double our giving to an institution that I believe in. Furthermore, the head of the institution had been extremely helpful to us on a personal level. My husband did not want to take on another large commitment. Sometimes he has to convince me. This time I persevered and finally convinced him. The first e-mail we received from the institution opened with "Shalom, Mel." The more things change, the more they stay the same.

This issue of our *JOFA Journal* is about women and giving. Last year I went to a parlor meeting organized by The Jewish Women's Foundation. Two things stood out. One was that there are more women than ever who control large amounts of money. Two, men seem, on the whole, to give more impersonally, supporting large institutions such as their universities, while women's philanthropy tends to be more personal, giving to causes where the impact of their money is much more immediate.

You will read some wonderful articles. Zelda Stern writes about how we give. She gives good advice on how to check to see that basic tenets of each organization we give to match our beliefs. Giti Bendheim reminds us not to forget our community needs as our giving expands. Sally Gottesman exhorts women with economic means to use their power to create change, and Blu Greenberg gives a wonderful historical perspective on American Orthodox philanthropic and service organizations. And there is so much more.

But philanthropy is not just about money. There are extraordinary women in many communities giving of their time and ingenuity and helping to make a real difference. This summer I observed young women in the Syrian community and watched how hard they worked, and how brilliantly, to raise money for food kitchens to help the needy in Israel. There are women who have created *bikkur cholim* organizations, who hand out Shabbat packages to those in need, who help brides and do so many other wonderful things.

I once read a story about a rich man who was constantly being asked to give money for different causes. He became angry at people calling and knocking at his door all the time.

Then one day he was reading *Tehillim*, Psalm 23, and came across the verse: "Surely goodness and kindness shall pursue me all the days of my life..." He realized how blessed he was to have the means to help so many people and for this he was being pursued.

May we all be pursued to do good. May we each answer the call in our own way. And may we all merit being a part of *tikkun olam.*

Allocating One's *Tzedaka:* Some Thoughts on Giving

By Giti Bendheim

Serious Jews of both genders consider it their responsibility to be charitable. Our tradition has much to say about the philosophy of *tzedaka,* from the personal to the institutional and from the demonstration of compassion to the expression of patronage. Given the ubiquity of *tzedaka* requests in our lives, it seems important for us to consider how women fit into the philanthropic picture and whether we bring something unique or particular to the performance of this important Jewish obligation.

Whether working inside or outside the home, women now take a greater role than in the past in decisions about where and how the family gives charity. While traditionally expected to support the *mikvah* and run the sisterhood, women today have the ability to provide or direct larger contributions from their family *tzedaka* pot. This new reality presents what might seem to be a tempting opportunity for women to move their family's giving away from supporting institutions that have denied women access and toward new and innovative projects. But while this move may satisfy a taste for reprisal, it would be short-sighted for both women and the community at large to support one type of giving at the expense of the other.

When considering *tzedaka* opportunities, an active member of a community is pulled in two directions–to maintain existing institutions and to make change. On the one hand, she understands how much blood, sweat, and tears have gone into creating and maintaining the old workhorse institutions that run the community. It is not very exciting to support these establishments, and they are often bogged down in the rusty machinery of habit and convention. Very often, they are run by an old-boys' network, and one's first impulse is to write them off.

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Allocating One's Tzedaka

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On the other hand, there is something awe-inspiring about the way these institutions embody a previous generation's hopes and creativity–often the generation that created you–and it has always seemed to me both disrespectful and somewhat impulsive to move on to new projects without being very sure that the old ones do not simply need a new infusion of ideas and support. As active participants in a community, we should give more than passing thought to how disheartening it is to build something, only to watch as the next wave of leadership discards it. Moreover, not only can progress occur much more naturally when it is part of an ongoing involvement but also much money can be saved by using the infrastructure that has been put into place by the people who came before you. This is not to suggest that one should sentimentally waste money on tired and no longer relevant ideas. New and innovative ways of thinking and doing are crucial. However, we cannot ignore our solemn responsibility to support the social institutions on which our community depends–the shul, the school, the *mikvah*, the *eruv*–and to make sure these institutions stay relevant to all of us and important to the way we live our lives.

Very often, real life gets in the way of our most thought-through and planful intentions. Israeli victims of terror need immediate help, the crisis in Darfur won't wait until all of our communal institutions are solidly financed, and the man who won't give his wife a *get* will be only too happy if I'm too busy raising money for my school to support people who will picket his place of business. Add to the mix, the many individuals who ring our collective telephones and come to our collective community doors with immediate needs and palpable misery. In these most intimate, even intrusive, of *tzedaka* encounters, how does one determine a response that is simultaneously true to one's values, one's long-range plans, one's point of view, one's ability, and one's right to privacy? Here is an area where we need to use our judgment, on a case-by-case basis, to implement charity-giving that is resistant to both manipulation and cynicism, both of which threaten to poison the *tzedaka*-giving atmosphere of our Jewish eco-system. Those who give *tzedaka* and those who receive it need to understand and acknowledge that giving charity includes an element of choice and that sometimes the answer is a legitimate, if regretful or apologetic, "No."

> "...giving *tzedaka* can involve being a more direct agent of change..."

At its most exciting, giving *tzedaka* can involve being a more direct agent of change, especially when the need for change feels urgent. One of the factors that is very important to me in contemplating where I would like to give this kind of charity is the degree to which my giving might effect real change. When contemplating new endeavors, I am personally more likely to want to contribute to a small project with a limited but measurably achievable goal than to a large project with a global agenda and a big budget. Because, like many women outside the world of finance, I come to the causes I support from an ideological or philosophical position rather than from a business point of view, I need help in figuring out how to do it smartly, but I also want room to think creatively and even boldly. The smaller project is more likely to put me in touch with people who share my vision of how things could or ought to be and is likely to allow me more flexibility in implementing my goals. I am likely to be able to make more of an impact with less money and perhaps to be able to support more independent, out-of-the box projects that do not appeal to everyone. I also feel that this "thinking small" perspective comes out of my recognition that, when it comes to women's issues, the only steps that can work, at least in the Orthodox community, are very small steps. When you're changing a culture, you can only make people a little bit uncomfortable, a little at a time.

I have learned, moreover, that successful small projects often develop into successful big projects, which can result in your landing on the ground floor of something new and exciting. I remember, in particular, the first organization that I actually sought out to contribute to, because I felt that its idea was so brilliant. It was a very empowering feeling to be able to put money behind an excellent idea – in this case, Nishmat's idea of a *Yo'etzet Halacha* – and to see that idea move forward into the world. There was something personally confirming about recognizing the *zeitgeist* and being connected directly to the process of change. The beauty of being able to give *tzedaka* in this way is that you yourself do not have to be a brilliant scholar, or a driven revolutionary, or a tireless crusader –you just have to be able to recognize one. Your talent lies in the ability to identify possibilities and in your particular power to help translate those possibilities into making Jewish life–yours and/or others–better.

We need to ask ourselves what kind of change we want to make. Change can involve making something better or making something different, in getting rid of something or adding something, or in providing something physical–like food or refuge–or providing something more abstract, such as freedom or justice. For us, as women in

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ONE WHO PURSUES *TZEDAKA* AND *CHESED* WILL FIND LIFE, RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HONOR

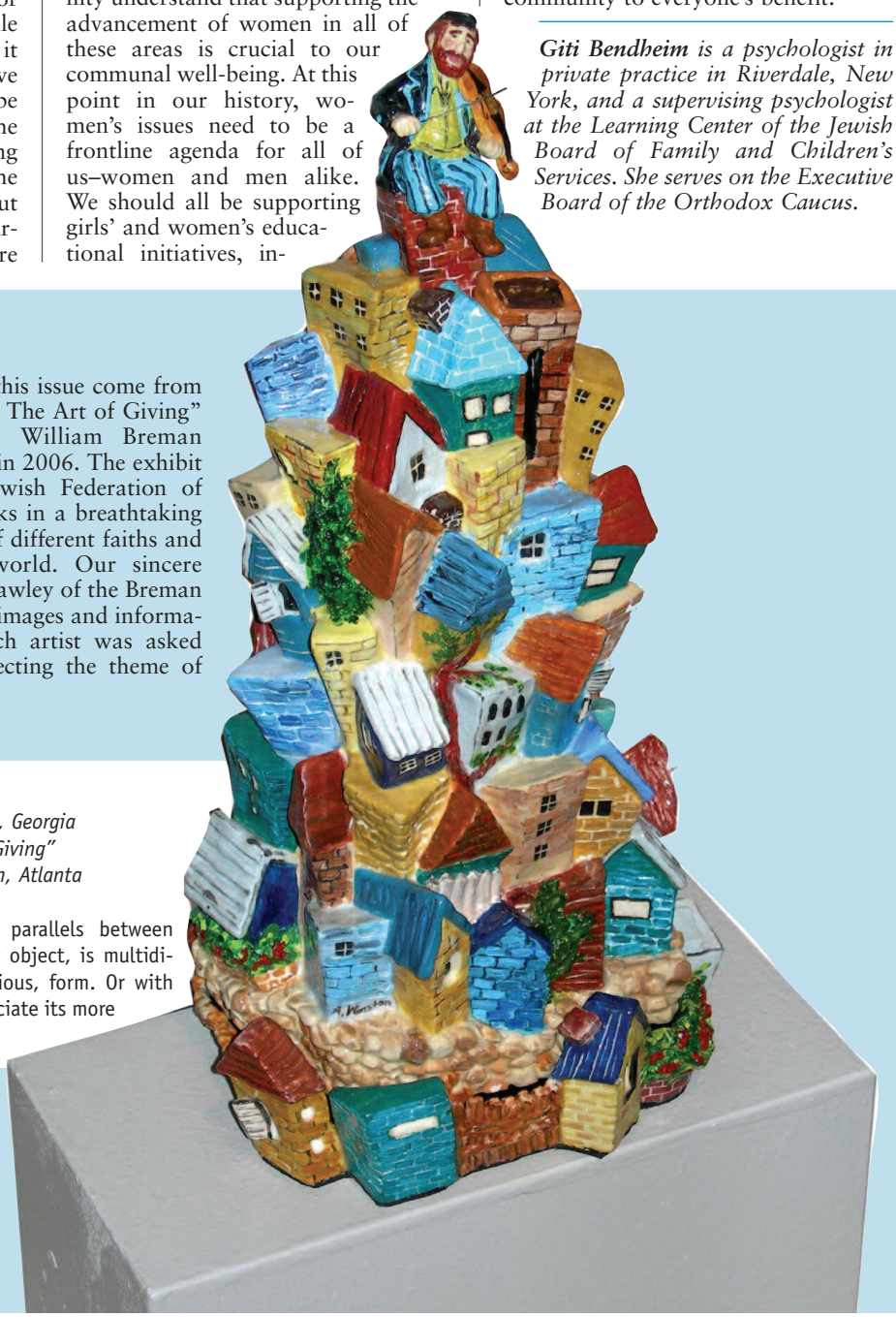
Proverbs: 21:21

the Orthodox community, these questions are grave and important, for they touch on the most fundamental aspects of our Jewish experience. We are not in a position to legislate change, nor is Orthodox Judaism a system that is easily given to change. But we are in a position to drive change. For many of us, the religious life we treasure meshes less than perfectly with the kind of openness and freedom we take for granted in our secular lives, and while that clash is in some ways fruitful, it often gives us pause. As women, we wonder whether or how we might be able to leaven one reality with the other–to invest more spiritual meaning in the general culture and to push the envelope of our Jewish experience. But to do that, we have to articulate to ourselves what we require to feel more alive and fully present in our complex religious lives. Putting money behind that wondering–by investing in halakhic research and learning, for example–allows us to venture beyond where we are and to take some small steps toward integrating our absolute allegiance to the Torah with our modern sensibilities. Paying our way makes possible the translation of these ideas into reality, fueling our attempts to define ourselves more truly by ensuring that our religious lives encompass our lived reality.

In that sense, supporting efforts that deal directly with women's challenges–in the areas of education, religious status, divorce, or abuse–is our responsibility. It is also our responsibility to make sure that the men of our community understand that supporting the advancement of women in all of these areas is crucial to our communal well-being. At this point in our history, women's issues need to be a frontline agenda for all of us–women and men alike. We should all be supporting girls' and women's educational initiatives, insisting on day care in our schools, funding individual female scholars who will be our future *talmidot chachamot*, paying for innovative attempts to solve the *agunah* crisis, and lobbying for *to'anot* here and in Israel. At the same time, women should be pushing hard to join boards and to assume other positions of communal responsibility. We should be thinking hard and talking forcefully about important issues in the wider Jewish community, and we should be putting our carefully allocated money behind the things we believe in, while still "paying our dues" to established social institutions. We may not be in a position to make the changes alone, but finding our own voices and stepping up to our own responsibilities will resonate in the community to everyone's benefit.

