

From Our President

May the Joy of Shabbat Continue Throughout the Week...

By Carol Kaufman Newman

There is a peace that comes over me whenever I light Shabbat candles. Whether or not I am expecting company or it is just my husband and me, whether or not it is those early four o'clock days or the late eight o'clock ones – everything stops for a moment and I take time to focus. I take time to think of my family and my friends. And I say a special prayer that the joy of Shabbat should continue through the rest of the week:

ועזרני להמשיך השמחה של שבת לששת ימי החול עד שאזכה להיות בשמחה תמיד

Help me to continue the joy of Shabbat to the other six days of the week until I merit to be in joy always.

Shabbat wasn't always so serene. When my four children were little I worked hard to have them not think of Shabbat as a day of "don'ts" (no coloring, no TV, no records) but as something special. We would buy new books on Friday and eat together, and my husband and I would even act out stories – he made an excellent seller of caps as the children played the role of the monkeys! When they were older we would read the Shabbazines they would bring home from school and talk about the *parasha*. Older still, we would challenge them to discover what our teacher, Rabbi Bieler, focused on in our class on *Parashat Ha'shavua*. And oh—that wonderful day when they discovered reading and Shabbat naps!

Saturday morning was a particular challenge when I had small children. My husband would leave for shul and I would make the beds, set the table, get the food ready, dress the children and then myself, and try and make it to shul for *Aleinu* or, at the very least, *Adon Olam*. If I managed to do it all I felt extraordinarily accomplished. Something about going to shul made it feel like Shabbat; without it I felt a sense of loss. I realize that I have those same feelings today, maybe even more so. Now that I am free of child care responsibilities, I feel it is extremely important not only to be in shul but to be there at the start of the service. Though I do it for myself, I have come to realize that as a woman I am taken more seriously by both the rabbi and the men of the congregation if I come on time.

In a previous letter I wrote about how my mother would ask me on Sunday what I was cooking for Shabbat. As a 20-something, the question seemed crazy. Of course now I understand. And not only do I find myself thinking of food a week ahead of time, but I am also thinking of different people I would like to share a Shabbat meal with and I often find myself inviting company a month in advance. I love filling my Shabbat table with guests, inviting old friends and new acquaintances. I enjoy mixing older people with younger people, single people and married. Hearing the happy buzz around the table increases the joy of Shabbat. Many weeks it is my children and grandchildren who fill the seats at the table – sometimes one family at a time and at other times different combinations. And yes, sometimes my husband and I are alone – and that works too.

This issue of the JOFA Journal is full of personal stories from different Orthodox women about their Shabbat experiences. It is a wonderful compilation of thoughts and feelings. There are also excellent essays on the rituals of Shabbat – how they developed and how they evolved.

So take your time with this Journal. Read it this Shabbat and the one after.

And may the joy of your Shabbat continue throughout the week.

Prayer Before Lighting Shabbat Candles

רבון כל העולמים, גלוי וידוע לפני כסא כבודך, שאני באתי להדליק נר של שבת קדש לקים מצות בוראי באהבה, בגילה ובשמחת לבבי כאשר צויתני.

Master of the Universe, it is revealed and known before the throne of Your glory that I have come to kindle the light of the holy Shabbat in order to fulfill the commandment of my Creator in love, and in the gladness of my heart, as You have commanded me.

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The Hebrew prayer on the front cover is found in many manuscript prayer books commissioned for individual women in Italy between 1700 and 1850.

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Oasis in a Real World: Why Shabbat Works in Contemporary Homes

By Sylvia Barack Fishman

We arrived in Israel on Friday morning, the day before ground troops were mobilized in Gaza. By Shabbat morning at Shira Hadashah, the mothership of “partnership *minyanim*,” plenty of men had been told they would be mobilized and others knew that they would follow soon. The sweet joy of that week’s *Shabbat Kallah* celebration that had pulled the diverse young and old, male and female voices into rich harmony was transformed at the end of services, as mothers, wives, and sisters wept and fathers stood pale and distracted. Equally unified, but now in concern, anxiety, and hope, the congregation recited *Tehillim* for the soldiers already in harm’s way.

Like many others, I have often marveled at two paradoxes of Shabbat, not only on a personal level but also as a sociological phenomenon. First, Shabbat, the day of rest whose remembrance and guarding are stipulated in the biblical Ten Commandments, is refined in the rabbinic codes as a day that both departs from and defines the workaday world. Activities prohibited on Shabbat are essential for human existence the

other six days of the week, particularly in the categories of agriculture and commerce. Thus, although Shabbat is certainly extolled as *kodesh*, a superior and holy time, it depends on *hol*, the mundane week time, to support it and also to give it meaning through contrasting expectations.

Second, Shabbat is conceived of as a temporal state co-eternal with creation; each Friday night at sundown, the Shabbat that the Creator planned descends upon the world, and it is up to Jews as individuals and in social networks *l’kabeil Shabbat*, to receive the status of the day. Shabbat is already there, and we recognize its presence and embrace it. At the same time, Jews colloquially speak of making Shabbat: by lighting candles first to initiate and 25 hours later to terminate Shabbat status, Jews essentially bring the day into existence and then usher it out. It would seem that, if we do not make Shabbat, there is no Shabbat for us.

These two paradoxes were vividly apparent that Shabbat morning at Shira Hadashah. Israel had mobilized troops two Saturdays in a row to capitalize on

the surprise factor in attacking Hamas terrorists in Gaza who had long been hurling rockets into Sderot and other southern communities. In the synagogue, we prayed for and thought about those uniformed Israelis for whom the protected nature of Shabbat had necessarily been breached. What was the status of Shabbat for those young soldiers and for those of us whose hearts and minds went out to them? Since the days of the Hasmoneans, defense of the State in its defense of Jewish lives has been mandated and has become part of Shabbat prescriptions – but the dissonance is real nonetheless: the oasis of Shabbat peace and the wilderness of the everyday world stand juxtaposed.

All of us who have ever needed to climb into a car and rush a suddenly sick child or parent to the hospital on Shabbat have experienced a parallel dissonance. It is Shabbat, and one is mindful of halakhic issues requiring changes in the ordinary routine, but at the same time Jewish law stipulates that the preservation of human life supersedes other considerations. As we navigate the emergency room, doing what we need to do, it is still Shabbat – the holy day that we have received. The protective cocoon of the Shabbat that we have made through our observances and restraints has been compromised, but for many of us the aura of received Shabbat is compelling nonetheless.

There is a third powerful, paradoxical quality that makes Shabbat the keystone not only for Jews historically but also for many Orthodox feminists in the 21st century in the Diaspora as well as Israel. For those of us who make our primary residence in the Diaspora, the issues are seldom as basic as life-and-death struggles in Israel, but they can be vividly diminishing to quality of life. Ours is a competitive culture of overworked parents and overprogrammed children. For many, the daily pursuit of careers is powerfully distracting. For others, the frustrations of interpersonal relationships and volunteer work can be overwhelming and cause them to lose perspective. But into this wilderness of wanting and getting, the prospect of the oasis of Shabbat exudes its beneficial influence.

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Shabbat Travel Kit, Adina Gatt, Israel.

Adina Gatt is an Israeli artist based in Nahariya who also has a studio in Hutzot Hayotzer in Jerusalem. The Shabbat travel kit contains 2 sterling silver candleholders, matchbox, sterling silver *kiddush* cup, bottle of wine, lightweight hallah cover and knife, *havdalah* candle and a *besamim* (spice) bag.

This beautiful set is highly functional and “ready to go.” It can be added to a suitcase before a trip to facilitate ritual Shabbat observance away from home.

Editor's Note

While Shabbat has traditionally been shaped by community and family, for many women it is also a deeply personal and individual experience. Shabbat celebration can vary for women depending on stage of life, family situation, economic, social and geographic factors.

The personal experiences chronicled in this Journal offer different perspectives from individual women attempting to maximize the beauty and spirituality of Shabbat. Many of them note that their views and priorities have shifted over time, adjusting to life changes. We believe that these different voices will resonate with many of you. Their stories will help all of us to understand the varied and changing landscape of contemporary Orthodox Jewish life and the central role that Shabbat continues to play in it.

Modern life presents countless challenges and opportunities for the Orthodox woman. For example, a *rebbetzin's* role is often far different today than it was in the past. In addition to juggling family and communal responsibilities on Shabbat, many wives of rabbis today are also full-time professionals. In general, women today face the challenge of trying to streamline Shabbat preparation while still maintaining

important values such as *bakhnasat orhim* (welcoming of guests) and balancing the need for time with family and friends. In an increasing number of families, husbands and wives divide Shabbat preparations and Shabbat child care. Whereas historically, women's lives on Shabbat were largely focused within the home, many women now expect to be able to attend shul regularly on Shabbat, take active roles in their congregations and participate in Shabbat learning groups. There are also women who work as professional religious leaders with extensive Shabbat responsibilities, including congregational interns and *madrikhot ruhaniyot* (spiritual mentors). There are even a number of young couples where both husband and wife serve as religious leaders in two different institutions. Many of these modern situations are taking us into uncharted waters, and, only in the years to come, will we learn how they affect the observance and personal meaning of Shabbat for Orthodox Jewish women.

We would love to hear about your own personal Shabbat experiences. Please send them to jofa@jofa.org and we will devote space to publishing these in a future issue.

Drisha Arts Fellowship

In this issue, we are pleased to present images of works by a number of Drisha Arts Fellows. The artists include Heather Stoltz, Carol Hamoy, Rena Bannett and Samantha Verrone. We also include a piece on the challenges of trying to combine life as an Orthodox Jew and a career as a professional dancer by Anna Schon who was a Drisha Arts Fellow last year. The program's current director is Eve Grubin whose work was featured in our Arts issue of the Journal (Summer 2006). Now in its third year, the Drisha Arts Fellowship has 19 full and part-time fellows for 2008/9. In its program the fellows, who come from a range of diverse backgrounds in Jewish learning, select Drisha classes appropriate to their level, and join together in an Artist's Beit Midrash class each week to enrich their work by engaging with Jewish texts. During the year, each artist has opportunities to present her work to the entire Drisha community and discuss how her learning has found its way into her art.

Drisha is now accepting applications from women who are artists (writers, performers, musicians, and visual artists) who would like to receive an Arts Fellowship to study at Drisha. Please visit www.drisha.org or email egrubin@drisha.org for more information.



Hallah Cover, Samantha Verrone, Drisha Arts Fellow

Hand printed on silk with Venetian semi-precious stones, the design is based on a rubbing from the only remaining stone of a 17th century synagogue in Bologna.

Celebrating Shabbat: Redefining Roles

By Sara Tillinger Wolkenfeld

I have been a shul-goer for as long as I can remember. Family lore has me attending Shabbat services as an infant, sitting on my father's lap, well behaved and attentive. Growing up, I knew of only two valid excuses for missing services on Shabbat morning: illness and blizzards. Arriving late was also frowned on; my father, *z"l*, was meticulous about his davening, but his Hebrew skills were not strong, and once he fell behind he could not catch up. "On time" with my father meant walking into the sanctuary several minutes before the *shal'iah tzibbur* began. Unlike other children, I did not leave the sanctuary to play, preferring to remain by my father's side throughout all of services. I loved to sing along with the familiar Shabbat tunes and prided myself on my ability to follow along carefully during the Torah reading. When we were done, my father often took me with him to a *shiur* or learning group before we went home.

This is not to say that everyone I knew went to synagogue on Shabbat – far from it. In my own family, only my father and I went. Many of the women in our community came late, if at all. My father and I attended the early service, and for the most part, I was surrounded by men. When, at the age of 11, I was strongly encouraged to take my place behind the *mehitza*, I did so grudgingly and adjusted to the idea slowly, with the help of a few wonderful women who also made prompt attendance at the 7:30 minyan a priority. Despite the elaborate meals and a restful home environment, whenever I missed my *hashkama minyan*, I felt that I had somehow "missed" Shabbat.

This focus on the synagogue as the defining aspect of Shabbat left me unprepared for a Shabbat experience that has since become centered around my home and my personal spirituality. Even after my first son was born and attending synagogue became more difficult, I struggled to retain some sort of regular shul-going schedule. In Jerusalem, where we lived last year, our friendly neighborhood synagogue made it easy: their two *minyanim* allowed us to tag-team our Saturday morning shul experience. My husband went to the early service and I left the house as soon as he returned home, allowing us each to have a full davening experience without the demands of an impatient toddler. Unfortunately, not all communities have this option. I know that even those synagogues that provide some child care usually have children's programming during only part of the services, making it difficult for parents of young children to attend services in full. During our recent job search process, when we traveled to different communities and tried to imagine ourselves as a part of their synagogues, we were very aware that almost all the options would leave me at home for at least some part of Shabbat. Wherever we chose to live, we hoped to help create a community that would allow every woman to participate as much as possible in a public Shabbat experience.

Now for a reality check. This September, my husband and I became educators at the Center for Jewish Life at Princeton University. As part of the Orthodox Union's Jewish Learning Initiative (JLI), we offer a resource for Jewish students on campus. We each teach *shiurim*, learn *b'hevruta* with students, provide guidance when needed, and host students in our home for Shabbat and holiday meals. Our job is to provide educational opportunities for students and to enhance their religious life on campus.

Shabbat at the Center for Jewish Life is a special time, and we try hard to be a part of it. The complicating factor is that the town of Princeton has no *eruv*. With three children under the age of three – our twins were born in August – this means an adult always has to stay at home. As a rabbi and a teacher in the community, my husband feels a responsibility to be at services. As a nursing mother who cannot carry her babies with her on Saturdays, I feel that I need to spend most of Shabbat at home. Our home is too far from services to even risk trying to get our two-year-old to walk it, so my children and I see Daddy off to shul in the morning, and we stay in.

Building a Shabbat celebration around a private rather than a public experience has not been an easy adjustment for me. I often enjoy davening on my own, without a congregation to distract or rush me, but not on Shabbat. Reading the *parasha* on my own somehow lacks the force and drama of hearing it read aloud in synagogue. I try reading it to myself, even studying the *mefarshim* to get myself excited about it, but, on Shabbat morning, it feels flat and empty without the voice of the *ba'al koreh* to bring it to life.

My attempts to redefine what it means to me to celebrate Shabbat are focused on the *mitzvah* of *hakhnasat orhim* – welcoming guests, trying to make our students feel comfortable and well fed, and creating a Shabbat atmosphere in our home that is both inviting and inspirational. Intellectually, I know that this is an important *mitzvah*. My mother raised me to be sure that there is always extra food on hand in case someone needs a meal. I know and believe in the value of this *mitzvah*, but I struggle with the idea of structuring my entire Shabbat around it. Can this be spiritually fulfilling for me personally in the way that davening and shul have always been? And what about my children? My son Noam is almost two and a half, old enough to begin to appreciate the concept of Shabbat. What

...continued on page 6



Creation: *Shabbat and its Origins*,
Rena Barnett, Drisha Arts Fellow
Paperboard and watercolor assemblage

In many interviews with Orthodox feminists, when I have asked what keeps them “in the fold” despite the sometimes dismaying lack of progress, their responses are revealing. They say that Sabbath observance has deep, spiritual meaning to them as well as practical, logistical benefits. When Orthodox feminists articulate the sentiment, “I stay here for Shabbat,” sometimes they talk about the profound meaning Shabbat has for them on a personal, religious level, discussing the way that home-based prayers such as *kiddush* articulate foundational elements of the Judaic narrative, such as the creation of the world and the Exodus from Egypt. Many speak about the mystical sense of renewal created by Shabbat and the feeling that one starts each week anew, cleansed in some ways as Yom Kippur cleanses – a kind of play on the concept that Yom

Kippur is considered to be *Shabbat Shabbaton*, the Sabbath of Sabbaths.

Despite the pressure that preparation for Shabbat imposes, almost universally my Orthodox respondents say that Shabbat itself more than compensates for them by dramatically enhancing family life and ameliorating quotidian conflicts. “Shabbat opens up quality time with my children.” “Shabbat gives my husband and me important things to talk about that are bigger than us, and that really matter to us.” “Shabbat helps me to reach inward, instead of always reacting to external pressures.”

Not least, Shabbat imposes a sense of perspective through the realization that no weekday responsibility has total control over one’s existence. No matter how compelling an issue may seem on Sunday morning or Tuesday evening, when dusk falls on Friday, Shabbat and the

Shabbat world take precedence. Each week, we know Shabbat will arrive, but we must do something about it: we must arrange our affairs so as to cause Shabbat to arrive for us. The tasks and attitudes associated with **making** Shabbat temper behavior, values, and attitudes during the real-world week as well. Sadly, but necessarily, the week can impose itself on Shabbat during times of war or illness. But far more often, the oasis of Shabbat extends its influence and joyously transforms our daily as well as our sacred lives.

Sylvia Barack Fishman, a JOFA Board member, is Professor of Contemporary Jewish Life in the Near Eastern and Judaic Studies Department at Brandeis University. She also serves as Co-Director of the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute.

Celebrating Shabbat

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values are we imparting to him by keeping him home all day? What does it mean to him that only Daddy goes off to shul on Shabbat morning? What will be the defining features of his Shabbat memories that set the day apart and make it holy?

The Talmud in *Shabbat* 127a says, “Welcoming guests is greater than welcoming the presence of God.” Nonetheless, *Kabbalat pnei ha-shekhina* – welcoming or receiving God’s presence – is what we do when we celebrate Shabbat. The restrictions of Shabbat and the commandments associated with it are all geared toward strengthening an appreciation of that presence in our lives as Jews. In our house nowadays, the presence of Shabbat comes in the form of the many guests we host. Ask my Noam, “What do we do on Shabbat?” and he does not hesitate to answer, “We have guests!”

I also worry now about what I am modeling for my students. The women in our university community take prayer very seriously, and I am sorry that I cannot join them at services more often, be a presence on their side of the *mehitza*, and actively inspire them to keep up their participation in davening. I enjoy all the ways in which women take leadership roles in Princeton’s Orthodox community, and I want to encourage them and to make them believe that a lifelong commitment to communal prayer is possible, even if it is difficult for me right now.

In my mind, I am still the regular shul-goer, a person who is part of a public observance of Shabbat. Someday I am sure I will actually be that person again. But I have to believe that the private parts of Shabbat also have the ability to inspire. For some students, the meals that we serve are a welcome addition to their Shabbat on campus. For others, eating a meal with us is the totality of their Shabbat experience. If our meal can contain more Torah, if we can facilitate more relationships between

Jews, if we can simply make people feel Shabbat as a welcome presence in their week – if any or all of these things happen, then we have accomplished something important. Trying hard to create a meaningful Shabbat for others is what gives shape to my day.

When my babies begin nursing less frequently, I would like to go back to shul on Shabbat. I am looking forward to taking on some of the public roles that right now are open only to my husband, such as speaking at *se’udah sblishit* or on Shabbat morning, helping facilitate a communal lunch at the Center for Jewish Life, or giving a Shabbat afternoon *shiur*. At that future point, my husband and I will have to decide whether it is appropriate to leave our children at home with a babysitter, or whether we should take turns attending services. If my husband were the rabbi of a synagogue, there would be no possibility of his not attending. Even in a university community, there is a strong expectation that he will be there – to help make the minyan, if nothing else. Indeed, the few times on Shabbat that I have gone without him, rushing in for an hour here or there, people ask me when he will be arriving and if he is alright.

For our students as well as for ourselves, we would like to model a family life that expresses our mutual respect for each other’s religious needs and obligations. Figuring out how to balance that desire with the needs of our children and of our community challenges us to think deeply about our priorities as parents and as Jewish leaders.

Sara Tillinger Wolkenfeld is co-director of the Jewish Learning Initiative at Princeton University. The JLI program is a partnership between the Orthodox Union and Hillel. She has studied at Midreshet Lindenbaum, Nishmat, the Pardes Kollel, Drisha and Beit Morasha, and is currently pursuing a Master’s degree in Talmud at the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Yeshiva University.

Divorced but Not Alone: The Strength of Community

By Bryna Zucker Loewenstein

Before the very first Shabbat after my divorce that my son Daniel and I spent at our home in Woodmere, I confess to being consumed with trepidation: who was my son going to stay with in shul? I was happy to keep him with me as he was only three years old then, but looking ahead, I knew that he needed to acclimate to the men's section.

You cannot imagine the relief that washed over me as, from the moment we entered the lobby of the Young Israel of Woodmere, I was warmly greeted by many familiar faces who offered to look after Daniel during davening. And much to my delight, after shul, someone I had never met before approached me and arranged for a play date that afternoon for our children. These gestures of kindness multiplied as the weeks went by, and in hindsight I recall that it took a full two years before we finally had a meal at our own home over Shabbat; the invitations just kept pouring in and to this day they have not stopped.

Another indelible memory is of our first Simhat Torah at the Woodmere congregation of Aish Kodesh. On seeing Daniel alone in the men's section, Rabbi Weinberger, the rabbi of the synagogue, immediately beckoned him into the circle and later danced with Daniel on his shoulders. You have never seen a happier child, and therefore, you have never seen a happier mother.

I smile now when I think back to that first Shabbat and first Simhat Torah 19 years ago, and my smile broadens when I review all that has happened during the nearly two decades that I have lived alone with my son within this Orthodox Jewish community.

“...a lot has to do with those who surround you...”

The difficulties of my situation were compounded because I was an *agunah* for nearly 17 years. (Smile – I am using the past tense “was”!) My reason for recounting this is not to evoke sympathy, but rather to give encouragement to any woman who thinks her situation will never improve and to once again laud those within my community who offered kindness, support, friendship, and love. Rather than feel like a pariah, I feel truly blessed at having made friendships that have endured and will endure the test of time and at having witnessed firsthand the meaning of *hesed*.

Although I will be the first to admit that it has not always been smooth sailing and that I did experience some difficult situations, I was able to weather the storms with the love of an amazing family (with a special mention to my Mom z”l) and very caring friends who gave and gave and continue to give.

All too often, we hear about the novelty wearing off; we start off with great enthusiasm about something, but over

time, it becomes harder and harder to muster the level of commitment that we gave at the onset. In some ways I was a novelty 19 years ago – a divorced woman moving into a neighborhood where divorces were not so common – but I can honestly say that all those who befriended me at the onset are still there for me now, and over time this wonderful circle of friends has vastly expanded, evolved, and matured. The changes that took place over the years can be seen in all their poignancy when I think back on the roles that my son and his friends played on Shabbat when Daniel was in elementary school versus what takes place in our home today, when my 22-year-old comes home for Shabbat from his dorm at Yeshiva University (YU).

