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THE JOFA journal

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FROM OUR PRESIDENT

LEARNING: A LIFELONG JOURNEY

*By **Judy Heicklen***

I am excited to be sending out my first letter to you as the President of JOFA. I truly believe that we are on the cusp of a new day in women's leadership in the Orthodox world, and it is energizing to be a part of it. I took on the role of President because I know that an Orthodoxy that expands women's roles to the fullest extent possible is one that is stronger and more vibrant for *all* of its members, men and women. And I think it is so appropriate that this issue is dedicated to education, which is such a core part of our mission.

I have thought a great deal about how to instill a love of learning into my children. What will inspire them to love text and its relationship to our tradition? For me, learning is one of the most powerful hooks into our way of life—the intellectual challenge, the surprising twists of logic, the methodical laying out of one proof after another all excite me. How can I open my children's hearts and minds to that excitement?

One commentary on the story of the Four Sons in the Haggadah is about needing to find ways to instruct all different types of children. *Hanokh la-na'ar al pi darko* (Proverbs 22:6): "Train a child according to his way." As a parent, I am frequently looking for what will work for each of my kids—not only because they are different ages and different sexes, but also because of how they think and what interests them. What will be that hook?

But I don't always get it right. I had always envisioned celebrating my eldest daughter's Bat Mitzvah by learning with her over a period of time and having a *siyyum* at the end. I had long had a passion for learning Mishnah, and I thought Mishnah would be appropriate for Ricki's skill level. So we started. We learned *Rosh Hashanah*, we learned *Megillah,* we learned *Ta'anit*. Or perhaps I shouldn't say *we* learned. We were in the same room, reading the same words, but it was a very one-way conversation. Much as Ricki wanted to be a good daughter, she was just not interested. What animated me was of minimal interest to her. My vision of a *siyyum* was exactly that—*my* vision. I needed to change my focus. More than wanting her to learn, I wanted her to love to learn—to have the passion for learning that sparks an ongoing engagement with what it means to be Jewish. Even more so, I needed it to be *her* vision, not mine. Wasn't that the point of a Bat Mitzvah—grappling with Judaism on her own terms? So we stopped learning together. We found a teacher who learned with her about something Ricki was passionate about—vegetarianism. Her Bat Mitzvah was beautiful and, more importantly, the spark was lit inside her.

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"Striking Gold" Out West

By Frayda Gonshor Cohen

Five years ago, my husband and I embarked on a journey westward, far from our beloved East Coast Jewish community and *batei midrash*. After searching for the right pulpit for my husband, we landed in the San Francisco Bay Area, home of the Gold Rush and arguably one of the largest, yet most highly unaffiliated, Jewish communities in the United States. Figures vary, but the current Jewish population of the greater Bay Area has been estimated at between 300,000 and half a million Jews. The East Bay alone—which consists of Berkeley, Oakland, and less-known suburbs that are still commuting distance to San Francisco—is the home to between 100,000 and 125,000 Jews. The Bay Area supports quite a lively scene of Jewish culture: the Contemporary Jewish Museum is well supported by some of the city's leading philanthropists, and the Jewish film festival and Jewish music festival attract more than 15,000 attendees each year.

Religiously, however, the picture is more sobering. Five percent, or at most 6 percent, of all East Bay Jews are members of the region's twenty-four synagogues, and fewer than 1 percent affiliate with Orthodox synagogues. So perhaps not surprisingly, although we found a community in Berkeley committed to Jewish tradition, with a Jewish infrastructure that made halakhic Jewish living possible, with kosher markets, schools and a *mikveh,* missing from our Jewish life were

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EMERGING VOICES

FROM THE EDITOR

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"Striking Gold", *continued from cover*

the multiple and high-caliber opportunities for rigorous text-based learning that had been so meaningful to us in Israel and in New York. After all, the Bay Area is known more for its pioneers, hippies, academics, and radicals than it is for its *yeshivot* and *talmidei hakhamim*. Five years later, though, we find ourselves in a community that is fostering—perhaps precisely because of its pioneering and alternative spirit—two exciting, even "feminist," models of Jewish engagement through rigorous text study.

The first model is Merkavah, a pluralistic *beit midrash* program run out of my husband's Orthodox shul, Congregation Beth Israel (www.cbiberkeley.org) that offers yeshiva-style classes in Talmud and Prophets for women. Its ethereal name (referring to the *merkavah*, or chariot, described by Ezekiel in his mystical vision) suggests the radical potential for change and growth made possible by including women in the tradition of Jewish text study. What's more, Merkavah creates a platform for Jewish women's leadership and scholarship. The program's first instructor, Dalia Lockspeiser Davis, was a graduate of Stern College's Graduate Program in Advanced Talmudic Studies (GPATS). By creating a "room of one's own," Merkavah is simultaneously providing an opportunity for women to steep themselves in a tradition that has largely been inaccessible to them and encouraging new expressions of Torah learning through a women-only space.

Merkavah's founder and director, Nell Maghel-Friedman, often compares its educational model to the popular local food movement's "community-supported agriculture" (CSA), to which many here subscribe. By supporting local farmers, and making personal connections with them through CSA, local community members can benefit from fresh and healthy fruits and vegetables. So, too, when a local community invests in developing local Jewish scholarly talent, the results can be refreshing and rejuvenating for the community at large. One Merkavah student had never been able to dedicate time to serious Torah study, as she was preoccupied with, first her schooling, then gaining a profession, then raising a family, then working to send her children through college. Merkavah has finally given her a chance to learn for herself, truly *lishmah*. To date, through the program she has completed three tractates of Talmud.

The second inspiring program is Kevah, founded and directed by Sara Heitler Bamberger, and the recipient of the UpStart grant designed for innovative Jewish startups in the Bay Area. Kevah encourages Jewish engagement and community building through rigorous Jewish text study in small group settings. By encouraging individuals to make Jewish learning an integral part of their lives and community, and particularly by encouraging small learning groups to develop in a grassroots fashion and matching them with highly qualified text teachers, Kevah groups build micro-communities and empower adults to take ownership of their Jewish and spiritual lives.

Kevah fosters a homegrown, local quality Jewish community and makes serious Torah learning accessible outside the walls of traditional Jewish infrastructures such as the yeshiva or the academy. There are now twenty-five organized learning groups based in the Bay Area, and a dozen more groups have started in the Denver area. The groups that currently meet include young professionals getting together weekly for a potluck and to study Jewish ethics, and young mothers learning about Jewish parenting. Kevah, whose name is drawn from the encouragement in *Pirkei Avot* to make a set time for Torah study, brings meaningful Torah learning into hectic lives. As a full-time student and a new mother myself, I know how special it is to find a learning opportunity that fits my schedule. Kevah is now expanding its services nationally and is looking for foundation support to launch in Boston, New York, and Washington, DC,

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As a community, I think we also are looking for educational options. One of the topics that has roiled my community in Teaneck this year is the planned opening of a charter school for Hebrew immersion in our district. Another related topic is that of day school tuition and how to find innovative ways of tackling this as a community. A third is the move toward gender-separated classes within coed schools. How gender interplays with how kids learn has been a hot topic in the secular world as well. As my son approaches his Bar Mitzvah this fall, the question of how we can educate our boys to be gender-sensitive resonates as well.

How do you make your voice heard within your community and your school? One of my pet peeves is the role of the *Shabbat abba* and *Shabbat imma*. While I recognize that in many households the mother lights candles and the father recites *kiddush,* there are many other permutations that our kids should see as "normal." Thus, every year I go back to preschool, ready with my reasons for a more gender-neutral *Shabbat* party. Maybe one day I won't have to ask.

Education extends beyond the day schools. Many of the programs we have been running at JOFA this year target adults as well. Let me touch on three of them. We launched a campus fellowship program with seven young women who ran programs across the country at their campuses. We ran our second *Kallah* Teachers' Workshop to train *kallah* teachers how to answer the questions of new and not-so-new brides. And we are about to launch our new halakhic source guide, *A Daughter's Recitation of Kaddish*.

I hope you have all been enjoying a summer full of learning. We have made many strides in expanding learning opportunities for women and by women, in increasing gender sensitivity in the schools and the pulpits, in opening doors that were previously closed—but there are many more to go before we will be able to fully realize JOFA's goals and vision. Thank you for joining me on the journey.

The Impact of Lay Leadership on Gender Issues in Jewish Day Schools

By Carolyn Hochstadter Dicker

As a passionate supporter of learning and ritual in Orthodox Judaism, as a mother of a first-born girl and two boys, and as a professional advocate, I recognize the important impact that lay leaders can have on gender sensitivity in the educational environment of Jewish day schools. It is in the day school setting that our children spend most of their time, and where our future Jewish community learns, grows, and develops. As parents and members of that community, we have the opportunity, through our participation in the lay leadership of the school or through directed donations, to significantly mold the school's *hashkafa,* or philosophy, and curriculum, as well as the nature of the administration, faculty, and board of trustees. Much can be accomplished through sensitive and committed advocacy, within the context of the particular school and community.

Gender-sensitive issues may arise in a day school in the following ways. The general philosophy of the school should be inclusive of girls and boys, giving all students access to the same education, and equal treatment regarding religious, secular, ritual, and leadership matters, to the extent permitted by halakha. Students should have equal access to Judaic texts and the same curriculum for Mishnah, Talmud, *Tanakh,* and Halakha, for the same number of periods. Honors programs on the same level should be offered for both girls and boys. Hebrew language should be a major focus, with emphasis on *Ivrit b'Ivrit,* to the extent possible. This language proficiency is crucial to enable women to excel outside the day school environment, where knowledge of Hebrew is key to learning Judaic texts and commentaries.

Tzniut is a concept that should be taught in a careful way. Many schools reduce the issue to a dress code for girls—to the detriment of the girls' self-image. Instead, the focus should be on all students achieving the general concept of modesty on an inner spiritual level, reflected in their outer appearance. The dress code should include gender-sensitive dress requirements that are in parity for girls and boys. Finally, a major goal for the school should be engaging the community at large in its gender-sensitive approach, with the head of school (HOS) facilitating this endeavor.

Choosing the Head of School

Most would agree that the most important element of a school is its HOS, who is responsible for its day-to-day operation, curriculum, and decorum, as well as the hiring, training, and mentoring of faculty and administration. Therefore, the hiring of an HOS is a key factor in the shaping of a day school and is typically the function of a search committee. In carrying out this task, the members of the committee have the opportunity to ask questions, including ones that will elicit responses regarding gender-sensitive matters. The committee also has the power to hire a female HOS, who can demonstrate by her actions that an Orthodox Jewish woman can be a leader in Jewish education, learning, and ritual.

The box on page 5 illustrates some sample questions to be asked at an HOS interview to provide insight into the candidate's general *hashkafa* and to touch on the issues previously identified, including *hashkafa*, access to texts, ritual inclusion, dress codes, and community engagement.