Giti Bendheim *is a psychologist in private practice in Riverdale, New York, and a supervising psychologist at the Learning Center of the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services. She serves on the Executive Board of the Orthodox Caucus.*

Many of the images illustrating this issue come from an exhibit entitled "Tzedakah: The Art of Giving" that was displayed at the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum in Atlanta in 2006. The exhibit celebrated the centenary of the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta, and contained works in a breathtaking variety of media by over 80 artists of different faiths and backgrounds from all over the world. Our sincere thanks to the artists and to Haven Hawley of the Breman Museum who generously shared the images and information about the artists with us. Each artist was asked to write a mission statement connecting the theme of *tzedaka* to the work created.



UNTITLED, *ceramic*
Allison Judith Winston, Atlanta, Georgia
From "Tzedakah: The Art of Giving"
Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, Atlanta

"My piece is intended to reflect the parallels between *tzedaka* and art. *Tzedaka,* like an artistic object, is multidimensional. It can assume an overt, obvious, form. Or with thought and consideration, one can appreciate its more subtle, less conspicuous aspects".

Can You Spare a Loan?

The Evolution of Tzedaka *in Rabbinic Literature*

By Wendy Amsellem

Having just gone through a season of giving, I suppose it may be impolitic to point out that the Torah never commands us to give money to the poor. Instead, there are numerous adjurations to lend money to those in need. The assumption throughout is that the money will be repaid. Other laws delineate gifts given to the poor, but they are always gifts of produce–not money. Over time, as the Jewish economy became less agriculturally based, we can trace a rabbinic effort to re-interpret laws of loans into obligations of gifts. This reinterpretation becomes the basis for the laws of *tzedaka* as we know them today.

The first biblical laws outlining our obligations to the poor appear in Exodus 22:24-26:

> If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, do not behave towards him as a creditor, do not charge him interest. If you take his garment as collateral, return it to him as the sun sets. For it is his only garment, his only covering for his skin–in what will he sleep? If he cries out to Me, I will hear him for I am merciful.

These verses assume that a loan is taking place, not a gift, and the verses stipulate the terms of the loan–namely that it be without interest. Moreover, there is an assumption that collateral is being taken, which is a clear indication that there is an expectation of repayment. The Torah mandates that the poor be treated mercifully and that, if the collateral is needed by its owner, it must be returned as the need demands.

SHARE *c.1915*
Collection of the Judah L. Magnes Museum, Berkeley, California
Published by the Jewish Relief Campaign

In the poster, the female figure of America serves a bountiful meal to four needy European Jews.

Leviticus 25:35-37 develops this theme further:

> If your brother becomes poor and his hand falters you shall strengthen him–stranger and settler–and he shall live with you. You shall not take interest from him; your brother shall live with you. Neither money nor food shall you give him with interest.

The emphasis is once again on lending without interest. We are to enable the brother to live with us, seemingly by extending loans that will allow him to cover his needs.

> "The Torah is... trying to safeguard the poor person's dignity."

Deuteronomy 24:10-15 similarly stipulates that the poor person who has borrowed money be treated with respect. The lender may not barge into the poor person's home to collect the collateral. Instead the lender is to wait politely outside for the poor person to bring out the object. Again, there is the presumption that a loan has taken place and that the lender can enforce repayment. The Torah is just trying to safeguard the poor person's dignity during the process.

There is one biblical passage that suggests that the lender may not necessarily be repaid:

> If there be a poor person from one of your brothers in one of your gates in the land that God has given you, you shall not harden your heart or clench your hand from your brother who is poor. You shall open your hand to him and lend him all that he lacks. Beware lest there be in your heart an unscrupulous thought [namely] that the seventh year, the sabbatical year is coming, and you think to be stingy towards your brother who is poor and not give him...Surely you shall give him and let your heart not be troubled when you give him since because of this, God will bless you in all your endeavors (Deuteronomy 15:7-10).

During the Sabbatical year all debts are canceled. In this passage, the Torah addresses the lender's very reasonable reluctance to lend money to the poor as the sabbatical year draws near. In all likelihood, the debt will be canceled before it is repaid. The Torah demands that the loans be given anyway and promises God's blessings as an alternative to repayment. It is significant that the money is never given as a gift; it is always termed a loan, albeit one that may never be collected.

There are, of course, many gifts that the Torah establishes for the poor. The corners of the field, produce that is forgotten in the field, sheaves that fall during harvesting–all of these are to be left for the poor. A tenth of one's produce is to be given to the Levite, who is often assumed to be poor. However, it is not clear if these gifts are binding outside the land of Israel, and they certainly only seem to be relevant for an agricultural population.

As the Jewish community moved into exile and away from an agrarian lifestyle, these types of land-based charitable gifts

were no longer sufficient. As a result, the rabbis reinterpreted the biblical verses to refer to charity as we know it today. The Babylonian Talmud in *Ketubot* 67b explains that when Deuteronomy 15:7 speaks of lending, it is referring to a poor person who refuses to accept a gift of money. The Torah says to give it as a loan, so that it will be accepted, but then afterward to claim that it was a gift. According to the Talmud, the goal is for the money to be accepted as a gift, and the giver merely uses the pretense of a loan to ensure that the gift is accepted.

Maimonides goes further in his re-interpretation of these verses. In his *Laws of Gifts to the Poor*, 7:1 he states as follows:

א מצות עשה ליתן צדקה לעניי ישראל כפי מה שראוי לעני, אם הייתה יד הנותן משגת--שנאמר "פתוח תפתח את ידך, לו" (דברים טו,ח), ונאמר "והחזקת בו, גר ותושב וחי עימך" (ויקרא כה,לה), ונאמר "וחי אחיך, עימך" (ויקרא כה,לו). [ב] וכל הרואה עני מבקש, והעלים עיניו ממנו, ולא נתן לו צדקה--עובר בלא תעשה, שנאמר "לא תאמץ את לבבך, ולא תקפוץ את ידך, מאחיך, האביון" (דברים טו,ז).

It is a positive commandment to give *tzedaka* to the poor of Israel according to the needs of the poor, as far as the giver can afford, as it says, "You shall open your hand to him" (Deuteronomy 15:8), and it says "you shall strengthen him–stranger and settler–and he shall live with you" (Leviticus 25:35), and it says "your brother shall live with you" (Leviticus 25:36). And anyone who sees a poor person asking and shuts his eyes from him and does not give him *tzedaka*, violates a negative commandment, as it says "you shall not harden your heart or clench your hand from your brother who is poor" (Deuteronomy 15:6).

Maimonides claims that there is a positive commandment to give *tzedaka*. Significantly all the verses that he cites to support this idea are not about giving, but rather about lending. Maimonides cites the verses from Deuteronomy and Leviticus out of context in order to create a biblical obligation to give to the poor.

Maimonides then continues to explain in the next section:

ב [ג] לפי מה שחסר העני, אתה מצווה ליתן לו--אם אין לו כסות, מכסין אותו; אין לו כלי בית, קונין לו כלי בית; אין לו אישה, משיאין לו אישה; ואם הייתה אישה, משיאין אותה לאיש: אפילו היה דרכו של זה העני לרכוב על הסוס ועבד רץ לפניו, והעני וירד מנכסיו--קונין לו סוס לרכוב עליו ועבד לרוץ לפניו, שנאמר "די מחסורו, אשר יחסר לו" (דברים טו,ח); ומצווה אתה להשלים חסרונו, ואין אתה מצווה לעשרו.

According to what the poor person lacks, so you are commanded to give him. If he does not have clothing, you clothe him; if he does not have household implements, you buy them for him; if he does not a wife, you marry him to a woman; if the poor person is a woman, you marry her to a man; even if this poor person was accustomed to ride on a horse with a servant running before him, and now he has lost his fortune, you buy him a horse to ride and a servant to run before him as it says "all that he lacks" (Deut. 15:8), you are commanded to fulfill his what he is lacking, but you are not commanded to enrich him (*Laws of Gifts to the Poor* 7:2).

In this second section, Maimonides describes one's obligations to the poor. Again, Maimonides quotes a prooftext from a biblical verse speaking of a loan; however, it does not seem that he is speaking of lending the clothing, the household utensils, the servant, or the horse. Instead Maimonides is once again using the verses about lending to create an obligation to give. Later in *Laws of Gifts to the Poor* 10:7, Maimonides designates a loan or a job offer as the highest form of charity, but he does not indicate that it is the only form mandated by the Bible.

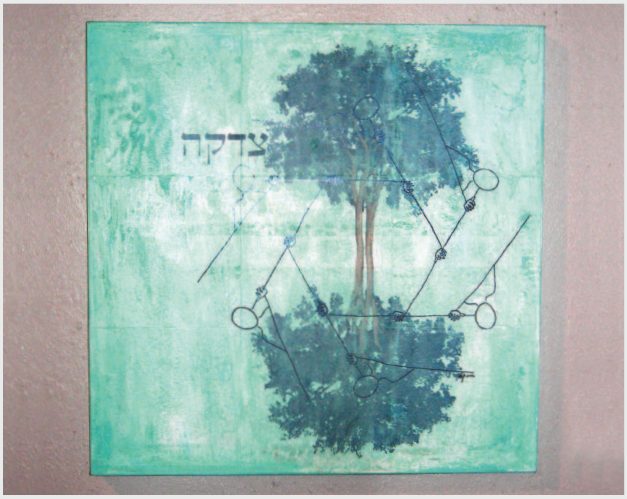
It is not hard to understand the rabbinic attempt to create a biblical mandate to give charity. There was a basis in the Torah for agricultural charity, and after the Jewish community moved into exile, that framework was no longer sufficient.. In its place, the Rabbis created an obligation to give money or whatever goods are needed by others. Why though does the Torah devote so many verses to creating an ethical lending framework, instead of simply insisting that we give to those less fortunate?

One possible answer is that the Torah is not just concerned with fulfilling the day-to-day needs of the poor. Those needs could theoretically be covered through agricultural gifts. Instead, the Torah is seeking to eradicate poverty. The Torah is in effect instituting a system of micro-lending. Poor people are given the capital to lift themselves out of poverty. The expectation that they will repay the loans is also an expression of confidence that they will be able to afford to do so. For generations, Jewish communities have created free-loan societies as an embodiment of these ideals. The awarding of the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize to Muhammad Yunus for creating a system of micro-lending in rural Bangladesh is evidence of the contemporary currency of this biblical idea.

As we think about how best to alleviate privation in the world, may we be inspired by the Torah to seek ways to uproot the causes of poverty and to help people to empower themselves. May we always remember to guard the dignity of the recipients of our aid, and may we give with a free heart and an open hand so that we may share in the blessing of Deuteronomy 15:10

כִּי בִגְלַל הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה, יְבָרֶכְךָ ה' אֱלֹקיךָ, בְּכָל-מַעֲשֶׂךָ, וּבְכֹל מִשְׁלַח יָדֶךָ.

Because of this, the Lord your God will bless you in all your endeavors.



UNTITLED
Rebecca Klein Ganz, Atlanta, Georgia
Acrylic and Mixed Media
From: "Tzedakah: The Art of Giving"
Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, Atlanta

"I get inspiration for my artwork through nature and the world around me. In viewing nature, there is an inherent but unconscious giving and receiving. For people around the world, it is not always second nature to help those in need: people must make a conscious effort to do so."

Wendy Amsellem *is a faculty member at Drisha Institute and serves as director of its high-school programs. She is pursuing a PhD in Jewish Studies at New York University.*

Striving to Align Our *Tzedaka* With Our Values

By Zelda R. Stern

People want our *tzedaka* dollars. We are all deluged by solicitations, whether through phone calls, online requests, mailed letters, or even directly by *sh'lichim*, supplicants, on our doorsteps. At *s'machot,* conferences, lectures, and other public events, we are solicited–sometimes almost tackled–by friends, acquaintances, family members, and even people we do not know.

What should we do?

Giving away money responsibly is not so easy. Although there are thousands of books and articles about how to make money and how to invest it, there are few about how to give money away.

How do we know where to direct our charitable dollars, our *tzedaka?* How should we determine which of the many institutions, agencies, projects, and organizations that solicit us are worthy of our contributions, large or small?

We can begin this process by examining our values and determining our vision of the ideal world. What are we passionate about? What are our cherished beliefs and hopes? We should then make our *tzedaka* decisions based on these values and beliefs.

We all give *tzedaka* both because we want to and because we are obligated to give. No matter how much or how little we have, halakha dictates that we give 10% of our income as *ma'aser*.

But we have the freedom to choose the recipients of our *tzedaka*.

My own values involve maximizing the potential of Jewish girls and women. I believe that women and girls should be afforded increased opportunities to engage in Jewish ritual, to have equal access to leadership positions, and to have unlimited opportunities to acquire knowledge.

The following three situations exemplify my own decision-making process.

A fundraiser for a large and old Jewish organization asked me for a contribution. Knowing there were no women officers in this organization, I asked him why this was the case.

He answered that when the organization was formed more than 100 years ago, it was written into its constitution that women were not allowed to serve as officers.

I responded that the Constitution of the United States allowed slavery and denied women the vote, but that we have since amended it. So, why not amend his organization's constitution?

He replied that women could not serve as officers for halakhic reasons, and one does not change halakha.

To this I responded as follows:

There are differing halakhic opinions on the issue of women serving as officers.

Any organization that denies itself the wisdom of 51% of the population cannot be as effective an organization as it could be and did not warrant my contribution.