It has been many, many years since I have had to worry about play dates, escorting Daniel to shul (when he was too young to walk alone), and anxiously filling Shabbat afternoons for my son. As a single parent, I knew that when my son was very young, all the teachings in the home fell solely upon my shoulders so I strove to always set a proper example and emphasize the importance of Shabbat. The older he got, the more he was able to teach me, and in fact we would often study the laws of Shabbat together. Suddenly, as opposed to my reminding him when he was little not to play the piano on Shabbat, he was now teaching me about the correct way to warm up food on the *blech*.

Indeed, the tables have turned. Now, rather than merely being the recipient of Shabbat invitations, Daniel has taken on the role of host, and more often than not, when he comes home for Shabbat he brings several of his friends from YU. He has even hosted Shabbatons for some of the students from his former high school where he now teaches regularly on Friday mornings.

The empty nest syndrome is not new to me. Daniel spent two years in Israel after he graduated high school and has lived at the YU dorm for the past two and a half years. I now have my “regulars” – the closest of friends with whom I spend Shabbat meals on those weeks when Daniel does not come home, and I have come to truly grasp the concept of Shabbat being a day of rest.

Over the years, I have segued from the young divorced mom who spent nearly every Shabbat as a guest at someone else's house to someone who, along with my son, now hosts yeshiva boys on those weekends Daniel comes home and who, when not in the company of friends, is the independent woman who spends an occasional Shabbat relaxing by myself and enjoying the serenity of a day of rest.

Although I am well aware that not everyone may have had as easy a time as I have had, I believe a lot has to do with those who surround you and those with whom you surround yourself. I have truly been fortunate to reside in a community that has so many thoughtful and generous members.

Bryna Zucker Loewenstein has a degree in political science and has worked in the financial services industry for the last 15 years. She is active in KULANU, an organization that works to provide services to individuals and families with special needs.

Acceptance of Shabbat Through Candle Lighting

By Melissa Nunes-Harwitt¹

Candle lighting as a form of Shabbat acceptance has long been associated with women. Although both men and women are obligated to have candles lit in their homes,² women are usually the ones lighting in households containing adult members of both sexes. In the absence of any other form of *kabbalat Shabbat* (Shabbat acceptance), the prohibition against *melakha* (productive work) does not automatically apply to men or women until it starts to get dark, which is at least 18 minutes after the customary lighting time. But although anyone is permitted to accept Shabbat early by a voluntary declaration, it is expected halakhically³ that women accept Shabbat by their act of lighting. Conversely, the action by which men are supposed⁴ to experience the onset of Shabbat is to daven Ma'ariv individually or with a minyan.

This article examines whether it might be permitted halakhically to weaken or sever the connection between candle lighting and *kabbalat Shabbat*. In other words, is it possible for women to continue to take responsibility for candle lighting but accept Shabbat another way?

Rabbinic texts explain the association between women and candle lighting both homiletically (Eve, the first woman, extinguished the light of the world⁵; failure to attend to candle lighting is one reason that women die in childbirth⁶) and practically (women are more likely to be responsible for

household affairs⁷). Women today continue to feel a special connection to candle lighting. The practical link still makes sense to many because women are generally more involved in household affairs than men, whether they work outside the home or not.⁸ Other women may focus on associations such as creating *shalom bayit* (peace in the home)⁹ or honoring their mothers.

Surprisingly, the relationship between candle lighting and *kabbalat Shabbat* is the subject of a long-standing halakhic debate. There is a *mahloket* (rabbinic disagreement) among *rishonim* (early rabbinic authorities) over whether *kabbalat Shabbat* hinges on candle lighting or on davening Ma'ariv. On the one hand, the Behag (*Hilkhot Hanukah* 9:158) rules that, when lighting Hanukah candles on Friday night, one should light them before lighting Shabbat candles, because “if one lit for Shabbat first, he would prohibit himself from lighting for Hanukah because he would have accepted Shabbat upon himself.”

On the other hand, Ramban (*Hiddushim* on *Shabbat* 23b) objects strenuously to the Behag's conclusion. He points to a *baraita* (a teaching from the time of the Mishnah) on *Shabbat* 35b:

On Friday afternoon we sound six blasts [of the shofar] ... the third is to light the candles ... and we wait in order to roast a small fish or in order to put bread in the oven.

Lighting the Shabbat Candles, Mordechai Beck, Jerusalem, Woodcut.

Mordechai Beck's woodcuts, etchings and linoleum cuts are rooted in Jewish texts and in the Israeli landscape. Beck has illustrated numerous biblical books.

In describing this Shabbat woodcut, Beck quotes from “Short Friday” the short story by Isaac Bashevis Singer who tells of his heroine Shoshie that “she had already performed the benediction over the candles and the spirit of the Sabbath emanated from every corner of the room.... The candlelight reflected in the window panes, and Shmuel Liebe fancied that there was a duplicate of this room outside and that another Shoshie was out there lighting the Sabbath candles.”



He uses this text to prove that other *melakhot* were performed after candle lighting. The Rosh (*Shabbat, siman* 24) has the same interpretation. He also emphasizes several talmudic stories about rabbis bringing Shabbat in early by davening Ma'ariv, which imply that lighting was not the moment of Shabbat acceptance.

In contrast, Rabbeinu Nissim (the Ran) supports the Behag's opinion (*Shabbat* 10a, “ומדאמרין”), countering the *baraita* quoted above by explaining it figuratively. He argues that “in order to roast a small fish” means that there would be as much time after the third blast as it takes to roast a small fish, not that anyone was actually doing so. The Ran also points out several talmudic stories that do seem to emphasize the importance of making candle lighting one's last *melakha* before dark. Ultimately, although the *Shulhan Arukh* cites both positions at one point (*Orah Hayyim* 263:10), he explicitly rules (*OH* 261:4) that davening Ma'ariv is what brings in Shabbat.

To whose *kabbalat Shabbat* does this rabbinic dispute apply? On the surface, it seems to be relevant to both men and women. There are no distinctions drawn based on sex, even when comparing stories of men and women accepting Shabbat early. Some of the examples of candle lighting are cases of men, often rabbis, doing the lighting themselves.¹⁰ But none of the stories about davening Ma'ariv are about women, and it seems unlikely that the rabbis considered women regular enough in their davening¹¹ to suggest that women's

Shabbat acceptance hinges on their participation in the evening service. It makes sense, then, to posit that the *mahloket* applies to men when they happened to be lighting candles for themselves, whereas it was assumed that women accepted Shabbat through candle lighting, which was more often their role than that of men.

The first text to make this assumption explicit is *Kol Bo* (*siman* 31), which states, “A woman who lights is forbidden from doing *melakha* after she lights, because since she has blessed on [the candle lighting] there is no greater form of [Shabbat] acceptance than that, and no *tenai* (stipulation) will help her.” R. Moshe Isserles, in his gloss on the *Shulhan Arukh* (*Rema* on *OH* 263:10), asserts, “The *minhag* is for women to accept Shabbat upon themselves by their candle lighting.” In contrast to *Kol Bo*, however, he qualifies this *minhag* by adding that women may make a verbal or mental *tenai* stating that they are not accepting Shabbat through their lighting.

Although later authorities agree with the *minhag* of women accepting Shabbat upon lighting, the *tenai* continues to be a source of disagreement. *Prisha* (263) sides with *Kol Bo*, emphasizing that women accept Shabbat by lighting and “there is no permitting them” to do otherwise. *Magen Avraham* (*OH* 263:20) permits a *tenai* but only “if there is a need,” a requirement repeated by the *Mishnah Berurah* (263–44). In the contemporary halakhic work *Shemirat Shabbat K’Hilkhata* (43:24), R. Yehoshua Neuwirth holds that when a woman lights candles early with a *tenai*, someone else in the household must accept Shabbat. Furthermore, he discourages any public *melakhot* after candle lighting, such as going out in a car.

The fact that men accept Shabbat by davening Ma’ariv and women accept it through candle lighting has many consequences. Men have an extra 18 minutes or more to finish up their Shabbat preparations; this extra time is far from trivial in the winter months when everyone is scrambling to get everything ready by mid-afternoon sunset. The requirement to light at home restricts women from traveling any way but by foot (for example, to reach a synagogue or the home of a dinner host), even if they light earlier than necessary. Finally, men are encouraged to find spiritual meaning communally in the form of a minyan rather than privately in the home.

Many women today struggle with the practical and spiritual challenges posed by these requirements. In particular, women who have made regular davening part of their lives may feel frustrated that their efforts are not supported by the current *minhag*. For those who want to accept Shabbat at shul or through an individual recitation of Ma’ariv, the emphasis on candle lighting may put undue stress on a set of priorities that do not reflect their reality.

R. Eliezer Waldenberg (1915–2006), a prominent halakhist who lived in Jerusalem, indicated in a *teshuva* his awareness of women’s feelings on this topic. He commented (*Tzitz Eliezer* 10:19) that many people had asked him about the permissibility of making a *tenai* in order to experience *kabbalat Shabbat* by davening at the Kotel. Although he held that some “need” was a prerequisite for making a *tenai*, he categorized the desire of some women to take part in communal davening as a “need.” He talked about the preference for accepting Shabbat as part of a large group of people doing the same, about the greater emotional experience of

davening at the Kotel, and about the desire of women to “fill their spiritual thirst.” R. Waldenberg accepted all of these as forms of “need” and permitted women to make a *tenai* to achieve them.

R. Waldenberg did not seem to see a conflict between lighting candles in honor of Shabbat while postponing acceptance of Shabbat until later. Using his opinion as support, there may be room for women who wish to defer their *kabbalat Shabbat* to make a regular, weekly *tenai* based on spiritual, practical, or psychological needs. This would require them to acknowledge the significance of candle lighting (as a visual marker of Shabbat as well as for the emotional reasons mentioned earlier) and would remind them to be conscious of Shabbat’s beginning at their chosen time of acceptance. A weekly *tenai* can be compared to a weekly check on the *eruv*. In both cases, people can create a way out of the basic restriction as long as they keep reminding themselves that it exists.

Is it possible for women to eliminate entirely the *minhag* of acceptance through lighting? Although some women may wish never to accept Shabbat at candle lighting, *minhag* is not dependent only on individuals, and most communities still link candle lighting and *kabbalat Shabbat*. However, a substantial shift in behaviors and attitudes could lead us to dismiss this *minhag* as obsolete. Candle lighting could lose its association with women as couples increasingly share responsibility for the home, or it might become less significant as a marker of Shabbat’s beginning if many women choose to assign that role to Ma’ariv. For now, we can affirm tradition and communal practice while using the *tenai* to validate the reality of women’s individual lives.

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¹ I would like to thank William Friedman, Miriam Gedwiser, and Arthur Nunes-Harwitt for their valuable comments. Any errors are my own.

² Rambam, *Hilkhot Shabbat* 5:1.

³ *Shemirat Shabbat* 43:18.

⁴ *Shemirat Shabbat* 43:26.

⁵ *Genesis Rabbah* 17:8.

⁶ *Mishnah Shabbat* 2:6.

⁷ *Mishnah Shabbat* 5:3: “Women are commanded on this issue more than men because they are found in the home and they are busy with the work of the home.”

⁸ See Arlie Hochschild, *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*, New York: Viking Penguin 1989, 3–4.

⁹ *Shabbat* 23b gives *shalom bayit* as an explanation for why a home must have light on Shabbat.

¹⁰ For example, *Sanhedrin* 68a (and see *Tosafot* there, “היאך מניחין”).

¹¹ *Mishnah Berurah* 106:1 note 4.

A Majesty All Its Own

By Rivy Poupko Kletenik

In the article below, Rivy Poupko Kletenik describes the Friday nights she now spends with her father, Rabbi Baruch Poupko, in a Seattle nursing home. Rabbi Poupko served as rabbi of Shaare Torah Congregation in Pittsburgh for more than 60 years and was a leading figure in the fight for Soviet Jewry. Ed.

Shabbat is a medium for telling the story of our lives. As we age, so do our Shabbat experiences mature. We move from charm and wonder to duty and discipline. Who does not remember the youthful joy of donning that new pair of patent leather Mary Janes and little white anklets, and the feel of a crisp new dress still smelling of the department store and then skipping to shul hand in hand with Mother or Father? These simple delights move naturally to youth group fun and then on to college-aged Shabbat expeditions and explorations.

After that, the “playing house” phase often naturally develops into the seasoned well-grooved, grown-up Shabbat experience of the auto-pilot cooking, planning, and inviting cycle – family times of tables regaled with *divrei Torah*, *zemirot*, and the latest Susie Fishbein wonder – blessed perhaps with indulged children and grandchildren spilling and wreaking havoc to their hearts’ content.

These stages of Shabbat we could anticipate and expect, but who would have foreseen this next stage, complete with all its raw nuances? This is the stage of *kibbud*, honor. I have joined those who sit sadly, faintly wiping away tears and biting lips to keep from crying, as we help a parent eat a Shabbat meal, forkful by forkful.

Somehow, during the week, this very same table in the very same nursing home dining room does not evoke nearly the same emotion that it does on Friday night. No weekday fruit and cottage cheese platter or Shepherd’s pie can come close to summoning the angst of a beloved father navigating a tiny plastic medicine container holding grape juice for *kiddush*.

In the public dining room of the nursing home, vanished is the grandeur and majesty – the noble stateliness of *Shabbatot* past. The memories hover accusingly, floating above us in billowy clouds with a Chagall-like twinkle, whispering overhead. Could we but only draw them down: *Hashivenu elekha venashuvah, hadesh yameinu kekedem*—Return us to You and we will return: renew our days as of old.

I wonder, are we really the same people? Am I that little girl entranced and enchanted by the magic of Friday night – hypnotized by the melodies pouring forth with drama and devotion from Father? Transported by the light of the candles and the sip of wine? Excited beyond words to share the Torah portion of the week? Sitting in a dining room chair far too big for me?

In a Hassidic tale, the king of yesterday is lost and unknown, wandering in an unfamiliar kingdom – his former glory unheard of by local inhabitants. How did we land in this foreign place? Where is the white cloth, the silver, the family heirlooms, the warmth of home? We have no choice; we must recapture a remnant of that splendor here in our shared exile of Lucite and plastic trays.

Though it is surely an impossible task, a glint of hope is reflected in my father’s saintly deep-set green eyes as he gazes intently on the Shabbat candles. Could there be a suggestion of memory as the *zemirot* are sung, perhaps a faint trigger of Proust-like madeleine-esque recognition with a taste of chicken soup?

We are only passing through, so we are told. And this is where we are passing today. We have no choice, *Hashivenu elekha venashuvah, hadesh yameinu kekedem*. The table begins to soar, its golden legs lifting itself upward as in yet another Hassidic tale. This is the very holy of holies: the place of truth and purity. Here we eat and here we daven in this, an unfamiliar land, occupied with sincerity and goodness – with those who dance before the ark of broken tablets.

Once upon a time there was an imposing looming *bima*, an animated rousing sermon, a booming *amen, yehei shemei rabbah* – riveting the very walls of the sanctuary built brick by brick by a young, vibrant rabbi. Once there was a father who stood as a conductor, baton in hand, boldly directing the music of our prayers and the choreography of our stances: “Please rise, please be seated.”

“This is the stage of *kibbud*, honor.”

Conductor then, my father is but a violinist now, and I am a page turner. Is that the name for the person who stands by the side of the violinist, patiently turning the pages of the composition? “Page turner” sounds awfully mundane for so lofty a task. I stand with one foot in the men’s section coaching and guiding the hallowed words of prayers, turning pages, pointing to the place, sliding my finger beneath line, and line and line.

The exquisiteness and purity of my father’s *tefillot* are *l’maleh min ha-teva*; they transcend the bounds of this world. The *litvish*-accented words are enunciated with an austere, precise devotion transporting listeners back in time and place to an *alter heim*, a town named Velizhe. It was there that these words and their cadences were patiently learned *Ofen Pripichik* style. There is nowhere on earth, no synagogue known, where a *Lekha Dodi* greets our beloved as my father’s now does: “*Hitna’ari me’afar kumi*, lift me up from the ashes, come and shine.”

The Midrash tells of the angels of prayer who gather our prayers together. Here, in this nursing home, they have to wait a bit and pause in the lobby by the door, as my father slowly recites each word. They linger patiently as this particularly sweet precious lilt is painstakingly completed. They carefully and gently catch each line and secure it in their hands. They weave the words of prayer gently into a crown that will adorn the Holy One on High.

This is not quite the Shabbat of yesterday, but it is surely the Shabbat of *me’ein olam haba*, a hint of the world to come, with a majesty all its own. Privileged, honored am I to add this to all those *Shabbatot* past.

Rivy Poupko Kletenik is the first female head of school of the Seattle Hebrew Academy. She writes a Jewish practice column for the JT News of Seattle.

Ba-meh Madlikin—Why Do We Still Say It?

By Professor Martin Lockshin

The popular and well-known liturgy that we now use for Kabbalat Shabbat is probably one of the latest to take shape as part of our liturgical canon. *Lekha Dodi*, which many of us consider the center and highlight of the service, is a relatively recent composition, written in Safed by the 16th-century kabbalist, Rabbi Shlomo ha-levi Alkabetz. (It is amazing that a prayer could have been added into our ostensibly fixed liturgy at such a late date and still have achieved near-universal acceptance by Jewish communities in almost every country.) The current list of chapters of Psalms that we say to begin Kabbalat Shabbat is also not very old. Surprisingly, one of the oldest elements of our expanded Friday night liturgy is the recitation of the second chapter of Mishnah *Shabbat*, *Ba-meh madlikin*. The earliest source that mentions this custom is *Seder Rav Amram Gaon* in the ninth century.

In every synagogue I have ever attended, *Ba-meh madlikin* is mumbled very quickly. This is hardly the ideal way to study Mishnah, particularly a difficult passage dealing with technical issues regarding wicks and oils appropriate for Sabbath lights. Some rabbis attempted to make the recitation more meaningful. For example, R. Eliyahu ben Binyamin Wolf Shapiro (born in Prague in 1660) records that one of the great rabbis of his generation used to recite *Ba-meh madlikin* in the chant that was normally used when studying Mishnah, “and not like the multitude who recite everything the same way.”¹ But I have yet to find an Ashkenazic synagogue that does so.²

A common misconception is that the central theme of *Ba-meh madlikin* is a discussion of the *mitzvah* of lighting Shabbat candles for ritual purposes. This is **not** the issue addressed³ by the question, “With what may one light and with what may one not light?” or by the detailed answers. Just as today we have lights other than ritual candles on in our homes on Friday nights, so people before, during, and after Mishnaic times wanted to have well-lit homes for the Friday night meal. The chapter delineates which kind of lights may be used to light the home. The concern is that certain types of oils and wicks are likely to require care, and accordingly you might find yourself, perhaps in an unthinking manner, fixing or adjusting the light on the Sabbath, which is a forbidden action. Another concern might be that the light generated by the lamps on the forbidden list would be of such poor quality that people would have no choice but to abandon their dark homes on the Sabbath.⁴

The logic behind the recitation of this text appears to be that people ought to be reminded on Friday what lights are appropriate in their homes on the Sabbath. But by the time of Friday night services, it is too late to tell people what they should have lit at home. Advocates of the custom of reciting *Ba-meh madlikin* at an earlier point in the service often disparage the more common Ashkenazic custom (which almost certainly was the original custom⁵) of reciting it after Ma’ariv, because by then it is obviously too late to fix your candles.⁶ But no matter how early in the Friday night service people recite *Ba-meh madlikin*, it is hard to imagine that there was enough time for it to serve any practical purpose, even in the days when people used oil lanterns.

Many early sources give a less rational reason for reciting this prayer: to protect the safety of latecomers at synagogue by

making the service longer.⁷ The concern was that if the Friday night service were too short, stragglers would still be reciting their prayers while the majority of congregants were already leaving. Those latecomers who finished their prayers and walked out of the synagogue alone might be subject to the dangers posed by *mezikin* (presumably this meant demonic forces, not muggers) who might accost people walking alone at night away from residential areas.

Aside from whatever difficulties might be connected with such a justification, it is obvious that it is borrowed: this rationale was originally given about a different Friday night prayer and then was grafted onto *Ba-meh madlikin*. The Babylonian Talmud uses this reason to explain why an abbreviated reader’s repetition of the *Amidah* is recited on Friday nights.⁸

A fascinating modern scholarly theory about *Ba-meh madlikin* is that it developed in the ninth century as an anti-Karaite measure. Some Karaites took the restriction of “kindling fires” on the Sabbath⁹ to mean that Jews must sit in the dark in their homes on Friday nights.¹⁰ It is commonly felt that both the creation of a blessing for lighting Shabbat candles (a blessing that has no source in the Talmud) and indeed the central importance placed on ritual Sabbath candles are a result of rabbinical attempts to fight against Karaite practices. Naphtali Wieder has argued reasonably that *Ba-meh madlikin* is also part of that anti-Karaite campaign.¹¹

Aside from the problem of reciting at breakneck speed a difficult chapter of Mishnah full of details irrelevant to life in the age of electricity, one line in it sticks in the craw of many moderns:

Mishnah 6: For three sins women die in childbirth: because they fail to be careful about *niddah* (laws of menstruation), *hallah* (laws of giving dough to the priest), and *hadlakat ha-ner* (lighting candles).

It is little consolation to note that the Babylonian Talmud takes pains to explain that it is not only women’s fate at liminal points in their lives that is determined by their punctiliousness in observing *mitzvot*; men too, whenever they find themselves doing the potentially dangerous kinds of things that men sometimes do,¹² are subject to scrutiny and punishment for careless religious behavior.

Even when this *mishnah* refers to a woman “lighting candles” it is not referring to the ritual lighting of candles that we know. It seems to be referring to three areas of life that were generally – for different reasons – in the control of women and that affected the religious lives of men. A man whose wife is not punctilious about the laws of menstruation will end up sinning because of her laxity. Women are assumed to be the ones who bake bread and light lamps that illuminate the home.¹³ So if women fail to be careful about the laws of separating *hallah* when baking bread, men (and women) will end up eating forbidden food. And when women light the wrong kind of lanterns on Friday afternoon, men (and women) may end up breaking the Sabbath laws.

A brilliant teacher of Kabbalah and Hassidism in Jerusalem today, Sarah Ben-Arza Friedlander, has attempted to provide

...continued on page 12

Ba-meh Madlikin ...continued from page 11

modern meaning to this line from the Mishnah.¹⁴ But I have often heard people wondering out loud whether it might be possible simply to remove this prayer from our liturgy.

Although in general, removing prayers from our liturgy is not easily done, curiously *Ba-meh madlikin* is actually one prayer that was successfully eliminated by the hassidic or proto-hassidic authorities who put together the liturgical style known as *Nusah Sefarad*. Often *Nusah Sefarad* introduces into the Ashkenazic liturgy various elements of Sephardic practice. But although both Sephardic and pure Ashkenazic liturgy recite *Ba-meh madlikin* on Friday night, somehow *Nusah Sefarad* has eliminated the prayer.