After the hiring, the school must continue to support the HOS as s/he acclimates to this new role. Accordingly, an HOS Support Committee is typically formed for the first year or two, providing another opportunity for input by lay leaders.

Board and Committee Participation

Another closely related opportunity for lay participation is through the Board Nominating Committee. This committee is key, because board members work hand in hand with the HOS and provide further input through their responsibility for policy-making, curriculum, budget, donor development, marketing, and recruiting. When nominating to the board, one can target people who are sensitive to gender issues. Moreover, board members become the officers and, ultimately, the President of the school. Lay leaders in these positions enjoy an even closer working relationship with the HOS, which more easily facilitates discussion. For example, as Vice President, I was able to provide suggestions to the HOS on matters of general curriculum not brought before the Education Committee. Moreover, women board members may rise to the presidency, reflecting the ultimate role model for students. The President is the most visible lay leader, who speaks at school functions and gives *divrei Torah*. Although students may be accustomed to having women teachers and role models in the field of education, having a woman president is yet another step toward modeling female communal Jewish Orthodox leadership.

Board committees also play an important role in connecting the lay leader with the HOS and the school's day-to-day function. The Education Committee focuses on curriculum, as well as faculty training, mentoring and related issues. While serving on such a committee, one can facilitate a variety of feminist goals by relating to matters of curriculum, such as implementing the study of Talmud for girls, the Halakha curriculum, the *Tanakh* curriculum for boys, and the caliber and type of Hebrew language instruction. By serving on a Dress

Questions for a Potential Head of School

Hashkafa/Religious Philosophy

Who is your role model for *hashkafa*?

Equal Access to Text

- What, if any, are the differences in your approach to educating male and female students?
- Would you allow a woman to teach boys Gemara? Why or why not?
- Would you hire or keep a teacher who would not teach girls Gemara? Why or why not?

Ritual Inclusion

- If a few female students approached you to create a women's *tefillah* group, how would you respond?
- Would your answer be the same for a women's *Megillah* reading?
- What is your approach to having women give *divrei Torah* at *davening*, or read specific prayers, such as *Tefillah LiSh'lom ha-Medinah* or the *Mi Sheberakh* for soldiers or for *agunot*?

Hebrew Language

- How do you feel about the importance of students becoming fluent in Hebrew?
- How do you feel about Judaic classes being taught in Hebrew only?
- How would you implement your approach?

Tzniut/Dress Code

- What is your approach to the topic of *tzniut* for both boys and girls? How would you impart that message to the students?
- How do you define *tzniut*? Does it encompass more than external dress, such as behavior, *middot*, or the public roles of women and men?
- Regarding a dress code policy for girls, would pants or shorts be acceptable for sports activities or for the annual school retreat?
- How would you go about enforcing a dress code policy for boys and girls?

Community Engagement

- Part of creating an environment based on *Torah u'Madda* involves getting the community excited about what is going on in the school, including its gender-sensitive approach. What do you feel is the role of the school in getting that message out?
- How would you go about attempting to engage the community at large?

—Carolyn Hochstadter Dicker

Code Committee, one can ensure that the dress code is appropriate and does not single out girls over boys, and one can work to increase sensitivity in the enforcement of the dress code.

Another entrée to the education process is via the Library Committee. When I chaired this committee, we made sure to select *sefarim*, secular books, and media that were gender-sensitive. A Naming Committee can similarly affect the entire essence of the school by choosing a name for the school that is gender-inclusive.

A very influential way to impact curriculum and policy is through the Donor Development or Finance Committees. A school might seek to institute an honors Talmud class for girls as well as boys, but the Finance Committee, for recruiting and budgetary purposes, might decide to prioritize a girls' or boys' class. Working on this committee can ensure that the interests of the girls are not neglected. In addition, through donor cultivation, one can find individuals or institutions willing to fund these and other gender-sensitive programs.

Similarly, participation in a Marketing or Recruitment Committee can facilitate the implementation and growth of a gender-sensitive environment insofar as the marketing materials and programs, both within and without the school, express the school's *hashkafa*. Lay leaders can also ensure that the brochures, newsletters, emails, and other communications highlight the activities and achievements of all the students, alumni/ae, faculty, and administration.

Finally, serving on the Legal or the Personnel Committee can have a beneficial impact on female day school constituents by addressing problems that arise from a lack of parity in the compensation packages of male and female teachers. As one example, "parsonage" for female Judaic faculty is an unresolved legal issue for day schools. Male rabbis, through their achievement of *semikha*, are clearly considered "clergy" by the taxing authorities, but a woman, with a parallel degree in advanced Judaic studies, may not be considered as such. A related and very important issue is their relative salary levels, which is a more global problem that has recently received media attention in the context of Jewish communal workers in the Jewish nonprofit sector, as well as in the workplace at large.

Navigating Politics to Bring about Change

Even though the greater goal of a lay leader might be to implement as many gender-sensitive policies as possible, not every item may be acceptable to every school. One must be aware of the underlying politics of the school, the board, and the local Jewish community. If a school is the only one in the community, one must balance the needs of the modern Orthodox population with those of the remaining constituents. For example, in the area of Talmud study for girls, it may be necessary to compromise and offer the girls the option of electing a *Torah she-B'al Peh* class that does not include the study of Gemara, for the families who are hashkafically uncomfortable with this practice. On the other hand, one cannot allow the diversity in the community to sidetrack the feminist activist, when there is only one choice of school. When the mission of a school is stated to be modern Orthodox, the task becomes a bit easier,

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Impact of Lay Leadership, *continued from page 5*

although the community issues still exist. These need to be handled carefully so that the community will be comfortable with the outcome.

Of course, one cannot "build a village" alone, but must forge alliances among board and committee members, as well as with the parent body and surrounding community. There is strength in numbers, which means, from an advocacy perspective, demonstrating that a particular issue is sought and supported by a significant segment of the community. Support for an issue may come from unexpected sources, including from those who do not consider themselves "feminist" in any way. The process begins by developing one's own role and reputation in the community. If a feminist advocate is seen in a positive light as a good person and moral individual, as well as a serious, religiously observant person, this adds clout to the Jewish feminist mission, which might otherwise be rejected out of hand as radical.

In addition, one cannot implement all issues at once. Especially when starting out, issues should be prioritized within the context of the circumstances of the particular school and addressed one by one. Another option is to have different issues dealt with simultaneously by different committees, such as the Education and the Dress Code Committees. It certainly is more effective if a diverse group of people are advocating for the various issues, providing communal clout. If defeated on one issue or faced with negative responses, one should not take it personally or give up. Rather, one should reevaluate one's approach and possibly reframe the issue, look for additional support, or wait until a more opportune time to revisit it.

For those who want to have an impact on gender issues in the Jewish community, through our Jewish day schools, there are many lay venues from which to take action. However, don't wait to be asked. Rather, step up and volunteer, with the caveat that it may not be an easy task. But if you invest your energy, good ideas, optimism, and politically attuned attitudes, much can be accomplished over the long term for the good of the entire community.

***Carolyn Hochstadter Dicker** is a JOFA Board member and an attorney with her own law practice, focusing on business law and bankruptcy, loan work-outs, foreclosure, and collection matters. She serves on the Executive Board of Kohelet Yeshiva High School of Philadelphia and the Board of Politz Day School of Cherry Hill, New Jersey (formerly serving as Vice President).*

Studying at Drisha

Participants in Drisha High School Program

Students in June Collegiate Program at Drisha

Founded in 1979, Drisha Institute has been a pioneer in advancing rigorous, high–level textual scholarship for Jewish women. In recent years, as Drisha has evolved into an active and vibrant learning community with a wide range of programs, it has begun to incorporate and expand its coed classes and programs. These include a Collegiate June program, a Collegiate Winter Week of Learning, an Adult Education Winter Week of Learning; a Sunday Night Open Beit Midrash, and an Engaged Couples Class. Also coed are many continuing education classes and special programs throughout the year including evening classes, Lunch and Learn sessions, and public lectures. The core text classes remain "women only," as are the bulk of the classes offered.

JOFA Needs Your Help: A Call for Volunteers!

If you would like to become more involved in our work, and have expertise or experience in:

- Fundraising/Development
- Website Development
- PR/Marketing
- Social Media
- Grant Writing

Please call 212-679-8500 or email jofa@jofa.org for more information.

This I Believe

By Rivy Poupko Kletenik

That my mother was driving me to the airport that brisk autumn morning in October of 1976 was already curious—my father was the standard driver to the airport.

My mother at the wheel meant "keep noise to a minimum and allow for concentration." My father at the wheel meant that traffic laws were optional and speed limits were a matter of interpretation—an ironically empowering experience for the passenger.

But this morning things were different. I was on the way to Israel for a year of study after high school. This was 1976, way before the elongated connecting umbilical cord of cell phones that keep us attached to each other nowadays. A large looming divide lay before us.

I came to understand that my mother distinctly wanted this time together with me; this was to be a weighty goodbye. Who knew? I was focused on finishing the packing, roommates, and adventure.

Holding that wheel steadily, my mother turned to me with purposeful deliberation. She let me know that I was about to embark on an experience that she had dreamed of but never had—a year of studying Torah.

Where did this come from? The words struck me deeply. My mother and I had never ventured into this kind of a discussion. There was something that my mother had wanted and never had?

My mother seemed to me to be the paragon of a persona of perfection. With a decidedly regal bearing and a countenance that hinted at aloofness, she read the *New York Times* every day, quickly and efficiently solving each day's crossword puzzle. She was one to discuss politics fiercely, cook and bake Jewish holidays into memory—a sisterhood meeting here, a book review there. Who knew of a longing for Jewish study?

This unexpected sobering revelatory moment did not last long—it was cleared quickly away for pressing matters of tickets, takeoff times, and luggage. I filed it away for later review and sped into the thrill of the year ahead.

My mother passed away seven years after that conversation—we never did go back to it. But something about it must have stayed with me when I made my critical choice between a life in the secular world and a life of Jewish education. I am thankful for a life of Torah and a life of service.

I believe in Jewish women studying Torah—in Jewish women being given the opportunity to taste the peppery passages and the sweet narratives, to contemplate the subtle nuances of text, to wrestle with meaning, and to fall in love with the beauty of our inheritance.

I believe that for generations Jewish women have yearned for an intellectual rendezvous with Talmud, longed to experience the mental gymnastics that comes with rigorous Torah study, and ached to feel the breath of eternity that comes with the turn of a page.

I believe that we should never ever take for granted that we live in a time when there are no barriers for women's study. That every text is laid open before us and can serve as the palette for our most essential of conversations. That the serious study of Torah can lead to significant contributions by women in all sorts of leadership dimensions. I stand in awe of the next generation of daughters who lead, who are educationally and intellectually adept beyond our wildest dreams.

I believe in fortifying them, sustaining them, and, above all else, talking with them about our deepest held dreams for them. I believe that there are no small conversations between mothers and daughters and that drives to the airport can last a lifetime.