But I urged him to solicit me again should the organization revise its policy.

In the second situation, a fundraiser called me to contribute to a Jewish high school. I asked to see its curriculum, and on reviewing it, I noticed that, although boys studied Talmud, the girls did not.

When I questioned this, the fundraiser replied that only males have the capacity to learn Talmud.

> "...we have the freedom to choose the recipients of our *tzedaka*."

As there was no curricular change in the offing, I told this fundraiser I could not contribute to the school, but I encouraged him to call me again should the school decide to teach Talmud to its female students.

Finally, a fundraiser asked me to sponsor a number of Hebrew letters–at $18 per letter–being written by a *sofer*, a scribe, into a *sefer Torah*. I asked the solicitor if, after the *sefer Torah* was written, girls and women would be permitted to read from it.

He said no.

I responded that I could not give money to this project. I explained why and suggested that he call me should he ever be involved in fundraising for a *sefer Torah* that would be read by girls and women as well.

Passionate about both my feminism and my adherence to halakha, I did not feel able to give money to these three organizations. My passions, beliefs, values, and goals involve the empowerment of women and girls in all spheres of life – in their families, workplaces, schools, synagogues, and communities. Because I want my *tzedaka* to reflect and buttress these values, I choose to support those organizations, institutions, projects, and programs that maximize the potential of Jewish girls and women.

To make these *tzedaka* decisions, I ask a lot of questions. For example, I explore whether women are represented fairly on both the board and in management and staff positions. I ask for the organization's letterhead that lists officers, board members, and staff so I can get a sense of women's representation in the organization.

When considering a donation to a JCC or a Y, I want to know if there are equal resources, time, and access to athletic facilities and team sports for male and female members. For example, if there is a basketball team for boys, is there one for girls as well? Is the women's locker room the same quality as the men's? I also look at programming and at how well it targets or includes girls and women.

Regarding personnel issues, I look at how liberal the institution's maternity leave policy is and whether there are opportunities for flex-time and part-time work. Are women afforded salaries, benefits, and advancement possibilities commensurate with those of men? Where the IRS permits, do women receive parsonage benefits? Is there a written policy on sexual harassment?

In regard to schools, it is not enough for me to know that the students are receiving a Jewish education. I want to know who the teachers are and what exactly they are teaching. Are there good and appropriate role models for girls? Is the curriculum a gender-sensitive one?

I review the materials the organization uses in its marketing. Do the images in its publications and online material reinforce stereotypes, such as males as active participants and females as observers–if women are even portrayed at all? Is the language used in the materials inclusive of girls and women? For example, does a brochure use only the pronoun "he," rather than alternating "he" and "she" or using "she or he"?

If I decide not to give based upon a principled reason, I articulate the reason so that the institution will not interpret my refusal to contribute as being due simply to a lack of funds.

And when I do give a contribution, I tell the fundraiser why I decided to give. By telling the laypeople and professionals who solicit our *tzedaka* exactly why we are giving–or not giving–we have an opportunity to possibly bring about change.

When we decide to deny a gift and we explain the reasons why, we may not change anything. But by the time the 5th,

or 15th, or 25th person declines to give a contribution for the same reason– for example, the organization's refusal to allow a woman to serve as president–the message will sink in, and the organization may well begin taking a good, hard look at itself and its future survival.

And one need not be a major donor to make a difference.

When any potential donor tells a solicitor she cannot give because of reason a, b, or c, the solicitor does not know how much revenue was potentially lost. Maybe it was a lot of money; maybe a little money. Forward-looking development staff view the donor-donee relationship as a potentially long-term one in which donors are cultivated and encouraged to give larger amounts over time. But if a possible donor says no at the outset, there will no relationship to develop.

One person *can* make a difference. It is incorrect to think that a small donation will not make a difference: every donation makes a difference.

And even more effective is having partners in our *tzedaka*–bringing together friends and family in supporting a cause. There are limitless opportunities to use our voices and our money.

Recently, one of the shuls I belong to asked me to make a contribution to its adult education program. I agreed to do so, but said I would support only women teachers (only male teachers had been hired thus far for the year). This same shul asked me to fund a Shabbat Scholar-In-Residence program. I responded that I would be happy to support women scholars. Here, too, only men had been scheduled to be the Shabbat scholars.

After much discussion, both goals were achieved, and the shul hired women teachers and scholars, accomplishments that benefited all the congregants and clergy.

Situations do arise, however, that can sorely test our determination to give according to our beliefs. What if a close friend or family member is being honored at a dinner given by an organization whose mission and programming we are uncomfortable with–or which are outright antithetical to our *tzedaka* desires? What if a close friend or family member asks us to donate to a cause dear to her heart, but far from ours? What if we "owe" someone, and that someone asks us to give to a boys' yeshiva where the *rebbe'im* are teaching its students that it is forbidden for girls to study Talmud? When such situations occur, I discuss my feeling of discomfort with the friend or family member, and I propose giving the same amount I would have given, but to another organization of her or his choosing that is aligned more closely with my values.

But sometimes–though we hope not too often!–we must stray a bit from our *tzedaka* plan for the sake of a valued relationship.

Luckily, though, there are plentiful opportunities for careful, considered strategic giving, whether to schools, shuls, Jewish community centers, workplaces, advocacy organizations, cultural institutions, or social service projects. And with these opportunities for giving come possibilities for making a difference–and making things different!

Every so often, take a look at your monthly credit card bill and your checkbook entries to review who were the beneficiaries of your *tzedaka*. Think about these recipients. Do they represent what you believe in?

By striving to align our *tzedaka* with our values and beliefs, we move toward a life of harmony, fulfillment, and satisfaction. The way we give our *tzedaka* is part and parcel of the way we live our life as Jews. We can both change others and change ourselves by speaking up and anteing up. Giving to what we believe in helps us live consistent and satisfying lives, lives that are true to ourselves. For me, this means I can speak, give, and live truly as an Orthodox feminist Jew.

Zelda R. Stern *is a psychotherapist and a founding board member of JOFA. She is a board member of the Harry Stern Family Foundation.*

Ceramic

JERUSALEM TZEDAKA HOUSE BOXES

Mallory Serebrin, Jerusalem

"I work with Jewish ritual objects taking them from traditional object to something unexpectedly dressed in color and design... My Tzedaka house boxes have become the larger expression and combination of what our Jewish tradition of giving, home, and joy means to me. The spirit of living here in Jerusalem is giving. I continue to find inspiration among the people here and the complexity of the life we live."

Ceramic and Wood

Women's Organized *Tzedaka* and *Chesed* in America

A Historical Perspective[1]

By Blu Greenberg

The history of Orthodox women's organizations in America is as old as Orthodox settlement on these shores. The earliest groups were created as auxiliaries, sisterhoods, and benevolent societies of synagogues and religious schools for boys. Yet, their work went far beyond service to their host-and primarily male-institutions. The women's groups modeled themselves on the *chesed* societies of Orthodox men in American and Europe, as well as on the Protestant women's societies of that time. Indeed, the Orthodox women's sisterhoods often borrowed the conventional Protestant title, "female benevolent society".

Orthodox women assumed the responsibility of aiding the downtrodden in their own communities. Phrases such as "to care for the indigent" or "to help our needy country-people become self-supporting." could be commonly found in their charters and mission statements.

The ladies auxiliaries took special interest in helping women. The Benevolent Hebrew Female Society of Congregation She'arith Israel in New York, the first congregation to be established in North America, included in its charter the task of "succoring of the indigent female." Widows and other women in need were the natural focus of the women's groups. Help for pregnant, birthing, and nursing mothers was a popular agenda for many of the groups in an age when maternity was perceived as a major upheaval in a woman's life.

Religious orphans became the special concern of Orthodox women's groups. They formed their own orphanage societies to prevent these children from being placed in "Americanizing" orphanages where they would lose their religious identity. Helping to make a wedding for a bride and furnish her house were common tasks of women's societies. This was particularly important after the mid-1880s, when, in response to marriage restrictions on Jews in several European countries, large numbers of single Jewish women immigrated alone to America in search of marriage partners. The Orthodox women also formed female *chevra kadisha* associations. In a letter "to the ladies of Jewish persuasion of congregation She'arith Israel", the rabbi recommended that they create a woman's *chevra kadisha*, adding that "separated by peculiar laws and customs of the rest of mankind, there are none who can appreciate our situation, ascertain our wants or gratify our sympathies so readily as those of our own race and persuasion."

Other tasks undertaken by Orthodox women's auxiliaries were visiting the sick, setting up burial societies, creating support networks for bereaved family members, feeding and clothing the poor, supplying kosher food to the elderly and infirm, and raising money for synagogue improvement projects. Some Orthodox women's groups, modeled after Reform ladies auxiliaries, expanded their services beyond members of their own faith or immediate community. The Sisterhood of Congregation Orach Chaim in Manhattan, for example, stated that its general purpose is "to help the poor of the surrounding neighborhood. Activities include providing religious instruction for 400 children of the poor as well as supplying clothing to the needy children and creating mothers' sewing circles." According to the records of one Orthodox sisterhood, activities included "Probation work in the Night and Day Courts with delinquent girls, Cooperation with reformatories and rescue homes."

Although the Orthodox women's associations often ran purely social events commonly associated with sisterhoods, their main focus was on helping others. Many of their charters resonate with verses from rabbinic sources emphasizing the different elements and supreme value of *gemilut chasadim*.

In the process of doing good, Orthodox women gained a great deal from their local female associations. Sisterhoods served as vehicles of socialization for women who had suffered the loss of extended family relationships that had nurtured them in Europe. These societies and auxiliaries created a substitute family framework in which immigrant women learned to become Americanized, democratized, and acculturated. They learned to run for office, hold elections, vote democratically, pay dues, keep budgets, take minutes, draft bylaws, and follow organizational procedures. In an era in which wives were given weekly allowances by their husbands, never signed checks or held joint bank accounts, these were tremendous steps forward. These competencies served them in good stead a generation or two later when they began to form the national women's organizations of the 20th century. Additionally, through the camaraderie of their shared work, the women also learned about fashion and techniques of child rearing that contributed further to their acculturation.

The turn of the 20th century witnessed a change in the local women's groups. The Orthodox men's groups increasingly began to federate into national organizations, and the women's auxiliaries, which until then had acted quite independently, were asked to join them. Joining the national groups posed a challenge to Orthodox female autonomy and independence. In some cases, the women were absorbed into the new organizations, making important contributions, but no longer holding primary leadership roles. In other cases, Orthodox women decided to maintain or form separate organizations. It was these independent national women's organizations, some synagogue-based, others Zionist in orientation, that had the greatest impact–on the women themselves and on the Orthodox community. We shall briefly examine the origins and development of several of these organizations.

The Mizrachi Women's Organization of America (now AMIT), the largest Orthodox women's organization, with a current

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GIVING IN LIVING COLOR

Sheryl A. Cohn, Dunwoody, Georgia
Acrylic and mixed media on canvas
From "Tzedakah: The Art of Giving"
Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, Atlanta

"For me, the most fullfilling and rewarding vehicle for *tzedaka* has been from my heart and hands, be it to my family and friends, to my favorite community causes or to total strangers on a broader scale."

"The Vest of the Ba'alei *tzedakah*" or "The Giver of Charity"
Andi Arnovitz, Jerusalem
Exhibited in "Tzedakah: The Art of Giving"
Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, Atlanta

ARTIST'S MISSION STATEMENT

Although I am a printmaker who typically works on paper in one dimension, I felt it necessary to create something that hypothetically could indeed contain money. After going back to the most basic of Jewish sources, the *Tanakh*, I focused on a specific quote from Deuteronomy 15:7-8:

"If there shall be a destitute person among you, any of your brethren in any of your cities, in the land that Hashem, your God, gives you, you shall not harden your heart or close your hand against your destititute brother. Rather, you shall open your hand to him; you shall lend him his requirement, whatever is lacking to him"

I created "The Vest of the Ba'alei Tzedakah" or "The Giver of Charity." I did not make a *tzedakah* box that sits on a table, but rather, a hypothetical garment worn by the giver of charity…in fact, in the wearing, the giver actually becomes the *tzedakah* vessel.

I loved the visual concept of opening a hand to the stranger. I felt that the imagery of hands reaching into pockets for the giving of money was even stronger. Thus I have created many pockets, which are actually made of hands, of *hamsas*, of the Middle Eastern symbol of good luck. Here in Jerusalem, where I live and work, these *hamsas* are all around me.

In the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, it lists many of the people and places to which we are obligated to give *tzedakah*. The list begins with the most specific and widens into the larger circles of our communities and our world. I chose to actually print, sew and attach parts of this list to the vest, in an attempt to express the huge obligation one has, and the contemplation one must go through in determining who gets what and how much. As in much of my work, there are strings everywhere. To me, we are people of paper and string. We tie fringes to the edges of our *tallitot*, and strings hang from *tzitzit*. Here, however, the strings become even more symbolic, in that in Judaism, the highest form of giving is that which has no strings attached.