Some recent authors have noted this phenomenon¹⁵ and have tried to explain how it happened. Rabbi Yosef Levy¹⁶ writes that, although he can find no written reason why *Nusah Sefarad* got rid of *Ba-meh madlikin*, he has a few theories. First, the text is less meaningful to us because, as Rabbi Abraham Gombiner wrote already in the 17th century, we do not use the same kinds of wicks and oils that were described in the Mishnah.¹⁷ And if the purpose is to make the service longer to protect latecomers, *Nusah Sefarad* has added a passage from the Zohar (*Kegavna*) just before the *Barekhu* prayer. Rabbi Levy speculates (unconvincingly¹⁸) that the custom of reciting *Ba-meh madlikin* originated in the days when people recited the

Minhah prayer on Friday early in the day and recited *Ba-meh madlikin* then, leaving plenty of time to go home and set up the Sabbath lights appropriately.

The innovations of *Nusah Sefarad* preceded the rise of Reform Judaism, before the days when Orthodox Jews started to defend the sacrosanct nature of every part of the prayer book, even the parts dealing with lamps that none of us use. It is unclear how we could initiate a movement today to substitute another prayer for *Ba-meh madlikin*. But I do not think it would be considered heretical if an individual congregation decided to keep the same basic structure of the service but replaced *Ba-meh madlikin* with a different and more relevant selection from Mishnah *Shabbat*: for example, Chapter 16, which deals with rules of emergencies on Sabbath; Chapter 22, which deals with reheating food; or Chapter 23, which deals with the issue of preparing for a weekday while it is still Sabbath. Or perhaps every week a teacher could teach a *mishnah* or two from tractate *Shabbat* at that point in the service, and thus the congregation could learn all of Mishnah *Shabbat* in a cycle of a few years. Surely a change that would have the community recite or study *halakhah* in a more meaningful manner can only be for the sake of heaven.

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¹ *Eliyahu Rabbah* 50. So also *Mishnah Berurah* OH 50:2 in the name of Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz.

² See also *Minhag Marseilles, Shabbat*, 105, where it says that *Ba-meh madlikin* should be recited out loud.

³ See e.g., *Eliyahu Rabbah* 270: אין טעם אמירת במה מדליקין משום מצות הנר כלל אלא להודיע לפרוש משמנים ופתילות הפסולים

⁴ Both explanations may be found in Bartenura's commentary to *Mishnah Shabbat* 2:1; the second explanation is already found in Maimonides' commentary to that same *mishnah*.

⁵ See N. Wieder, "Berakhah bilti yedu'ah 'al ker'at ba-meh madlikin mi-tokh ha-genizah," *Sinai* 82 (5738) 197–221, esp. 201. This article was later reprinted in Wieder's book, *Hitgabshut Nosah ha-tefilah*, 323–351.

⁶ See e.g., Avudraham's commentary on the prayer book: קריאתו אחר ערבית מה תועיל. או אינו עת לתקן

⁷ Wieder (see note 5), 198–200, proves that this explanation was based on a misunderstanding of a text by Rav Amram Gaon. Still a number of medieval authorities (see the citations there) explain the prayer in this way.

⁸ *Shabbat* 24b and see Rashi there, s.v. *mi-shum sakkanah*.

⁹ Exodus 35:3.

¹⁰ See the lengthy discussion of the Karaite and Rabbanite positions in Ibn Ezra's shorter commentary to Exodus, there.

¹¹ See Wieder's article cited in note 5.

¹² See *Shabbat* 32a: וגברי היכא מיבדקי? - אמר ריש לקיש: בשעה שעוברים על הגשך

¹³ See Bartenura's commentary to *Mishnah*: לפי שערכי הבית הן והיא מצויה בבית, תלוין בה

¹⁴ See the Hebrew web site, <http://www.piyut.org.il/articles/355.html>.

¹⁵ See e.g., *Birkei Yosef* OH 270: והאידנא נהוג עלמא בארץ העבי שלא לאומרו

¹⁶ *Sefer Minhag Yisrael Torah*, OH 270.

¹⁷ *Magen Avraham* OH 270:1.

¹⁸ See note 5 above.

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A Different Shabbat

By Nechi Shudofsky

In daily living, everything is different after a spouse dies. Since the death of my husband Noam z'l in March 2005, Shabbat is one of the greatest challenges I must face.

Throughout our nearly 50 years of married life, Shabbat was the heart of our family and the focus of our week because we all loved "our" Shabbat so much. When our children were growing up, they did not like to leave our Shabbat table to be with their friends. Instead, they would prefer to stay at home and invite their friends to share Shabbat with us.

Our family Shabbat table was patterned very much after the Shabbat table in my own childhood home, following my father's *zemirot* – and many of his traditions. Of course, we also developed our own unique Shabbat table traditions with much singing of both *zemirot* and Israeli songs.

My husband, who spent his life as a Jewish educator and served as the administrator of the Ramaz School for more than 40 years, had a unique style of teaching at the table. His *divrei Torah* were never the conventional text study that the children had experienced in school that week. He always drew from a wide range of sources including Bialik, Ben Gurion, Israel Eldad, and many others.

How was I to deal with a "different" Shabbat once he was gone? It took a very long time before I felt able, once again, to invite guests to my Shabbat table. At first, I asked only close friends with whom I felt very comfortable and who, I knew, would not feel awkward at a table with Noam missing. I found that the most painful thing to confront was the "empty chair"

Shabbat Hallah Cover with Map of Israel, Ita Aber, 1984

Smithsonian Collection, Washington DC
Ita Aber is one of the pre-eminent contemporary
Jewish textile specialists in the United States.



Hallah Cover, Fradele Feld, Cherry Hill, NJ.

Blessing is in cross stitch with English resembling Hebrew lettering. Fradele Feld is president of the Delaware Valley Chapter of the Pomegranate Guild of Judaic Needlework.

at the table. I asked other widows how they dealt with this and listened to their suggestions. I decided to move to the chair myself. This was the most bearable and least painful of all the options. Occasionally, my daughter, Leora sits in her father's chair when she comes for lunch or dinner.

I also found myself in the position of having to direct the rituals at the table, of having to decide whether to make *kiddush* myself or ask a guest. In addition to being the hostess I had always been, I now had to make sure that the conversation flowed and that *zemirot* were sung. Noam had always directed the organization of the table and meal and now it was left to me.

Once I overcame these hurdles and began to invite more friends over for Shabbat meals, I still had to learn how to go by myself to other people's homes and then return alone to my empty house. While I appreciate every invitation, the invitations always underscore what I have lost – because as lovely as it is to be with friends, it is not the same as "our" Shabbat table.

The invitations after my husband died were many and most welcome. But as his death receded into the background, the invitations became less frequent because – as is natural – everyone became used to this new reality—everyone except me.

For me, now, how to make and observe Shabbat always looms at the beginning of the every week and serves to highlight my loss. The question never goes away: how to face another Shabbat?

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The Evolving Phases in the Life of a Female Shul-Goer

By Michelle Farber

As a young girl aged five or six, I accompanied my father to shul in New York every Shabbat – in the evening, morning, and afternoon. Whether I was sitting in shul learning to daven with my father or playing bottle caps in the hallway while the men ate *se'udah shlishit*, I was never treated any differently from my three brothers. Whatever was expected of them regarding shul attendance was expected of me. My mother was not a big shul attendee so my early years were spent in the men's section of the sanctuary. These were good times for me.

I remember distinctly when my experience began to change. One *Motzei Shabbat* when the *shammas* of the shul was pouring grape juice for all the children for *havdalah*, he looked at me and said, "You can't have any." When I asked him why, he told me that girls are not allowed to drink the *havdalah* wine. I was somewhat shocked, and being inquisitive, I was frustrated when neither he nor my father could provide me with an explanation for this "rule." I think that this may have been the first time that I was told that girls have a different role in the Jewish religion than boys. For my father, that distinction did not exist.

My frustration continued as I got older. I can remember being called the "*rebbetzin*" by my friends when I was about nine years old, because I was the only one among them who was expected to be in shul for certain parts of davening while they sat on the steps outside shmoozing. As a teenager, I was the first girl to show up in shul, usually within the first 15 minutes of the service. Moving to the women's section after my Bat Mitzvah was somewhat difficult. Shul became a lonely experience as I could no longer daven with my father and brothers. Besides having very few friends who came to shul on time or even at all, almost no other women arrived until later in the *tefilla* and then they usually came to talk. Nonetheless I persisted in coming to shul weekly. What bothered me most were the comments that my father's friends would make about what a "*tzadeket*" I was because I came to shul so early. The men and boys who showed up on time were not called *tzadikim*, so why was I singled out?

Despite all the challenges, I continued my pursuit of a full religious life both in shul and through textual study while more or less ignoring all the negative comments. I made *aliyah* at age 20, and eventually found a shul in Jerusalem where it was evident that the women came to daven and where they were treated with respect. I grew to understand that women can have a meaningful Shabbat experience in shul within the confines of traditional Orthodoxy by davening, hearing the Torah reading, and having a side-by-side *mehitza* through which the women have access to the nexus of the proceedings and are able to speak, or listen as other women speak, from the pulpit. At the same time, I found meaning and equality in pursuing the study of Jewish texts and finding opportunities to study Gemara in a Bet Midrash setting. I studied at Midreshet Lindenbaum for five years, where my experience was not so different from my male friends who were studying for *semikha*.

As a young woman, I came to learn that, despite being exempt from time-bound *mitzvot*, a woman could have a meaningful religious life similar to that of a man. The *Shulhan Arukh* states that a woman who learns Torah receives a reward for her learning, but not as great a reward as a man because she

is not commanded to learn (*Yoreh De'ah* 246:6). The Rema comments:

ומכל מקום אם עוזרת לבנה או לבעלה

שיעסקו בתורה, חולקת שכר בהדייהו

(in any case, if she helps her son or husband so that they can learn Torah, she shares the reward with them.)

When I came across this statement in the Rema, I found it very disconcerting. Why should a woman's reward stem from allowing others to learn? Why should a woman's existence revolve around helping her husband and children?

I subsequently married a pulpit rabbi, and as we started a family (we now have five children aged two to nine – a boy and four girls), I faced many new challenges. Gradually my shul experience became characterized by frustration. I would bring my son to shul on Shabbat, but would spend most of the time trying to keep him from disturbing others. Soon I came to realize that, notwithstanding the medieval Ashkenazi practice of bringing young children to shul (*Tosafot Hagiga* 3a s.v. כד), I was unable to find value in it.

As the years went by, I continued to attend shul on Shabbat, but spent less and less time inside the sanctuary. I would often daven Shacharit at home (at the same time, if this is even possible, as I was attending to my children's needs) with the hope of davening Musaf in shul. I felt jealous of my husband who departed on time for shul, usually by himself, while I was left to deal with the children. Given his responsibilities in the shul, there did not seem to be an alternative. I accepted my fate, but was disappointed at being deprived of a meaningful shul experience.

We have since moved to Ra'anana and together started a shul of our own. In many respects, Kehillat Netivot is our joint project, and as my formal responsibilities have increased, I have redefined the significance of shul in my life. I attend every Shabbat, but I continue to daven at home and come to shul mainly to be present. Both as co-founder of Kehillat Netivot and the rabbi's wife, I often need to attend to shul-related issues after I arrive. Sometimes I sit with my younger daughters in the children's service. My most recent challenge is that my eight-year old daughter complains about having to leave for shul early with her father; I cannot help but feel that things might be different if she had a mother who could come to shul early with her every week and daven next to her.

However, in the last few years I have, for the most part, stopped feeling frustrated, jealous, or disappointed. I have begun to understand that my roles as a mother with young children and as the wife of a rabbi can provide me with a different kind of religious satisfaction. I feel that my immersion in my own personal religious experience in my earlier years has brought me to the point where I can now help others. Earlier, I was focused on my individual experience. At this stage, my focus has become external – on my husband, my children, and my community.

Today, when I reread the passage of the Rema about a woman sharing the reward of her children and husband, I understand it in a different way and can even relate to it. It is clear to me that my role has shifted. I now see myself as an edu-

cated woman who can share her knowledge with her family and community and be a source of halakhic and spiritual growth for others. To this extent, my responsibilities may sometimes come at the expense of my own spiritual development; however, these responsibilities provide my life with a new meaning. The special moments of Shabbat for me are now singing Kabbalat Shabbat at home with my children, sitting alongside my children at a children's prayer service, chatting with members of my community outside of the sanctuary, and inviting guests over for Shabbat meals. My role has evolved into something unique that includes not only myself but also all those around me. In the Rema's language – "she shares the reward with them" – my religious life has become a shared experience.

This year, as usual, on both mornings of Rosh Hashanah I went to an early minyan in the neighborhood to daven Shaharit (before my husband needed to be in our shul), free of interruptions from my children and free of communal responsibilities. It was my time to just be on my own. But for some reason, this year in particular, I didn't find my davening as satisfying as it usually is. I felt somewhat lonely and out of place without the members of our community around me, without

my children by my side, and without my husband on the other side of the *mehitza*. This feeling made me realize that my religious experience of prayer is now defined not exclusively by saying the words of the liturgy and thinking of their meaning but by being near those for whom I am davening. Even on a regular Shabbat, when I am surrounded by family and congregants and I sometimes find it difficult to concentrate on what I am saying, I nevertheless think that those prayers and that experience are more meaningful to me.

I look forward to the next phase of my shul journey, with my four teenage daughters davening next to me every Shabbat in the community that we have built – something I have dreamed of since the day I left my father's and brothers' side and went to sit by myself on the women's side of the *mehitza*.

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Makom Tefilla: Counted and Counted On

By Abigail Tambor

This month marks the second anniversary of Yavneh, a partnership-style minyan that meets once a month on New York's Upper East Side. Our stated purpose is to create a "*Makom Tefilla*," a place of worship where all people, at all levels of observance, can come and explore their relationship with God, prayer, and their community. Yavneh's spiritual and inclusive services operate within the framework of halakha, including a minyan of ten men and a *mehitza*. I am the *gabba'it*.

My role as *gabba'it* is a very practical one. I call up those who have *aliyot*, asking for both their fathers' and mothers' names. I follow along closely with the Torah readers and assist them when necessary. Along with the minyan's rabbi, David Kalb, and the *gabbai*, I lead participants in communal prayers, or *Mi Sheberakhs*, recited aloud in support of the Israeli soldiers, American soldiers, the persecuted, and the ill. I work to ensure that the minyan functions smoothly. When there are gaps in participation in the service, I help fill them by reading part of the Torah portion or davening.

Clearly, my role goes beyond the practical and is, for many, symbolic of a more participatory *tefilla*. Along with

the other woman leaders, daveners, and Torah readers, I am the face of change. For many, mine is the most consistent face of this change. People often comment on my knowledge of the intricacies of running the service, which many have no cause to know other than through repeated exposure. I liken it to the experience of driving versus being driven. You can be driven somewhere a thousand times, but until you are forced to drive there yourself, you do not really know the directions. Many, on both sides of the *mehitza*, if left on their own, would have no idea when to sit or stand or what to say when. For women who are gaining access to new *kibbudim*, or honors, within the service, the disadvantage is more significant, because their exposure until then has been more limited and from a greater distance. They take comfort in my knowledge and see it as a step forward. It allows them to take the minyan and me seriously and goes a long way toward creating the inclusive *Makom Tefilla* for which we strive.

Fulfilling my role as *gabba'it* is a source of great pride to me, but is not without its pitfalls. Ensuring a smoothly run service requires my attendance from the beginning of the service. However, because it is often a chal-

lenge to get a quorum of ten men together in time for our 9 a.m. start time, my husband's prompt arrival is also a priority. Getting us both out the door, along with our three young children – ages seven, four, and two – on time and on speaking terms has not gotten any easier over the last two years. Sometimes we have to choose whose early attendance is more important. His often wins.

That being said, great satisfaction comes from knowing that, for my children, the normative roles of men and women in the synagogue are not the same as the ones with which I grew up. Having my son or daughter next to me as I fulfill my role as *gabba'it* makes all the effort to get them there worthwhile. In essence, it is for them that I do it. At the same time, I do it for myself and for all the others who seek a meaningful prayer experience at the minyan. I have never been one to find a deep, spiritual connection with the synagogue or with *tefilla*. Years of distance, barrier, and separation have kept me from it. However, in our *Makom Tefilla*, where my presence is counted and counted on, I come closer than ever before.

Abigail Tambor is on the Board of JOFA and served as co-chair of the Program Committee for JOFA's 10th Anniversary Conference.

How to Read *Eshet Hayil*

By Wendy Zierler

Eshet Hayil and Me

I cannot remember exactly when my family began singing *Eshet Hayil* at the Friday night table. I do know that it was we, the kids, who brought this custom into the house. When I was five years old, my family moved to Toronto from Sarnia, a small town in Western Ontario where my father had owned a furniture store that was founded by his father, an immigrant from Galicia. "Who had time in Sarnia," recalls my father, "for a leisurely Friday night dinner? You had to rush home, eat quickly and get back to the store." When my family moved to Toronto, however, all this changed. My father ceased working on Shabbat. We began attending Jewish schools and camps where we learned *tefillot* and Hebrew songs.

When we first introduced the singing of *Eshet Hayil* at the Shabbat table, my father, who had received but a rudimentary Jewish education growing up in Sarnia, struggled with the complex Hebrew words, yet persisted in going through it every week. For our family, singing *Eshet Hayil* symbolized a renewed commitment to Jewish observance and the authentic calm of a leisurely Shabbat meal shared with the whole family. It stood for the realization of a Jewish Canadian/American dream, completely elusive to my grandfather's generation: the possibility of earning a living while living as a fully observant Jew.

Scholars say that the custom of singing *Eshet Hayil* at the Friday night table was initiated by kabbalists in the 17th century, who viewed Shabbat as an occasion of mystical union with the Divine. They understood *Eshet Hayil* allegorically as a representation of the *Shekhina*, the feminine presence of God.¹ In a sense, we were living out our own contemporary allegorical interpretation of Proverbs 31, with the Woman of Valor being the Sabbath, whom we had welcomed, with renewed energy, into our midst.

There is allegory, and then there is literal reading. Singing *Eshet Hayil* was also an occasion to offer appreciation for my mother, who cooked, baked and sewed, and had now prepared the Shabbat dinner that we so much enjoyed. The valorous woman in Proverbs 31 never sits still, let alone rests. Her light never goes out and she rises from her bed when it is still dark. Was that not just like my own mother, who teemed with nervous energy, walked more quickly than anyone else in the family, and had this uncanny ability to wake up in the middle of the night in response to the sound of my footsteps approaching my parents' room?

Years later, as a mother, scholar, and feminist, I find myself returning to *Eshet Hayil*, wondering where I see myself in relation to this biblical *uber-frau*, who singlehandedly feeds her entire household, works her hands in wool and flax, clothes her children in crimson, all the while managing a business and various philanthropic endeavors. To what extent do any of us see ourselves in this *aleph-to-tav* list of what was valued in a woman in the biblical period? Are we amused by it or alienated? In the context of our own times, when so many of us work outside as well as inside the home, negotiating on a daily basis a heroic set of professional as well as domestic duties, does Proverbs 31 provide inspiration or does it enshrine a set of unrealistic expectations? Nowadays, when husbands are more involved in child rearing, domestic chores, and Shabbat preparation, should they still sing this paean to their wives while wives sing nothing to their husbands? Given our awareness of the number of single women in our midst as well as couples and families who do not confirm to this heterosexual norm, are we not concerned about trumpeting this image as an ideal?

In asking these questions, we exit the experiential mode in which the song wafts over us unthinkingly and begin a more critical set of deliberations that can lead to disgruntlement as well as rediscovery. What do we find when we look into the ways in which Jews read and understood this poem/song in the past? And what new readings can we offer as moderns and as feminists?

Women of Valor quilt,

Heather G. Stoltz, Drisha Arts Fellow
Women of Valor (approx. 60"x38") is a representation of *Midrash Eshet Hayil*, which matches one biblical verse to each verse of Proverbs 32:10-31. Each of the 22 blocks of the quilt depicts one of these women, using different colors and symbols to portray their characteristics and actions. For example, beauty is represented by purple and strength by red fabrics. Blocks representing women who had direct contact with God each have a deep orange diamond-shaped symbol reaching from the top corner of the block to the center, while blocks of women who had contact with God through an intermediary have the same symbol but in a less intense yellow. Each block is seven inches square in size. This size was chosen because it is the formulaic number used in the Bible to represent sanctity and holiness and underlines the importance of these women and of Biblical women in general.



Allegorical Versus Literal Readings

In poring over midrashic interpretations of *Eshet Hayil*, I find that my family was not unique in combining an allegorical and a literal approach to the poem. The rabbis engaged in a similar set of interpretive tendencies and tensions, more typically favoring the allegorical over the literal. Well before the kabbalistic reading of *Eshet Hayil* as the *Shekhina*, *Pesikta Rabbati* 35 (9th century) insisted that the *Eshet Hayil* of Proverbs 31 was a feminized figure of *Kneset Yisrael* (the Congregation of Israel). In a similar vein, *Midrash Mishlei* (9th century) offered the following allegorical interpretation of the *Eshet Hayil* as the Torah:

[נ] אשת חיל מי ימצא. [ו] היא התורה. ורחוק מפנינים מכרה. שהיתה לפני לפנינים, וזכה משה והורידה למטה לארץ. בטח בה לב בעלה ושלא לא יחסר. שלא חסר בה דבר.

What a rare find is a capable wife! This is the Torah, whose price is far above rubies. For she [the Torah] had been kept in the innermost [chamber] Moses merited to bring her down to earth [to Israel]. Her husband puts his confidence in her and he has no lack of gain. That she [the Torah] lacks nothing.

What leads the rabbis to insist on this allegorical reading? On the most basic level, these interpretations imply a certain skepticism, supported by the biblical words “*mi yimtza?*” (who will find?), that any woman can be so valorous or impeccable. By turning the *Eshet Hayil* into the (infallible) Torah, the litany of positive attributes becomes more credible. Real-life women lack or fail in some way or another, but the Torah, the rabbis say, does not.

This tension between literal and allegorical interpretation is perhaps best seen in the writings of Gersonides (Rabag, 13th–14th century France). In his commentary on Genesis 47:6, Gersonides forges an exegetic link between the *Eshet Hayil* as seen in Ruth 3:11 and the *Anshei Hayil* that Pharaoh asks Joseph to identify from among his kin:

אנשי חיל - ראויים לגבורה ולשררה, כמו אשת חיל את.