Rivy Poupko Kletenik *is beginning her sixth year as Head of School of the Seattle Hebrew Academy. This piece was expanded by the author from an essay written for NPR's "This I Believe" series, which engaged listeners in a discussion of the core beliefs that guide their daily lives.*

The Role of Summer Camps in the Education of Orthodox Girls

By Sharon Weiss-Greenberg

Summer camp is an informal but powerful part of girls' education in contemporary Orthodox society. It is generally accepted that camps are so effective in transmitting educational values and knowledge because of their emphasis on experiential learning. In addition, sleepaway camp settings often offer ideological choices that may not be available in terms of Jewish educational settings locally. Most important, they can be very empowering both for female campers and staff because of the leadership opportunities that they provide—opportunities that are not present in other parts of the Jewish community.

I spent sixteen summers attending a Jewish summer camp, initially as a camper and eventually serving as head of the camp. From childhood through emerging adolescence and adulthood, camp was a time that I looked forward to throughout the year. Although my modern Orthodox Jewish family remained consistent in terms of Jewish observance and values, my formal education brought me to schools that spanned the religious spectrum—from a school where I was considered a fanatic for observing the laws of Shabbat and *kashrut* to a school where I was told by my classmates that I was not *tzenuah* because I had arrived to my first day as a third grader in sandals without socks.

My parents sent me to a modern Orthodox camp in the hopes that I would turn out in their image of a modern Orthodox Jew. The particular summer camp I attended not only provided me with a Jewish educational experience that was consistent with my family's values, but also allowed me a familiar religious setting for eight years, from the second half of elementary school through high school. Through these years—and afterward, when I became a staffer—camp has been a place where I felt I could grow and improve myself religiously, spiritually, physically, and intellectually.

Camp as a Learning Experience

As a camper, camp was a place of refuge where I found religiously similar friends. I learned about Jewish history and Jewish texts while having fun with my friends. After returning home, I brought that excitement to my formal education. Sitting in a classroom, I felt engaged learning about the walls falling down at Jericho, for example, because I could recall blowing a kazoo at camp to make the cardboard walls of Jericho actually fall down.

Camp as a Leadership Experience

As I got older, I developed my leadership skills as I became head of a fire pit on a campout and color war captain, positions that I had dreamed about as a young camper. The camp that allowed me these experiences, Camp Stone, recently celebrated its fortieth anniversary. As a part of the anniversary, I was asked to write an article about what I had gained in my role as head of camp. Instead, I chose to write about my first summer on staff at camp as a member of the sports staff.

At that time, I was seventeen and eager to have a summer of fun. I had figured that I would be able to relive some of my experiences as a camper without the rules. Little did I know that even though this summer would indeed be a lot of fun, it would also serve as a major growth experience. It was the first time that I had to evaluate the minute details of my life on a daily basis. I had to consider what campers would see in the way I dressed, talked, and walked—I had to try to see myself as others would see me. This led to a process of self-evaluation whose importance I cannot overemphasize.

That summer, I also realized how important it is to use every moment of one's time in a productive manner. The entire staff and camp were interdependent; the members of the staff picked up the garbage, built bunk beds, learned Jewish texts together, and were involved in creating an ideal environment for the campers. In this process I was able to bond with the other staff members in a lasting way as friends, colleagues, and fellow lay leaders.

Camp as a Feminist Experience

I did not realize how extraordinary my camp experiences were until I contrasted them with my life outside camp, where I attended a single-sex school and college. Although I held leadership positions beginning in elementary school and continuing through high school and college, I underwent an "awakening" during my senior year of college, when, as student council president, I was told by my male counterpart that I was not welcome in the related college's *beit midrash*. Soon after graduation, I was dismayed to discover that my male colleagues, who had the same amount of experience and credentials as I did, were being paid at least $20,000 more than I would be earning in a day school setting. The synagogue that I attended would not allow women to make announcements and, on Simhat Torah, would allow women to dance with a Torah only in the basement, while the men danced freely upstairs. I came to realize that camp was the only place where I did *not* feel the glass ceiling that was sadly ever-present in my Orthodox schools, jobs, and synagogues.

Camp as an Empowering Experience

I have spent a great deal of time researching the establishment and development of girls' camps in the United States. (See "For Further Reading" following this article.) Although camp accounts for only a small fraction of time in the calendar year, the personal and social growth that can occur during this short time period may have long-lasting results.

Orthodox girls and young women who are not being properly engaged as leaders in their home Jewish communities may find that their camps are the only Jewish set-

ting in which they can be more fully empowered. Camp can be a unique environment where halakha is observed, but where the informality and stage of life of its leaders may allow for certain leadership opportunities, including employing women as heads of divisions and the camp as a whole.[1]

Moreover, a benefit of the isolation of a camp setting is that it is not necessarily subject to all the elements of the greater society and, as such, a camp may specifically reject aspects of the larger society, including sexist, racist, or materialistic notions that may be pervasive outside the camp setting in magazines, on television and in shopping centers. Camps are faced with a choice: they can reaffirm stereotypes by limiting campers and staff members to their stereotypical gender roles, or they can demonstrate, through expanding gender roles, that the stereotypes are flawed and should be rejected.

To serve as good role models to the campers, camp staff members are often encouraged to take a step back and reflect on who they are and how they are perceived. Staff members, ranging in age from eighteen to twenty-five years old, are at the stage in life when they can use their work experiences as a way to develop their identities and value systems. As such, a heightened sense of self-awareness may bring counselors to embody those behaviors or values that they have reflected on and attempted to demonstrate to their campers.

An example of this evaluative process is in the area of body image. The Jewish Women's Foundation of New York has partnered with The Foundation for Jewish Camp to publish *Beyond Miriam*, a manual for camp directors that addresses girls' issues, including body image, eating disorders and cutting. In the manual, there are suggestions from psychologists that staff overcome their own body image and self-confidence issues in order to provide positive role-models to their female campers. Ways of doing this include having staff "make a list of women you admire…stop weighing yourself…concentrate on things you do well…value your dollars…voice your opinion... be a role model.. [and] break the barriers." In advising staff to "value their dollars," the manual suggests, "Look at your budget and be sure the money you spend reflects the person you are, not the person society wants you to be." These words of advice encourage contemplation, individuality, and "breaking the barriers." In embarking on this journey of self-evaluation and determining whether their thoughts and values align with their actions, camp staff not only improve themselves as role models, but are able to develop themselves as confident, self-assured leaders.

For many reasons, camp has served as a place that gives a voice to Orthodox women and girls. This past summer, I spent time researching the female staff experience in the Jewish summer camp setting with an emphasis on egalitarianism and empowerment. Although my research is not yet complete, one of my initial observations was how empowering the Orthodox summer camp has been for its female staff, most of whom had attended the camp as campers. These women were expected to attend daily *minyan*, including *ma'ariv*; study in high-level *shi'urim*, deliver *divrei Torah* and *shi'urim*, and serve in many other capacities equally alongside their male counterparts. Women were equally represented in camp leadership and staffing at large.

Although my interviews highlighted the sense of responsibility and empowerment felt by staff members, I wonder how the experiences, skills, and values gained from the camp setting will translate into their home communities. Even though I am confident that camp is a setting in which feminist and/or egalitarian values are allowed to flourish, I question how we can ensure that these camp values are transferred into our schools, synagogues, and home communities.

Report Card of Molly Engelberg, Talmud Thora Knesseth Israel, Berlin, 1921-2

Collection of Yeshiva University Museum

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For Further Reading

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[1] These young women are usually single, although some couples, or married women apart from their spouses, do work in Jewish summer camps.

Tales from the Field: Anecdotes and Reflections on Gender in Early Childhood Education

By Chaya R. Gorsetman and Amy T. Ament

"One of the long term goals of early education is to strengthen and support children's inborn tendencies to be curious and deeply engaged in making the best sense they can of their experiences."[1]

Life in our modern Orthodox communities is changing. What might have been true about the role of women only a generation ago can no longer be taken for granted. Women are learning, consulting on halakha, taking active leadership roles sitting on shul boards, and taking on more *mitzvot,* such as insisting on hearing the *shofar* and sitting in a *sukkah*.

However, the social reality is not necessarily in concert with the messages being transmitted in day schools. This problem should be of utmost concern to educators, particularly in light of the abundant research demonstrating the ways in which children acquire knowledge by making connections between what they are learning and what they have already experienced.[2] The central question, therefore, is: *What happens when a child experiences something in school that contradicts his or her social context or personal experience?* The reality for most boys and girls attending modern Orthodox day schools includes men and women who are educated professionals—successful doctors, lawyers, scientists and professors who take an active role in public life. Often, however, the subtle messages they receive in school, specifically in the context of Jewish life, conflict with the social context with which they are familiar. Children experience a disparity between the home and school, and schools have thus far been ill equipped to address the impact of this disparity on the development of young children.

The following stories from the field illustrate these ideas in very poignant ways. All interactions described occurred between teachers and students within modern Orthodox day school settings. Each highlights important questions and challenges the reader to imagine how it might have gone differently.

1. *Some boys in a kindergarten class were not consistently wearing* tzitzit *to school. The teacher invited the school rabbi to help the boys understand why they should wear* tzitzit. *The rabbi, speaking to the entire coed class, was so effective in his speech that a young girl commented, "If this mitzvah comes from the Torah and it is so important, I want to wear* tzitzit, *too." The Rabbi then gave the explanation of* kevod bat melekh penimah*—because girls are innately more spiritual, they don't need reminders such as* kippah *and* tzitzit. *As a result of this conversation, the director fielded several calls from parents the following day, reporting that their sons came home under the impression that girls are more special than boys.*

Emerging questions include:

- What was the teacher's intention in inviting the rabbi to speak to the class?
- What was the rabbi's goal?
- Why did the (female) teacher not feel she had the authority to address this issue with her own class? What does that say to the children?
- Did the teacher consider the girls in the class? (The rabbi later reported that he felt bad that he hadn't thought about the girls while he was giving his speech and felt compelled to give a traditional response when the question arose.)
- How does a girl feel when a boy takes a tangible, concrete object and recites a *berakhah* while she has nothing to hold?
- How do we have the conversation with girls (and boys) about why boys wear *kippot/tzitzit* and girls don't?

If a girl asks to wear *tzitzit*, what are the possible responses? Does a girl wearing *tzitzit*, like a girl who plays dress-up in her father's tie and carries a briefcase, become identified as "trying to be a boy"? Why do we treat *tzitzit* any differently from the mitzvah of *lulav,* in which children of both genders are often encouraged to take them in school, even though their mothers might not?

2. *The practice in many modern Orthodox schools is for boys to say the* berakhah *over the* tzitzit, *and then, lest they feel left out, girls say the berakhah* she-asani kirtzono *(who has made me according to His will, the traditional morning blessing for the female). In one school, the boys sing a few introductory lines about wearing* tzitizit. *The girls then sing the following introduction to* she-asani kirtzono*:*

"Ani yaldah gedolah *(I am a big girl)*
Ani yaldah yafah *(I am a pretty girl)*
Ani omeret todah la-Shem *(I say thank you to Hashem)*
Shehu bara oti *(that He created me)*."