"The Vest of the Ba'alei Tzedakah" or "The Giver of Charity...," is meant to be a visual reminder of the huge responsibility Judiasm places on those capable of giving. Inside the coat, unable to be seen by the viewer, but always at the back of the giver, are printed the words from Psalms 104:28. These words remind us that ultimately it is God who does the giving, something which we must all strive to remember:

"You give to them, they gather it in: You open Your hand, they are sated with good."

DEEDS OF LOVINGKINDNESS ARE GREATER EVEN THAN CHARITY. CHARITY IS ONLY TOWARDS THE POOR: BUT LOVINGKINDNESS CAN BE DIRECTED TOWARDS ANYONE

B. Talmud Sukka 49b.

JOFA Journal is very excited to launch a new regular column written by high school students. Students interested in contributing to future issues should contact the editor at jofa@jofa.org

V'torat Chesed Al LeShonah:

Torah and/or Chesed—Should Gender Matter?

By Michal E. Dicker

While searching for summer programs to attend, I came across several teen learning programs. One organization in particular had separate learning programs for girls and boys, and it struck me that the curricula and programs offered were very different for the two genders. More substantive text study was offered for the boys. For the girls, although there were learning opportunities, the focus was on *chesed* activities. In fact, there was no mention of *chesed* activities for the boys at all.

As I read these brochures and other similar material disseminated by youth groups, I was perturbed by this recurring theme, because it appeared that the girls were being shortchanged–and maybe the boys were as well. Perhaps the reason for this type of programming stems from the way these organizations perceive women–biblically, halakhically, and practically. It seems that they believe that males should play a learning role and females should be doing *chesed*. Unfortunately, this perception and consequent programming further perpetuate the notion that women and men are spiritually fullfilled in different ways, when that is not necessarily the case. In fact, this perception is disproved by the *Tanakh* itself. For example, going all the way back to the very beginning of biblical times, *Avraham Avinu* (our forefather)–a man–was known for his great *chesed*. Conversely, during the period of the Judges, *Devorah*–a woman–was known for her great learning, her *nevu'ah* (prophesy), and wise judgment. In actuality, the *Tanakh* presents men and women in both of these roles.

ARRIVAL OF REBEKAH

Etching, England?, 19th century

Courtesy of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary

In the Torah, Rebekah, together with Abraham, is the personification of *chesed*. When Eliezer is sent to find a wife for Isaac, he devises an extra test for the girl he is seeking. If she embodies *chesed* by offering the stranger water from the well, that shows she is worthy to enter Abraham's household. And, indeed, she passes the test with flying colors, offering to give water not only to Eliezer but to his ten camels as well.

Another rationale for this type of programming might be that *chesed* activities appeal more to many girls than does textual learning. Thus, the teen programs offer these *chesed* opportunities to cater to their prospective female attendees. If this is indeed the case, that women and girls do prefer *chesed* to learning, then is this attitude innate to the female persona, or is it something acquired due to external, social factors? It would seem to me that this perceived attitude is not innate, as demonstrated by the biblical examples provided above, as well as by my own personal experience. At the high school that I currently attend, boys and girls are fortunate to have equal access to textual learning, including *Tanakh*, *Gemara*, and Jewish philosophy. Boys and girls participate equally in *chesed* activities, including visiting old age homes and tutoring children.

Accordingly, if the problem is a social one, how does one address it? How does one prevent girls from being influenced by society to assume certain roles and limit themselves to certain activities?

The answer lies largely in the educational system. If one starts at that level, one will go a long way in preventing such "brainwashing." At the elementary school level, girls and boys must be given the same opportunities for text-based learning, as well as outlets for *chesed*. At the high school level, this concept of gender equity needs to be further emphasized throughout all aspects of school programming. In addition, summer programs need to provide balanced opportunities in both learning and *chesed*.

Until we address the education that children are receiving from preschool onward, as well as the gender-related messages and programming that are provided to them, this gender disparity will remain. The message that children should be receiving is found in *Ayshet Chayil*, which we recite each Friday evening:

פיה פתחה בחכמה, ותורת חסד על לשונה.

She opens her mouth with wisdom
and the law of kindness is on her tongue.

Proverbs 31:26

The *Ayshet Chayil* is a woman who both speaks words of wisdom and teaches the "*Torah*" of *chesed*.

***Michal E. Dicker** is in 10th grade at Stern Hebrew High School in Philadelphia. She is an active member of the Women's Tefillah Group in Cherry Hill, New Jersey.*

Bringing Women to the Table

By Sally Gottesman

Two years ago, walking through old Jewish graveyards in Poland and Ukraine, I was struck by the fact that women's tombstones, far more than those of men, were illustrated with etchings of giving *tzedaka*–a feminine hand, a coin, a *grush* being dropped into a box. Men's graves had books and Torah scrolls and occasionally a *tzedaka* box etched onto theirs, whereas women's graves predominantly had decorations of Shabbat candlesticks and *tzedaka* boxes. I came to understand the difference this way: while women and men were both expected to perform acts of *chesed* and *tzedaka*, women did not pray regularly in shuls; nor did they generally learn Torah. Consequently, philanthropy was a woman's principal vehicle for religious expression.

Why, then, with this legacy–and after women in the United States created Hadassah, Amit, Emunah, National Council of Jewish Women, synagogue sisterhoods across the nation, Women's Divisions of Federations, and, most recently, JOFA and the Jewish Women's Foundations–am I often asked in my role as consultant to not–for–profit organizations and philanthropists to write about the challenge of getting more Jewish women to be philanthropists in a field that has been dominated historically and even today by men?

Why? Because very few women are "major-givers" or "mega-givers," and because of the way in which our community operates, it is those groups of donors–made up primarily of men–who set the agenda. Indeed, after studying the 200 most generous Jewish philanthropists, Gary Tobin reported in 2003 that there were not enough women on the lists of mega-donors to warrant gender-based sampling to study the differences between the women and the men.[1] Women's near-total exclusion from the halls of major Jewish philanthropic power has had a significant impact on our community because the questions, concerns, reactions, and solutions of half the community are not taken into account. Thus, both women and the Jewish community lose.

But we also live in changing times, ones in which women's voices are heard more in shuls, in schools, in *batei din*, and in economic venues. Thus, it is incumbent upon us to use our economic power to create change for women and for the entire Jewish community.

Here is a personal example. Several years back, reflecting on the ideas and the money it took to create *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!,* which today operates 200 Rosh Hodesh groups for adolescent girls of all denominations around the country, I wrote, "Thus three women in our 30s and one in her 50s invested money in our dream, a dream we knew it was highly unlikely the traditional major Jewish funder–male and in his 60s–would have. Every study had shown that adolescent girls of all religions and classes lost tremendous self-esteem when they hit adolescence. What was the Jewish community doing about it? These issues and questions were second nature to us. And they are the ones we asked…and began to create answers for."

Studies suggest that women today view the use of money differently from men. Unlike men, most women do not think about using money to achieve positions of power so they can then address critical community issues. If they did, there would be more women at the major philanthropic tables, and we would certainly have a more inclusive Jewish community and a community richer in ideas. So, what can we do to get there? Here are a few suggestions:

- We can ask the women in the families of mega-donors to come to the table. We can scout for Jewish women in the top 1% or, better, the top .01% of wealth who are not currently involved in the Jewish community and ask them –and not the men in their families–to become involved.
- We can decide that it is of essential value to have both women and men thinking about philanthropy and the future of the Jewish community. Thus, if we cannot get women from mega-donor families to the table–because they are not interested or because they have felt uninvited for so long–we can involve the largest women donors we can in numbers equal to that of the involved men, even if their gift is smaller than that of the men.
- We can recognize women's tendencies to create long-term funding relationships, rather than giving to a specific cause for a year or two. And we can also value women's inclination to be engaged actively in the organizations they fund.
- We can give *kavod* to women (and to men) on all levels of giving whose contributions are commensurate with their wealth. We can ask women for larger contributions, because so many women give beneath their income and asset level. Many women I have spoken with say, "My husband gets asked for $25,000. I get asked for $5,000. Guess who gets invited to the decision-making table?"
- We, as women, can start writing larger checks, whether we are asked to or not, and we can make our voices heard when we do give money. Women and men can also refuse to write checks to organizations that do not have women in leadership positions and let the "powers that be" know the reason why they are not contributing.
- We can start valuing the organizations that support women and girls and stop considering them or their donors as marginal. Such organizations include JOFA and Drisha and other Orthodox

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Research on Jewish Women Philanthropists

One of the few pieces of research on Jewish women philanthropists up to now has been the dissertation of Joan Kaye, now Chief Executive Officer of the Bureau of Jewish Education in Irvine California, cited by Sally Gottesman. Entitled "Portraits of Jewish Women Philanthropists" and completed in June 2004, it first gives a background to the new phenomenon of Jewish women's philanthropy and then presents research based on interviews with 18 American Jewish female philanthropists, ranging in age from 29 to 92. There is much that is perceptive and fascinating in her analysis. To give just one example, she explores the reasons for the increase in the number of women donors in America. She attributes this to:

1) Daughters becoming major partners in directing family wealth.
2) Many married women functioning as the primary decision makers in the couple's philanthropic endeavors.
3) An increased number of widows taking over the reins of the family business and control of assets
4) An increased number of divorced women leaving their marriages with sufficient assets to become philanthropists.
5) An increased number of top female executives accumulating sufficient wealth to become major philanthropists.

I Am My Sister's Keeper

By Rachel Bluth

The year was 1995, a year that would serve as a turning point on the Agunah frontier in a way reminiscent of the women's suffrage movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that brought to the forefront women's rights in the secular world. Even though at the time I was an in-house writer for *The Jewish Press* with a weekly column known as "The Agunah Chronicles," I was not prepared for the sheer vastness of the *agunah* tragedy. The very idea for this column was conceived at one of the first meetings of a fledgling support group for women who were traumatized by the *get* process and the hardships they encountered while awaiting their *get*. Some of these women are still waiting to receive a *get*.

This group of "pioneers," brave enough to venture forth to seek comfort and healing among their own, met once a week in an apartment in Flatbush in Brooklyn. The initial head count was four, and I felt privileged to chair this group of caring, wonderful women. As they vented and shared their feelings, it fell to me to keep us focused on the group's purpose–to heal their spirits, help them gain a measure of closure on individual issues, and enable them to channel their anger and bitterness into productive thoughts so that they could rejoin mainstream society in a healthy, hopeful, and satisfying way. I am both glad and sad to say this group still exists today, but it is now not one group of 4 women but six groups with 20 to 30 women in each group. Some groups meet once a week, and others, once a month.

Almost two years ago, I received a call from three young women in Borough Park, asking me to chair yet another support group. At the first meeting, I anticipated the usual gamut and range of bile and rage, as well as the stereotypical browbeaten and downtrodden individuals, immersed in their own pain and for whom the recovery would be long in coming. To my pleasant surprise, these three young women were amazingly upbeat and composed. What they were looking for was a way to recover from their traumatic marital experiences, but not in the conventional manner. They were not so much interested in telling their stories as they were in wanting to find their inner strengths and to retrieve the qualities that had been diminished in them by controlling, abusive, and conniving spouses. They wanted to create a strong and viable subcommunity, in which they could be productive, self-sufficient, and independent, within a larger community that still has great difficulty in understanding and accepting modern-day *agunot* and a rabbinate that places the responsibility for a failed marriage at their feet.

This group of three, who chose to call themselves P.A.V.E.S (Perspectives And Vital Experience Sharing) quickly bonded with other, and each month brought new faces to the meetings. Each meeting featured a guest speaker, someone in a professional capacity who could answer vital questions about matters of interest to the group. These professionals included lawyers, child psychologists, forensic professionals, rabbis to answer questions about the *get* process and halakhic issues, and abuse counselors. The discussions included such topics as how to help their children cope in a two-parent world, which yielded information on Big Brother and Big Sister programs. As the group grew in number, the women found a wonderful sense of camaraderie–a sense of family.

The women soon began to invite each other and their children to share Shabbat and *Yom Tov*. Children who had felt isolated from friendships with children of two-parent homes now found friends who understood and accepted them. The women became almost like sisters, and their outreach and interdependence grew further to include a clothing exchange, to which they brought clothes to share with one another and their children. When someone was in dire need of funds because a child support check was weeks or months late, or the rent was due and the money was not available, they raised much of it among themselves. They also accumulated a vast wealth of information about lawyers and judges, good and bad, and which rabbis and *batei din* to avoid. The group created a large resource guide to help each other through court appearances, and they also accompanied each other to court as a show of support and to offer strength and encouragement during this grueling process.

P.A.V.E.S became a model for what can happen when women decide to reclaim their lives and rise above the stigma cast on them by our society. These women chose not to accept the label of inferiority for wanting out of a bad or abusive marriage. They opted not to succumb to the stigma of being subhuman for fighting for their freedom, often at the expense of their good name and reputation. Instead, they chose life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And they succeeded admirably. To accommodate the needs of its members, the group has branched out into chapters in Borough Park, Flatbush, Cedarhurst, Lakewood, and Monsey.

> "They reach out to one another...with courage, dignity and valor."