Able men – Capable of courage and leadership, as in “You are an *Eshet Hayil* (an able woman) (Ruth 3:11).

In both the masculine and feminine cases cited above, the word *hayil* is understood as capable or leaderly. Lest one assume that Gersonides is promoting a proto-egalitarian position, we turn to his commentary on the words “*Eshet Hayil*” as they appear in Proverbs 12:4:

אשת חיל - הנה האשה הזריזה במעשיה היא עטרת בעלה ואולם האשה המתעצלת במעשיה היא משחתת אותו והיא לו כמו הרקב בעצמותיו שיבלו אותם והנה רמז בזה אל האשה המשרתת השכל בשתכין לו מהמוחשות מה שיעטרך לו בחקירותיו ואם לא תהיה נשמעת לו אך תתרשל מזה והיא מתאחרת ובוששת הנה היא לו כרקב בעצמותיו כי היא תמנע ממנו השלימות.

A capable woman – is she who is swift in her deeds. She is a crown to her husband. However, the lazy woman corrupts him and is like rot that will wither his bones. And behold, there is another [allegorical] meaning to this referring to the feminine

A Wife's Repsonse to *Eshet Hayil*

In their *birkon*, *Shaarei Simcha: Gates of Joy*, (reviewed in JOFA Journal Spring 2008) Adena K. Berkowitz and Rivka Haut discuss the option of a wife responding to *Eshet Hayil* with an expression of her feelings for her husband, and they suggest a possible text. See *Shaarei Simcha*, Ktav 2007, page 20.

[matter] that serves the [masculine] intellect and prepares for him from the tangible realm what he needs for his investigations and if she is not subject to him, if she is negligent, tardy, or absent, behold it is like rot in his bones and she will prevent him from reaching [intellectual] perfection.

In the second part of his interpretation, Gersonides adopts an allegorical approach that is based on a classical binary opposition between the masculine principle of the intellect or mind and the feminine (subservient) principle of matter. Like a good wife, it is the role of feminine matter to serve the masculine mind and enable its perfection.

If one considers the poem within its biblical context, Gersonides' reading emerges as the least convincing of the allegorical lot. Here is Proverbs, a book in which wisdom and intellect are repeatedly figured in feminine terms (see Chapters 1, 8, and 9), so much so that many contemporary biblical scholars have often viewed the representation of the *Eshet Hayil* as an extended praise of this same feminine figure of *Hokhma*, and yet Gersonides insists on reading the feminine here not as Dame Wisdom, but as the material principle that serves the masculine intellect!

Then there are those classical exegetes who eschew the allegorical tack, insisting that Proverbs 31 eulogizes actual women. In one famous story quoted in *Midrash Mishlei*, the *Eshet Hayil* is associated with the (here unnamed) wife of Rabbi Meir (Beruria in other sources), who, when her two sons die on the same Shabbat, waits until after Shabbat when Rabbi Meir returns from the academy and makes *havdalah*, serves him his *Motzei Shabbat* meal, and only then tells him the tragic news by way of a halakhic question; namely, if you borrow something, do you need to return it when its owner comes to claim it? Only when Rabbi Meir affirms that one needs indeed to return it, does she show him the dead bodies of their sons. She is deemed an *Eshet Hayil* because of the way in which she comforts her grieving husband. The bravery and strength of this woman inhere in her (conventionally masculine) ability to suppress completely her own feelings of grief and loss for the sake of consoling her husband. I confess I do not believe this story: what mother can cover her own grief so thoroughly and why should she be expected to do so? Are she and her husband not allowed and expected to cry and mourn together?

Elsewhere in *Midrash Mishlei* (and in *Midrash Hagadol*, 14th century), the *Eshet Hayil* is associated not with one particular woman, but with a string of 23 biblical women: each separate verse of the poem matches with a different biblical woman (with the exception of one verse that is attached to two). Feminist writers such as Penina Adelman (*Praise her Works*, 2005) have used this *midrash* in their own effort to recover the stories of biblical women, including some lesser known or hitherto uncelebrated figures such as the wife of Noah, the wife of Ovadiah, or even Vashti.² The unexpected

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Hava Shapiro: A Modern Literary Response to *Eshet Hayil*

By Wendy Zierler

Some biblical episodes have generated reams of literary response, but Proverbs 31 is not one of them. Perhaps this is because, rather than being a psychologically compelling or suggestive portrait of a woman, *Eshet Hayil* offers a picture of someone who seems to have no flaws, no down moments, no doubts. Who can relate to that?

The one significant modern, feminist literary response to *Eshet Hayil* that I have found is “*Tippusim*” (Types), a prose sketch first published in 1928 by Hava Shapiro (1878-1943).¹

Shapiro, a descendant of Pinhas of Koretz, whose family had a Hebrew printing business based in Slavuta, Ukraine, was one of the first modern Hebrew women prose writers. In much of her work she credits her own mother, Malka, a Hebraist in her own right, with inspiring her to learn and write in Hebrew, and it is the image of her mother that predominates in the first part of *Tippusim*. The title of Shapiro’s sketch, “Types,”² betrays her awareness that the biblical *Eshet Hayil* is a stereotype rather than a rounded character. What Shapiro does, then, is lend the type some psychological and emotional specificity. In fact, Shapiro offers two sketch variations on the type, one positive and one negative, each alluding specifically to Proverbs 31.

Hava Shapiro, “Types”

“The Mother”

On Friday nights, she sits next to the lit-up table, her chin supported by the palm of her hand. Her eyes are glued to the open book and she is entirely absorbed in her reading.

She permits herself this pleasure only on Friday nights. All other nights of the week she is busy running her husband’s business. She has the brain of a man, they tell her. She doesn’t dress up, doesn’t bedeck herself, doesn’t pile up words. She oversees the activities of her household [נעופיה הליכות ביתה]. She counsels her children. Aids the sick, the poor. In secret. With modesty. Encourages, strengthens faltering hands, weakened spirits. Away laziness! Away boredom and despair! There is so much to do in this world! To do for others. Others are the main thing. As for herself she knew no personal contentment. Her duty was her contentment.

A fountain of life and of vigor were within her. She does not carp, nor tire, nor complain. Why bother? One has so many responsibilities in this world. And there are so many lovely books!

On Friday evenings, when the men are at shul, she gives herself over to them, to the books. The rooms in the house have been cleaned. The white tablecloths are on the table. The Shabbat candles

are burning, and a modest light, the light of rest, spills out over the dishes and the furniture, on the *ballot* covered with embroidered cloths, on the bottles of *Kiddush* wine, on the gleaming goblets – even on the secular book open on the table.

The children – they and she have a kind of compact. On Friday nights they do not disturb her. They play in the corner. They cast glances at Mother. They bathe in her modest glow, in the image of her noble profile. They sense something of her special, hidden world.

And the next day, Shabbat afternoon, she gathers them around her. They sit close, right next to her and listen. In silent, rapt attention, like adults. She reads them the Proverbs of Ben Sira. And explains. Their eyes hang on her happy, radiant face and their ears take in her caressing voice. The warm-hearted verses, expressions and sayings enter their hearts and are understood.

What is more magical? The voice? The parables? The tone? The atmosphere? Mother’s glances or her company?

Beloved Mother in Israel, modest-intelligent, who compares to you? [מי ידמה לך]

“Woman of Valor”

Thin of flesh, quick and swift in all of her movements. She is constantly filled with grievances. Grievances about fate, about fortune, and the main thing – about him, her husband.

Without her, she maintains, there is no way that he would survive in this world. Without her and her counsel. She – the symbol of woman. She, the intelligent one. The devoted one. She knows all before the fact and foretells it before the fact. And he – he doesn’t even know how to appreciate it as he should.

“She only considers her own health,” he says, and compares her, in her concern for her every limb to other women who are healthy like the cows of Bashan.

Nights go by for her without sleep, and days without food and drink. Everyone believes her. But he denies it. “Such things never were,” he says.

She carries all the worries on her head. Her health breaks down and her beauty fades. And still he denies. “No one remembers what she was like before the breakdown,” he says. “She only worries about what others have.”

She traveled to the healing baths to recuperate. He gets up and tells her about his business problems and an unexpected event that has brought them to ruin. What else could she do? Once again she is forced to travel to another place of healing, to recover. Heartless man, who has no mercy for his wife’s health.

Everyone knows and says: she is a Woman of Valor. She speaks learnedly. Incisively. She knows how to get what she wants. Anywhere. And he: “They do for her only to avoid her tongue (lashing) ... her injurious tongue.”

When no one else is around she rains down on him her torrent of curses. “Others would exalt a wife like her,” she upbraids him. And he? He compares himself – in front of others – to Titus’s fly.

Once, he feared her. But now – nothing. He hears, hears but does not respond.

When she finishes cursing, she falls down upon her bed and advises with the voice of a dying woman: “After I die, you can find yourself another wife.”

He approaches her submissively, stands, and grins. Does not believe. Belief has departed him.

In the first section, “The Mother,” Shapiro makes a few crucial additions or modifications to the image of the *Eshet Hayil* that render it a useful source for modern feminist readers.

First, whereas Proverbs 31:26 praises the woman for her oral wisdom (“She opens her mouth with wisdom; and the law of kindness is on her tongue”), Shapiro renders her first *Eshet Hayil* a scholar and a Hebraist, responding to the Friday night context of the singing of this song by having the mother’s reading take place mainly on the Sabbath, when she is free of her other duties. Shapiro portrays her modern-day *Eshet Hayil* as demonstrating the same selfless, hard-working devotion to others that one sees in the biblical portrait. At the same time, she insists on giving this woman an intellectual and spiritual life that in turn inspires her children. Note, as well, that the husband – his praise in the gates, his needs – is completely absent from this first section. The mother is the sole focus. On Friday nights, she reads undisturbed, but on Shabbat afternoon, she shares her scholarship with her children.

“...mutual respect in marriage must be demonstrated and maintained...”

It is curious that, of all texts, the mother chooses to teach her children from the Wisdom of Ben Sira, an apocryphal work that is known for its extreme misogyny, including such lines as “All malice is short to the malice of women, let the lot of sinners call upon her,” and “From the woman came the beginning of sin and by her we all die” (Chapter 25:6, 33). Perhaps by placing Ben Sira’s proverbs in the mouth of this *Eshet Hayil*, Shapiro was attempting to counter the anti-female bias of the book. It is also possible that Shapiro was aware of Solomon Schechter’s 1896 Genizah discovery of a Hebrew version of Ben Sira. In having the mother quote from this text, she lends this *Eshet Hayil* a contemporary, *maskilic* set of intellectual interests.

In contrast to this favorable portrait, the second part of Shapiro’s sketch, which is ironically titled “*Eshet Hayil*,” describes a capable woman who feels completely unappreciated by her husband and who breaks down under the pressure of all she does for him and others. In contrast to Proverbs 31, which lauds endless industriousness, Shapiro’s sketch shows the underside of this biblical paradigm. The woman in this second part of the sketch is far from flawless. She is given to outbursts, rains curses upon her husband, and generally comes across as a restless, carping type. In closing the sketch with the image of this anti-*Eshet Hayil*, Shapiro reminds us that most of us cannot and do not even wish to undertake the unrelenting domestic drudgery described in Proverbs 31. Responsibilities must be shared; mutual respect in marriage must be demonstrated and maintained, or things will deteriorate as they do for the husband and the wife in the sketch. In so doing, she provides us with wisdom befitting the book of Proverbs.

¹ For an extended biography of Hava Shapiro, see Carole Balin, *To Reveal Our Hearts: Jewish Women in Tsarist Russia* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2000), 51-83. See also Wendy I. Zierler, *And Rachel Stole the Idols: The Emergence of Modern Hebrew Women’s Writing* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 33-34 and 221-228.

² My translation. For the Hebrew original see, Hava Shapiro, *Behikansi atah* [In My Entering Now: Collected Writings of Hava Shapiro], Wendy Zierler and Carole Balin, eds. (Tel Aviv: Resling Press, 2008), 151-153.



***Eshet Hayil* with Israeli wildflowers. 1999.**

Debra Band. Potomac, Maryland.

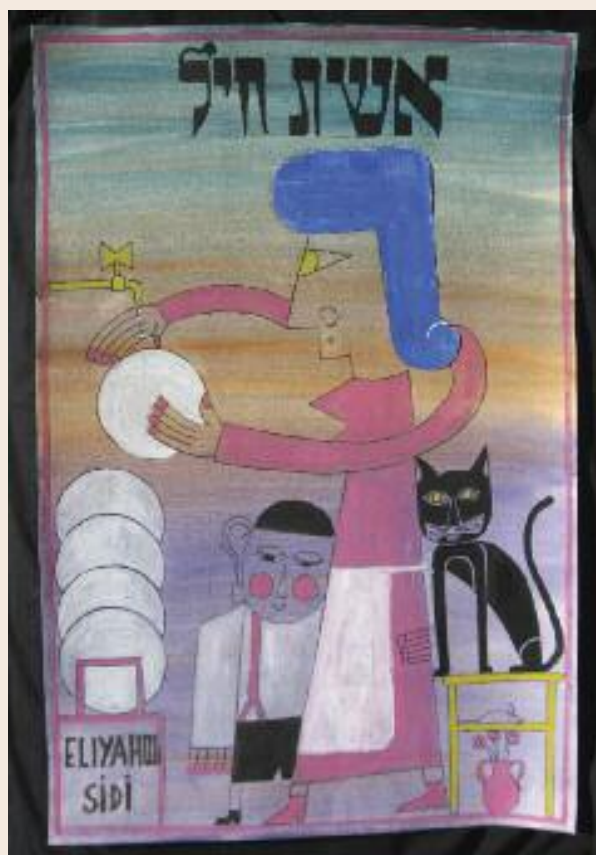
Ink, gouache and gold on calfskin vellum.

Debra Band has illuminated The Song of Songs and selections from the Book of Psalms. Both works have been published in popular editions by JPS.

How to Read Eshet Hayil ...continued from page 17

consequence of this approach, however, is that the idea of the woman of valor becomes an ancient rather than a contemporary notion, limited to particular women of the past; by implication, only our ancestors were truly meritorious and exemplary while we occupy a less holy, spiritually denuded realm.

Many of us are acquainted with remarkable men and women, though, who possess amazing and numerous virtues that inspire us and even arrest our imaginations. As feminists, we may not thrill to the list of tasks and traits enumerated in the biblical acrostic that is Proverbs 31. Yet, I still cling to the scholarly mission of searching out outstanding women of the past as well as to the belief in the real possibility of contemporary women of valor, however we define the term. Once again, I refer to the issue of context. We typically ignore the fact that the *Eshet Hayil* poem is preceded in Proverbs 31 by nine verses of instruction offered by an unnamed Queen Mother to her son King Lemuel, in which she warns him against drunkenness and debauchery (with women), encouraging him instead to judge righteously and be an advocate for the needy. One way to read the *Eshet Hayil*, poem, then, is as King Lemuel's eulogy for his valorous and wise mother, bearing in mind the genre of the eulogy, which often includes hyperbole and sacralization of the lost loved one.³



Eshet Hayil (front page of 23-page *Eshet Hayil* series),
Eliyahu Sidi, Jerusalem, 2007.

Gouache on paper, private collection.

Born in France in 1938, Sidi has lived in Israel since 1970.
An exhibit of his work is currently at Bet Avichai in Jerusalem.



Sima Rynderman, Boston Mass., *Eshet Hayil* Embroidery

Sima Rynderman is a multimedia Judaica artist living and teaching in Boston, and an active member of the Pomegranate Guild of Judaic Needlework.

We all know, of course, that it is best not to reserve one's appreciation for that ultimate occasion. Instead, why not sing it each week to others as well as ourselves? This past Friday night, after completing a draft of this essay as well as a dizzying array of other home-related tasks, I giddily joined in the singing of *Eshet Hayil*, adding in my own extemporaneous musical list of my accomplishments and those of the people around me—my kids had been remarkably cooperative that Friday, my husband survived another week on Wall Street and had managed to get home just in time for candle lighting—to the praised attainments of yesteryear.

A better way to begin my Shabbat, who can find?

Wendy Zierler is Associate Professor of Modern Jewish Literature and Feminist Studies at Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion in New York. She is the author of And Rachel Stole the Idols: The Emergence of Modern Hebrew Women's Writing (2004) and of the feminist commentary included in My People's Passover Haggadah (2008).

¹ See Polen and Kushner, "Hassidic Commentary," in *My People's Prayer Book, Volume 7: Shabbat at Home* (Burlington, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2003), 85. Also see Benjamin J. Segal, "The Liberated Woman of Valor," *Conservative Judaism* 52:2 (Winter 2000), 49–56.

² For more on rabbinic readings of Proverbs 31, see Yael Levine Katz, *Midreshei Eshet Hayil*, Ph.D. thesis for the Talmud Department of Bar-Ilan University, 1993.

³ According to *Midrash Tanhuma*, the *Eshet Hayil* chapter is identified as the eulogy that Abraham delivered after Sarah's death.

A Balancing Act: Feminism Meets Motherhood

We asked JOFA Board members, Pam Scheininger and Idana Goldberg to answer a number of questions about how they strive to balance feminism and motherhood on Shabbat. Both are busy professionals. Pam, who is also on the Journal editorial committee, is an attorney. She and her husband, members of the Netivot Shalom congregation in Teaneck, New Jersey, have three children, ages 7, 5 and 3. Idana is a foundation professional at the Jewish Funders Network and is a faculty member of Me'ah. She, her husband, and their children, ages 7, 4½ and 1, live in White Plains, New York and daven at the Hebrew Institute of White Plains.

Their responses reflect their individual experiences and do

not aim to provide a template for all mothers. Clearly, every mother's situation is different and depends upon her family structure, the ages of her children, the community she lives in and many other factors. Special needs children present their own challenges for a family on Shabbat. Additionally, not all families live within an *eruv*, that allows parents with very young children to take them to shul or to other people's homes on Shabbat, and we know that not every shul provides the sort of childcare support that Pam's and Idana's do.

Nevertheless, we trust that parents will find the following helpful in working out their own ways to balance different responsibilities on Shabbat and in suggesting how their shuls can be encouraged to be supportive in this regard.

The household chores involved in getting ready for Shabbat can be quite burdensome.

How do you convey the joy of Shabbat while managing the reality of the chores required?

PAM: I try to be efficient about how I prepare for Shabbat. I don't work on Thursdays so I shop while my children are at school and I prepare during the afternoon as they are getting home. Although Shabbat preparations certainly take time and energy, I like to think that my children have come to know that the preparations are a part of how we get ready for Shabbat. When I start preparing, my children know that Shabbat is coming and they are excited about that.

IDANA: I believe that it's critical to have reasonable expectations for Shabbat. My reality as a full-time working parent with a full-time working spouse is very different from that of earlier generations of Jewish women. While making sure that our home is ready for Shabbat and having special and delicious food prepared to honor Shabbat is important to me and my husband, I also know that we have to do our best not to let the burdens of preparation take over the joy. We share the cooking, cleaning, and food preparation as best we can. I am lucky to work from home on Fridays, which lets me do some food shopping in the morning or get food in the oven before I sit down at my home office for the day's work.

How do you balance having guests with the need for family time and less labor-intensive Shabbat preparations?

PAM: I like having guests and I think that it is important for *hakhnasat orkhim* to be a central part of my family's Shabbat experience. Because my children are still young and have early bedtimes, we only have guests for Shabbat lunch. Also, because of the time involved in preparing for guests (as well as the expense), we aim for a schedule of lunch guests every three to four weeks. We do, however, have my children's friends over for lunch on a regular basis.

IDANA: We also love to have guests for Shabbat, and like Pam, we tend to entertain or go out only for lunch as our kids are also young. I think the balancing act also has to do with setting expectations for ourselves. Having guests does take more time and effort than simply cooking for our family, but even entertaining guests can be maximalist or minimalist. To me, having guests is about connecting with friends or family or getting to know new people. While I take pleasure in experimenting with new and different recipes, I also try to remember that Shabbat should be about the company and not about how many side dishes one makes or how many courses one serves.

Many of us strive to attend shul on time. Even with the best youth activities, however, keeping kids in shul for the full span of services is difficult. How do you manage to balance child care responsibilities and shul attendance? How do you divide such responsibilities with your spouse?

PAM: My husband and I try our best to stick to a schedule on Shabbat mornings. My husband takes my two daughters to shul shortly after shul begins. My daughters have snack bags to keep them busy and they sit with my husband until 9:45 a.m., when youth groups begin. My husband, who is a *gabbai* at our shul, is usually on the *bima* at 9:45 a.m., so if things are running smoothly that day, my older daughter takes her sister to her group. I bring my son to shul about an hour after services begin and he goes to youth groups. Happily, our shul has great groups and my children generally stay there until the end of shul without incident.

IDANA: We're not quite as scheduled as Pam! We all strive to get to shul as soon as we can in the morning and usually all together. I am often one of the first women with young children in shul, although since our youngest was born a year ago, sometimes I'm not as early as I'd like to be. We're lucky that, as a matter of principle, our shul has baby/child care that begins when shul does. The summer we moved into our community we had a nine-month old and were used to a shul in Manhattan where there was infant child

...continued on page 22

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care. We mentioned this to our rabbi and by the end of the summer, the new program was in place. One challenge is that, even with this child care, many parents are still unable to leave their toddlers. We try to “train” our kids to go to groups from infancy, so that now as a one year old, our youngest will happily stay and play with the babysitter even without us there. Recently, some parents started a terrific program within the baby/child care that includes Shabbat songs so that even the youngest kids have a Shabbat experience.

Do you have congregational responsibilities on Shabbat? If so, how do you balance your children’s needs with the needs of the community?

PAM: This is a really challenging area for us as I am the president of our shul and my husband is the *Gabbai Sheini*. When my son was slightly younger and not yet comfortable in groups, balancing our responsibilities and child care was very difficult. Often I had to wait outside shul with my son until my husband finished his *gabbai* duties; then my husband would run out and take my son (who was usually screaming at this point) so that I could run into shul and make announcements. Also, on several occasions, my daughters have needed my husband’s attention just as he was supposed to begin his tasks on the *bima*, and he has had to scramble to find a replacement. Fortunately, now that my children are a bit older, they all go to youth groups and usually my husband and I can fulfill our responsibilities.

IDANA: I’m a lay person as far as Shabbat goes, though my husband, like Pam’s, is also Gabbai Sheini. Our shul is pretty easy-going and he has on occasion had one of our kids next to him on the bima. Overall, though, we haven’t found any conflict between our kids and communal responsibilities.

How do you structure the time spent at the Shabbat table? Are there particular areas of frustration or satisfaction?