- Why do we parallel *tzitzit* and *she-asani kirtzono*? Are these two *berakhot* equivalent?
- Why is there a need to insert a *berakhah* for girls here?
- Why, when introducing the *berakhah*, does the song emphasize girls' physical attributes? The boys' song focuses on the importance of the mitzvah.

[1] Judy Harris Helm and Sallie Beneke, eds., *The Power of Projects*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2003, p. 11.

[2] "Information not connected with a learner's prior experiences will be quickly forgotten. In short, the learner must actively construct new information into his or her existing mental framework for meaningful learning to occur." www.answers.com/topic/learning-theory-constructivist-approach.

- If we explain what the *berakhot* mean, how do we justify to boys that they are not saying *she-asani kirtzono*?
- What do we imagine girls are feeling when they witness boys taking a tangible object they are wearing, and then kissing it whenever it is mentioned in *tefillah*?
- What do we imagine girls are thinking/feeling when we teach about *brit milah* (covenant of circumcision)?
- What do we imagine boys think when we teach about *tzniut* (modesty; in many traditional settings these lessons are explicitly linked to girls' behavior and mode of dress)?

3. *A* kabbalat Shabbat *celebration in a preschool class. The teacher turns to the young girl who has been chosen as the* Imma *and asks what the* Imma *does to prepare for Shabbat. The girl does not answer right away. The teacher tries to help and says, "You're the* Imma. *The* Imma *prepares for Shabbat by shopping, cooking, and taking care of the children." She then turns to the boy and says, "You're the* Abba. *What do you do?" The boy responds, "I am a firefighter." The teacher then remarks, "And when you come home, you help, right?"*

- Is it fair for the teacher to assume that women stay home and get ready for *Shabbat* while men go out to work? Is that true in every family? Why was the girl not asked, "What's your job?"
- Is the teacher aware that this characterization may not reflect these children's experiences?
- What implicit assumptions was the teacher reinforcing or propagating in prompting the *Abba* to say he would help?
- In most modern Orthodox communities, becoming a firefighter is not a career path that is encouraged, yet the boy is allowed to take on this role and explore (it is developmentally appropriate for young children to try out roles, as it helps them formulate their ideas[3]). Do we allow girls the same freedom?

How might it have looked if we offered children choices of roles in the *kabbalat Shabbat* celebration, just as we do in the dress-up area? Family roles could be expanded to include grandparents, reflecting the children's growing reality, as people live longer and extended families get together often. When we plan, we need to be cognizant of children's experiences. Are fathers active partners in their homes (not just the "assistants")? Have we ever considered changing the format of *kabbalat Shabbat* to be more inclusive? Could everyone participate in saying the *berakhot*? What opportunities do girls have to practice saying *kiddush* (as they are obligated to if no male is present)?[4] When do boys have a chance to practice saying the *berakhah* over the candles?

4. *A veteran teacher was told that she would be involved in a project on gender. Before the project began, she was preparing a packet of handouts for her students about the upcoming High Holidays. Suddenly, she realized that all the pictures in the packets were of boys* davening*—there were no illustrations of girls actively engaged in meaningful observance of the*

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[3] "In dramatic play, the child develops a concept of his or her own sex role. Numerous social roles are tried out and increase the depth of understanding of many other roles. The child begins integrating the rules of society. ... A conscience is developing." Verna Hildebrand, *Introduction to Early Childhood Education*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986, pp. 371–372.

[4] *Editor's note*: For an analysis of the equal obligation of women and men in the mitzvah of kiddush, see JOFA's Ta Shma Halakhic Study Guide (2008), *Women's Obligation in* Kiddush *of Shabbat* by Rahel Berkovits.

What if...

- boys did not hear the words "stop crying, you're a big boy" when working through sad or frustrating emotions?
- girls were allowed to "get dirty" and were encouraged to play with dirt and mud and sand?
- boys were encouraged to play with dolls and strollers?
- girls were encouraged to work in the block area (join the boys in collaborative efforts)?
- in Jewish children's books both men and women were shown cleaning, baking, and preparing for Shabbat?
- a children's book about *Sukkot* showed a picture of the mother standing on a ladder?
- we weren't afraid to teach girls how to read the Torah (if only to enrich their understanding of text)?
- girls had opportunities in the classroom to recite *kiddush* (women have a halakhic obligation regarding *kiddush*)?
- boys were allowed to light Shabbat candles in class (men have a halakhic obligation to light candles)?
- we considered the message we send when we use the nicknames "sweetie" and "buddy"?
- fathers were invited to school to bake *hallah* with the children?
- mothers were invited to schools to *daven* with the children?

Other questions for teachers to consider:

- What impact do our words and actions have on our students? Are we even aware that our own underlying beliefs subconsciously influence how we speak to children? Do we consider the effect we have on girls' and boys' identities?
- When we encounter gender issues in the classroom, do we recognize them as opportunities to create a more inclusive environment?
- Are we quicker to label boys as having ADHD than we are to label girls?
- Do female teachers treat boys differently from girls?
- Who gets called on more, boys or girls? Does it depend on subject (math, reading)? Are boys called on more because teachers want to rein in their behavior?
- Are there differences in the ways we praise boys and girls? In the ways we respond to incorrect answers?

—Chaya Gorsetman and Amy Ament

Tales from the Field, *continued from page 11*

holiday. She felt that she could no longer hand out the packets she had distributed to students for the previous ten-plus years. Her consciousness was raised just knowing that she would be participating in some capacity in a project on gender.

We acknowledge that our discussion contains some assumptions and generalizations—and, in fact, some of these ideas are being implemented in schools already—but nonetheless, the problem illustrated is widespread enough to warrant serious examination. The intention here is not to offer directives, but rather to encourage teachers to be reflective about the gender messages that are being transmitted through religious instruction in our schools. Through the spirit of such reflection, good practice will emerge. This is important at every level, but it is vital for this reflection to begin in early childhood education.

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Women's Learning at *Midrasha* of Bar-Ilan

The *Midrasha* is the women's division of the *Machon HaGavoah LaTorah*, also known as the Ludwig and Erica Jesselson Institute of Advanced Torah Studies at Bar-Ilan University. The President of the Institute is Professor Daniel Sperber. Founded in 1976, the *Midrasha* currently has more than 700 students. It gives young women the opportunity to undertake serious textual study in Bible, Talmud, Midrash, and halakha, while they pursue their academic degrees, providing classes for students with limited religious background, as well as a more advanced *Beit Midrash*. In the *Mishpetani'ot* program, female law students study relevant parts of *Shulhan Arukh* (*Even Ha-ezer* and *Hoshen Mishpat*) alongside their courses in the law faculty, while the "Doctoral Students of Excellence" program provides an intensive Torah experience for young women pursuing their doctorates. The *Midrasha* also runs a yearly course to prepare *Madrikhot Kallot* for all Israeli brides, both religious and non-religious.

With My Thanks

I have been privileged to be the editor of the *JOFA Journal* since the summer of 2003. It has been a wonderful experience for me. With the help of the highly professional JOFA office and the able editorial committee, I feel that we have been able to present a wide range of viewpoints, experiences, and perspectives within Orthodox feminism and to promote sincere, respectful, and thoughtful discussion among our readers.

Over the years, because of our "big tent" approach, we have found that our readership includes not only staunch JOFA advocates and not only Orthodox women, but also a wide array of women and men of different ages, backgrounds and viewpoints. We have provided a place for young female scholars to publish their work and become better known in the community. Besides scholarly articles, each issue has sought to include articles of personal reflection and opinion. Although our focus is on contemporary American Orthodoxy, we recognize that what happens in other countries is significant, and our pages often feature the work of Israeli writers.

I am especially pleased that I am passing on the editorship of the *Journal* to Roselyn Bell, who has worked in Jewish publications for many years, most recently as publications director of the American Jewish Committee. Roselyn is a consummate professional as well as being strongly committed to the JOFA mission. I will miss the extensive feedback that I have received from *Journal* readers over the years, but know that I am leaving the *JOFA Journal* in talented and capable hands. May JOFA and the *Journal* continue to go *mei'hayil el hayil*.

Jennifer Stern Breger

Educating Our Boys

By Tully Harcsztark

Feminist discourse in the Orthodox Jewish community—where it has been allowed in—has largely been driven and shaped by the voices of women; and unsurprisingly so. As women sought equal access to Jewish learning and practice, as women shared the pain of exclusion and missed opportunities, it was the female perspective that was being heard, debated, and analyzed. Decades later, women have made enormous progress—albeit with real limitations—in gaining access to learning at the highest levels and to increased opportunities as Jewish communal professionals and leaders. But what about the men? How have the lives of men been affected and shaped by the changing landscape? There are many points of entry here, but I would like to focus on high school life. Important things happen when boys learn in an environment in which the feminist perspective is present. The most important of those things is not rooted in curriculum—although that, too, is clearly important. It is rooted in the everyday exchanges that take place in school between the genders—between teacher and student or among the students themselves.

How do we "wire" schools so they provide a framework for such interactions? Structural elements are vital to shaping the discourse and culture. It is not enough to talk about it; it must be expressed in the way school is organized. Both men and women must teach Talmud and *Tanakh*. Both men and women must serve as fellows studying in the *Beit Midrash*. Boys and girls should debate with each other about the meaning of a *sugya* or a verse in *Tanakh*. The structures are not the end, however; they are the means. They create a framework that shapes the interactions that happen throughout the days, weeks, and years at school. The wiring frames the discourse and the discourse shifts perspectives and understandings.

What do boys learn from an environment that is led and shaped by both men and women? They learn five very powerful messages:

1. Capacity: Members of the learning community experience firsthand the capacity of both men and women to anticipate the question of *Tosafot* or to penetrate a difficult Ramban. There is no need to debate whether women are capable of studying on the same level as men. The question is answered in everyday exchanges in class and in the *Beit Midrash*. In a coeducational setting, boys grow up respecting girls and feeling on par with them in the learning of Torah because they have studied together in classes and in *hevruta*.

2. Perspective: I recall studying *sugyot* in yeshiva—in *Kiddushin* or *Ketubot*, for example—with an awareness that, were women present, the discourse would change. The presence of another perspective both contributes to the debate and keeps all participants honest. Thinking becomes more careful and rigorous in the presence of differing perspectives. In a coeducational setting, it becomes clear that this is so not only in topics related to feminism. On any topic, the learning becomes more socially and culturally rounded through the varied voices present.

3. Language: Students develop sensitivity to pronouns. The consistent use of לשון זכר, the male perspective, begins to shift. Students learn to refer to "he or she" or to alternate their gender usage. When this becomes second nature, we can attest that this awareness has been internalized and is part of who the students are.