We have also joined forces with MARCH (Mothers Alone Raising Children) to form an umbrella group called Sister To Sister, which provides women in need with an advocate/sister who can offer friendship and encouragement and who will be there for them as required. Sister To Sister provides financial counseling to help women reorganize their finances, so they can use the funds at their disposal more productively and be better able to meet bill payments and cut out hidden wasteful spending. They link women to training programs where they can develop skills to make them more marketable in the business world, thus allowing them to bolster their income. They provide counseling for self-improvement and renewed self-esteem. Programs for children are available, as well as financial aid to help with tuitions and legal fees. Needs are met as quickly and efficiently as they present themselves–all in a dignified and respectful way that enhances the women's sense of self and dignity and fosters the knowledge that no one is ever alone.

At the time of writing, I am still privileged to chair the original Borough Park group, and each meeting in the presence of these fabulous women humbles me. They reach out to one another in ways that no one reached out to them, with courage, dignity, and valor. They lift each other up and thus are lifted up themselves. They are true *Neshei Chayil*. They do not wait for the world to change; they bring change to the world by creating a world of their own. And if ever the Almighty will ask "Where is your sister?" I have no doubt that the answer will be, "My sister is here, Dear Heavenly Father; she is here and well because I am my sister's keeper!"

***Rachel Bluth** is a journalist and a counselor with a practice in Cedarhurst, New York, which addresses family issues, stress, anger management, and related problems. She was the author of a weekly column in* The Jewish Press *entitled "The Agunah Chronicles."*

Keeping Our Options Open?

Women and Federation Giving

By Deborah Skolnick Einhorn

In 1895, Bostonian Jews founded the Federation of Jewish Charities of Boston, the first Jewish community chest designed to collect and distribute charitable dollars. This Federation became the prototype for collective giving among American Jewry. Although women had started pounding the pavement to raise money for Federation much earlier, the women of Boston were the first to establish a formal Women's Division of Federation in 1917. Communities across the country soon adopted this model. Ninety years later, though, Women's Division stands as only one option for female donors in the Federation universe.

There are now at least three avenues for women's involvement in connection with Federation, which continues to act as a local fundraising and allocating body for local, national, and international causes. Women's Division, which raises funds from women giving donations in their own name, participates in the Federation annual and endowment campaigns. Federation's general campaign–historically coined the "men's division"–raises funds from all donors and typically forms the power center of the organization. The newest additions, Jewish Women's Foundations (JWFs), often connect themselves tangentially to their local Federation, but raise and allocate their own funds. I will briefly describe these three options–and their distinct gender and communal dynamics–based on historical analysis, interviews, and participant observation research that I have conducted since 2002 for my dissertation on Jewish women's philanthropy.

Historically, women leaders, like the pioneers in Boston, established their own formal women's divisions in the post-World War I era, when welfare needs were high both at home and abroad. Women looked to their female peers to fulfill the communal call for universal participation in the campaign. By the World War II era, these gifts were promoted as "plus giving," the amount over and above the family gift to the Federation. Not surprisingly, this nomenclature has since gone out of style, in recognition of women's status as professionals, breadwinners, and full-fledged donors in their own right.

Notwithstanding their financial contributions, until the late 1970s and the influence of the second wave of feminism, women's involvement was relegated to their own division, and women were barred from such centers of power as the Young Leadership Cabinet (dubbed "The Locked Cabinet" by *Lilith*'s Amy Stone in 1976). Eventually persuaded that "separate can never be equal," however, ten Federations abolished their Women's Divisions completely. Notably, all reinstated them by the 1980s, perhaps recognizing that some women were seeking more than just power from their donor dollars. For those donors, this "special something" only seemed possible in a separate female campaign.

Women's Division may be best known for its pioneering use of donor

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Women to the Table

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women's organizations that rarely receive truly significant contributions from the major Jewish foundations or from individual donors. At Moving Traditions, an organization whose goal is to inspire people to draw on Judaism at key lifecycle moments, this would mean that when I ask a professional at a mega-donor's foundation whose primary commitment is to Jewish education about the possibility of funding *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!*, I won't get the dismissive answer: "He just isn't interested in that type of thing."

- We can talk more openly about money, class, and philanthropy. Women need to learn how to talk about "numbers" because numbers matter when it comes to getting to the philanthropic table, and once at the philanthropic table, numbers continue to matter. It isn't always easy to talk about money because we have been trained that it is "not nice" to do so. But we need to learn to talk about specific dollar amounts with our partners, in our solicitations, and at budget meetings.
- We can begin a conversation about what cultural norms should be developed for those in our community who have considerable assets, aside from income. Women can lead the way in taking the conversation beyond *ma'aser* (giving away 10% of income) and *chomesh* (giving away 20% of income) into taking account of the complex ways that wealth is owned today.

The New Tithing Group founded by Claude Rosenberg has begun this discussion by defining new tithing as "making the maximum comfortably affordable donations to charity based on annual surplus income, the tax consequences of charitable gifts and the value, after debt, of investment assets (excluding personal homes and possessions)." The New Tithing Group found that, in 2003, American tax filers in the top four adjusted gross income groups (above $100,000) could more than triple their annual contributions and boost U.S. charitable donations by an additional $107 billion in 2003 without sacrificing their lifestyle by considering these other assets.

What would this mean for the Jewish community–and for JOFA–if our members with incomes above $100,000 tripled their annual contributions? How could this segment of our community impact the 21% of Jewish New Yorkers who live on incomes of less than $27,150 for a household of four–UJA-Federation of New York's definition of poverty? What would it mean for Jewish feminism and the work we do if we really broadened our discussion of income to truly reflect our assets?

All too soon, future generations will search graveyards, looking for hints of our everyday lives. Let us do our part to ensure that *both* women and men are the major philanthropists that future generations discover there.

***Sally Gottesman** is the Chair of Moving Traditions and serves on the boards of American Jewish World Service and Bikkurim. She holds an MBA from the Yale School of Management and is a consultant to not-for-profit organizations and philanthropists, primarily in the Jewish world.*

1 *Portraits of Jewish Women Philanthropists*, Joan Kaye. Dissertation submitted for degree of Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership, Pepperdine University, California, June 2004.

Keeping Our Options Open?

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recognition through the Lion of Judah pin. Established in 1972 in Miami, the "Lion" recognizes women's major gifts (typically $5,000 per year or higher, with distinctions for higher levels of giving) to the annual and endowment campaigns. As I found in my research of recognition societies (organizational subgroups that honor donors' gifts), becoming a Lion of Judah endows women donors with a sense of sisterhood and shared purpose. This undoubtedly motivates donors–at least 14,000 of them–and Lion of Judah still stands as *the* benchmark for a successful combination of marketing and philanthropic recognition.

Despite its success and many imitators, Women's Division's recognition societies have their share of detractors and concerned donors. Some donors, especially those of the younger generation, express ambivalence about the wearable and public type of recognition embodied by a piece of jewelry. Do these symbols align with Jewish values about the giving of *tzedaka*? Do they align with personal tastes and the social norms of their peers? Others express concerns about the destination of the dollars behind the pin, to what they perceive as causes that are not sufficiently progressive or feminist.

Nonetheless, Women's Divisions today typically raise at least 20% of their Federation's annual campaign dollars. Women, of course, can now choose to attribute their donation to the Women's Division, to any of Federation's other special interest/professional groups, or directly to the general campaign. Many women continue to find their place in the Women's Division, where positions of leadership and power are reserved for them and they can find strong relationships among female donors. Others, however, prefer the mixed-gender environment of the general campaign, which has historically been the organization's power center.

When I began my research, I assumed that Women's Division would be populated primarily by married women who were not working outside the home. Instead, my preliminary research revealed that such charitable preferences did not necessarily correspond to professional or marital status. For example, I found that younger married women tended to feel more comfortable with the idea of a family gift, especially if they were not working outside the home at the time. These women preferred to spend their limited free time (and their charitable dollars) with their spouses in the mixed-gender environment of the general campaign.

> "JWFs seek to honor feminist principles in both form and content."

Young women had different reasons for choosing to direct their contributions to a general campaign. Although several women who were not working outside the home at the time of our interviews considered a family gift the only "honest" option, other women expressed their preference for the general campaign in terms of increased access to influential leadership positions. Of course, monetary donations are inextricably linked to the Federation power structure, which continues to struggle with gender imbalances. In a recent Ma'yan study, *Listen to Her Voice*, 70% of respondents believed that women were underrepresented as Jewish community leaders.

Still other women donors have trouble finding their place in either of these long-standing Federation frameworks and seek additional or alternative Jewish philanthropic outlets. Whether their donations are given through the Women's Division, the Young Lawyer's Division, or directly to the general campaign, they reason, the dollars ultimately are funneled to the same causes. A strong conviction that the list of Federation beneficiary organizations should include many more initiatives supporting the needs of women and girls, which have historically been under-funded. led to the establishment of Jewish Women's Foundations (JWFs). Seattle's Women's Endowment Foundation (WEF), founded in 1989, pioneered this Foundation and Federation partnership to improve "the lives of women and girls through targeted grant making and...donor activism" (WEF mission statement).

JWFs seek to fund long-term social change and aim to ultimately shift the Jewish communal agenda to include more feminist and progressive initiatives, as well as more sustained funding for grassroots initiatives. Although the movement is less than two decades old, women leaders have established close to 30 JWFs nationwide. These organizations have varying degrees of cooperation with their local Federations; some consider themselves completely independent entities, whereas others are staffed and housed under Federation auspices. Many JWF funders are drawn from outside the Federation donor circle. Through interactions with crossover staff and donors, however, some JWF donors do begin contributing to Federation's campaign as well.

Jewish Women's Foundations seek to honor feminist principles in both form and content. The groups generally act as pooled giving collectives; they are hierarchy-free organizations that grant all donors, regardless of the amount of their donation, equal access to power and funding decisions. However, my research did reveal some struggles between honoring the needs of the

THE WORLD IS BUILT WITH *CHESED*

Psalms: 89:3

***TZEDAKA* BOX**

Chava Wolpert Richard, Sterling Silver, New York, Private Collection.

The inscription, "With all your heart and with all your soul," from the *Sh'ma* prayer, involves a rebus: the heart shape takes the place of the word "heart." A 3-D star forms the coin slot in the hinged top.

The box was designed in 1990 for an international Lubavitch competition for charity boxes in London.

funders to be empowered and heard and honoring the needs of the foundations' beneficiaries (who likewise need to be heard and empowered for decision making). These struggles seem to be primarily a function of growing pains; the foundations' feminist model of consensus-building becomes increasingly challenging as the number of donors and stockholders increases.

Perhaps it should not be surprising that one size cannot fit all when it comes to women's philanthropy. Many women donors have sought alternatives beyond Federation. They have carved new feminist niches in private foundations, freestanding Jewish women's organizations, start-ups, and the women's funding movement. And others, of course, continue to search for their perfect philanthropic home as Jews, women, and feminists.

Deborah Skolnick Einhorn *is a Near Eastern and Judaic Studies doctoral student at Brandeis University, specializing in American Jewish Life. Her dissertation research focuses on the uses of social capital in American Jewish women's philanthropy.*

TZEDAKA **CERTIFICATE** *made out to Malka Wollferg, Jerusalem*
Monzon Press c.1910
Courtesy of the Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary

Bat Mitzvah Projects

By Rachel Borghard

My name is Rachel Borghard. I am 14 years old and am currently a freshman at The Frisch School. Two years ago in February I celebrated my Bat Mitzvah. At the time, I was studying *Pirkei Avot*, a book of morals and ethics written by the ancient Jewish sages. *Pirkei Avot* was an inspiration for the numerous *tzedaka* and *chesed* projects that I did for my Bat Mitzvah. Specifically, I put art baskets together for a preschool, decorated ceramic pots for an old age home, and donated my hair to an organization for cancer patients.

My first project involved children at a preschool called Tibbs, located in Englewood, New Jersey. Tibbs is a school for toddlers from low-income families. I first heard of Tibbs through my middle school, The Elisabeth Morrow School, as part of its community service program. When I visited Tibbs, I noticed that it was lacking many things, one of them being art supplies. To me, art is a way for people to express themselves and be creative. Because I love art so much, I decided to have everyone at my Bat Mitzvah arrange art supplies and put them into decorative bags. These gifts were donated to Tibbs in honor of my Bat Mitzvah.

I wanted to incorporate art in another way for my Bat Mitzvah. So I came up with the idea of decoupaging ceramic flowerpots for an old age home. During Chanukah, members of my shul, including my family, visited a Jewish old age home in Rockleigh, New Jersey. My family and I spent a lot of time talking to all the wonderful people there. Later in the year, when it was getting closer to my Bat Mitzvah, I was thinking of a place where I could donate things. I remembered the people at the old age home and wondered what I could do for them. I came up with the idea of giving them flowers in decorated pots. The flowerpots would be scattered throughout the home and would be a nice way to add color. After my Bat Mitzvah, my mother and I spent many days assembling the pots and plants, but the result was well worth it. This was another one of my Bat Mitzvah projects.