PAM: At this point, my children are at an age when most of our energies at the Shabbat table are geared toward ensuring that they eat their food without major incident. On Friday nights, when Shabbat is early, the children sing *Shalom Aleichem* and *Eshet Hayil* with us, and then my husband and I “bentch” each of the children (this has actually turned into a family activity with my children participating in “bentching” one another). We do try to have songs at the Shabbat table (Shabbat-related songs if not actual *zemirot*), and we sing *birkat hamazon* together. I say *hamotzi* during each Shabbat meal, and my children take this as a given, which is nice. That being said, at this point, I don’t find the Shabbat table to be a particularly spiritually satisfying element of Shabbat – it’s more about actually being able to sit down and have a meal together for one of the only times during the week.

IDANA: I was really relieved recently when I confided to a friend that our house is a total *baal ha’gan* on Friday nights, and she laughed and said, “of course it is, so is mine; what do you expect?” With three small children at the end of a long school and work week, Friday nights can be a

real challenge, but we attempt to convey to our kids that Shabbat is special. It’s important to us that our children don’t think that Mommy makes Shabbat special through cooking and Daddy does so by davening. My husband and I alternate kiddush and hamotzi each week so that our kids see us both as ritual actors. Luckily in our community, many women make either kiddush or hamotzi so this is not unusual for them. Our kids love to talk about the parasha so we always make sure to talk to them about what they learned or share with them a midrash that we think they’ll like.



Shabbat Opposing the Work Week, Irene Helitzer, Sea Cliff, New York, 2005. Stoneware.

The artist writes, “Observing Shabbat is not always an easy thing to do, especially in a secular society. With Shabbat Bride as Queen, Torah as King, Angels of Peace and Rest for Bishops, Candles (*Shamor* and *Zakhor*) as Knights, and Rooks that symbolize peace arriving at homes throughout the world, this Shabbat line-up “opposes” a contemporary family busy at work. The board depicts Shabbat in the center of the page from a weekly calendar. A ring of night with *havdalah* pieces separates Shabbat from the weekdays.”

What steps can shuls and communities take to create a more inclusive and/or feminist Shabbat experience?

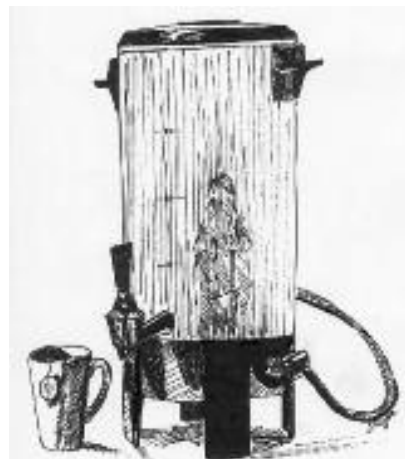
PAM:

- Shuls can be child-friendly. While I believe that children should not be allowed to disrupt *tefilla* and that a parent should take children out of shul if they are interfering with the *tefilla* of others, shuls should accept children's presence in the sanctuary.
- Groups for children should be available during most, if not all, of *tefilla*. They should be well run, well supervised, and meaningful. In my opinion, this is a budgetary priority for shuls wishing to include both men and women. If possible, groups for younger children should be in close proximity to the sanctuary to allow parents to be able to check on their children without spending time running up and down stairs.
- Babysitting should be available during all *shiurim*. This provision should be automatic, whether the *shiurim* are on Shabbat or during the week.
- The shul itself should be simple to navigate with clear sight lines between the women's and men's sections. While the halakhic issues relating to *mehitza* should be observed, mothers and fathers should be able to find one another and get one another's attention during *tefilla* so that they may facilitate child care needs.
- *Tefilla* for children should include roles for girls, from young to old. If there is a teen minyan, to the extent possible, girls should have an active role in that minyan.
- Shuls should aim to be as participatory as halakhically possible. Women should be invited to give *divrei torah* and *shiurim* and run for shul office. The *bima* should be accessible to both men and women. This is important for the women and men themselves and also important in terms of the models available to the children. Children should grow up seeing their mothers as well as their fathers teaching and speaking in shuls. To the extent possible, young men and women should also be encouraged to take an active role in the shul.
- There should be a room available for nursing women.

IDANA: *I think that all of Pam's suggestions are really great ones, and shuls must get on board with making the shul a space for both men and women. What I find most frustrating about Shabbat, however, has almost nothing to do with figuring out who's cooking or cleaning or how we find the time to entertain. My husband and I work these out the way we work out most things in our marriage; a fair division of responsibility and some compromise. Instead I struggle to figure out how to give my children a picture of Shabbat and, by extension, Jewish life that matches my own religious and feminist inclinations. The shul we attend has already made great strides in this department. We have a monthly Women's Tefilla and annual Megillat Esther reading; recently the shul decided to have a woman carry the Sefer Torah through the women's section on the Torah's return to the aron; and our shul has a female Congregational Intern who teaches shiurim and introduces the Torah reading from the women's section. Many Bat Mitzvah girls choose to participate in the Women's Tefilla and even those who do not do so give a d'var Torah from the bima in shul. Our shul has a Women's Focus Officer, and the rabbi and the board take women's concerns seriously.*

Yet for me it's not enough. I want my children to see a shul of both men and women who come to shul on time and participate in the tefilla; I want them to see a community where women are engaged spiritually and participate to the fullest extent possible within halakha. Yet my children still see a main minyan where men are in the center, men lead tefilla, and only men read Torah and have aliyot. When women and girls speak from the bima in shul, they must do so at the end of davening, while male speakers – Bar Mitzvah boys included – speak at the usual time before Musaf. There is still an annual youth Shabbat, which has accommodated girls by having one give a d'var Torah in shul, but as in most Orthodox shuls, the youth who participate are still boys.

The shul experience for me encapsulates the Orthodox feminist struggle. Bound by halakha, I attend an Orthodox shul. As an Orthodox Jew, this is my community. But I continue to try to figure out how to help my children understand my own inner conflict as I continue to try and find my own meaning in what remains for me an imperfect tefilla each Shabbat.



Shabbat water urn showing reflection of woman lighting her candles. Jane Trigère, South Deerfield, Massachusetts.

Like the blech and the crockpot, the Shabbat water urn is a mainstay of our Shabbat food preparation. In earlier times, public ovens were crowded with pots brought by each family before Shabbat. Lids would be sealed, often with a flour and water paste, or with wire, and the large stone oven full of carefully arranged pots (so that they could be identified the next day) would be sealed for the night and watched to make sure the pots were not tampered with. On Shabbat, children or servants would pick up each pot and would arrive home—in Ashkenazi families bearing the *cholent*, in Sephardic families, the *hamin*, *dafina* or *skhena*—all of them variants of stew-like dishes—that provided a hot meal without transgressing the prohibitions of lighting fires and cooking on Shabbat.

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An Expanded Shabbat Table: How Two Families Became One

By Joan Sadinoff Katz

It is Friday night. Amid flurries of last-minute preparation, another busy week comes to a close and Shabbat's calm descends. The day bears different gifts for each of its revelers. For some, Shabbat brings spiritual rejuvenation; for others, it is simply a time for much-needed rest. But spanning the collage of traditional Judaism is the value of family and its inextricable connection to Shabbat. Shabbat is defined by the meals we eat together, by the conversations and stories shared around the table, by making up time spent apart during the hectic week.

Shabbat is a gift, and only we are able to create its atmosphere. Every family member must put away his or her cell phone, schoolbooks, and workaday anxieties for 25 hours, subordinating the needs of the individual to that of the communal. Within each family exists a unique system and customs that help engender this feeling. These customs do not develop overnight; each couple shapes these rituals as they begin to build their life together and evolve into a family. But how does a family with two separate traditions create a new tradition that speaks for both families? How can two individuals, each with their own children, establish a new unity that resonates for both families?

For my family members and me, these questions were both a challenge and an imperative. At the time that Henry and I married 28 years ago, he had been a widower for a year, with four children whose ages ranged from 9 to 18. I had been widowed for four years, with three sons from ages 8 to 13. Our children all attended Hebrew day schools and had shared similar summer camp experiences. But despite our similarities, we were two very separate families whose children did not know each other well. We were faced with the task of building something new. Trust and a sense of family and safety needed to be established.

The day of our marriage was lovely. The children were the wedding party, holding up the *huppah* and serving as ring bearer, maid of honor, and best man. Family, children's friends, and our own friends celebrated with us. The day after the wedding, we began to build our new family and find our places, our roles, and even our titles.

I recall one evening, before our marriage, when we had a discussion in a restaurant with all of the children about what they thought we should be called. With laughter, some nervousness, and a sense of relief to be talking about this important topic, we jokingly batted around different possibilities: just "Mom," or maybe "Mommy #1," or how about "Mommy #2"? Our goal was to let everyone know that it was OK to take time and explore until some name felt right. We acknowledged that we were all treading new terrain, but that we would work things out over time.

Each one of us has had to find our own comfort zone. Some of the children lost their places as the oldest or youngest sibling. Several of our sons became instant roommates with their new siblings, whom they had met only a short time before. In addition, Henry and I needed to find time to work out our ideas on everything from rules about jumping on the bedspreads, to limits on allowances to daily study rules.

Shabbat, with its beautiful rituals and ceremonies and its 25 hours of family time, gave us a frame within which to work when we were first trying to create our unique, Katz-Sadinoff shape. Shabbat was a time when the stress of trying new things

was lessened. We all sat at our newly expanded Shabbat table, conscious of our larger size but taking comfort in the rituals and ceremonies we all shared. The "Abba" at the table, whatever his honorific title in English, made *kiddush*, and the "Ima" lit candles. The melodies were familiar to us all, as was the food, and the conversation ranged through known terrain.

However, the large number of children at the table did create some tension. Status was determined by how close one sat to Henry's or my seat. In a small group, people can be equals in taking part in the conversation, but we numbered nine at our smallest. As we sat, multitudinous, around our large table, our chatter would often splinter into many different conversations. Other times, one person ended up dominating the discussion. Unity, our holy grail, was not easily attained; it required that we, as the adults, balance the conversation, stepping in to lead at times while ensuring that each child had the chance to shine. Yet, knowing that Shabbat's three, sumptuously long meals provided ample spotlight time for all, we were able to relax.

Henry and I both brought into our marriage the tradition of blessing our children on Friday night. At a time when we were just getting close to the children and they close to us, here was an opportunity to reach out, touch, caress, and bless them in a public, formal, and delicate way. Each one of us savored these moments; even our teenagers were willing to reach forward to receive this blessing from their new parents.

The hours of Shabbat offered us time to be in our own sphere. We used those hours to play board games and ball games and, through these activities, to get to know one another in a relaxed way. Most children seek to individuate and expand their sense of themselves by visiting with friends. In the first years of our new family, this process of individuation was slowed down for our children. Instead, there was more of an emphasis on keeping each other company on Shabbat. As they were the newer children in the community, my children from my first marriage did not have many Shabbat invitations. In fact, our new and enlarged Katz-Sadinoff group received very few Shabbat luncheon invitations. Perhaps we were too large a group for others to feel at ease with. Be that as it may, the children played with each other, often inviting other children to our home for the afternoon. Our oldest son, Michael, left his freshman dorm each week to return home, to be a part of this new and developing family unit.

Both Henry and I felt that remaining an integral part of our extended families was important for us and for our children. We put a lot of time and energy in hosting aunts and uncles, cousins, and grandparents from all four parts of our family. As a family, in fact, we asked and expected that all the children would attend every function, no matter which part of the family hosted. Shabbat was also the best time for inviting family over because we were often busy on Sundays. Without question, our family put in a great deal of time meeting new relatives and maintaining connections with others. Perhaps this explains another reason why our children seemed to remain at home more than did many others.

Shabbat in our new, blended family changed my life in ways I had not anticipated. I found that during my time in synagogue I focused only on the public, communal needs of our family.

Seven Ways That Schools Can Make Shabbat A More Inclusive Experience For Children

- 1 Ensure that girls and boys both have meaningful, full roles in Shabbat rituals experienced in school. For example, make sure that early childhood departments are creating real roles for Shabbat *Imahot* and *Avot* and exploring the various possibilities within that role. To the extent that children have Shabbat roles in lower or middle schools, make sure that the roles are as equal and inclusive as possible.
- 2 Teach students which Shabbat roles women and men may share or exchange. Be as creative and expansive as possible. Examine and discuss the halakhic vs. cultural reasons that men have historically had certain roles on Shabbat while women have had other roles. Talk about what roles children would like to have as part of a more inclusive Shabbat experience.
- 3 Examine your Shabbat imagery, whether through story, song, pictures or books, for gendered or gender-specific messages about Shabbat. Create and introduce imagery and language that show women involved in Shabbat ritual, and men and women sharing in Shabbat preparation. If there are images that are gendered, encourage the children to question the images and what they represent. Ask whether the same ideas could have been portrayed in a more inclusive way.
- 4 Make sure that both female and male faculty members have substantive involvement in Shabbat assemblies, plays and productions. Have teachers model the ways in which Shabbat can be inclusive for women and men within the framework of halakha.
- 5 Talk to students about how they may optimize their Shabbat shul experience. Explore with both girls and boys the models that they see at shul, the opportunities available in learning and prayer and the ways in which they can ensure that the opportunities are more fully inclusive. Help female students examine their shul experiences and the ways in which they may have internalized those experiences. Boys and girls should be equally encouraged to attend shul regularly and on time and to participate in Shabbat rituals.
- 6 Encourage girls to give *divrei Torah* and lead *parasha* questions on Shabbat. Teach girls that they have a place in Shabbat learning and teaching and encourage them to find their voices.
- 7 Examine each weekly *parasha* through gender-sensitive eyes, and teach your students how to do the same. Even for younger children, there are opportunities to talk about the women as well as the men found in that week's *parasha*. Encourage all students to think about the messages in the *Torah* with respect to men and women and how those messages make them feel.

Pam Scheininger

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Following the direction of my daughters, I sat in the seat their mother had previously filled. I was happy to meet the welcoming friends and acquaintances in the community, but had little time to spend on spirituality in the prayers or on self-reflection. Like my adolescent children, I put off my own individuation, my personal integration into a new community, and tried instead to foster the growth of my fledgling family.

While putting off my own spiritual needs was appropriate and necessary for a period, eventually, once our new family was well established, I was able to focus on my own Shabbat needs and to work with others in my community to form a women's *tefilla* service. This initiative has enriched my Shabbat experience ever since and introduced me to a group of women in our community who share my needs and with whom I feel very close.

Indeed, this effort to find a meaningful Shabbat prayer experience for myself brought Henry and me closer to each other. We were able to talk about our experiences on Shabbat through another lens. During the formative years of our women's *tefilla* group, we had great difficulty obtaining a Torah to use on Shabbat. Henry recalled that it was a tradition in some homes to own a Torah and suggested that we do the same so that it

could be available to our women's *tefilla* group. I appreciated his caring and his understanding of my need for a Shabbat setting that would resonate for me, and I was grateful for his ongoing help in fostering the group.

Today, Shabbat continues to be a time when we find opportunities to join with and enjoy our new larger family. As with every family, weekdays are packed with activities, and Shabbat provides a unique moment to slow down, to focus on and savor our grandchildren, and to watch our children, now the parents of their own families, as they each create their own beautiful Shabbat experiences. Looking back, it is clear that Shabbat helped us enhance the creation of our second and enlarged family, and we feel blessed that we have been supported and shaped by its beautiful traditions and rituals.

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Women and *Se'udah Shlishit*

The third meal of Shabbat, *se'udah shlishit*, is often the one that women skip. But the obligation for *se'udah shlishit* is equal to that of the other two meals of Shabbat. Women are obligated in all the positive (as well as the negative) *mitzvot* of Shabbat equally with men, including that of eating three meals (*Shulhan Arukh* OH 291:6.) The root of the obligation of *se'udah shlishit* is the commandment in Exodus 16:25 regarding the manna in the wilderness, "And Moses said, Eat it today, for today is Shabbat to the Lord, today you shall not find it in the fields." Tractate *Shabbat* 117b draws from the threefold repetition of the word "*hayom*" (today) that there is an obligation to eat three meals on Shabbat.

In the 19th century, the *Arukh Hashulhan* observed that women did not pay attention to the obligation of *se'udah shlishit* and said this should be remedied. As Sari Horowitz's article makes clear, participating in a *se'udah shlishit* with its relaxed atmosphere, songs, learning, and conversation can a very meaningful experience. Because one is usually not so hungry at *se'udah shlishit*, there is less emphasis on food and more on "togetherness" and the connections between participants. Some maintain that as the Friday night meal represents Creation and the Shabbat lunch meal represents Revelation, so the third meal embodies the themes of Redemption and Unity, presaging a future of unity between all Jews, and in the world as a whole.

Se'udah Shlishit in Denver

By Sari Horovitz

My *se'udah shlishit* group was born about eight years ago on a long, summer Shabbat afternoon. My children were out and about, and I had already read, walked, and napped. I was restless. I had been reading a provocative book about the rabbinic treatment of women in the Talmud and I wanted to discuss it with someone. Unfortunately, no one else I knew was reading it. During the following week I called three women with whom I was friendly and with whom I thought I would like to share time and conversation. I invited them to join me for *se'udah shlishit* and to study Torah. Thus was born our "Women's *Se'udah Shlishit* Group."

We met that Shabbat. My friends were not interested in reading my chosen text, but they were interested in learning Torah and in meeting each Shabbat. All four of us are *ba'alot teshuvah*, married with children. Although we began with the objective of studying Torah every week, we soon discovered that we have disparate learning styles and interests; for example, two of us might prefer studying Rambam, and the other two might want to read the inspirational works of R. Akiva Tatz. Yet, despite the differences in learning styles and the lack of focus that sometimes results from our diverse learning goals, we are devoted to meeting every Shabbat.

For years, the four of us have also planned and implemented a women's only Simhat Torah gathering for the larger community (we belong to three different Orthodox synagogues). Some years this has taken place in a sponsoring synagogue and other years in a member's home. Each year we partake of the singular energy that is created when women gather to sing and dance together.

Currently, our weekly Shabbat learning is focused on what we call the "Torah of Life." What began as a time dedicated to learning and visiting with each other has become something

much deeper. Our friendships have deepened, our connections have expanded, and trust has been established. *Se'udah shlishit* has become the time when we bring our deepest spiritual questions to each other, discuss decisions regarding our lives as observant Jewish women (e.g., should we cover our hair or not?), and "debrief" the holidays ("How were your seders?" or "What was meaningful about Yom Kippur?"). It has also become the time during which we share our most joyous *simchas* and our greatest losses. We love singing together, but the focus of the group is ultimately a mix of talking, learning, and discussing.

We have found that *se'udah shlishit* is an ideal time to get together with other women. Shabbat is drawing to a close. The urgency has shifted from davening and serving guests to recognizing that the day will soon be over and each moment is precious. When the group first began, we took a break for the winter months, but now we meet all year, even though for some members, it is a 30 to 40-minute walk to the house where the Shabbat group is meeting that week. Recently, a community-wide women's study group has been meeting around Minhah time. Some of us study in that larger group first, and then we migrate to whomever is hosting *se'udah shlishit* group that week. Once there, we often linger past the time of three stars. We stretch the intimate time that we have created within the bounds of Shabbat so that it, like the spices and light of *havdalah*, flows into the coming week.

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Havdalah

Most halakhic authorities maintain that *havdalah* is obligatory for women. The extent of women's obligation in *havdalah* and whether they may make *havdalah* for themselves and others are subjects of dispute. The subject of women and *havdalah* will be addressed in a future *Ta Shma*, JOFA's comprehensive halakhic source guide series.

Ladino Havdalah Song

Sephardi women through the centuries traditionally prayed and sang in Ladino. This song, translated by Vanessa Paloma, was sung by women to mark *havdalah*. We note that many Hassidic women have the tradition of reciting the Yiddish prayer "Gott fun Avraham" ascribed to Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev, three times before *havdalah* to assure blessings for the coming week.

*Buena semana mos de El Dio!
Buena semana mos de El Dio,
alegres y sanos.*

*Para mis hijos biendecir,
que me los deje El Dio vivir,
buena semana.*

*Buena semana mos de El Dio,
alegres y sanos.*

*Para fadar y cercusir
para poner los tefilim,
buena semana.*

*Buena semana mos de El Dio,
alegres y sanos.*

*A nuestros padres bien honrar,
para los novios alegrar,
buena semana.*

*Buena semana mos de El Dio,
alegres y sanos.*

*Nuestra Torah venerar,
Yerushalayim ensalzar,
buena semana.*

*Buena semana mos de El Dio,
buena semana.*

*May God give us a good week,
May God give us a good week,
with happiness and health.*

*A week to bless my children
that God give them life,
a good week.*

*May God give us a good week,
with happiness and health.*

*A week to name girls and circumcise,
to start to don tefillin,
a good week.*

*May God give us a good week,
with happiness and health.*

*A week to greatly honor our parents,
to give joy to those in love,
a good week.*

*May God give us a good week,
with happiness and health.*

*A week to venerate our Torah,
to praise Jerusalem,
a good week.*

*May God give us a good week,
a good week.*

Excerpted from Leora Tanenbaum with Vanessa Paloma, "Orthodox Women's Private Prayers" in *Pray Tell: A Hadassah Guide to Jewish Prayer*. Copyright: Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc.

Melaveh Malka

As we welcome the Shabbat in with ceremony, so we bid farewell to Shabbat with a special meal on Saturday evening after *havdalah*. This meal, also sometimes called the *se'udah* of King David, is generally known as a *melaveh malka* – accompanying the Queen Shabbat as she departs until the next week. As we are told to personally accompany all guests when they leave our house, so we are enjoined to accompany the Shabbat Queen to show our respect and appreciation. It is the way to extend some of the unique holiness and joy of Shabbat into the everyday reality of the week. The additional soul, the *neshama yeteira*, traditionally given to every Jew for the duration of Shabbat, is said not to leave until after the *melaveh malka* ends. Participating in a *melaveh malka* is not obligatory but it is considered meritorious for both men and women. It is known that the Vilna Gaon was very careful that his wife should always eat *melaveh malka* after Shabbat. Other rabbis wrote that for a pregnant woman, eating *melaveh malka* is a *segulah* (good omen) for a healthy pregnancy.