4. Role models: Having female Talmud and *Tanakh* teachers for whom one has great respect changes one's perceptions and develops awareness and sensitivity. Boys see that women learn Torah and serve as Jewish role models just as men do. This profoundly affects the way that boys treat their female peers, and will eventually shape the way that they live their lives with spouses and daughters—and will affect the nature of relationships with their sons as well. It is certainly important for a boy to establish a unique connection with a male teacher, as for girls with female teachers. However, having male and female role models is of enormous importance in shaping the opportunities and expectations for men and women in the long term. It reframes possibilities for committed Jewish men and women in the professions, in the community, and in the home.

5. Self: The impact of this "wiring" extends beyond how boys think about girls. It refashions how boys see themselves. Developing awareness of issues of gender teaches one to be more sensitive to other social, cultural and ethnic issues. It shapes the way one reads and listens. One develops an ethics of interaction that is more attuned to the person before them. It is a בן אדם לחבירו that becomes part of one's being.[1]

Is coeducation the only road that feminist-oriented schools can take? A wide range of factors and tradeoffs informs the decisions of communities and schools regarding single-sex versus coeducation. But one thing is clear to me. These five powerful messages are best internalized through regular, normalized, consistent, substantive interaction between male and female students.

It is certainly crucial to be explicit about the decisions that a school makes. The school community must

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[1] I thank my colleagues Lisa Schlaff and Simon Fleischer for their helpful formulations.

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carefully study the texts regarding women learning Talmud, coeducation, or *kol isha* and teach students to talk to those issues with confidence and clarity. However, there is a paradoxical—perhaps oxymoronic—character to culture building. Something becomes part of a culture when it has penetrated down to the daily-ness of everyday life—where it is lived and experienced, rather than lectured and talked about. Ideas have been effectively internalized when they become, literally, a matter of fact. Our legitimated values are pre-theoretical notions that shape the way that we understand our world. It is not philosophy; it is not the world of ideas. It is the day-to-day reason with which we explain our world.

Important things happen when boys learn in an environment in which the feminist perspective is present.

Be aware, though: this works well when living within the particular community and its culture. A coeducational environment in which men and women have comparable roles teaches particular values about men, women, and the study of Torah. Step outside, and (in the language of Peter Berger) the plausibility structures are immediately weakened. One experiences difference and dissonance. It is in the face of such dissonance that one begins to theorize in earnest. The liminal point, the border of inside and outside, is a point of tension at which lived values cross over into reflection, theory, and self-consciousness. Many students will be challenged—in yeshiva in Israel or beyond—to defend their experience. Our students must be equipped with both the textual knowledge and the ethical value statements to clearly articulate the importance of their position. Before they are on their way, we must remind them that there is a reason for all of this. It is not about "being normal." It is about more than equality. It is about ethics and values; listening and learning—for men and for women; for the Jewish people.

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Pluralism in Practice

By Claudia Marbach

I teach rabbinics in the middle school of the Jewish Community Day School of Boston (JCDS), a pluralistic school just outside Boston that runs from kindergarten to eighth grade, with nearly two hundred children whose religious affiliations range across the spectrum of Judaism.

I have been involved with JCDS for the past twelve years, since my oldest child (now learning in Migdal Oz in Israel) started first grade there. When I enrolled my daughter at JCDS, I did not know how the school would affect our entire family. I chose the school because the Hebrew teaching was excellent, there was *tefillah* every day, and there was a commitment to Jewish texts. JCDS was only a few years old and was trying (and still is trying) to figure out what "pluralism" meant in practice. It attracted several Orthodox families the year we joined, but some of the families were coming with reservations primarily about the intensity of text study in *limmudei kodesh*. The wonderful secular Israeli Hebrew teacher was also in charge of *tefillah*, *humash*, and holidays. However, the teaching of these subjects was, from an Orthodox perspective, somewhat dispassionate and not very expressive of a love for Judaism as a living and breathing way of life.

I had been taking some time off from my legal career to be home with my three young children. In my oldest daughter's last year of preschool, I was trained by Hadassah to lead a preschool holiday program called *Al Galgalim*. When we moved to Boston, I set up the program there, and trained some teachers. When my child entered JCDS, the principal asked me to help with fundraising. My initial reaction was that I could better help the school by being in the classroom. To my surprise, despite my lack of formal training, she immediately took me up on the offer.

Soon I was in the classroom several times a week, planning which *pesukim* were to be learned by heart and which stories emphasized. Working with young children was fun, and the work in first and second grades did not seem such a stretch from my preschool experience. I relied on my basic Orthodox day school education, a year in Israel at Michlalah–Jerusalem College, some classes at Drisha, and my own *hevruta* learning. I had had no formal Jewish education after I finished college. Since law school and a few years of legal work, I had been busy with kids and not studied much beyond *parashat ha-shavua*. That was to change rapidly.

In the spring of 2001, the principal asked if I would teach Mishnah the following fall in the middle school, which then had about twenty-five students. I had not studied Mishnah formally since middle school, nor did I have experience in teaching older students. My only other experience teaching anyone over the age of seven was for a short period during law school, when I volunteered with a friend to teach a weekly class to college students. Despite my hesitation, I agreed to take on the challenge.

What followed has been a decade of learning, teaching, and evolving into a Jewish educator. I don't think I ever intentionally left my law career, but at some point I realized that teaching was more enjoyable than working as a lawyer, and that I was better at it. I now think of myself primarily as an educator rather than as a lawyer, although I still pay my bar dues. Of course, I would make more money as a lawyer, and would perhaps be more respected—even in the Orthodox community, which seems to value doctors and lawyers over teachers. But I feel that I am contributing to the world and to the Jewish community in a more substantive way than I would have by reviewing software licenses (as I had done in my last legal position).

From Lawyer to Teacher of Jewish Law

My legal experience has come in handy in my teaching, both for close textual reading and in encouraging me to make connections between Mishnah and American law. For example, in my sixth grade curriculum we spend a month relating the *mishnayot* in *Bava Metzia* to labor law.

One nice aspect of being a teacher is having summers to recuperate and plan the following year. I spent my first summer planning my curriculum—because the one that had been proposed seemed technically informative but lacked topics with which the students could identify. I had been given the freedom to teach just about anything that fell under the umbrella of *Torah she-B'al Peh* (Oral Law). Recalling my own experience starting with *Masekhet Berakhot*, I decided that for a mixed group of religious and secular students, the traditional subject of *birkhot ha-nehenin* and *tefillah* might not be universally exciting or intriguing.

My goals were to expose the students to the breadth of Jewish thought, teach them a Jewish ethical world view, give them the skills to begin to access Jewish texts by themselves and finally to make connections for the students between the texts and their own lives. The first *masekhet* that I taught was *Sukkah*. We learned the laws of *sukkah* construction. We talked about why the rabbis would be so interested in such questions, and learned the basic skills of reading a *mishnah*. At the end of the unit, the students constructed the various *sukkot* described in the Mishnah and a fantasy *sukkah* that fit the rules set out in the *masekhet*.

I have since developed a curriculum based on *Seder Nezikin* that extrapolates from the Mishnah's discussion of fairness in court proceedings and the obligations of workers and employers to one another to current issues that the students face in daily life as they relate to others. They learn how difficult it is to negotiate a contract from a position of weakness (e.g., with their parents) and how

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they might inadvertently mistreat a poor worker. We apply the rules of the Mishnah both to workers the students are likely to encounter (such as nannies and janitors) and to those they typically do not encounter (such as sweatshop workers who make the clothes they wear). I use the concrete notions of the Mishnah to help the students to be aware of people around them and approach them with the understanding that we all have both rights and responsibilities, and are made *b'tzelem Elokim* (in God's image), as my teacher Rabbi Jack Bieler used to say, to see the world "through Torah-colored glasses."

Over the past decade, I have grown in my teaching and pedagogic skills with the help of some good mentors. I was able to attend the Pardes Educators two-week program in Israel and have participated in a Brandeis seminar on teaching rabbinics, run by Prof. Jon Levisohn.[1] I have also grown as a student of Jewish texts. Each year, in my preparation for class, I feel that I go deeper into the texts than the year before. I take delight that preparing for my Pesah *seder* no longer involves just preparing a *d'var Torah* for my family, but also working with twenty children to make sure they are ready for their *sedarim* too, each one doing a small research project on a Haggadah topic of their own choice.

Last year I began teaching an introduction to Talmud class to the eighth graders. We study the eighth chapter of *Bava Kama*, which deals with damages and the value we place on human life. This is wonderful material for early adolescents; how to put a compensatory value on embarrassment, for example, is very real for them. Each student does an independent research project tracing an idea of his or her choosing from Torah through the Mishnah, Gemara, and *Aharonim*; for example, a child who was adopted chose that as her topic. I also research each of their topics to help them locate suitable texts.

All this has strengthened my learning and familiarity with texts beyond what I could have imagined ten years ago. At times I get carried away with a topic and am up late at night, my desk piled high with books and my web browser overflowing with bookmarks.

At JCDS, great emphasis is placed on differentiated learning, which I try to embrace more fully each year. I also choose a different lens through which to examine my units each year. This year, my emphasis is on grammatical skills to enhance my students' abilities to break down texts. When I review the worksheets that I have developed, I see how I can sharpen that aspect. If I can give the students the skills to decipher the texts, the likelihood of their becoming lifelong learners of Torah increases. I have this goal equally for observant and non-observant students. I emphasize to them that they are a crucial link in the chain of our *mesorah*—however they choose to observe it.

[1] A working paper written during that seminar program can be found at www.brandeis.edu/mandel/pdfs/Bridging working papers/Paper23.pdf.

Being an Orthodox Teacher in a Pluralistic School

I struggle to find my place as an Orthodox teacher in a pluralistic school. I insist that every student know what our tradition is, but am careful about my language. I say, "This is what traditional Jews do on Shabbat. Your observance may be different." On the one hand, since teaching at JCDS, I cover my hair and wear skirts to school, even though the school has an informal dress code for both students and teachers and I could wear jeans if I wanted. Over the years, I have encountered many people who look at me and "know" what I think on a variety of subjects, from the role of women in Judaism to my views about what they have in their shopping carts when I meet them in the supermarket. I have subtly—and sometimes, not so subtly—disabused them of prejudices about Orthodoxy and introduced many of them to Orthodox feminism. They are often surprised that I don't condemn them for what they have in the cart as long as they don't serve it to me or my children.

I have the pleasure of trying to foster *ahavat Yisrael* on a daily basis.

On the other hand, I have had requests that I put on *tefillin* at school to be a role model for the girls. It would make sense to do so for my role at school, but it is neither a mitzvah to take lightly nor an obligation I could take on just for school days. There are times when someone wants to say *kaddish* and I am asked to be counted in a *minyan* when the majority of people there, including the mourner (unfortunately, at times, a student), would count women. I weigh the Orthodox definition of *minyan* with the need of a person to say *kaddish*. In this case, I have come to feel that the *ben adam l'haveiro* imperative outweighs the rabbinic position and join the *minyan*.