My last Bat Mitzvah project was inspired by my grandmother, who had been battling breast cancer for almost 16 years at the time of my Bat Mitzvah. She periodically lost her hair from the chemotherapy and wore a wig. It was because of her experience that I decided to grow my hair and then donate it to be made into a wig. I knew how much it would mean to someone going through chemotherapy to get a nice wig. I grew my hair for about two years until it met the minimum length for donation: 10 inches. At the end of two years my hair was long enough to cut. I ended up donating 13 inches to an organization called Locks of Love.

One of the *mishnayot* of *Pirkei Avot* discusses that we should be as careful about the small *mitzvot* as we are about the big ones:

והוי זהיר במצוה קלה כבחמורה
שאין אתה יודע מתן שכרן של מצות.
Be heedful of a light precept as of a grave one,
for you do not know the reward for each precept.
Ethics of the Fathers 2:1

Even if we perform a big *mitzvah*, the reward for us is unknown, and we do not necessarily feel its impact. Therefore, *Pirkei Avot* stresses that we should perform smaller *mitzvot* as well. This teaching related to all of my Bat Mitzvah projects. Although I did not do a huge *mitzvah* and change the world, I did do smaller *mitzvot*, which I hope changed a few things for the better in some people's lives.

Rachel Borghard is a freshman at The Frisch School in Paramus, New Jersey.

AYSHET CHAYIL

Enya Keshet, Israel c.2000
Courtesy of The Library of
The Jewish Theological Seminary

The most famous quotations associating women, *tzedaka* and *chesed* are from the *Ayshet Chayil* text at the end of the book of Proverbs In the description of the "ideal woman", not only is "the law of kindness *(chesed)* on her tongue, (31:26) but "she reaches out her palm to the poor and extends her hand to the needy" (31:20).

The area of *chesed* was the one in which the rabbis always considered women as superior to men. According to Rabbinic sources, women are mere empathetic, more hospitable, more sensitive to the needs of others than men. While one can feel offended by the opposite view as regards intellectual gifts, it is important to see the many ways in which *chesed*, one of the three pillars of the world according to *Pirkei Avot*, is so closely associated with women in the sources. In the famous story recounted in *Ta'anit* 23b, Rabbi Abba Hilkiya was asked why his wife's prayer for rain was answered before his prayer, and replied that her acts of *chesed* had more merit because a woman gives food to a person in need. since she is usually approached in her home whereas a man only gives money. Therefore it is the woman who fulfils the concrete need. In another story of the third century sage Mar Ukba, related in *Ketubot* 67b, he and his wife who were very generous and charitable, did not want the recipients of their charity to see them, and so they ran into a furnace from which fire had just been swept so as not to be discovered. While the embers burned Mar Ukba's feet, they did not burn those of his wife. She told him to stand on her feet and be protected, and he was. According to the Rabbis, this was because her level of *chesed* was greater than his.

We have evidence from inscriptions on synagogues and tombstones that there were generous women who contributed to the building of early synagogues throughout the Jewish diaspora. The Talmud also gives examples of women participating in community charitable projects. *Sanhedrin* 43a describes women arranging to give medicines to people awaiting execution to numb them and relieve their suffering. And the Mishnah in *Makkot* 2:6 tells of women organizing campaigns to support those confined to the Cities of Refuge. Similarly the Gemara in *Ketubot* 106a describes women of Jerusalem who took the responsibility of maintaining other women whose sons were being raised to help the *Kohen Gadol*, and who were not allowed to work because of the risk of becoming ritually impure.

What is especially interesting is that the Talmud in a few places refers to women who were actually charity overseers, (*gizbarot*) and the text does not seem to consider this exceptional. One text refers to a woman needing a signet ring to use officially as a seal for the charity disbursements. Thus there is early evidence that women held public roles in charitable and philanthropic endeavors.

Medieval texts such as the 13th century *Sha'arei Teshuva* of Yonah Gerondi and fragments from the Geniza reveal examples of women in public charitable roles, especially collecting and disbursing of funds, as well as examples of individual generous women who portioned out their assets un their wills to various communal charities and the poor. Yonah Gerondi actually advised women who worked and earned money to give to charity to work more than usual so that they could independently give charity, from the extra profit. Historians of the 18th century have also found examples of women supervisors (*gabetes* in Yiddish) in charge of collecting funds in places such as Poznan and Kornik in Eastern Europe. In some instances, the women only collected from the women in the community and handed over the money collected to the male supervisors to distribute. In other cases, there is evidence of women being in charge of collecting donations from men as well as women and also distributing the funds themselves.

Margalit Shilo in her book "Princess or Prisoner?" on Jewish women in Jerusalem in the 19th century also explores the role of the charitable efforts of individual pious women and of the early charitable organizations established by women in the holy city.

Establishing a New Organization

The Formation of JCADA in Washington

By Barbara J. Zakheim

In October 1999, a *Washington Jewish Week* article addressed the subject of domestic abuse in the local Jewish community and related the case of a professional woman who had been in an emotionally and physically abusive relationship. A sidebar to the article provided a list of resources that were available in the Jewish community to assist victims of abuse.

As I read this article over Shabbat, I realized that I knew two women who had been in similar relationships to the one described and who had consulted me for advice, years before, when they had nowhere else to turn. I was embarrassed that I had not been educated enough to know at the time that these relationships were abusive–I just thought these women lived with *very difficult* men. Furthermore, I was upset that the list of resources seemed to lack any program that was specifically focused on domestic abuse in our own Jewish community, meaning that there was still nowhere for Jewish victims to turn.

After Shabbat, I decided to do some research about what was being done about domestic abuse in other Jewish communities. I learned that the Washington DC area was the only major U.S. Jewish community that did not have a specific organization and program addressing this issue. Programs existed in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Baltimore, Miami, Atlanta, New Jersey, Boston, St. Louis, and Columbus. This was both good and bad–good from the perspective that we could learn much from other communities and bad in that local victims had nowhere to turn, the community was uneducated about the issue, and there was no effort being made to prevent abuse from occurring in future generations.

I was sufficiently motivated by the results of this research to make calls to both people and organizations mentioned in the article and to others whom I thought might be interested in taking some action. These calls resulted in a meeting in my home during the last week of December 1999; attendees included the president of Women's Division of Federation, some female Federation staffers, a local rabbi's wife, a local Orthodox female psychologist, representatives from Na'amat and Jewish Women International, a social worker mentioned in the *Jewish Week* article, and some friends.

Although some women at the meeting were not sure that domestic abuse was a problem in *our* community and wanted to do market research, the majority of attendees felt that we should move ahead and form an organization that was similar to those in other cities.

Within six months of this meeting, The Greater Washington Jewish Coalition Against Domestic Abuse (JCADA) was incorporated and formed as a coalition of organizations with a threefold mission of prevention, education and support. Six months later we were providing training for rabbis and social workers, and, by June 2001, we had opened our hotline and started to offer case management services, educational programming, and abuse prevention training for youth.

Looking back over the last six years, it is apparent that JCADA has established itself on the local Jewish community scene. In answer to the skeptics who felt that it was unnecessary to establish a new organization, JCADA can be seen as a success. We now have one full-time executive director, a part-time case manager, and a program assistant, and JCADA has handled more than 60 cases and well over 600 calls to our hotline. I feel particularly proud that we have been able to attract support from the various denominations of the Jewish community. We have a board that spans the spectrum of Orthodox to Reconstructionist, and there have never been religious issues or indeed any others that have been divisive.

In terms of caseload, we estimate that about 20 percent of our cases are from Orthodox or traditional families. I am often asked if there is more denial of domestic abuse within the Orthodox community; in truth, it is hard to answer this question. My experience has been that the rabbis from every denomination are slow to deal with or give time to the problem of domestic abuse. The Orthodox rabbis in the community are split: several are very concerned and supportive, and several barely acknowledge that we exist. From the beginning, we made a determined effort to involve Orthodox rabbis and their lay leaders. When we organized a training seminar for rabbis, we provided a separate one for the Orthodox rabbis at their request. This seminar included not only pulpit rabbis but also rabbis who worked as educators and some wives of rabbis. Additionally, we continue to provide prevention training in various educational frameworks including Orthodox day schools, and we recently provided training for *kallah* teachers and *mikvah* attendants.

In terms of awareness, Orthodox community members are probably more aware of problems of domestic abuse than some other segments of the community because of the *agunah* issue. Over the years, we have dealt with several *agunah* cases, which tend to receive more exposure and thus attention in the Orthodox community. Despite this increased awareness, only a few Orthodox congregations have signed on as coalition partners. Among our individual donors, however, we estimate that about 20-25 percent are Orthodox.

> "Our experience with JCADA illustrates how powerful a small number of women activists can be."

Financial support of JCADA comes from many segments of the community, although probably a little more than half of our funding comes from women. We have received funds from women's advocacy groups, as well as from the local women's *chevra kadisha*. We also have received support from several family foundations, although we do not know if the initiative to donate to us comes mainly from male or female members of those foundations. In terms of individuals, many couples and individual men support us. In fact, one of our achievements has been to make JCADA and the problem of domestic abuse not only a women's problem but also a community-wide issue.

Although JCADA is a successful start-up organization, the tragedy is that the needs it was established to address still exist in the Washington area, as in other Jewish communities worldwide. Among our future goals are the provision of a safe house for victims fleeing dangerous situations; expansion of our education programs to help reduce the denial of domestic abuse that still exists in the community; and expansion of our prevention program to ensure that our young people are knowledgeable about healthy relationships, power and control issues, and the importance of strong emotional health and self-esteem.

Unfortunately, there is still much to do. Yet, our experience with JCADA illustrates how powerful a small number of women activists can be in focusing community attention on an issue and then bringing about positive change.

***Barbara Zakheim** lives in Silver Spring, Maryland, and is the President and Founder of JCADA (The Greater Washington Jewish Coalition Against Domestic Abuse).*

Women's Organized Tzedaka

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membership of over 40,000, was founded by Bessie Gotsfeld (1888-1962). Bessie, as she was known to all, spent the early years of her marriage in Seattle, Washington, where she met and was influenced by Rabbi Meir Berlin, a founder of Mizrachi, the modern religious Zionist movement. Returning to New York in 1919, she became active in establishing women's Mizrachi groups in Brooklyn. The women of these loosely linked groups wanted to work jointly on projects, and in 1924, they formed Achiyos (Sisters of) Mizrachi.

The concept of a national religious women's movement was a bold idea for Orthodox women at the time. The women wanted complete autonomy over the funds they raised and full jurisdiction over their projects. Although initially there was opposition from the male Mizrachi leadership regarding control over these funds, the women prevailed, maintaining their independence. National Mizrachi Women's Organization of America was formally constituted in 1925. Among their initial projects were vocational high schools for girls. Most of the Mizrachi Women's projects in Israel were aimed at supporting disadvantaged children, and after the Second World War, many who had survived the camps rebuilt their lives in Israel at children's villages supported by AMIT, such as K'far Batya. The goal of the organization was also to make women productive, creative, equal members of society, and therefore, quality education for girls became a priority. It is noteworthy that the great Torah teacher Nechama Leibowitz first came to prominence through Mizrachi Women which employed her in its institutions for several decades, beginning in the early 1950s. Today, AMIT runs a large network of educational and social service projects throughout Israel.

In contrast to AMIT, the national religious Zionist organization, Emunah, first took root in Israel and only later was transplanted to America. In 1947, following the UN vote on partition, the women of the Religious Women's Workers Party of Israel (*Irgun Hapo'alot*) recognized the need to form an alliance with Diaspora Jewry. Its chairperson, Tova Sanhedrai, traveled to America for support. Rejected by several women's organizations, she then organized a core group of individual American women who agreed to a partnership, and the Hapo'el Hamizrachi Women's Organization, (later renamed Emunah Women) was formed.

Most of Emunah's projects of the last half-century have focused on social service, welfare, and education in Israel. But like most other women's organizations, over its lifetime it has expanded its original agenda. A recent and unique project has been the Torah Arts School in Jerusalem at which girls study dance, theater, and the visual arts in a Torah framework. Emunah has also developed a Holocaust Resource Center in the United States.

Women's Branch of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations in America (UOJCA) is the national organization of Orthodox synagogue sisterhoods. The UOJCA was founded in 1902 as a men's organization, but by the 1920s all of its constituent synagogues had individual sisterhoods. In 1923, at the initiative of seven women from New York City sisterhoods, including the most prominent *rebbetzins* of the time, Women's Branch was formed.

Although each sisterhood remained independent, allowing for differences among individual congregations and rabbis, the national group undertook projects larger in scope and in keeping with its mission: to unite and strengthen all Orthodox Jewish women and to spread the knowledge of traditional Judaism. Many of its earlier projects are not widely known or properly credited. One such project dealt with kosher food supervision. To make it easier for Jewish homemakers to observe *kashrut,* Women's Branch convened a *kashrut* committee to answer questions about kosher food. Out of their own pockets, the women paid a rabbi to investigate products and factories, and they worked diligently to persuade companies to use kosher ingredients. This was the beginning of nationalizing the kosher food industry, and from this project grew the Kashrut Division of the UOJCA. In the 1920s, Women's Branch raised the funds to build a boys' dormitory at Yeshiva College and to create a post-high-school Hebrew Teachers Training Institute for Girls, later renamed Teachers Institute for Women, and absorbed into Yeshiva University.