Miriam's Well

According to Midrashic tradition, God created ten things at twilight before the first Shabbat. One of these was a well that would belong to those, like Abraham, who knew how to draw up its pure water. After the Exodus, the well reappeared in the merit of Miriam—as the manna was in the merit of Moses and the Cloud of Glory in the merit of Aaron—because she waited by the Nile to protect her brother Moses who had been hidden in the water, and later sang at the crossing of the Red Sea. The well, which had healing powers, traveled with the Israelites in the desert. When Miriam died, the well disappeared, but it was believed that it was only hidden and will emerge at the time of the Messiah. Many kabbalists maintained that the well continues to exist in the depths of Lake Kinneret. Medieval writers wrote that Miriam's well is the source of all the water in the world and that on *Motzei Shabbat*, its water moves around from stream to stream and from well to well. Because of this, a custom—noted by many including the *Rema* and *Shulhan Arukh Harav* (written by the first Rabbi of Lubavitch)—developed to draw water before or after *havdalah* and to drink it in order to access the healing powers of Miriam's well. As water is traditionally associated with Torah, Kabbalists such as the Ari also considered this custom to be a *segulah* (omen) for acquiring Torah wisdom and spiritual regeneration. Some Hassidim believe that when Jews sing on Saturday night, the well itself will reappear as a sign of Redemption. Just as many people now incorporate Miriam into the Passover seder through Miriam's cup or a special food on the seder plate, so one can include the remembrance of her well into Saturday evening rituals by taking water from the tap and sipping it.

Experimentation and Commitment: Shabbat on New York's Upper West Side

By Sarah Rindner

In the recent Israeli documentary *Ha-Modernim* ("The Modern Ones"), filmmaker Cheli Rosenberg documents the lives of young unmarried residents of Jerusalem as they navigate romantic, social, and familial pressures. Quite appropriately, Rosenberg frames *Ha-Modernim* with evocative footage from an Erev Shabbat in Jerusalem, beginning and ending the film with the message that the experience of being single and observant is somehow deeply intertwined with the experience of Shabbat.

This connection is equally strong, perhaps even stronger, on American soil. For young professionals and graduate students living on their own in New York, Jewish life is decidedly far less pronounced during the week than it is on Shabbat. On Manhattan's Upper West Side in particular, elegant, century-old German Jewish congregations such as Ohab Tzedek, the Jewish Center, and Ramath Orah are filled to capacity every week with hordes of smiling, chattering young people. On Saturdays in the spring and summer, joggers through Central Park may be perplexed by the preponderance of black suits and frilly dresses overtaking the northwest corner of the Great Lawn. A friend of mine once was approached by a surprised-looking Uma Thurman in running gear, who asked him what the commotion was all about. He explained what was going on and then excused himself, apologizing that he had seen someone he wanted to talk to and had to return to the fray.

In the fragmented, individualized, and sometimes solitary life of religiously observant, post-college, pre-marriage residents of the big city, Shabbat provides, at the very least, the assurance they will encounter others of their kind. Shabbat on the West Side for its single population (to be distinguished from its also quite sizable population of couples and families) is not an extension of a pre-existing community; it *is* the community – it creates it and it sustains it. And the community it creates for singles is far from a second-rate substitute for the more "authentic" Shabbat experiences taking place in family homes in the surrounding suburbs. I would even suggest that there is something remarkable about Shabbat on the Upper West Side, a kind of delicate dance between experimentation and commitment that results in something both radically new and also comfortingly familiar.

Shabbat on the West Side provides access to a whole host of interconnected sub-communities with varying models of religious practice. It is possible for someone living in Upper Manhattan to go several months, a year even, without repeating Shabbat day attendance at any one synagogue. The accompanying message can be intoxicating for many, as it was for me: your model of Jewish practice can be something you choose – it is not entirely handed down to you. The model I usually choose involves active female participation, which is found in a wide array of options in the neighborhood. Another element I have been drawn to is the prospect of an intellectual community, with local synagogues providing a broad assortment of lectures and *shiurim*, and, more important, opportunities to establish rich and rewarding friendships based on something more than geographic proximity.

The result is that Shabbat has become quite different from the quiet reading and family time it was growing up (something that is itself precious to be sure). Every weekend is a whirlwind of new prayer experiences, interesting speakers, and intense conversations. And Shabbat has become a touchstone for all of the feelings of freedom and anticipation I associate with carving an identity out for myself as a Jewish woman and as an adult.

And yet, somewhat paradoxically, Shabbat on the West Side has made me appreciate many of the accoutrements of traditional Jewish gender roles that I once found irrelevant. One of the basic staples of the Upper West Side Jewish experience is the large, usually overpacked Shabbat meal, where novice cooks find themselves faced with the prospect of 15 or more ravenous guests and a distinct regret they had not spent more time helping in the kitchen growing up. Yet for most of us, total domestic ineptitude gradually grows into a respectable proficiency, and we find ourselves laying claim to rituals we once thought limited to a different "kind" of Jewish woman. It may be true that my tofu quinoa concoction is a far cry from my mother's potato kugel, but it is mine. And in a way, this experience has left me far more sensitive to and respectful of centuries of Jewish homemaking than I ever was before. The more I build a home for myself here, the more connectedness I find between the abstract, cerebral world of Jewish texts and ideas and the sensual, visceral associations we all have with events like Shabbat meals. As untraditional as the world of the Upper West Side may seem, the re-creation of familiar rituals on new ground brings with it an intensified appreciation for those rituals.

Indeed, one of the most striking experiences of Shabbat in New York City, particularly for young singles, is that element of re-creation. The bustling streets and stores around you make for the acute awareness that you have created this Shabbat experience for yourself. No one is forcing it on you; no one expects it of you. Instead, it is yours, through and through, in a way that may be risky for some, but wildly stimulating for those who remain religiously engaged. And the most remarkable thing is how many people do remain engaged with Judaism through the framework of Shabbat. I have several formerly observant friends who have thrown off nearly every vestige of their Orthodox upbringings in this new urban environment, yet almost all of them have invited me, at some point, to some sort of Shabbat dinner.

It is hard to know sometimes whether the unusual thing is the way we re-create and redefine Shabbat in our own environment or the way in which universal features of Shabbat maintain their grip on us, regardless of the directions our lives take. I never properly understood Ahad Ha'am's famous phrase – "more than the Jews have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews" – until I experienced the significance it brings to Jewish life on the West Side.

Of course, perhaps the most dominant feature of Shabbat on the Upper West Side for singles is that it is bound to be somewhat temporary. As people leave the city, begin families, and

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"Come, O Bride, the Sabbath Queen": Decoding the Feminine Imagery of Shabbat

By Rachel Furst

Come, my friend, to meet the bride; let us welcome the Sabbath.

לכה דודי לקראת כלה, פני שבת נקבלה

Come in peace, O crown of her husband;
Come with joy/gladness and jubilation
Among the faithful of the treasured people
Enter, O bride! Enter, O bride!

בואי בשלום עטרת בעלה
גם בשמחה/ברנה ובצהלה
תוך אמוני עם סגלה
בואי כלה בואי כלה

Come, O bride, the Sabbath Queen.¹

בואי כלה שבת מלכתא

Seeking to expand the range of religious expression available to women and to develop models of spirituality that speak to women's experiences, Jewish feminists have plumbed tradition for feminine imagery and associations that could be adopted for contemporary purposes. The sources are actually richer in this regard than one might suppose: in traditional texts, Shabbat, Torah, Jerusalem, prayer, the Temple, the moon, and the *Shekhina* herself are all gendered female.² Yet in light of the fact that classic religious imagery is exclusively the product of men's imaginations, it is necessary to question whether the paradigms of femininity that these images and associations promote are actually useful for encouraging women's religious agency and increased ritual participation. This article considers the feminine imagery associated with Shabbat in traditional sources and the particular models of gender that those images reflect.

Talmudic Foundations

Thanks to the inclusion of Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz's *piyyut* "*Lekha Dodi*" in the Friday night liturgy of nearly all religious communities, the personification of Shabbat as bride and as queen is familiar to most traditional Jews. But despite the *piyyut*'s provenance in 16th-century Safed, the strikingly feminine imagery that informs the poem is significantly more ancient.

The earliest gendering of Shabbat dates to the talmudic period. In describing various activities in which the rabbis would engage so as to demonstrate their love for the Day of Rest, the Babylonian Talmud reports that some scholars related to Shabbat as a "bride" or a "queen," preparing for her arrival as they would prepare for a wedding or a royal visit:

Rabbi Hanina would wrap himself [in finery] and stand towards evening on Friday, and say: "Come, let us go out to greet Sabbath the queen." Rabbi Yanai would put on his [Sabbath] clothes on Friday and say: "Come O bride, come O bride" (BT *Shabbat* 119a, Schottenstein translation).³

If the female persona that Shabbat assumes in these descriptions seems coincidental (deriving, perhaps, from the gender of the noun itself), the following passage from *Bereishit Rabbah* leaves less room for ambiguity:

R. Simeon b. Yohai taught: The Sabbath pleaded to the Holy One,

blessed be He: "All have a partner, while I have no partner!" "The Community of Israel is your partner," God answered. And when they stood before the mountain of Sinai, He said to them, "Remember what I said to the Sabbath, that the Community of Israel is your partner, [hence,] '*Remember the Sabbath day, le-kodsho* [to keep it holy, here read as: to betroth it]' (Exodus 20, 8)" (Genesis Rabbah 11:8, Soncino translation).

In this passage, gender is not incidental to the depiction of Shabbat, but is rather its primary thrust. The marriage metaphor used by the *midrash*'s author – a metaphor in which Shabbat is betrothed by God to the people of Israel – serves to convey the intimacy of the relationship between them, an intimacy best depicted as the bond between wife and husband.⁴

In another *midrash* that uses the marriage metaphor, Shabbat is referred to as God's spouse – more precisely, as God's queen – in even more explicitly gendered terms:

"Then it shall be seven days under the mother" (Leviticus 22: 27). R. Joshua of Siknin in the name of R. Levi said: It is like the case of a king who entered a province and issued a decree, saying: "Let no visitors that are here see my face until they have first seen the face of my lady." In the same way the Holy One, blessed be He, said: "You shall not bring an offering unto Me until a Sabbath day has passed over it"; for there can be no seven continuous days without a Sabbath... (Leviticus Rabbah 27:10, Soncino translation).⁵

Whether God's queen or Israel's bride, Shabbat is always the female partner in the marriage. This rendering leaves God, or Israel – the male partners – to betroth Shabbat, to welcome her, i.e., to play the active role in the metaphorical wedding between them. The value of this particular characterization on a religious plane is clear: the Jewish people, human beings in imitation of God, are thus called upon to take an active role in their performance of that most basic of commandments, the observance of Shabbat.⁶ But the effect is a reinforced association between Shabbat's femininity and her passivity, or lack of agency.

Rabbinic Reversals

Although there are several more talmudic passages of relevance to this discussion, the feminization of Shabbat is not actually a widespread or programmatic motif in rabbinic

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"Come, O Bride" ...continued from page 29

writings.⁷ Furthermore, most of the *Rishonim* (medieval authorities) rejected the feminine imagery of the talmudic sources and replaced the allusions to "the Sabbath bride" or "Queen Shabbat" with masculine metaphors. A striking example is Rashi's commentary on BT *Bava Kama* 32a-b, a passage parallel to the one cited previously, in which R. Hanina's pre-Shabbat summons is adjusted in a small, but critical way: "Come, let us go out" – like a person who receives the presence of a king."⁸ Similarly, the Rif's version of the passage in BT *Shabbat* 119a reads, "Rabbi Hanina would wrap himself [in finery] and stand towards evening on Friday, and say: 'Come, let us go out to greet Sabbath, the king.'" And in his *Hilkhot Shabbat*, the Rambam too modified the aforementioned talmudic passage:

What is honor [of the Sabbath]? . . . He wraps himself in *tzitzit* and sits in serious consideration looking forward to receiving the presence of the Sabbath, as he goes forth to greet the king. And the early sages would gather their students on the eve of Sabbath and wrap themselves and say: Come, let us go forth to greet Sabbath, the king (Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Shabbat* 30:2).

This interpretive approach persisted through the 15th century and beyond, when R. Yaakov b. Asher, the *Ba'al ha-Turim*, wrote in his legal code that one should "rejoice in the arrival of Shabbat, as one going out to greet the king, and as one going out to greet the groom and bride."⁹

It is not clear why so many medieval halakhists re-gendered the talmudic imagery in their depictions of Shabbat ritual, which effectively signaled an abandonment of the marriage metaphor.¹⁰ It is likely that in their own attempts to conceptualize the splendor of Shabbat and to describe the reverence that the Talmud's symbolism was meant to elicit, they identified more strongly with masculine icons and terminology. However, it is also possible that the recasting of Shabbat in masculine terms was an attempt to neutralize the marriage metaphor itself, whose intimate and even sexual overtones were a source of discomfort.¹¹



***Shabbat Bride*, Carol Hamoy, Drisha Arts Fellow
Permanent Collection, HUC-JIR Museum, New York**

Many of artist Carol Hamoy's works are assemblages of different materials that explore Jewish tradition and female identity. In this work, as described by Emily Bilski, then curator at the Jewish Museum, New York, Hamoy has attached gauze, lace, tulle, feathers, beads, ribbons, and candles to a dressmaker's mannequin to create her Sabbath Bride. The colors of the free-standing sculpture are bridal white accented with pink and peach—and the materials are draped to emphasize the curves of the female figure. Hamoy uses objects from everyday life and especially items used in the garment industry, where all her family worked as she was growing up. The familiar feathers from her childhood also recall the pin feathers plucked from chickens as part of Sabbath preparations. In that way Hamoy says, "With certain alterations, my work is a continuation of my family's work" (Description excerpted from Carol Hamoy, *Voices*, Ceres Gallery New York, 1993.)

Kabbalistic Developments

Nonetheless, the marriage motif was embraced and enhanced by the Kabbalists, in whose theological treatises the feminization of Shabbat found its strongest expression. First in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, then in the writings of the Nahmanidean school, and finally in the Zohar and post-Zoharic works, marriage was a metaphor used regularly and extensively to depict the union between different *sefirot*, or elements of the divine, whose singular natures were expressed, in part, via their distinct female or male identities. In kabbalistic theology, religious acts performed by human beings on earth were understood to trigger parallel responses in the divine realms; thus, Shabbat rituals, which were conceived of as the symbolic performance of marriage rites, were believed to inspire a wedding of the feminine

and masculine attributes of God. Shabbat was not only the occasion of this mythic wedding, which was alternatively depicted as a royal coronation, but an actor in the multilayered drama as well.

In the symbolic system of Kabbalah, Shabbat was typically feminine, but was occasionally represented in masculine terms; the androgyny of Shabbat was akin to the androgyny of the divine.¹² Thus we read in *Sefer ha-Bahir*:

Why is it said: *Remember* [the Sabbath] (Exodus 20:8) and *Keep* [it] (Deuteronomy 5:12)? *Remember* [Zakhor] refers to the male [zakhar] and *Keep* refers to the female (*Sefer ha-Bahir* 182).¹³

Shabbat was associated with both the masculine *sefirot*, *Tiferet* (Beauty) and *Yesod* (Cosmic Foundation), as well as the

feminine *Shekhina* (Immanence). As *Shekhina*, Shabbat assumed the persona of bride or queen, who was betrothed or crowned by either Israel or one of the masculine elements of God, as in the earlier midrashic sources. Conversely, as *Tiferet/Yesod*, Shabbat actively betrothed the community of Israel, whose members themselves were associated with the feminine *Shekhina*! Indeed, in reflecting on the Talmud's suggestion that Friday night is the appropriate time for Torah scholars to engage in marital relations (BT *Ketubot* 62b and *Bava Kama* 82a), Yehudah ben Yakar, teacher of the Ramban, posited:

Our *mitzvah* of marital coupling is [symbolically] derived from that which the Holy One said to the Sabbath: "The Community of Israel [*Shekhina*] will be your mate." And [the Sabbath] is *Zaddik Yesod Olam* (*Perush ha-Tefillot ve-ha-Berakhot* 2:42).¹⁴

Common to most of the depictions of Shabbat as feminine in kabbalistic texts is the image of Shabbat as recipient or receptacle, and indeed, even when associated with *Yesod*, the usually masculine *sefirah*, Shabbat is gendered feminine so long as this particular characteristic is being evoked. Thus, the following passage alludes to the earlier *midrash* regarding the coupling of Shabbat with the people of Israel:

"Through the seventh day" (Genesis 2:2) . . . [*Yesod*] served as a reservoir (*mikveh*) for divine blessing, the gathering place enjoined by God. This was alluded to in the verse "Let the waters under heaven be gathered unto one place" (Genesis 1:9). For [*Yesod*] received all the *shefa* (overflow). But [*Yesod*] lacked a partner, and so *She*... (*Be'ur Sodot ha-Ramban* to Genesis 2:3).¹⁵

The feminine gendering in these texts reflects Shabbat as the object of human or divine attention – Shabbat that is filled up, taken in marriage, crowned, or otherwise acted upon. Moreover, the divine union that is the fundamental goal of wedding Shabbat to God/Israel is ultimately perceived as masculine.¹⁶

Though not nearly as prevalent as the images of bride or queen, Shabbat does assume two additional female personas in kabbalistic writings: that of mother and of daughter. The *neshama yeteira*, the additional Sabbath soul that fuses with and transforms every Jew's being for the duration of Shabbat, is associated with the *Shekhina* and described as an encircling, embracing, maternal presence.¹⁷ In other texts, Shabbat is deemed God's beloved daughter, who is exiled during the week but allowed to reunite with her family on the seventh day: "An only daughter is the Shabbat Queen."¹⁸ These depictions, which draw upon women's roles and relationships, suggest that the Kabbalists occasionally used feminine imagery to communicate aspects of religious experience that could not be sufficiently conveyed in more usual, masculine terms.

* * * * *

Although a close reading of these texts demonstrates that the traditional gendering of Shabbat's persona serves primarily to reinforce a passive model of femaleness, which may be disappointing to those seeking paradigms of agency, the concurrent association of femininity with reverence, majesty, and adulation is surely of some value to contemporary feminists. The fact that male thinkers and writers expressed their love for Shabbat in ways that idealized the feminine – and, perhaps more importantly, that in the process of identifying with the object of their adoration, they occasionally perceived of themselves and their

relationship to the divine in feminine terms – suggests that feminine modes of being were indispensable to their own religious experiences.¹⁹

At the very least, the celebration of femininity as an attribute of God and its positive association with passion, intimacy, and connection, might encourage new avenues of spiritual expression for women and men alike. Passivity and acceptance are not in and of themselves negative traits; indeed, the feminine gendering of Shabbat was undoubtedly an attempt to convey the serenity of the seventh day, in contrast to the turmoil of the work week. Gender roles are problematic when they are binding, but the availability of alternate paradigms of being may prove liberating for all.

And as gender roles themselves undergo change, the significance of traditional images and allegories may also shift, in spite of their former implications. Much in the way that marriage as a social institution has adjusted and adapted to meet the realities and the needs of new generations of women and men, so too might the metaphor of marriage come to represent a new, connected-yet-distinctive way of being. Rereading old texts in a new light should not delude us as to their original intent, but as it has in the past, tradition may yet prove rich enough and resilient enough to sustain inventive and contemporary interpretations.

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¹ From "*Lekha Dodi*" by Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz. The last line, though not included in all renditions, was recited by R. Isaac Luria (the "*Ari*") and his circle of Kabbalists in 16th-century Safed. See M. Y. Weinstock, *Siddur ha-Geonim, ha-Mekubalim, Ve-ha-Hasidim* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1971), 80. For a thorough analysis of the *piyyut*, including sources for its feminine imagery, see Reuven Kimelman, *The Mystical Meaning of Lekha Dodi and Kabbalat Shabbat* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2003).

² See, for example: Arthur Green, "Bride, Spouse, Daughter: Images of the Feminine in Classical Jewish Sources," in *On Being a Jewish Feminist*, ed. Susannah Heschel, 248–260 (New York: Schocken Books, 1983); and Elliot Wolfson, "Female Imaging of the Torah: From Literary Metaphor to Religious Symbol," in *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism: Essays in Honor of Marvin Fox*, Vol. 2, ed. Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Nahum M. Sarna, 271–307 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).

³ See also the virtually identical passage in BT *Bava Kama* 32a-b.

⁴ Marriage was already used as a metaphor in the writings of the prophets, specifically Hosea, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, to illustrate various facets of the relationship between God and the People of Israel.

⁵ See also Genesis Rabbah 10:9, which compares Shabbat to a bride (*kallah*) in a play on the verse "*Va-yekhal Elokim*" (Genesis 2:2), although in this passage God is not explicitly designated as Shabbat's spouse.

⁶ The implications of the talmudic metaphors for practical religious observance are made explicit in several medieval texts, among them the late 14th-century *Menorat ha-Ma'or* by R.

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"Come, O Bride" ...continued from page 31

Israel al-Nakawa: "Just as a groom wears beautiful garments, so too, a person wears beautiful garments on Shabbat. Just as a groom rejoices all [seven] days of his wedding, so too, a person rejoices on Shabbat. Just as a groom is at leisure and does not engage in labor, so too a person is at leisure on Shabbat." See Elliot K. Ginsburg, *The Sabbath in the Classical Kabbalah* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 105.

⁷ One talmudic source uses masculine imagery in allusion to Shabbat, although the metaphor is not as explicit as the bride/queen motifs in the passages cited previously. See BT *Pesahim* 103a where the end of Shabbat is described as the departure of a king.

⁸ Rashi also describes R. Nahman b. Yitzhak's practice of greeting Shabbat as akin to "a man who receives his rabbi/teacher in his home." See Rashi on BT *Shabbat* 119a.

⁹ *Tur*, OH 262. The *Tur*'s reference to a "bride" is secondary to a "groom." See also the parallel passage in the *Shulhan Arukh*, OH 262:3.

¹⁰ The metaphor was never abandoned entirely, and its traces can be found in several liturgical commentaries composed in medieval Ashkenaz, such as the 12th-century *Sefer ha-Pardes le-Rashi* and *Siddur Rabbenu Shlomo ben Shimshon me-Germaiza*; however, it played a minor role and was not developed exclusively or programmatically. See Ginsburg, *Sabbath*, 105–106.

¹¹ In a somewhat elusive comment, A.J. Heschel suggested that "Rashi, the classical commentator, afraid lest the feminine metaphor lead to misunderstandings, tried to rob it of any literal meaning by changing either the gender or the object of the metaphor." See Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), 127.

¹² For an extensive discussion of the androgynization of Shabbat in kabbalistic sources, see Elliot R. Wolfson, "Coronation of the Sabbath Bride: Kabbalistic Myth and the Ritual of Androgynisation," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 6 (1997): 301–343. Shabbat's androgynous nature is also reflected in a number of mainstream rituals and in liturgy, which is evidence of the far-reaching impact of kabbalistic thought on halakhic practice: for example, the *Shulhan Arukh* rules that on Friday night, one should first slice the bottom hallah, representative of the feminine, whereas on Shabbat morning, the top, "masculine" hallah should be sliced first (OH 274:1). See Moshe Hallamish, *Kabbalistic Customs of Shabbat* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Orhot, 2006), 270–272 and 335–337.