One thing that has surprised me is the depth of my friendships with many very committed Jews who are not Orthodox. My definition of *shomer Shabbat* has expanded to almost anyone with a regular Shabbat practice. We might not share Shabbat, but I respect that they are committed to our tradition and to the continuity of the Jewish people. Pluralism demands that one look at each person as a Jew and only then at his or her practice. I might be upset if a school friend tried to feed my child non-kosher food, but I would respectfully discuss it with them and find some way to live together in our pluralistic Jewish community.

There are negative aspects to being an Orthodox teacher in a pluralistic school. It is not always easy to be perceived as an upholder of the faith. I am sure there are events to which I am not invited because of others' perceptions and misperceptions of me and my children. My children have resolved that they are Orthodox: even though both my daughters learned to *leyn* for their *b'not mitzvah*, they will not do so for the partnership *minyan* that my husband and I established with some friends. My son is one of only a few boys putting on *tefillin* at JCDS,

Class of girls from the Ecole Juive, Tunis
Early 20th century postcard
Collection of Yeshiva University Museum

and he struggles with whether to join with the other students who abridge the *tefillah* or say a full *tefillah* and risk appearing arrogant.

After graduating from JCDS, my own children have continued at the local pluralistic Jewish high school, Gann Academy, where they have received an excellent education in both secular and Judaic studies. This is demonstrated by my oldest daughter's ability to flourish in Migdal Oz's rigorous Talmud program, which is all in Hebrew. The school is also excellent at promoting the acceptance of differences, whether they are religious or other differences.

But it has not always been easy for my children. Their peers often invite them to eat in non-kosher restaurants and they either do not go or have only a soda. They get invitations that start "I'm sorry you can't come to my party because it is on Friday night, but I wanted you to know that you are invited. If there is any way ..." My daughters have been lucky to have many friends from school and other kids who come to our neighborhood on Shabbat to join the *shomer Shabbat* crowd. My son has not been so lucky, and has fewer friends on Shabbat. My children have, on occasion, been taunted by some who go to Orthodox schools and say that JCDS/Gann students don't know much about Judaism. In fact, my experience is that even though they might not be experts in *dinim*, they are thoughtful text learners, are curious to know more and are sensitive to the *kavod* of others.

Less Patience for Intolerance

To my surprise, I have become less tolerant of some aspects of the Orthodox community. It is frustrating for me to participate in women's *tefillah* when the children's *tefillah* in school is more comprehensive. I still occasionally give a *d'var Torah* at the local women's *tefillah* group, but I have little patience for the arguments against women's *tefillah* groups that crop up from time to time in our community. Increasingly, I find my own spiritual fulfillment in teaching and learning. I have less patience for intolerance of other types of Judaism and for xenophobia in the community. I find myself more sensitive to political statements dressed as *divrei Torah*, and attribute this sensitivity to my exposure to pluralism, which has taught me to be aware of a plurality of opinion and not to assume that everyone agrees with me.

On the positive side, I have had opportunities to have dialogues with colleagues about Judaism that have been enriching to all of us. I have had many debates with a strongly feminist, secular colleague about what being a feminist within the tradition means to me. A few years ago I had a *hevruta* with a colleague who had never before learned Mishnah; when we finished, we invited the rest of our colleagues to their first *siyyum*. We held a *sheva berakhot* for a young teacher and included many teachers who had never even heard of the practice before. I have been asked *she'eilot* by non-religious parents who do not have a rabbi of their own and feel that I have been able to encourage both children and adults to explore Judaism more deeply.

The final verdict on the experiment of pluralism is still out. Will the observant children in such schools stay observant? Will non-observant children become more involved Jewishly? Anecdotally, the answer is yes to both questions. Has it enriched my Judaism? Most definitely. I am comfortable with Jewish texts in a way that I would never have imagined. I have learned how to learn and how to teach.

The most rewarding thing for any teacher is the look in a child's eye when he or she masters a new concept or understands a text for the first time. Beyond that, I also have the pleasure of trying to foster *ahavat Yisrael* on a daily basis. Once, before Yom Kippur, we were having a discussion about *teshuvah*, which, in a pluralistic setting, is a challenge every year. That year I decided go around the class and ask each child what being "a good Jew" meant to him or her. An Orthodox boy was sitting next to a boy from a secular home who said that being a good Jew meant supporting Israel and learning Hebrew. When the Orthodox boy said that being a good Jew meant believing in God and *sh'mirat mitzvot*, the secular boy turned to him and said, "So, do you not think that I am a good Jew?" The Orthodox boy was dumbfounded and we proceeded to have a wonderful discussion about inclusion in *k'lal Yisrael*. This is probably not a discussion I would have experienced in an Orthodox school, but it is a good one to have. I was brought up to think that Orthodoxy had the monopoly on ethical behavior and had actually been confused when, in college, I found people of all kinds with strong ethical codes. I have learned from teaching at JCDS to widen the tent of the "good Jew" and appreciate the many different ways we each may contribute to the Jewish people and the world at large.

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Mentoring: The Next Feminist Challenge

By Elisheva Baumgarten

In the book of Esther, after killing Haman and his family and putting Mordecai in a position of power, King Ahasuerus turns to Queen Esther and asks, "What is your wish now? It shall be granted you. And what else is your request?" (Esther 9: 12). Often, when I voice concern to male colleagues in the field of Jewish studies about the limited opportunities for women, their response echoes that of Ahasuerus. After all, within the past two decades, many women have found their place in the field of Jewish studies and have excelled within their specific areas of study. Opportunities for women to study and teach are readily available, so what more can one want?

In response to this query, I would like to point to an aspect of professional development that I believe constitutes a challenge to all of us: the availability of meaningful mentoring. Notwithstanding women's relatively unimpeded access to higher education today, without proper guidance and mentoring, the next generation of women will not find their places among their male peers as quickly as one would hope. Although the example detailed below relates to academia, I am sure it has parallels in other professions as well.

In the spring of 1997, two years after beginning my doctoral studies at the Hebrew University, a very senior professor, whom I knew only casually, asked if I would be interested in helping a distinguished visiting scholar read some Hebrew texts. This request left me in a state of disbelief, as this distinguished scholar was one of my academic heroines. She was a key figure in European history and a pioneer in women's studies. I had read all her books and found them inspirational. I could hardly wait to meet her.

On the morning that I was to meet this scholar, I felt tremendous excitement. As a student in the Department of Jewish History at the Hebrew University in the 1990s, I had the pleasure of studying with many distinguished professors who were wonderful teachers and scholars. They were also all men. At that time, out of the thirty or so available full positions in the department, only one-third of one was held by a woman. Moreover, during the course of my graduate studies I received comments and suggestions, most of which I believe were not made maliciously, but which exposed a deep skepticism about my chosen topic of research, Jewish family life in the Middle Ages. And here I was about to meet a senior scholar, respected by all, who was also a pioneer in women's studies.

To my great surprise and delight, my meeting with the scholar began with her explaining that she never employs a student before hearing about his or her work. Therefore, our first meeting would be devoted to a discussion of my dissertation, rather than to looking at the rabbinic responses she wanted my help in interpreting. We spent more than two hours talking about my research. I walked out of the room with a list of books to read, theories to think about, and new ways of phrasing thoughts and ideas. She also quizzed me thoroughly about my family, my children (two, at that time), my work schedule, and my plans for the future, and told me about her career, her children and grandchildren, and her students.

Despite this unforgettable conversation, the moment most etched in my memory occurred afterward. As we walked down the hall for a cup of coffee, we bumped into the professor who had made the connection between us. In a most patronizing tone, he smiled and said, "So, ladies, did you have a nice chat? Do you know how many children Elisheva has and all the details about her life that you girls need to know about each other?"

I was astounded that he dared to address his colleague in such a condescending manner and was also appalled by his assumptions about what we had been discussing for the preceding two hours. Would men have done anything different, and had we sinned against the unwritten rules of scholarship? The scholar did not bat an eyelash. She smiled at him and, with a completely straight face, turned to me and asked: "Oh, Elisheva, do you have children?" Then, turning back to him, she said: "We only talked about research, and yes, I know everything there is to know about Elisheva's dissertation." At that moment, I knew that I had found not only a teacher, but also a mentor.

This encounter came back to me four years later,

when I was teaching at the University of Pennsylvania as a postdoc. My students were bright young women; together, we explored the problems and questions of gender and Jewish history. How would Jewish history look different if women and gender were part of the narrative—and why does giving Jewish women a past matter? These questions were at the heart of our discussions. Toward the end of the term, my students were writing their final papers. A young woman appeared in my office early one morning to talk about her paper on biblical women and leadership. After an intense conversation, she closed her notebook and said, "Dr. Baumgarten, now can we talk about life?" The conversation that followed centered on her observation that almost all the role models that she had at college were women who chose not to have families in order to pursue their careers. As an excellent student considering graduate studies and an academic career, she was worried that she would face a choice none of her male professors could understand. From biblical women, we moved on to a discussion of life choices. I realized then that she was turning to me not just as a scholar, but as a female scholar who could comprehend the choices and paths she was anticipating.

Over the years since my first teaching experience, I have found that a consistent theme of conversations with my graduate students, usually after serious discussions about thesis proposals and chapters, revolves around issues of identity and self-definition and questions connected to work–family balances, to having children or seeking job opportunities. There is still a dearth of female models in the field who can serve as mentors to young female students and scholars. I have also found that my female students who have the same access to education and knowledge as their male peers need this kind of guidance much more than my male students do. Whereas the young men have a variety of set patterns already mapped out, the women have only the beginnings of paths to follow. My experience has taught me that mentoring is vital for female students to provide guidance and support around personal life-style decisions as well as about the choice and methodology of areas of research and study. Without this help, the careers they dream of are much harder to achieve.

A central claim of the feminist movement from its outset, and echoed by the Orthodox feminist movement, revolves around education. Knowledge is power and can lead to transformation. The strides that this knowledge and power have enabled over recent years are self-evident. As women's knowledge has grown in areas that were traditionally the realm of men, we find ourselves asking how women's ways of knowing are different and whether women learn and are taught in different ways. Yet these questions are not just knowledge-related. We are still developing new models of scholarly life that will allow women to embrace the demands of their careers without giving up other meaningful aspects of their lives. Inevitably, these models will apply to men as well as to women and will allow both women and men to live fulfilling intellectual and personal lives while engaging in many fields of professional development. It seems to me that as our ability to obtain knowledge becomes less of an issue, mentoring is our next feminist challenge.

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Approach to Teaching *Humash*: JOFA's Curricula

By Robin Bodner, Executive Director, JOFA

JOFA's *Bereishit* and *Shemot* curricula promote gender sensitivity, encourage questions, and use differentiated learning techniques.