Women's Division of Young Israel was also formed to augment the work of its parent body, the National Council of Young Israel. But in the case of Young Israel, women were part of the parent body itself. Founded in 1912 by "15 visionary men and women," the synagogue-based National Council of Young Israel was organized to counter the era's challenge of assimilation and to attract young people by creating "a palatable synagogue experience that was user friendly to new immigrants and their subsequent generations." Young Israel was actually the first national group to recognize women in leadership roles. Its charter–which long predates feminism and relates to the gender-inclusive origins of the Young Israel movement–allows women to hold office up to and including the vice presidency of its constituent synagogues.

Over the years, men and women's roles became more separate within the Young Israel community, and branch sisterhoods were established throughout the country. Finally Women's Division was formed to unite and serve the branch sisterhoods. An early project was the college kosher kitchen program, which was designed to make a traditional way of life easier to follow on campus. Distinctively, the Women's Division of Young Israel specifically harnesses the energy and talents of its *rebbetzins*. "The Rebbbetzin's Letter" is now published five times a year as a rotating guest column and is sent out to membership along with "The Rabbi's Letter."

Other Orthodox women's national organizations include Yeshiva University Women, N'shei Chabad (Lubavitch Women), N'shei Aguda (Aguda Women), and Women's Division of Sha'arei Tzedek.[2] All of these organizations similarly had to adapt to changing community needs, both in Israel and in the United States. All have redefined themselves, evolving specific goals and programming to meet changing societal needs and the needs of diverse memberships. A large challenge today to sisterhoods and national women's organizations is the decline in membership as growing numbers of Orthodox women have joined the workforce.

The stories of the formation and early development of Orthodox women's philanthropic and service organizations offer an important window into the lives of pioneering Orthodox Jewish women in America. These stories also inform and inspire those of us in the very newest organizations–such as JOFA–that build on their work. Orthodox women's organizations of today, whether a century or a decade old, must constantly reinvent themselves to meet the new urgencies of our times. There is no other choice.

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

1. Editor's note: This article draws on a longer essay on this subject published in the *Encyclopedia of Jewish Women and Religion in North America,* (Indiana University Press, 2006).
2. These organizations are described in the encyclopedia article noted above, but are omitted here for lack of space.

Letters to the Editor

RESPONSES TO THE *AGUNAH* ISSUE

DEAR EDITOR,

An International Rabbinic Conference on Agunot and Mesuveret Get, scheduled by Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar in Jerusalem in November 2006, was cause for joy and optimism for all who recognize that women cannot fairly obtain a Jewish divorce. Its cancellation, a few days before its scheduled date, was a pyrrhic victory for the ultra orthodox who attempt white washing this scourge in halakha by denying it is a problem. The agreement of international representatives to sit together to pursue solutions was a victory in and of itself. The abrupt cancellation has made lay persons and rabbis alike sit up and take notice that the problem must be dealt with so that our holy law continues to command respect. Though disappointed, we continue to work—with more commitment than ever—toward implementing solutions to free our chained or extorted sisters. We pray that people of courage will arise and demand an end to politicization of matters which affect so many women and their children.

Batya Levin
Chair, JOFA Agunah Task Force

DEAR JOFA READER,

I am writing to inform readers of a revision in the RCA Prenuptual Agreement discussed in your last issue that was made recently in Californa.

With the cooperation of the California Iranian Jewish community, Rabbi Yona Reiss, Director of the Beth Din of America, and the RCA, the standard version of the RCA Arbitration (Prenuptial Agreement) was revised to meet the needs of the Iranian community as well as eliminate certain civil legal issues that prevent it from being useful in California. The revised version can be used in any community and probably is more helpful, both psychologically and legally.

The changes are as follows:

1) The new version is bi-lateral: Women, as well as men, would be obligated to pay support so long as they refuse to accept the *get*, just as men are obligated to pay support so long as they refuse to give the *get*.
2) Any option of allowing the Beth Din to adjudicate any issue other than the issue of the *get* has been deleted. Thus, there is no possibility of the parties being forced by the rabbis to sign an agreement that would obligate them to have their property, support and/or custody issues decided by the Beth Din. The Prenuptial Agreement focuses solely on the issue of the *get*, and no other issue.
3) Under California law, (and the law of other jurisdictions, such as Canada), the imposition of a support obligation in case of *get* refusal requires the agreement to be "signed off" by an attorney. This has become an impossible task as California attorneys did not want to obligate their malpractice carrier to pay in case a husband sues the attorney for having allowed him to waive his right to "extort". Therefore, to eliminate the requirement that an attorney sign off on the agreement, the new version speaks specifically to the payment of support as a "Jewish obligation", independent of any civil obligation to pay support.

Since no such Jewish Prenuptial Agreement has been tested in the civil appellate courts until now, there is no guarantee that the agreement will be enforceable in court. However, in California, at least, the likelihood of enforcement of such an Arbitration Agreement and the decision of the Arbitrators has been greatly enhanced by the changes that have been made.

The California Iranian Jewish community is very grateful to Rabbi Yona Reiss for his efforts to help make these revisions a reality. Rabbi Reiss attended a one-day conference in California, sponsored by the Iranian Jewish Women's Organization, to explain the halakhic validity of the agreement, and to urge its use. A link on the website of the Iranian Jewish Women's Organization (www.ijwo.org) provides the text of the revisions.

Alexandra Leichter, CFLS
Beverly Hills, California

EDITORS NOTE

In a communication with the Journal, Rabbi Reiss, Director of the Beth Din of America, noted that the promulgation of this form that complied with specific Californian law requirements, in conjunction with the Iranian Jewish community of California was a major step forward in bringing solutions to potential *agunah* situations to a larger community.

While the revised form assumes that only *get* related issues will be submitted to the Beth Din, the RCA standard form does provide parties with the option to submit other disputes to Beth Din adjudication. Indeed, the RCA encourages parties to submit other marital disputes to the Beth Din. Rabbi Reiss considers it important that there be a Beth Din capable of dealing with all such issues and one of the RCA objectives is to provide the necessary professional expertise to be able to do so when appropriate.

The standard form can be found on the Beth Din website (www.bethdin.org) and on the Orthodox Caucus website at www.ocweb.org. The RCA has the same form with an added feature of the special notary form that can be used by officiating rabbis for New York marriages at www.rabbis.org.

Educate Yourself Further on the *Agunah* Issue

The *Agunah* issue was a major focus of JOFA's recent Tenth Anniversary International Conference on Feminism & Orthodoxy. The issue was highlighted at the opening session, and there was one period during the day that was totally devoted to issues surrounding the *Agunah* crisis, with nine simultaneous workshops and two films on the topic. Readers are strongly encouraged to purchase CD's of the *Agunah* sessions to educate themselves on the latest developments in this area. To order, visit www.jofa.org.

Agunah Ad

Over 2000 men and women from 12 countries signed on to the *Agunah* Ad that appeared in the Jewish Week on *Ta'anit Esther.*

WOMEN IN THE PERFORMING ARTS

In our last issue we asked readers to write in on the subject of Orthodox women and the performing arts, and we are pleased to include the following two letters. We would still like to hear of the many new "women's only" groups in America that have been created by Orthodox women.

DEAR EDITOR,

I would like to react to your last journal dealing with the Arts and to take the opportunity to supply the readers with some information about Orthodox women's theater which has been developing throughout Israel in *haredi,* national religious and *ba'alat teshuvah* circles. I would like to relate mainly to theater affiliated with the national religious community, based on research I conducted since 1998 on the topic, within the framework of my doctoral thesis in anthropology at the Hebrew University.

Theatrical activity of Israeli Orthodox women, most of whom are native Israelis and have not had much exposure or experience in this art, is one aspect of the many changes taking place in this society in the past decade. National religious women have become involved in politics, in the intensive study of Torah and Talmud and have also developed artistic venues in which they express doubts, fears, spiritual aspirations and conflicts through prose, poetry, cinema, painting, dance, music and also theater.

Israeli Orthodox women's theater must be analyzed in the context of these changes and in the context of the traumatic events which have been taking place in past decade in Israel: the assassination of Rabin, the outbreak of the second intifada and the evacuation of Gush Katif. Theater has become a 'safe space' where Orthodox women can deal with personal, social, 'political' and religious issues connected to their specific way of life. Although plays may express criticism of some aspects of it (the rigid religious education, the excessive demands for propriety, the exclusion of women from the arena of the synagogue and other surfacing social problems such as abuse against women), the artists do not want their work to be too subversive for fear of it being ostracized. That is why many (but not all) consult rabbis on issues of textual interpretation, modesty and even on questions of directing, especially when the plays deal with biblical figures such as the matriarchs, or stories of a kabbalistic nature. This is done in order to avoid what might be considered *hillul hashem*. Although most rabbis are not familiar with this art and have hardly even seen theater, they have been forced by the performers, members of their community, to abandon the traditional Jewish aversion to theater as a subversive art. Instead, they have had to acknowledge that theater has become a legitimate venue for self-expression that contributes to *avodat Hashem*. A collection of responsa has been published by Emunah College, the only Orthodox women's college in the country with a theater department. It deals with a wide range of questions connected with the performing arts: ranging from a discussion of practical questions such as how to move onstage, whether women can represent male characters and which costumes they should wear, to more philosophical and moral questions dealing with social theater, the necessity to refrain from gossip and evil and how not to be tempted to 'worship the ego' despite the exhibitionism usually associated with this art-form.

Most of the women do not deal with existing texts from the Western repertoire; their theater is original, based on a wide range of texts from the religious canon: Bible, Midrash, Gemara, prayers and Hassidic stories. They choose canonical texts which deal with female figures and they add their own perspective and interpretations; by producing Jewish interpretations (*parshanut*) and religious preaching (*darshanut*) onstage, women have entered realms that have traditionally been male-dominated. Dramatic adaptations of these texts reveal the relevance of the canon to their present day lives.

Orthodox women actresses are, in most cases, amateurs, married, with large families and work in other professions. Lately, younger performers who have studied in academic frameworks have dedicated themselves to the theater and to theater education. Most are native born Israelis but in areas with large communities of Anglo–Saxon immigrants such as in the Efrat/Gush Etzion area and Beit Shemesh area, English-speaking troupes have been formed and they perform musicals and plays in English, viewed by a mixed audience of English speakers and native Israelis.

Israeli Orthodox women's theater is clearly not a subversive art which 'reaches out' to the secular artistic world. When it does, the reactions of the secular artistic community towards it are in many cases patronizing and therefore disappointing for the performers. My conclusion therefore is that Israeli Orthodox women's theater is mostly (but not exclusively) directed at an internal, marginalized all-women audience as a means to communicate and strengthen them from 'within' and as a way to justify their stances vis-a-vis other factions in Israeli society (*haredi* on the one hand and secular on the other).

Throughout years of intensive fieldwork, I have witnessed changes and developments in this theater. Today, Orthodox women have become more professional in all areas of theater: directing, acting, lighting and stage management. In many cases they are even requested to help and give advice to Orthodox male theater troupes who are less restricted halakhically. Before the evacuation of Gush Katif, young women initiated street theater to present what they felt were the dangers of the disengagement. Although the rabbis allowed them to perform in the streets of Jerusalem, with certain reservations (using masks, wide costumes etc.) they preferred not to and instead they directed a group of male yeshiva students as actors and in doing so, dealt with many complex aspects connected to the production.

As is evident from this short summary about Israeli Orthodox women's theater, there is a growing recognition of the power and legitimacy of theater not only within educational institutions (many Orthodox schools have theater departments) but also within the community at large.

Yours truly,
Dr. Reina Rutlinger-Reiner
Jerusalem

EDITORS NOTE

Dr. Rutlinger-Reiner's book "The Audacity of Holiness: Orthodox Women's Theater" was recently published in Hebrew by Carmel Publishing House.

DEAR JOFA,

One of the questions asked of performing artists in your recent issue was: "Is it possible to pursue a career as a professional... actress..., and to advance in that career in the context of a modern Orthodox

lifestyle?" I'm afraid that my answer, in a word, is "no."

I include myself in the ranks of professional actresses because I am a member of two performers unions, Actors Equity Association (professional theatre actors and stage managers) and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists ("AFTRA"). My acting credits include performances in New York City, regional theatre, and television ("Another World", "As The World Turns", and "Guiding Light"). I studied with several well-known acting teachers in New York, and with the legendary Sanford Meisner in Los Angeles. Like the vast majority of professional actors, I have also held "day jobs" including camp counselor, secretary, and teaching artist.

Unfortunately, since becoming fully observant, I have been unable to find professional acting work. Shabbat is a big component in this, because not only are performances virtually always held on Friday and Saturday evenings, and often Saturday matinees, but rehearsals are often held at these times as well. In addition, around the holidays in the fall and at Pesach, the possibilities of working around my religious commitments are virtually impossible.