¹³ See Ginsburg, *Sabbath*, 107.

¹⁴ See Ginsburg, *Sabbath*, 109. "Zaddik" (Righteous One) is another name for the *sefirah Yesod Yesod Olam*.

¹⁵ See Ginsburg, *Sabbath*, 111.

¹⁶ See Wolfson, "Coronation."

¹⁷ See Ginsburg, *Sabbath*, 128 and 243, who cites Zohar and *Sefer ha-Rimmon*.

¹⁸ Zohar, *Ra'iyah Mehimna*, Vol. 3 (Deuteronomy), 281–282. See Ginsburg, *Sabbath*, 73–74. The People of Israel and the Torah are also described as God's only daughter; see Green, "Bride," 251–254.

¹⁹ See Green, "Bride," who notes that the feminine *Shekhina* is the only aspect of the divine that the Kabbalists claim to have experienced.



Shabbat table centerpiece, Ita Aber.

This embroidered centerpiece is adapted from an antique Bukharin Shabbat centerpiece with psalms and Shabbat blessings around the edges of design.

Experimentation and Commitment

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generally gain more stability, this delicate balance of experimentation and commitment is unlikely to last in the same way. Many a time I have heard a friend, tired of the latest synagogue mob scene or overwhelmed by 20 people showing up to a meal to which she only invited 8, utter a frustrated "I've had enough." Stability does have its advantages. At the same time however, I cannot help but appreciate how all that instability has resulted in the carving out of such a significant place for Shabbat in my life. It is a kind of Shabbat that some may frame as less than ideal, but it is one that is unusual and irreplaceable, and I feel lucky to be experiencing it.

Sarah Rindner studied at Midreshet Lindenbaum before receiving a BA in English from Stern College and an MA in the same subject from Columbia University. She teaches English at SAR High School in Riverdale, New York.

Hand Movements During Candle Lighting

"Many women draw their hands three times in front of the candles. Some women draw their hands towards themselves, symbolically drawing the light of the candles within themselves. Others draw their hands outward, spreading the radiance of the candles throughout the room, home and world. Some Sephardic women bring their fingertips to their mouths and gesture with a kiss towards the candles, similar to the gesture they use when the Torah is lifted in the synagogue."

Berkowitz and Haut, *Shaarei Simcha*, page 4.

By Anna Schon

Ironically, my greatest challenge to becoming a dancer and maintaining the life of a dancer is not found in the physicality

Continuing to unite my spiritual and physical self in the future might be a futile dream, but for now, I'd like to hope that it's not, and that is OK with me.

Anna Schon is currently working as a professional dancer. She attends daily ballet classes at City Center in New York and studies chemistry at Pace University. After attending SAR and Ramaz, she received a BA from Barnard College in Dance and European History. Last year she was an Arts Fellow at Drisha Institute.



Whimsical "Outer Space" Hallah cover,
Sima Rynderman, Boston.

Shabbat and Rediscovering Community

By Lynn Kaye

Everyone who observes Shabbat has had a moment when he or she really understood why Shabbat has been so vital to their lives. I certainly did. Though I grew up in a Shabbat-observant household, it was not until I was at university in England that I connected in a profoundly personal way with the peace and serenity that Shabbat observance brings.

At Cambridge, which is run on a trimester system, students have exams only once at the end of each year. The results of those exams determine one's grades for the year, and the results of the third (and final) year are decisive for a student's graduating grade and honors. This grading system engenders a lot of tension in undergraduates, and I certainly felt the strain. I worked all the time, reviewing material, studying for hours and hours – memorizing verbal forms, names, dates, literary movements, and biblical loanwords. I did not take many work breaks during the day because any time that I was not working was worrisome. It was in this intense atmosphere that I truly discovered Shabbat. Only Shabbat could stop me from working, release me from my worries, absolve me from guilt that I should be doing more. I was thankful for the commandment to rest, because without it, I would not have.

After graduation, as a young adult, one of the most powerful aspects of Shabbat observance for me was the private time it provided. While I enjoyed family time with my husband and socializing at meals with friends, an important joy of Shabbat came from recharging psychologically with quiet time for reading and thinking. Synagogue services were not as profoundly restful and meaningful as time alone to learn Torah or for *tefilla*. Sometimes, after Shaharit and Torah reading, I would finish the prayers privately and leave synagogue early to have quiet time on Shabbat morning. I loved the time Shabbat afforded me to read, look out the window, and just be quiet, unrushed, and peaceful.

When I came to work at Shearith Israel on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, my Shabbat experience changed. Shabbat became much more

about community for me: connecting with people, catching up, hearing what was happening. Shabbat is a great time to connect with my congregation, from the students in our Hebrew school and Junior Congregation, to adults with whom I learn Torah or discuss halakhic or communal matters, to the dedicated individuals who work to enhance *hesed* in the community, to members I am just beginning to know. Although the *kiddush* does not really allow deep and lengthy conversations, it is a chance to see people I may not see during the week and to make connections that I can develop further.

My teaching responsibilities on Shabbat – giving sermons after morning services, occasionally teaching the Shabbat afternoon class, and supervising Junior Congregation and the periodic women's services – have also changed the rhythm and emphasis of Shabbat. Shabbat is now a day for communal engagement and concentrated teaching opportunities as well as collective prayer.

Prayer services have become a more central part of my Shabbat since I took the position. Happily, the service at Shearith Israel, with its hauntingly beautiful choral pieces, provides a meditative setting within which to greet Shabbat on Friday night. Through the Kabbalat Shabbat service, I am able to gain a sense of peace and greater appreciation of the transition from *hol* to *kodesh*, from the mundane to the sacred. I have a favorite choral piece, the 23rd psalm, which I anticipate each Friday, and with my eyes closed I follow its musical transitions with special attention, trying to imprint those beautiful harmonies into my mind to take home with me.

Afternoon and evening services at Shearith Israel have a quiet calm, and I enjoy the melodic chanting of psalms and the camaraderie in the women's section, which is so well populated on Shabbat afternoons that last year we extended its seating capacity! We conclude services with *habdalah*, and I return home after Shabbat.

When I was a child, Shabbat was about community and family, Shabbat meals, and friends to see. My Shabbat

experience changed during my years at college and as a young married woman. My communal position at Shearith Israel has helped me rediscover the public aspect of Shabbat that I knew as a child. One of the key texts about Shabbat in the Torah (Exodus 31:16-17) that is incorporated into the services in both Sephardic and Ashkenazic communities is “*Veshameru* – And the children of Israel will keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath for their generations, an eternal covenant. Between Me and them it is a sign forever that in six days God made the heaven and the earth and on the seventh day He stopped and was refreshed.” It is significant that the Torah phrases the commandment to observe Shabbat in the plural, because it is through groups coming together to make Shabbat that we spread awareness of God and of God's involvement in the world, both within our community and beyond. Central to the significance of Shabbat is participating in a congregation of people who observe it together, constituting the “sign forever,” bearing witness each week to God's creation of the world and to God's involvement in its order. Benefiting from the peace and rest of Shabbat as an individual is undoubtedly important, but I feel that I have recovered the profound appreciation of Shabbat within the rhythms of a congregation through my role as a religious leader.

Lynn Kaye is Assistant Congregational Leader at Congregation Shearith Israel, the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

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www.jofa.org



Women, Shabbat, and the College Community

By Talie Lewis

As an active member in the Orthodox community at the University of Maryland for the past two and a half years, I have learned that college students have the chance to influence the culture of the college they attend and lend their voices to the decision-making process in the campus religious community in a way they were never able to do in their home congregations. At universities, the maximum age difference between the youngest and oldest members is four or five years, creating a relatively equal power distribution between newer and more established community members. At Maryland, no community member has been around for decades, and as a result our traditions tend to evolve more frequently and fluidly than in non-college communities. Because we come from different communities, each with its own customs, our Jewish experience at college exposes us to a diversity of traditions. This heightens our awareness of our communal practices and the possible changes, adaptations, and compromises that may be necessary to accommodate all members of the larger Orthodox community on campus. Developing this awareness is not easy, but doing so may be the most important task for any traditional college community.

Shabbat highlights this challenge. For example, in the Maryland Orthodox community, Shabbat *minyanim* attract many more students than weekday *minyanim*. With a crowd of up to 350 students attending Kabbalat Shabbat services on a given Friday night, there is a much more upbeat, spirited, and, at times, even overwhelming atmosphere than at weekday services. Services take place in the Hillel building, which is also home to the smaller Conservative and Reform *minyanim*. Kabbalat Shabbat is mostly followed by large Shabbat meals and frequent *onsei Shabbat* attended by members from each sub-community, whether in the Hillel building or at students' apartments. Thus, Shabbat brings our community together in a way that gives a stake to everyone who participates in it. Additionally, as we are developing our individual selves, our Shabbat experiences allow us to infuse that per-

sonal development with a sense of common purpose. As do many others, I value this as a critical part of my college experience,

Another aspect of the Shabbat culture that is unique to college communities is the variety of gender roles, both religious and social, that operate within our communal framework. At Maryland, many students live in apartments with kitchens, which means that they frequently prepare their own Shabbat meals. These conditions have created a dynamic in which both men and women prepare for Shabbat. Male and female students in almost equal numbers shop for food, bake hallah, and cook their meals. Additionally, because we are separated from our families, many students take on new rituals that they used to depend on their parents to perform. For example, students who never lit Shabbat candles in their homes, males in particular, begin lighting Shabbat candles in college, and although sometimes hesitantly, many female students recite *kiddush* and *hamotzi* on a regular basis. These modifications may not only be a product of our independence; our secular surroundings may play a role in bringing them about as well. I know that I have felt empowered to actively take on these rituals by the many sociology and gender-related courses I have taken, as well as by my understanding of halakha.

Additionally, the Maryland college community offers women more opportunities to participate in Shabbat rituals than any other community of which I have ever been a part. *Divrei Torah* are staples during Kabbalat Shabbat and *se'udah shlishit* and are most often delivered by students, both male and female. There are women's *shiurim* on Shabbat, and women's *tefilla* groups on *Rosh Hodesh*, and several other opportunities for female members to actively participate on both individual and communal levels. Sometimes however, instances arise that evoke feelings of frustration in me as an Orthodox Jewish woman. Consequently, although Shabbat brings an unparalleled sense of *kedusha* and unity to my week, it also creates some disappointments.

Shabbat is the time when we gather, pray, and practice as a community; thus we must make certain decisions in regard to the development of Shabbat ritual. This may be the most significant of our community's challenges. Men's increased involvement in the traditionally "female" roles discussed above such as preparing for Shabbat and lighting candles is not so controversial, at least not from a halakhic perspective. These role changes have, therefore, not caused too much controversy. However, some attempts to increase women's participation in *tefilla* and in other rituals have indeed sparked debate. Last year, for example, a group of women in our community presented the idea of passing the Torah to the women's side of the *mehitza* on its way back to the *aron* on Shabbat morning. This suggestion evoked strong feelings. As a result, everyone involved was forced to evaluate the *hashkafa* of our community and the extent to which we, as communal members, could and should influence ritual change. Although our community has three rabbinic figures to answer our tough questions (our JLI rabbi in charge of Jewish learning programming, our Chabad rabbi, and our Hillel director who is also an Orthodox rabbi), this decision was ultimately left up to the community itself. The process that ensued was a long and complicated one, but ultimately, our community decided against the change. Some students felt uncomfortable with making such a "progressive" change, and others were not convinced by the claim that passing the Torah to the other side of the *mehitza* is halakhically permissible. Consequently, a significant percentage of both men and women expressed opposition to the idea, and it was not implemented.

In the academic, often times liberal, atmosphere of college, it can be difficult to accept that we are unable to make ritual changes that do not seem to contradict halakha. That is a lesson far removed from the messages of innovation and equality advocated by many of our professors and classmates. Such is the tension inherent in being a

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Loaves of Bread Before Shabbat

To avoid embarrassment because of their poverty, the wife of Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa had the habit of lighting her oven and throwing twigs into it to make smoke in order that people might think she was baking bread and cakes every Friday even though they had no flour. She had a malicious neighbor who said to herself, "I know that these people have nothing. What then is the meaning of all this smoke?" So she went and knocked on the door. The wife of Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa was ashamed and hid herself in the barn. A miracle happened and when the neighbor came in, she saw that the oven was filled with loaves of bread and the kneading trough full of dough. She called out to her, "Come quickly and bring your shovel to take the bread out of your oven. It is getting burned." Rabbi Hanina's wife responded, "I am coming at once. I just went to fetch my shovel." (A *Tanna* taught: She had actually gone to fetch the shovel because she was accustomed to miracles).

Story from Babylonian Talmud *Ta'anit* 24b-25a



Round relief tile of Shabbat symbols,
Rena Bannett, Drisha Arts Fellow. Glazed high fired clay.

Women, Shabbat

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member of a religious community on a college campus. As shapers of our community, we deal with this tension by coming to terms with the differences in the personalities and backgrounds that constitute it. Only when we examine the larger picture can we make peace with the frustrations sometimes associated with building and maintaining a community.

One vital aspect of this communal examination involves recognizing the experiences that shape the lenses of its members. Before coming to Maryland, many students spent a gap year in Israel on various year programs, including a wide array of yeshivot and seminaries. For many, the combination of Jewish day school upbringings with these very influential gap year experiences created specific expectations and concerns about the influences of a secular university environment.

I spent a year at Midreshet Lindenbaum, and I know that it has profoundly affected my college experience. During my year in Israel, I was motivated to embrace my role as an active member in the Orthodox com-

munity, not despite my gender but because of it. Now, I am aware that this experience is not that of every student who went to Israel or even of every student who attended Midreshet Lindenbaum. I understand that many students feel a strong imperative to connect to their religious experiences and that feeling manifests itself in different ways. For some like me, that means taking on or attempting to take on new religious roles. For others it means protecting the traditions to which they are accustomed in the midst of an environment focused on change. This could be the reason why many students feel uncomfortable with being part of the ritual change process as well as with the ritual changes themselves. As someone who has tried to exert some influence on my surroundings, I have come not only to accept but also respect this reason.

As a female Orthodox student who has had the opportunity to read Torah at *Rosh Hodesh* women's davening, deliver a *d'var Torah* during Kabbalat Shabbat, and say *kiddush*, *hamotzi* and *havdalah* on a regular basis, I am grateful and honored to be a part of the Maryland Orthodox Community.

Despite the tensions and sporadic feelings of discomfort that have come from our inability to change ritual in certain cases, it is clear that being a part of a vibrant Orthodox college community that strives for unity, where individuals and subgroups have the chance to listen to the viewpoints of others and, for the sake of the larger entity, are prepared to accept decisions even when disagreeing with them, has special benefits. Shabbat highlights these benefits for us, providing a time for rest and relaxation, and especially for communal gathering and active participation. According to Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Shabbat is like a palace in time with a kingdom for all. It is not a date, but an atmosphere." The Maryland Shabbat atmosphere can certainly be challenging, but it is clear to me that our challenges stem from our community's attempt to fulfill Heschel's words and ultimately create a kingdom for all. Although this may be a frustrating process, it is a necessary one of which I am proud to be a part.

Talie Lewis is a junior at the University of Maryland, majoring in Health, Culture and Inequality Studies.

IN MEMORIAM

Rabbi Emanuel Rackman

By Blu Greenberg

With the passing of Rabbi Rackman, *zatzal*, the world has lost a man of great moral courage; the Jewish people, a fierce defender; the denominations, a promoter of internal unity; the Orthodox community, a model of Torah, *derekh erez* and ethical standards; and Jewish women, a singular rabbinic champion of their causes. And my family lost a dear friend, for Rabbi Rackman and my father, *zatzal*, were close friends since college days and daily *havruta* for 32 years.

Rabbi Rackman was a great friend of JOFA. He was a presenter at the opening plenary of the first international conference in 1997 and he continued to attend JOFA conferences for as long as his health permitted. He did not come late to Jewish women's issues. Long before JOFA, before *agunah* activists, and even before the fledgling Jewish feminist movement of the 60's, he spoke and wrote about the problem of the abandoned wife. He saw the situation as one of injustice, and it deeply pained him that his beloved Judaism could be complicit. Not satisfied with hand wringing in the face of injustice, he called for halakhic transformation and repair.

After several decades of speaking out for *agunot* and seeing no response to his plea for a global halakhic solution, Rabbi Rackman, together with several other rabbis, created the *Beit Din L'Inyanei Agunot*. The sole function of this special court was to release women held in marriage against their wills by recalcitrant and oftentimes blackmailing husbands. The methodologies the *dayanim* used were not standard ones; but they had been used by earlier halakhists and were thus available as precedents. Particularly, the *beit din* relied on the broad Talmudic principle of *mekah ta'ut*, a mistaken transaction. If a transaction was found later to be based on false information, it became retroactively void and the purchase price had to be returned. As had others before him, Rabbi Rackman loosely applied this principle to certain marital transactions. If a marriage was based on false pretense, such as man hiding the fact that he was gay, impotent, prone to violence or had a criminal record, the marital bond was considered invalid *ab initio*. There was no need for a *get* and the *agunah* could be released.

Rabbi Rackman searched for other precedents as well. I recall a phone conversation with him in the 1990's in which I heard a distinct thrill in his voice. He had come upon a *teshuva*, by Rabbi Moshe Rozin, a 20th century *posek* [*Sheilat Moshe*] that pointed to a new support to release an *agunah*. It was the *umdenah*, the rabbinic estimate of what would have been in the mind of a particular person in a time past had that person known certain facts. The particulars of this *teshuva* were that a man and a woman had married and almost immediately, he committed suicide by drinking poison. His brother, the levirate husband who could release her through the *halitzah* ritual, was nowhere to be found. For seven years she remained an *agunah*. Rabbi Rozin posited an *umdenah* on both counts: – had she known the husband had no intention of marrying for life and had she known that the brother would not be available to release her, the rabbis assume that she would not have entered into marriage and thus the ceremony of seven years earlier was considered invalid.

Rabbi Rackman saw in these methodologies a halakhic way to secure justice for *agunot*. In his eyes, a single case of *iggun* in the community was intolerable. He came under censure from certain Orthodox colleagues for taking alternative, minority decisions and acting upon them, but he was committed to halakha as a living, ethical system and could do no less. When several colleagues tried to challenge his authority by asking to see his case work, he objected, saying 'No other *beit din* is required to publish its cases, and the principle exists that one *beit din* should respect the work of another. They are asking me to publish in order to invalidate my releases and I won't let that happen.' He was not naïve. He had political savvy but no rancor, no pettiness. His politics were about the cause, not about personalities.

On the larger canvas of his life, too, his actions and words were all about justice, about a principle of equality for the disenfranchised, about mutual respect, about care for the downtrodden, about the beauty and ethics of Judaism, about the capacity of a living halakha to carry us with righteousness and dignity on our walks through life.

In the internet exchanges after his death, Rosalind Preston, feminist and leader of English Jewry mused for all of us: "Will we ever see the likes of him again?"

Yehi zikbro barukh

For the text of Blu Greenberg's eulogy delivered at the funeral of Rabbi Rackman which gives a fuller view of his life and work, visit www.afbiu.org and click on Remembering Rabbi Rackman at bottom left of page.

Emerging Voices

We welcome future submissions from all high school students. Please contact www.jofa.org.

It's Not About The Don'ts: Shabbat Possibilities

By Leah Sarna

A fairly well-known rabbi gave a *shiur* to my class a few weeks ago. Like any good speaker, he began with a hook. He told my class about a discussion regarding Shabbat he had led at Camp Moshava a few summers ago. When asked what was the first word that came into their minds in relation to “Shabbat,” many of the kids said, “Don’t.” They felt that Shabbat was simply a giant restriction.

Interestingly, I don’t ever remember having that kind of relationship with Shabbat. My Shabbat has always been comprised of all the things I love best.

Starting in second grade, my friends and I studied *mishnayot* on Shabbat. We used to sit in the shul library during *se’udah shlishit*, learning and joking and driving our teacher (my friend’s father) absolutely crazy. He walked out on us a couple of times, but he always came back. Between first and fifth grade (at which point we all branched off to do our own studying in preparation for becoming *B’not Mitzvah*), we miraculously covered about four tractates.

Those elementary school years set my standard for what every Shabbat ought to include: family time, good food, engaging *tefillot*, friends, and learning. Nearly ten years later, I’m now a senior in high school. My Shabbat still includes all of the above, plus a significant helping of sleep.

My whole family davens Kabbalat Shabbat and Ma’ariv together, and then we sit down to a sumptuous meal. We talk about Torah, the goings-on in our own lives, and world events and politics (which was particularly fun last March, when all four of us supported different presidential candidates). When dinner is over, I generally nap in a chair after a failed attempt to read a book or newspaper. Later, I remove my contact lenses and go to bed.

On Shabbat morning, I wake up early and go to *hashkama minyan*. Afterward, a friend and I run youth groups for children in grades one to four. We daven,

talk about the *parasha*, and play games. I don’t find this activity particularly meaningful, but as I (and my parents) benefited from these groups when I was younger, I feel compelled to give back to the community.

However, I always wish that I could daven with my synagogue’s main minyan, which is wonderful. The women stand beside the men, but a step higher. The step on the women’s side of the *mehitza* is surprisingly helpful, because with it, we are equal in height to the men. The davening, *leyning*, and speeches are of a high quality, and there is relatively little talking. Anyone can give a *d’var Torah*, including women and young people. The key is having something worthwhile to say.

Kiddush is the social hour, and my friends and I make plans for the afternoon, which we will all inevitably sleep through. After lunch, a sixth grader, who is preparing for her Bat Mitzvah, comes over my house. She’s going to be one of the first Women’s Tefilla *B’not Mitzvah* celebrated during Shaharit at my shul (the norm is Minhah), and I teach her how to lead the davening. Along with the finer points of Hebrew vowels, we discuss questions of greater interest: why Women’s Tefilla includes certain parts of davening, but not *barkhu*, *kaddish*, or *bazarat hashatz*; why we call Torah reading “*limmud Torah*” and how that makes sense with the blessings we recite before and after Torah reading; and so on and so forth.

Some weeks, my mother and I walk back to synagogue mid-afternoon for a Women’s Tefilla Minhah. The women in my community have uncommonly good voices, and the service is always beautiful. After Minhah, a woman gives a *d’var Torah* about the *parasha* or in relation to an upcoming holiday or event. This is a chance for any woman in the community, whether she has a strong or a weak Jewish education, to share some Torah.