Inspired by students' thoughtful questions that many teachers did not have the tools to address, the curricula were developed to encourage more reflective study of *p'sukim*, and thus to accommodate new interpretations, personal connections to principal characters, and attention to often glossed-over moments in the text. The units are designed for both male and female students as a supplement to existing curricula and can be adapted for any level of study, from elementary through adult education. Each unit consists of teacher resources, lesson plans, and worksheets for both English – and Hebrew–speaking classes. Tailored for multiple learning styles, the units expose students to passages of *Midrash* that encourage critical reading to make sense of the *p'sukim* and promote inquiry and creative thinking. By providing the tools and teaching the skills needed to approach the text in a thoughtful and inquisitive way, the curricula fill a gap in the materials currently available.

Bereishit: A New Beginning, A Differentiated Approach to Learning and Teaching seeks to give our *Imahot* (biblical matriarchs) a voice and encourages students to relate meaningfully to them as role models while challenging accepted gender stereotypes. Made possible in part by the Covenant Foundation, with additional support from the Jewish Women's Foundation of New York, the project was directed by Dr. Chaya Gorsetman, who co-authored the curriculum with Amy Ament and Rabba Sara Hurwitz and received guidance and input from a professional advisory board. Based on observations of a third grade class at SAR Academy in Riverdale, New York, and questions raised by the students, the team developed ten units, which

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JOFA's *Shemot* Curriculum

By Tammy Jacobowitz

Several years ago, I joined a JOFA educational team charged with the goal of developing a gender-sensitive *humash* curriculum for the day school classroom. Our job: to supplement "regular" *humash* learning with lessons that would increase an awareness of gender through the study of *humash*. Following on the success of the *Bereishit* team, we set out to design a series of units for fifth grade teachers of *Shemot* that would highlight women in the biblical text and help deepen girls' personal connections to the Bible and its study. Taking into consideration that most day schools in the New York area study the first half of *Shemot* in the fifth grade, we decided to shape nine lessons centered on the early chapters in *Shemot*.

In the early stages of development, our gender-inclusive approach to *humash* study challenged us to think more broadly about inclusivity in the classroom. In addition to focusing on biblical women and trying to reach the girls in the classroom, we attempted to design lessons that would facilitate a more inclusive learning environment. In our units, questions of all kinds are respected and encouraged, and learners with a variety of learning styles are valued and nurtured. Students have choices of activities that play into their diverse strengths and afford them multiple avenues for expression and engagement. Furthermore, we organized each unit around a "big picture" question so all the learning segments would contribute to the students' understanding of the larger issues at stake.

Our gender-inclusive approach to *humash* study challenged us to think more broadly about inclusivity in the classroom.

Our inclusive lens prodded us to treat the biblical text with a similar openness; in other words, we wanted students to recognize that the biblical text itself has many stories to tell and layers of meaning encoded within it. To help students access these layers and to expand the students' tools in the study of *Tanakh*, we turned to the midrashic tradition. As a bonus, the midrashic collection from which we culled most of our material—*Shemot Rabbah*—opens up a rich undercurrent to the biblical text, which showcases women's spirited participation in the Exodus narrative.

Nearly all of our nine units incorporate small bits of midrashic material in ways that encourage creative questioning and bolster the students' understanding of the *p'shat* (plain sense of the text). For example, in one unit, after they have spent time discovering Miriam's leadership qualities in the *p'shat* of the verses, students learn the story about young Miriam challenging her father, Amram, to reunite with her mother, Yokheved. Studied this way, the midrashic story confirms the students' understanding of Miriam's character and deepens their appreciation for the power of well-spoken words and initiative, even in a young child.

Not all our units center on topics that would seem obvious for a gender-sensitive curriculum. Although the early chapters in Exodus are heavily populated with female characters, women quickly disappear from the narrative later on. One way in which we dealt with this problem was to expand our lens beyond women per se, to think in gender terms about family structure and access to power.

Teaching *Humash*, *continued from page 19*

were piloted in second, third, fourth, and fifth grades at SAR Academy; Ramaz in New York City; and Yeshivat Noam and Ben Porat Yosef in northern New Jersey. Teacher training programs, mentoring, and additional support were offered during the pilot phase. The presentation of the curriculum at CAJE's Day School and Early Childhood Conference in June 2005, was met with great excitement. As one teacher noted, "There's nothing like this out there—not for Orthodox, not for Conservative, or for Reform."

Shemot: Faith, Resistance, and Leadership: A Differentiated Approach to Learning and Teaching addresses issues of leadership in the *Shemot* narrative on an individual and collective level. Funded in part by the Dobkin Family Foundation and Judy Heicklen, it continues the high-caliber work of the *Bereishit* curriculum. The units were written by Tammy Jacobowitz and Judith Talesnick with input from a professional advisory board. The nine units that make up the curriculum were piloted in fifth grade classes at SAR Academy and Yeshivat Noam and Solomon Schechter in northern New Jersey. An educators' workshop convened by JOFA in the spring of 2009 brought together teachers from a variety of schools in the tri-state area to expose them to the *Shemot* curriculum methodologies, discuss best practices in teaching *humash*, and develop a community of practice for ongoing peer support.

The curriculum was presented and enthusiastically received at a session on Gender and Education at the 6th International Conference of the Israel Association for Research in Jewish Education in December 2010.

Based on the *Shemot* curriculum, in 2009 JOFA published a handbook of activities and other enhancements for the Pesah *seder*, written by Tammy Jacobowitz and Judith Talesnick.

Both the *Bereishit* and *Shemot* curricula will be available online for free download at www.jofa.org in Fall 2011. We encourage schools, teachers, synagogue youth groups, parents, and private study groups to download, read, use, and enjoy these documents.

The unit titled "Moshe at the Well" demonstrates this strategy. The unit offers the students a prism through which to consider Moshe's growth as an individual, from the time he leaves Egypt until God calls to him from the burning bush. Moshe is decidedly the focus of the unit, but our lessons cast a wider look at Moshe's influences—his mothers and sister—and conflicting family ties.

As a preparatory homework assignment for this unit, the students draw a family tree for Moshe at four pivotal moments: as a newborn baby, after he is weaned and given back to *Bat Par'oh*, when he goes out to his brothers, and when he leaves Egypt. The goal is for students to confront the shifting lines of identity that characterize Moshe's early life. How does he see himself? Which is his "true" family?

Later in the unit, after the students study the verses that describe Moshe's encounter at the well, they think about "Moshe in transition." Comparing Moshe's experience to those of Abraham's servant with Rivka and of Jacob with Rachel in parallel scenes that also take place at wells, they consider how the well scene functions as a critical coming-of-age moment for Moshe, when he asserts his connection to the tradition of the *Avot* (his forebears) and gains comfort and strength in his new family. As a final homework activity for the unit, the students write letters home to each of Moshe's "mothers" describing what happened at the well, as well as his feelings about having a new family.

***Miriam Watching from Far Away*, Carol Racklin-Siegel**
The image is included in *The Brave Women Who Saved Moses* (bilingual children's book in Hebrew and English), EKS Publishing Company, Oakland, California, 2009.

Prints are available from the website of this Jerusalem–based artist www.pomegranatestudios.com

Not all our units center on topics that would seem obvious to a gender-sensitive curriculum.

Exploring Moshe's emergence from an Egyptian child into a capable leader through the prism of Moshe's shifting family ties affords the students the opportunity to think about the role of family constellations in the development of identity and leadership.

Another challenge we encountered in developing the *Shemot* curriculum stemmed from our immersion in the Midrash. To better shape the students' appreciation of the text and to deepen their understanding of women's role in the Exodus narrative, we chose selective *midrashim* from *Shemot Rabbah* and the *Tanhuma* to incorporate into the lessons. For example, in our units on Miriam, the midwives, and the women in the incident of the Golden Calf, we latched onto the suppressed narratives in the Midrash—highlighting women's remarkable faith in the face of slavery and their consistent ability to imagine a redemptive future.

Rescuing this suppressed narrative of women's heroism is wonderful for (a) calling attention to women's otherwise unnoticed, or less noticed, active role; (b) helping students to read the text carefully and attentively; and (c) developing positive female role models.

Paradoxically, though, the portrayal of the women as stalwarts of faith can lead to an excessively stark division between the roles of women and men: women instinctively believe in God, whereas men fall prey to fear and uncertainty. In other words, the wooden quality of the heroism replaces one stereotype with another and inadvertently reinforces gender-based assumptions about men's and women's behavior. We wanted to avoid this stereotyping, and also to avoid painting a portrait in which the men as an entire group are seen as stubborn and close-minded. We were also concerned as to how the boys in the room would feel.

In our unit on the Song at the Sea, we worked hard to negotiate this problem. In this unit, the students studied Miriam's song in depth. Rather than reading quickly through the women's song as a corollary to, or a shorter version of, Moshe's lengthy song, the unit lets students explore the multiple ways in which the women's song represents an alternate mode of religious expression to Moshe's song. Presented side by side in the Torah, the celebrations at the sea offer insights into multiple ways of connecting to *Hashem*.

Through a series of activities (text learning, listening activities, and movement activities), the students discover three key differences between the songs:

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Shemot **Curriculum,** *continued from page 21*

1. The women's song is short, like a mantra, and is accompanied by dancing. By contrast, the men's song is a long song, unaccompanied by dancing.

2. The women's celebration is planned, whereas the men's song is spontaneous. Guided by the Midrash, the students interpret the women's possession of instruments at the sea as an indication of their preparedness for God's miracles as they were packing for the Exodus. On the other hand, Moshe leads the men in a spontaneous song—*Az Yashir Moshe* (Ex. 16:1); after he saw the miracle, he praised God.

3. Finally, the students learn that the women's song at the Sea parallels several other biblical tales in which women celebrate a victorious return of warriors with tambourines and dancing (see *Shoftim* 11 and I *Shmuel* 10). In contrast, Moshe and the men sing a narrative song, retelling the events of the victory, and it helps students break down the distinction along gender lines to see the similarity of Moshe's song with the song of Devorah in *Shoftim* 5.

Our goal in showing the two songs as alternate modes of religious expression is to shy away from fixating on differences between women's and men's spiritual behavior, and rather, to offer the students the opportunity to consider the following questions: Which mode of expression do you identify with? How do you celebrate joyous events, and connect to God? Why?

Even as the unit calls attention to and examines the extraordinary contribution of the women, the students are encouraged to think beyond a binary gender difference and relate personally to both modes as equally viable and valuable alternatives.

The most rewarding feedback we received was from a teacher who piloted the units and reported that the gender issues in the text arose naturally in class discussions. Even more, she felt as if her students were engaged with Miriam's leadership, the midwives' ethical dilemmas, and the women's drive to bring forth children because they were exciting and important issues in the *humash*.