When our children were young, my husband and I decided that we could not possibly plan on day school educations for them without my working full time, and as I detested clerical work, I returned to law school and have been an attorney since 2000. Nonetheless, wanting to keep my hand in should performing opportunities ever come along again, I periodically take acting classes and have even managed to appear in private, non-paying showcases and productions. I deal with the other matters you raised by being very selective. In acting classes, I have been able to choose the scenes I work on, and have accordingly chosen scenes that would not involve significant physical contact with a male scene partner. When deciding whether to audition for a particular production, I make sure to read the script to determine that issues of physical contact with male actors, costuming requirements, the language and theme of the play, and the content of the role are all within my comfort zone as an Orthodox woman. This, of course, raises other issues for me as an artist, who has been taught to take emotional risks and to stretch beyond my own personality. I have appeared in plays on Shabbat, which has involved early and complicated logistical planning on my part, including staying near the theatre, bringing meals, doing my makeup in advance (on Friday) and at the last minute (after Shabbat). I have made *kiddush* (for myself and any cast and crew who wish to participate) in a dressing room. However, in the past 12 years, I have performed before audiences a grand total of 4 times. This is hardly enough to nurture an acting career.

I think that actors face particular difficulties that musicians, in particular, may not. Firstly, with the rare exception of one-woman shows, actors need to work with other theatre professionals—most of whom do not have the issues and, to be blunt, restrictions, of Orthodox Jews (I recently auditioned for a production at Washington's Theatre J, located in the DCJCC. While performances are not held on Shabbat, I was told by the director that he would not be able to consider me because he planned to hold rehearsals on Sukkot). Secondly, performances are scheduled at times that are convenient for audiences. Finally, there is a bias in the theatrical world regarding traditionally religious people. Artists believe (rightly, I think), that they need to push beyond the boundaries of convention, and that they must be completely dedicated to their work. This, after all, is the source of the old truism, "The show must go on." Unfortunately, there is a widespread assumption that complete dedication to one's work cannot go hand-in-hand with complete dedication to other things, and that traditionally religious persons are too hidebound and conventional to be real artists. The great irony, for me, is that in our "anything goes" East Coast urban culture, being an Orthodox Jew is probably the most unconventional thing I've ever done!

Unfortunately, for me, the outlook is bleak. A request a few years ago to an Orthodox day school to start a performing arts organization for adults and children in my community was turned down. I have often asked outreach organizers why the Orthodox community has not attempted to produce fictional programs to illustrate, explain, and encourage Orthodox Jewish observance to people who are seeking to connect with Judaism. The usual answer is a variation on these themes: (a) it wouldn't be in keeping with Yiddishkeit; (b) the difficulties of writing/casting/filming would be too great; (c) it's too expensive; and (d) there wouldn't be enough interested viewers to make it worthwhile to deal with all of the above. Yet I've met many people who have viewed every Hollywood production with Orthodox subjects (e.g. "Fiddler on the Roof", "The Chosen", and "A Stranger Among Us") greedily because they are desperate for a glimpse of our world! How sad that our stories are being told only by those who are outside our community!

I hope that the time will come when the Orthodox community will make greater efforts to allow those of us whose gifts are in the performing arts to use those gifts within and for the benefit of the community. Especially with the cultivation of these talents in our children and teens, we are setting them up for bitter disappointments if we do not find ways for them to use these talents. We may also be setting ourselves up for the loss of some who believe that the community's rejection of their talents is a rejection of them as well.

Sincerely yours,
Edna Boyle
a/k/a Edna Boyle-Lewicki
Silver Spring, Maryland

An Interesting Story

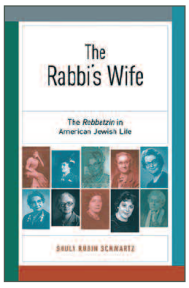
One woman was charitable but had a husband who was stingy, who did not wish to buy books (intended to be loaned to poor students who needed them) or give charity. And when her time came to perform her (monthly) immersion she did not wish to do so. He asked her, "Why do you not immerse yourself?" She said, "I will not immerse myself unless you agree to buy books and give money to charity." And he did not want to do so, and she refused to immerse until he would agree to buy books and give charity He complained to the sage about her, who told the man: "May your wife be blessed that she forces you to do a *mitzvah*."

Sefer Hasidim, 670
Quoted by Abraham Grossman, *Pious and Rebellious: Jewish Women in Medieval Europe*, 2004, p.192

Book Corner

The Rabbi's Wife: The Rebbetzin in American Jewish Life

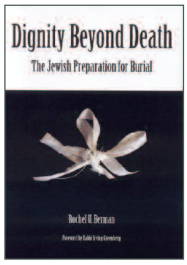
By Shuly Rubin Schwartz
New York University Press, 2006 $35.00



Named a 2006 National Jewish Book Award winner, *The Rabbi's Wife* explores the role of American rabbis' wives of all denominations over the last century, beginning at a time when few women worked outside the home, and when the role of *rebbetzin* offered opportunities that these women might not have had otherwise. In Schwartz's words, these women succeeded "in forging consequential lives through the "wife of" role when direct avenues of power remained largely closed to them". Many became leaders in their own right, both inside and outside their congregation; many understood the rabbinate as a two-person career. Oral interviews provided Schwartz much useful information to round out written sources for this book which is a fascinating window into the history of American Jewish women, and of American Judaism. Among the *rebbetzins* presented by Schwartz are the two Hirschensohn sisters. Tamar, who married David De Sola Pool, rabbi of Congregation Shearith Israel in New York, wrote and published, both in partnership with her husband and by herself, and headed Hadassah's New York chapter before becoming national president. Tehilla married Morris Lichtenstein, founder of the Society of Jewish Science ("applied Judaism" in their words - a Jewish form of Christian Science) and, after his death, took over as head of the movement, preaching regularly on Sundays; she was the first woman to serve as spiritual leader of a congregation. At the end of the book, Schwartz discusses Esther Jungreis, who after years as a congregational *rebbetzin* in Woodmere, New York, became a charismatic, evangelical leader though her organization, Hineni. JOFA readers will be particularly pleased with the detailed description of the career of Blu Greenberg and her progression from congregational *rebbetzin* (a role she has always valued), to nationally acclaimed author, teacher and speaker to independent leader of the Orthodox Feminist Movement.

Dignity Beyond Death: The Jewish Preparation for Burial

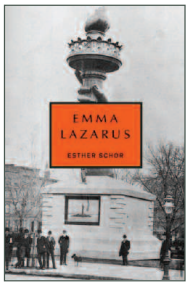
By Rochel U. Berman
Urim Publications 2005 $24.95



This remarkable and sensitive book describing the author's involvement in her *chevra kadisha*, and the beauty of Jewish burial practices is the ideal subject for review in an issue of JOFA Journal that is focused on *tzedaka* and *chesed*. The book, which was a finalist in the National Jewish Book Awards in 2005, and winner of the Koret International Jewish Book Award in the category of Jewish Life and Living in 2006, makes clear how caring for the dead is indeed the ultimate act of loving-kindness. Berman shares a wealth of material, much of it obtained through personal interviews, about the process and rituals involved in preparing the dead for burial and about the volunteers, men and women, who undertake this *mitzvah*. She explores why individuals choose to do this, how they are trained, how they deal with the many challenges involved and the effect on their families. For so many who participate, being a part of a *chevra kadisha* has enriched their lives and been a transformative experience. While she interviews and records the views of both men and women who have been involved in *chevra kadisha* activity, much of the book is drawn from her own experience, which has obviously been within women's groups. Because of this, the book is marked by a particular richness of women's experiences. Berman includes material on the unique circumstances presented by the Holocaust and its aftermath, as well as on the specific tasks of dealing in a dignified manner with the dead in the wake of terrorist attacks in Israel, and after the attack on the Twin Towers in New York. One of the reasons she wrote this book was to dispel the ignorance about the practice, as she considers that many Jews, including Orthodox ones, do not know what the ritual entails. She therefore provides a detailed guide to the *tahara* process, and information on how to start a *chevra kadisha*, and how to train members. She stresses the importance of increasing knowledge about the Jewish preparation for burial and of teaching children about death and dying, about *kavod hamet*, and the role of the *tahara* and the *chevra kadisha* in communal life. For her, "Becoming a member of the chevra kadisha became one of the pivotal identities that defines who I am. On a.... communal and spiritual level, I have come to consider work with the Chevra as the most profound expression of my Judaism".

Emma Lazarus

By Esther Schor NEXTBOOK (Jewish Encounters) Schocken 2006 $21.95

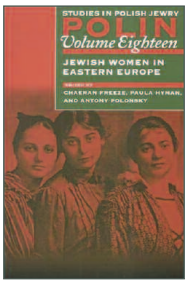


Known best for the lines of "The New Colossus" engraved on the Statue of Liberty, Emma Lazarus is brought vividly to life in this work by Princeton Professor Esther Schor. Skillfully drawing on letters undiscovered till the 1980's, Schor presents a highly readable portrait of this fascinating and wide-ranging Jewish American writer who died at the age of 38. The book is one of the first of the exciting Jewish Encounters series published by NEXTBOOK. Born into a wealthy Sephardi family in 1849, Lazarus became part of New York elite literary circles after her father published her first book of poems when she was only seventeen. Many of her poems were on Jewish themes, including ones on anti-Semitism. One poem, entitled "Raschi in Prague", recounts the legendary narrative of the medieval commentator's meeting with the duke and vizier of Prague. Lazarus's literary work attracted the attention of Emerson in the United States, and of writers and artists such

as Browning, Henry James, William Morris and Burne-Jones. Schor's biography outlines how in her short lifetime, Lazarus developed a reputation as critic, activist, and philanthropist as well as poet. She took up the cause of the new Jewish immigrants who came to America after the Russian pogroms of 1881/2; she herself worked in the employment bureau of the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society on the Lower East Side, and strove to provide industrial training for refugees in New York. She was the first well-known American to publicly make a case for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. According to Schor, "She was a woman so far ahead of her time that we are still scrambling to catch up with her- a feminist, a Zionist and an internationally famous Jewish-American writer before these categories even existed".

Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry, Volume 18: Jewish Women in Eastern Europe

Edited by ChaeRran Freeze, Paula Hyman and Antony Polonsky, Littman Library of Jewish Civilisation 2005 59.50 (hardback) 29.50 (paperback)



So much of what many of us know or think we know about East European foremothers is traditional wisdom at best, characterized by unfounded generalizations or created nostalgia. This volume is the first collection of essays devoted to the study of the experiences of Jewish women in Eastern Europe. The introduction by editors Paula Hyman and Chae Ran Freeze summarizes the major academic research in this area and points to crucial gaps. A fascinating piece by Moshe Rosman explores the relationship between the lives of women and men in the Early Modern period. Shulamit Magnus analyzes the famous memoir of Paula Wengeroff, "Memoirs of a Jewish Grandmother". The volume includes essays on the important question of the level and types of education of women on Eastern Europe, which help us to understand the background to the decision of Beis Ya'acov founder Sara Schenirer to devote herself to the education of girls in a religious context. Two essays deal with the issue of Jewish women's conversion to Christianity, and the piece by Rachel Manekin makes clear why in particular there was an impetus for Jewish girls from small villages to convert, since in contrast to the cities, there were no real Jewish communities or support mechanisms in the villages, and "the Jewish world was confined to family life". Tova Cohen, in her contribution on the *maskilot* (the fact that the term sounds strange to us as opposed to *maskil* as used for a man of the Enlightenment or Haskalah movement is evidence of her point that women writers have not received attention by scholars), argues persuasively to restore these female writers to their rightful place in the history of both the Haskalah movement and modern Hebrew literature. The book contains an extremely useful annotated bibliography relating to the lives of Jewish women in Eastern Europe including many memoirs, in different languages.

NO ONE HAS EVER BECOME POOR BY GIVING

Anne Frank

On *Tzedaka*

By Davi Walders

I.

It is good to give t*zedaka* before morning prayers.
With lighter pockets, prayers rise higher.

It is good to give *tzedaka* before fasting.
With another's hunger filled, ours becomes more holy.

It is good to give *tzedaka* before Shabbat.
The candles will glow more warmly; our rest will be filled with joy.

It is good to give *tzedaka* after Shabbat.
The week will go more smoothly for us and others.

It is good to give *tzedaka* before a journey.
The travel will be safer.

It is good to give *tzedaka* after a journey.
The travel will be richer.

It is good to give *tzedaka* generously.
One can enjoy one's own wealth more.

It is good to give t*zedaka* often.
It is a blessing forever.

II.

Let us not be the spoiled brats of Jewish history—
our generation—the wealthiest, healthiest, safest,
freest our people have ever known.

Let us not be free to ignore
the poverty of the hungry whose soul is eaten,
whose clothes are shredded, whose heart despairs,
whose back is bent from begging.

III.

Let us never forget how good it is
to give with an open hand,
an open heart
and all our might—
to repair, to be just,
to be worthy of the covenant.

Davi Walders *is a poet, essayist and educator who lives in Chevy Chase, MD*

Mission Statement of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance

The Alliance's mission is to expand the spiritual, ritual, intellectual, and political opportunities for women within the framework of halakha. We advocate meaningful participation and equality for women in family life, synagogues, houses of learning, and Jewish communal organizations to the full extent possible within halakha. Our commitment is rooted in the belief that fulfilling this mission will enrich and uplift individual and communal life for all Jews.

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