My regular Shabbat is filled with learning and teaching Torah. Occasion-

ally, I have what I would term an “irregular” Shabbat. From a patriotic Reform Temple with services conducted in English to Sephardi synagogues with *divrei Torah* and *piyyutim* in Portuguese, to a Danish shul celebrating two *B’nai Mitzvah* and two *B’not Mitzvah* on one Shabbat (with 14 *aliyot*), to a *haredi shteibl* with floor-to-ceiling, wooden, sound-proof *mehitza*, I’ve spent Shabbat in a wide variety of communities.

While this variety has generally been enriching, I found the last experience frankly disturbing. As my friend and I walked into the *shteibl* on Friday night, we found men in the *ezrat nashim* (here a separate room connected by a wall of curtained windows). Apparently no women ever go to shul on Friday night, so the teenage boys daven there. Upon our arrival, the boys quickly cleared out. We davened alone, struggling to hear the *shaliah tzibbur*.

Our hosts had invited another family to dinner that night. The father was a rabbi and the mother a preschool teacher, and they had two boys and two girls. Throughout dinner, the father called on his sons to give a *d’var Torah* or recite the chapter of Mishnah they had studied recently. The daughters and their mother spoke about cooking, clothing, and school. Torah, it appeared, was only for the men.

I was shocked.

At my school and in my home, women study Talmud with as much dedication as the men. In my community, women come to shul, participate in davening, and are full-fledged members of the community. Women give *divrei Torah* and *shiurim*. Women may serve as president of the shul and make the announcements. Women *bentch gomel* and say *kaddish*. I always imagined that women of our generation who didn’t have these measures of equality would...well...want them.

That is what set this Shabbat experience apart from the other irregular experiences. It baffled me that the
...continued on page 40

The Judenstern

Halakha tells us nothing about the structure or design of Shabbat lamps. Although we talk generically about “candle lighting,” Shabbat lights were not always candles or candelabra. In the ancient world, clay bowls were probably used as oil lamps, and some had more than one spout for multiple wicks. It is thought that hanging lamps developed in the Middle Ages from the simple hanging bowl. These hanging lamps were found in the homes of both European Jews and non-Jews, although Jews also used them for ritual lighting on Shabbat and holidays.

By the 16th century, non-Jews no longer used these lamps in their homes, switching to wax candles. Yet, the hanging lamp continued to be used in Jewish homes and came to be known as the *Judenstern* or Jewish star. Made of bronze or cast brass, the *Judenstern* had a star-shaped container for wicks with oil suspended from a shaft and a drip pan below to catch the dripping fuel. Often the lamp hung over the dining table, suspended by a ratchet that could be raised and lowered. All week it would hang close to the ceiling; for Shabbat it would be lowered.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, in Jewish communities in Germany, Italy, Holland, and England one could find very elaborate hanging lamps made of silver and some made of pewter. Yet, the basic form of the lamp remained unchanged.

Candlesticks began to be used in Jewish homes in the 17th century and for a long time it seems that families would light both candlesticks and hanging lamps for Shabbat.

Images of hanging lamps are found in German medieval manuscripts, and later, we see their prevalence in many illustrated books of Jewish customs printed in Ashkenazi communities. Even in the nineteenth century, all the paintings of domestic scenes by the celebrated painter Moritz Oppenheim show hanging lamps. The earliest hanging lamps that we are sure were owned by Jews date from the 17th century. However, one in the Jewish Museum in New York dates from the 14th century and was found in the Jewish quarter of a city near Cologne in Germany, although Jewish ownership cannot be confirmed. Another one, now in the Cathedral of the German city of Erfurt, is decorated with biblical scenes (all from the Hebrew Bible) and dates from the 12th century; some believe it could be a Sabbath lamp. Similarly, a copper alloy hanging



Brass Hanging Sabbath Lamp, Germany, 19th century.
Courtesy of The Maurice Spertus Museum of Judaica.

lamp, found in an area of London where Jews lived before the 1290 Expulsion, was recently identified as a Sabbath lamp.

For a study of hanging lamps see *Hanging Sabbath Lamps* by Adi Dermer née Blumberg z'l based on her senior project at Pelech High School in Jerusalem in 1989, (*Hanging Sabbath Lamps* by Adi Blumberg, translated and edited by Ariel Hurwich Braun, Jerusalem: The Adi Foundation, 2001/2005).

The Tzena U'Rena of Our Foremothers

Beginning in the 17th century, Ashkenazi women traditionally studied a text called *Tzena U'rena* on Shabbat afternoon and would read it to their children. In many memoirs, individuals wrote of the tremendous impact that this text had on their religious development and knowledge.

Taking its title from the Song of Songs (3:11), which enjoins the daughters of Zion “to go out and see,” the *Tzena U'rena* was a Yiddish translation of the Pentateuch, *haftarot*, and Five Megillot with midrashic and aggadic interpretations. Written by Yaakov ben Yitzhak Ashkenazi, the earliest existing printed

edition dates from Basel in 1622. The text was reprinted more than 200 times in Yiddish and translated into other languages. It was immensely popular, becoming known as the “Woman’s Bible,” and many women claimed it as their encyclopedia of Jewish knowledge. Through this work, Jewish women (and many men) who could not read Hebrew or Aramaic came to be familiar with *midrashim*, commentaries such as that of the 13th century Rabbeinu Bahya, kabbalistic works, and many other traditional Jewish texts. From the end of the 17th through the 18th century, many editions of the *Tzena U'rena* were printed with woodcut illustrations, which were intended to help women understand the meaning of the stories.

Thankfully, we are way past the time when we need pictures to explain the meaning of biblical stories. Whereas in the past, only a few women had access to the original texts of our tradition, in contemporary society all Jewish women have access to the multiplicity of our texts, both in the original Hebrew and Aramaic and in the many available translations and scholarly editions. Today we have the added benefit of internet resources, which are growing exponentially in number. Now women – both those with strong textual skills who have had the benefit of a good Jewish education and those to whom the sources are less familiar – can fix times for learning on Shabbat, through individual study and in *shiurim* and learning groups. In this way we can continue the tradition of our foremothers and enhance the holiness and joy of Shabbat.



Frontispiece of Tzena U'rena Metz 1768.

Courtesy of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Shabbat in Phoenix

By Elana Bernstein Storch

I grew up in a large family and busy household in New York's Upper East Side. On Friday afternoons my friends and I would part ways to go home and help our mothers prepare for Shabbat. Later, as we lit the candles we felt as if we were re-creating the miracle of *beriat ha'olam*. Although I always hoped that I would one day have a family to pass these traditions on to, I never imagined that today I would be re-creating this special feeling of holiness in the southwestern desert of the United States.

Our Shabbat candles here in Phoenix do not just create a "palace in time" for ourselves; instead we have the privilege of sharing Shabbat with a diverse population of wonderful people who have never before been involved in this weekly ritual that was woven into the fabric of our lives in the community in which I was raised. In Phoenix, Shabbat could easily pass by unnoticed. I was challenged to move here from our comfortable and familiar surroundings on the East Coast when I realized the potential role our family could play in improving the quality of Jewish life in Arizona.

Throughout our 18 years in Arizona, we have invited countless numbers of people into our home for a Shabbat meal and have come to discover that many of them are newcomers to the traditional Shabbat experience. They usually sit down at the table and ask, "You do this every Friday night?" They are astonished and intimidated at the thought of re-creating this experience in their own homes.

Hence was born the notion of SHORTCUTS TO SHABBAT® Through specially crafted seminars I have taken hundreds of

people through Shabbat preparation—from soup to sorbet. I have taught women in the community to maintain a kosher kitchen, bake hallah, and create Shabbat and holiday meals with ease. My goal is to present simple shortcuts to what looks like hours of work. I ask the participants to imagine their kitchen as an art studio, a place of inspiration and experimentation as they artfully arrange their menus and platters. My friends always laugh when I tell them the words my mother has lived by: "No one will ever write on your tombstone, she made it all from scratch."

Over the years, I have found that sharing the brightness of our Shabbat candles and the tradition of Torah with others, especially with people who are new to Sabbath observance, has added to the specialness of our Day of Rest. It has also given my children something invaluable. They quickly learned that our "open door" policy on Shabbat and the constant element of surprise in our guest list serve to enhance our Shabbat and help us create a *mikdash me'at*—a little sanctuary—within our own home. Through the act of lighting the Shabbat candles, we not only inspire ourselves but also have the opportunity of inspiring others to fulfill the *mitzvot* of Shabbat. And that is a great gift.

Elana Bernstein Storch is the co-founder of the Jess Schwartz Jewish Community High School, the first Jewish high school in Arizona, and co-founder of The New Shul and KiDMA—The Southwest Community. She is the creator of SHORTCUTS TO SHABBAT® seminars and workshops.

Birkat Habanot Blessing of the Daughters

The traditional blessing for parents to give to their sons on Friday night is, "May God make you like Ephraim and Menashe (the two sons of Joseph) and for girls, "May God make you like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. Rabbi Yehuda Henkin, a distinguished halakhic authority in Jerusalem, uses a different blessing for girls. Dissatisfied with the traditional blessing because it is not parallel to that of the boys, he states that in the case of voluntary blessings there is no halakhic problem in changing the wording. We do not bless the boys that they should be like the Three Patriarchs (In Hebrew it is also not exactly parallel grammatically either.) Because of this, he substitutes "*Yesimekh Otakh Elokim k'Rachel ukh'Leah asher banu shtehem et Beit Yisrael*—May God make you like Rachel and Leah who together built the house of Israel."

This is based on Megillat Ruth, 4:11, "All the people who were at the gate said, with the elders as witnesses: 'May Elokim grant that the women who enter your house be like Rachel and like Leah who both built the house of Israel.'"

According to Rabbi Henkin, there is no reason given why boys are blessed to be like Ephraim and Menashe, but he posits that it is probably because they lived together in harmony unlike previous generations of brothers in Genesis. Although the Torah records bitterness between Rachel and Leah, the Midrash asserts that Rachel revealed her personal signs of identification to Leah to enable her sister to be married first. Together with their maidservants Bilhah and Zilpah, they became the mothers of *Bnei Yisrael*.

Emerging Voices

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women didn't seem to want to take part in the study of Torah and didn't seem frustrated by their exclusion from that study.

Thanks to the work of my mother and her generation, I grew up in a feminist Jewish world. My Shabbat is a feminist Jewish Shabbat. Anything else just doesn't feel like Shabbat. Yet my Shabbat experience in the *haredi* community left me with questions. Living a sheltered life in a modern Orthodox, transdenominational *klal Yisrael* bubble, how inclusive am I really? If I can only accept those to my religious left, am I really as tolerant as I think I am?

Leah Sarna is a senior at Maimonides School in Brookline, Massachusetts. She attends Shaarei Tefilla in Newton, Massachusetts, and will be studying at Migdal Oz next year.

Candle Lighting Practices

The ritual of candle lighting, although incumbent on both men and women, has historically been associated with women. Visual evidence for women's role is found in illustrations from early periods. In Eastern Europe, women's tombstones were traditionally engraved with images of Shabbat lights or candles, sometimes accompanied by a woman's hands blessing them. Today, candle lighting is a *mitzvah* observed by many women who do not observe other religious rituals. While many married women now share in *kiddush* and *hamotzi* at the Shabbat table, few are willing to give up being the one to light the candles.

Some sources characterize women's candle lighting as a rectification – a *tikkun* – for Eve's sin: just as the biblical figure diminished the light of the world through her sin in the Garden of Eden, women can return light to the world through lighting Shabbat can-

dles. But there is another way to view candle lighting.

Those looking at candle lighting as a reward can turn to kabbalistic sources that view women as the bearers of life and light to the world. As Shabbat itself is a remembrance of creation, *zekher lema'asei bereishit*, so a woman lighting Shabbat candles reenacts God's creation of the first light – the *ohr haganuz*. Through the generations, the woman has traditionally been seen as the Shabbat Queen, bringing light and Torah into her house and into the world. When a woman lights candles on earth, candles are kindled in the divine realm, symbolizing the union and harmony between heaven and earth that is achieved on Shabbat. Thus, the time of candle lighting is considered a very personal and auspicious time, appropriate for expressing innermost feelings. There exist numerous individual and personal prayers from

diverse Jewish communities to be recited at this time. Women saying these prayers often declared that their *mitzvah* of candle lighting was equivalent to that of the High Priest in the Temple. Before lighting, many have the custom of putting coins into a *tzedakah* box. After lighting, one covers one's eyes in order not to enjoy the lights until the *berakha* is recited.

Although the *mitzvah* of candle lighting can be fulfilled with one candle, as this traditionally would enable *oneg* Shabbat, the enjoyment of Shabbat, we generally light two or more candles. Indeed, once one lights a certain number as a norm, one should continue lighting that number and not light less. Lighting two candles has several meanings. The two candles represent the two versions of the biblical commandment, "to remember the Shabbat" and to "keep the Shabbat," or, according to



Terra-cotta painted Sabbath Lamp, Libya. 18th century.

Courtesy of The Maurice Spertus Museum of Judaica.
The ten fonts symbolize the Ten Commandments.

Kabbalah, the masculine and feminine aspects of God's creation; some early sources suggested that one candle is to illuminate the home and the other to honor Shabbat.

Some women light more than two candles. Some mothers light one candle for every member of the family. Some light six to represent the days of the week leading up to Shabbat, and others light seven corresponding to all the days of the week. The ten wicks on the ceramic Libyan Sabbath lamp on this page were said to represent the Ten Commandments; others light 12 lights representing the 12 tribes.

There is a practice that if one forgets to light candles on any Friday evening, one should increase the number of candles ever after. Yet, this practice seems to relate to the notion of candle lighting as a punishment or as a rectification – hardly to the joy and feeling of specialness that most women feel when lighting.



Contemporary Sterling Silver Shabbat Oil Candelabra
Menahem Berman, Jerusalem.

Private commission

Photo courtesy of Yeshiva University Museum.

Book Corner

By Jennifer Stern Breger

Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality: A Sourcebook (rev. ed.)

Edited by Ellen M. Umansky & Dianne Ashton
Brandeis University Press, 2009, \$29.95 paper

This volume, revised and expanded from the first edition published in 1992, is a valuable window into the spiritual lives of women, past and present. With a broad definition of spirituality, it sets out to present selections from the prayers, personal letters, memoirs, poems and other writings by Jewish women through the ages, who sought God's presence in their lives. Edited meticulously, the volume is arranged chronologically, and opens with a petition found in the Geniza, dating from 14th-century Cairo, addressed to the head of the Egyptian Jewish community from a woman who fears that her husband is abandoning her and traditional Jewish life for Sufiism. The extracts are preceded by introductions putting them in context and showing the influence of social and economic factors and the literary culture of the surrounding society. The volume includes: contemporary prayers penned in Israel and America; a mikvah ceremony conducted in 1989 for a woman who has been raped; translations of Malayalam Jewish folk songs by women in Kerala, India; public addresses such as Blu Greenberg's to JOFA's second international conference in 1998; and the script of Mierle Ukeles' performance piece, "Mikva Dreams." Over the centuries, the extracts become both more personal and revealing of the interior lives of the writers, and delineate the public and communal arenas in which many Jewish women express their spiritual yearnings. Not all the extracts in the volume are by Orthodox or traditional women, and the variety, particularly in the modern period, shows the diversity of contemporary Jewish religious life and the wide range of spiritual paths being taken by Jewish women.



Judaism deftly gives a historical survey of the growth of Orthodox feminism in America, explaining the role of JOFA and the development of women's *tefilla* groups and partnership *minyanim*. What is illuminating for the Jewish reader is to learn about similar struggles and tensions in Christianity and Islam. The situations in the different religions are not identical, but the similarities are striking. Tanenbaum skillfully weaves interviews with 95 American women of all faiths into her own extensive research on the history of each religion. The book underlines how, across religious divides, women of faith can learn from and inspire one another. What unites the compelling individual stories she tells is the sincere struggle of women to achieve spiritual fulfillment within their tradition and not to be treated as second-class citizens. Many use techniques of creative textual interpretation, looking for precedents within their own religion to introduce changes to the tradition for the benefit of both men and women. Tanenbaum stresses the importance of women achieving leadership roles in their religious communities because "when a woman is distanced from leadership roles, it is all too easy to consequently become distanced from the tradition." She ends her book with suggestions for religious women of all faiths "who simply want to experience their faith to the fullest."

A Jewish Woman's Prayer Book

By Aliza Lavie

Spiegel & Grau, 2008, \$35.00

As readers of this Journal know, increasing work has been done in recent years to make prayers recited by Jewish women accessible to a wider audience. Aliza Lavie, a lecturer in political science at Bar-Ilan University, makes a major contribution to this endeavor. The original Hebrew version has been a huge bestseller in Israel since it was published in 2005. Lavie was inspired to start researching and collecting Jewish prayers from different periods and different societies when she felt that the standard prayer book did not contain any prayer to comfort an Israeli woman who had lost both her baby daughter and her mother in a terrorist attack. She assiduously collected prayers from Yiddish *tekhines*, *siddurim*, Midrash and other rabbinic literature, and a host of other sources. The English version contains the Hebrew text of much of the original volume with an accompanying English translation on facing pages. It is beautifully laid out and can be held like a prayer book. Arranged in categories, it includes special prayers for Shabbat and the holiday cycle; different times in a woman's life cycle; prayers that relate to the specific women's *mitzvot*; prayers relating to fertility and pregnancy; and prayers for mothers. From the volume, readers will understand that women's prayers are generally more personal and more concrete than standard liturgy. In the context of the Shabbat theme of

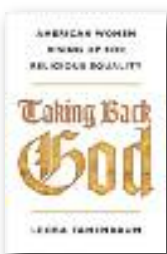


Taking Back God: American Women Rising Up for Religious Equality

By Leora Tanenbaum

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008, \$27.00

Leora Tanenbaum has written this fascinating book dealing with Catholic, mainline Protestant, Evangelical, Muslim, and Jewish women who are challenging their religious faith communities from a position of commitment and not of alienation. Woven into the book is Tanenbaum's own story as a woman frustrated by many aspects of the position of women in Judaism, but who is committed to being an observant Jew. The section on



this Journal issue, one particularly moving prayer is the simple one recorded in the name of Perl, wife of Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev, who prayed when she prepared her *hallot* that, when her husband would make the *berakha* over the *hallot*, he should have the same feelings in his heart as she has while kneading and baking them. Particularly valuable is Lavie's inclusion of many prayers from Persian, Ladino, and Arabic sources. Also included are the prayers and poems of many contemporary Orthodox women in Israel, and elsewhere, such as writer Yael Levine. One modern prayer expresses a mother's feelings at the onset of her daughter's first period. The English volume of Lavie's book was the winner of the Barbara Dobkin Award for Women's Studies in the 2008 National Jewish Book Awards.

New Jewish Feminism: Probing the Past, Forging the Future

Edited by Rabbi Elyse Goldstein
Jewish Lights, 2009, \$24.99

This volume, the runner-up for the 2008 Barbara Dobkin Award for Women's Studies, contains a rich collection of articles by Jewish feminists across the spectrum. It represents all denominations and includes international as well as American voices. It looks at the flowering of Jewish feminism, its accomplishments, and the variety of challenges that Jewish feminists face.



JOFA readers will be gratified to see thoughtful and sophisticated pieces by Idana Goldberg, Sara Hurwitz, Haviva Ner David, and Wendy Zierler, as well as an insightful piece by Jerusalem scholar Margalit Shilo which analyzes the first decade of Kolech: Religious Women's Forum, in many ways JOFA's sister organization in Israel. But what is most valuable is that this book enables Orthodox feminists to put our paths, our achievements, and the challenges we face in a broader context and to become more aware of shared concerns. As Orthodox women committed to halakha, our challenges and options are often different from those of other women striving for feminist goals within Judaism, but it is important to get a sense of the vibrancy of Jewish women from different backgrounds who are addressing a range of ritual, theological, and political issues. There is a freshness in the articles in this book that is quite remarkable as the contributors both look back and look ahead. Some of the articles are necessarily less directly relevant to Orthodox women, but all of them, representing both the early Jewish feminist pioneers and the generation of young leaders (as well as the up and coming leaders), are vital reading for all of us interested in the future of contemporary Judaism.

Waiting for Rain: Reflections at the Turning of the Year

By Bryna Jocheved Levy
Jewish Publication Society, 2008, \$30.00

Many JOFA readers have had the privilege of hearing Bryna Levy lecture at MaTaNa or other venues in Jerusalem. This book is based on lectures that Levy gave at MaTaNa exploring the biblical and liturgical readings associ-

ated with the Tishri holidays from Rosh Hashanah through Simhat Torah. Levy, one of the leading biblical scholars in Israel today, combines close textual analysis with original insights based on a wide range of sources, traditional and modern. She draws on lesser known figures – such as Rabbi Abraham Sabba, a scholar and preacher who was exiled first from Spain and then from Portugal, who, on reaching Fez in safety, reconstructed from memory some of his earlier writings that had been destroyed. Incorporating many modern biblical scholars, Jewish and non-Jewish, she weaves in sources like the writings on Holocaust survivors of Terence Des Pres. A remarkable chapter deals with the *piyyut*, *Eleh Ezkerah*, recited at the end of Musaf on Yom Kippur. In another chapter, writing eloquently that rain is where heaven and earth meet, she underlines that the hope for rain is the hope for life and that the prayer for rain recited on Shemini Atzeret is an appeal for the revival of our souls. Levy's love of the land of Israel where she has lived for more than 27 years is apparent on every page of her text. In her words, "In Eretz Yisrael every word resounds with a truth of its own." While this volume, whose deep scholarship is combined with a very accessible style of writing, can serve as a wonderful way of preparing for the holiday period or as a companion to be read during the *hagim*, it is so rich in textual analysis, exploring such a wide range of biblical characters including Noah, King David, and Ezra, and casting fresh light on countless topics relating to Jewish tradition and contemporary life, that it is not only relevant to the holiday period but throughout the year.



The Marriage Covenant: A Guide to Jewish Marriage

By Rabbi Elyashiv Knohl
J. Levine/Milennium, 2008, \$34.95

First published in Hebrew in 2002, this book has become the accepted guide in the Israeli national-religious community to marriage and the laws of family purity. The English version offers young couples a clear discussion of issues relating to marital intimacy and sexuality, providing halakhic guidelines and sources in an accessible manner and dealing respectfully with practical questions that arise in daily life in contemporary society. Never losing sight of the emotional and psychological aspects of marriage, the author stresses the importance of developing respect for differences and individuality within a marriage while learning to live together in harmony. Rabbi Knohl, one of the authors of the Israeli pre-nuptial agreement, (The Agreement for Mutual Respect), deals with many real-life situations, and suggests possible leniencies within the halakhic system. It includes a 56 page supplement, "A Guide to Marital Relations from a Torah Perspective." Noting both Ashkenazic and Sephardic customs, the book contains sections on weddings and *sheva berakhot*.



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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