Tammy Jacobowitz *recently completed her doctoral dissertation in Midrash at the University of Pennsylvania. A graduate of the Drisha Scholars Circle, she was a co-writer of JOFA's* Shemot *curriculum, and co-writer of JOFA's Pesah* seder *activity handbook. She currently teaches* Tanakh *at the SAR High School in Riverdale, New York.*

Living and Learning in the Bible Belt

By Daniella Pressner

Six years ago, my husband, Saul Strosberg, and I moved to Nashville, Tennessee. Saul had just graduated from Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School and had accepted the position of rabbi at Sherith Israel, the Orthodox synagogue in Nashville. For weeks after we made the move, I wondered what had made me agree to it. I had no family or friends within an eight-hour driving radius, no job lined up, and little sense of mission. Saul spoke with passion about the significance of interacting with the larger Jewish community, of helping to make Judaism relevant to all Jews, and of educating for the sake of helping others make purposeful decisions. He had grown up in upstate New York and was acutely aware of the intense impact that two individuals could have on a community. Growing up in Chicago, I had little experience to relate to this vision. I had been one of many Jewish students, one of many Jewish families, and one of multiple Jewish communities. In New York, I had been in the midst of the Scholars Circle program at Drisha Institute, with plans to pursue a Ph.D. in the development of law in Judaism and Islam. I was unclear how any of my dreams could be fulfilled in Nashville. Saul had offers in larger cities—but something about Nashville drew him. Young, idealistic and a bit naive, I chose not to analyze further. This decision would come from the heart—from my recognition that Saul's passion, fervor, and commitment might be wasted in a big city.

For weeks after we made the move, I wondered what had made me agree to do it.

Although I was aware that there were many Jewish communities smaller than Nashville, I couldn't help but wonder, from a New York perspective, what it would be like to live in a community that was not saturated with opportunities for Jewish text study, which had been such an integral part of my upbringing.

On our drive down, rock stations were replaced with country music and Christian broadcasting. We arrived at our shul. Of our neighbors, two buildings were churches; the third, a Baptist Bible college. Saul parked the car, and I felt the blood rush from my head, partly because it was 99 degrees outside and partly because I was overwhelmed with questions: How do our sources encourage us to serve Jews in other locations? Where do we learn to sacrifice our own learning to teach others the little that we know? I had rarely given these questions much thought before, but now there are few days when I have not asked myself one of these questions.

Greater Nashville supports a population of around 1.2 million, including just under 8,000 Jews, according to a 2002 population study—a number that remains current. The city has one Jewish day school and five synagogues: two Reform, one Conservative, one Orthodox, and one Chabad. The affiliation rate of Jews with Jewish institutions is about 83 percent, a figure that undoubtedly reflects the generally higher religious commitment of the South.

Vanderbilt University's Jewish contingent has grown tremendously in the past five years and currently includes more than 1,000 Jews. Seventeen percent of the Vanderbilt freshman class identify as Jewish. Both a Hillel and a Chabad are on campus, as is a kosher café; kosher meat, wine, and cheese can be found at three local grocery stores in town.

Our community is one of the warmest and most welcoming I have ever been a part of. The five congregations, as well as the Gordon JCC, the Jewish Federation, and Jewish Family Service, support one another's events by attending, promoting, and sometimes co-sponsoring them. Our rabbis take a yearly road trip together and meet to discuss the community as a whole. All the congregations offer education for both adults and children, although there are generally fewer resources for Jewish education than one would find in many larger Jewish communities.

As director of Judaics at Akiva School, I am most familiar with the day school community. Akiva School is a K-6 independent, pluralistic community school, 85 students strong, dedicated, according to its mission statement, to "pursue excellence, foster critical inquiry and inspire informed Jewish living." As the one Jewish day school in Nashville, it is the only option for families seriously committed to Jewish education for their children.

Many Akiva parents are just beginning to realize the impact that Jewish studies can have on their children's academic careers—which is a given in larger communities. Considering all the social pressures, no family in our school can be taken for granted, and any family's commitment may waver from year to year. It takes confident and passionate parents to continue to send their child to a school when they feel they are thereby sacrificing their child's social or athletic future.

Akiva students have a block of 80 minutes for *Tanakh* and *Ivrit*, as well as about 30 minutes for *tefillah* daily. In addition, the students learn about the *hagim*, the Jewish life-cycle, Jewish history, and Israel through typical school programs, celebrations, commemorations, and electives. There are currently no options for Akiva

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Living and Learning, *continued from page 23*

graduates to continue their Jewish day school education into middle school in Nashville. Although some students commit to learning once or twice a week in their synagogue's Hebrew school, formal engagement with Jewish texts in a Jewish environment comes to an abrupt end after sixth grade. For the past four years, we offered an opportunity for Akiva alumni in seventh to twelfth grades to come one night a week for two hours to engage in serious text study and discussion at the school. Even though this proved to be a difficult commitment for many students, those who participated seemed to appreciate the experience. Although we did not offer the program this year, it is something we are thinking of reintroducing.

In Nashville, students are exposed to a culture that is heavily Christian. There is no doubt that living in the Bible Belt influences families' decisions to affiliate with a synagogue. It is unclear, though, whether their affiliation reflects greater religious or spiritual commitment per se. At precisely the moment that our students begin to seriously tackle the difficult identity questions of adolescence, they graduate from Akiva.

This is why it is so critical that each student feels connected and recognizes his or her place in the larger Jewish community. As the director of Judaics, I quickly realized the incredible impact that each of the four members of the Jewish studies staff had on both the students and the school culture. What the students learn—their ability to relate to texts, to tradition, and to Israel—is almost solely dependent on four people. Trying to find teachers who speak Hebrew fluently, have a solid foundation in text study, and a commitment to our tradition is incredibly challenging for a number of reasons—including the salary a small school is capable of offering and the daunting move to a faraway city. Another challenge is providing teachers with professional development and continued opportunities to be refueled and reconnected to their Jewish identity.

Every day at Akiva, the individuals who have committed themselves to educating our youth—whether they are *sh'lihim* from Israel, longtime Nashville residents, or fresh out of college—give our students the opportunity to achieve the same Hebrew proficiency, critical thinking, and comfort with Jewish texts as students in much larger, established institutions. Our students enter class with a fresh excitement for what their teachers have to offer, and what they learn is, more often than not, something they could not learn in their homes or surrounding institutions.

As a teacher of the "bookends" of our school, kindergarten and sixth grade, I see all that the students have learned and am aware of how much further they could go were we to extend their day school education past sixth grade. I share our parents' pride as they watch their children speak in Hebrew, tackle difficult texts in *hevruta,* and challenge their teachers to make every text, and every moment, meaningful. I question whether I would ever teach in another school with such commitment and spirit—a spirit to be found only in smaller Jewish communities.

Outside the day school community, I have offered adult education courses, taught Hebrew school, and facilitated the Matan Mother-Daughter Bat Mitzvah program at Sherith Israel. Because the decision to join a synagogue is based not always on religious observance but rather on the place a family feels most connected, Sherith Israel is composed of members of multiple backgrounds and affiliations. Learning with adults in the synagogue and elsewhere has been an incredibly rewarding and enriching experience. Often the focus for members in our community is how learning relates to their lives, and how their lives will be different once they leave the *shi'ur*. Their questions are often personal and emotional, and force me to *feel* my Judaism, as opposed to just *thinking* it.

Formal engagement with Jewish texts in a Jewish environment comes to an abrupt end after sixth grade.

Our synagogue's Hebrew school is unusual because, in the main, our students attend because they want to be there, not because of parental pressure. Furthermore, many of the same students attend the day school.

Until now, the Hebrew school has offered the Matan Bat Mitzvah program only once, but it has had a great impact on the seven mothers and eight daughters involved, and on the larger community, in a number of ways. First, although the day school does not, for the most part, struggle with gender issues because it is a community school and goes only up to sixth grade, the issue of gender does come up in our shul for many reasons. Because so few of our members lead strictly Orthodox lives, it is imperative for our community to find ways to help every member feel included. Our synagogue has demonstrated its commitment to gender inclusivity by inviting women to deliver *divrei Torah* and to lead certain prayers on Shabbat, by using gender-sensitive language when appropriate, by inviting female scholars in residence to teach to the community, and by expanding the opportunities afforded to *b'not mitzvah*. Although these changes have been welcomed by many members of our community, inevitably some members feel uncomfortable with them.

The Matan Bat Mitzvah program exposed parents to the complex text study that so many of their children tackle on a regular basis at Akiva. The program also helped create an aura of self-reflection as the girls and their mothers thought about their roles in the community and their position as part of the chain of Jewish women

in history. Most importantly, this program was uniquely structured for our mothers and daughters.

For some families who felt less connected to Orthodoxy because of their perception of women's roles, this class, along with a few opportunities for women's *tefillah* held in the past three years, has helped them become more interested in strengthening their commitment to Judaism. In the context of the woman's *tefillah* group, the empowerment and leadership afforded to the young women provide a connection that was missing in the regular service.

Our synagogue has also worked diligently to help each child find his or her voice in becoming *b'nei mitzvah*. The *b'nei mitzvah* program is tailor-made to challenge and bring meaning to each child and his/her family. Both boys and girls give *divrei Torah*, read Torah, lead parts of services, write pamphlets on *bi'ur tefillah*, lead *kiddush* and *havdalah,* and act as *gabbai'im* and *gabbai'ot*. Even though the girls realize the limitations on what they can do in the Orthodox service compared to the boys, they notice their increased opportunities and recognize a community genuinely interested in helping them grow as committed, active, and passionate Jewish young adults.

I have had the opportunity to continue my passion for academic Jewish studies at Vanderbilt and have spent summers learning at both Drisha and Pardes. As I look forward to the time when I can pursue my Ph.D., I recognize that I will approach any doctoral program with a greater and more nuanced appreciation for the *gift* of learning than I previously had. I have learned that not all students have the same opportunities to learn Jewish texts or have role models to make these texts come alive. I have learned that the teachers in my school carry great responsibility to provide their students with the very best Jewish education they can offer.

As I drive to Akiva every morning, I wonder how we will be able to continue to raise the level of learning in our school and in our Nashville community. There are mornings when I feel the need to inspire families to reach for more and to understand that sometimes Jewish education needs to come at the sacrifice of other interests. On all mornings, I recognize the opportunity that I have had in Nashville to teach, to learn, to inspire, and to be inspired. It is one that few people receive unless challenged to step beyond their comfort zone. Judaism can be relevant, inspirational, and completely alive in different kinds of communities, and it is up to each of us to grapple with what part we have in this future.

***Daniella Pressner** is the director of Jewish Studies at Akiva School in Nashville, Tennessee. She was recently awarded a DSLTI fellowship for future day school leaders and is the president of the Jewish Family Service of Nashville and Middle Tennessee.*

"Striking Gold", *continued from page 3*

within the next three years. The boutique, customized approach means that people of all denominations can start to engage in rigorous study of classical texts in a way that seems to be sustainable over time.

In different ways, both Merkavah and Kevah offer refreshing feminist models of Jewish learning. Both programs were founded and are run by observant Jewish women. Merkavah, by creating women's space, is encouraging the development of women's leadership and women's Torah. Kevah, by creating networks of Jewish learning groups, is making serious Torah learning accessible, breaking down barriers and hierarchies that have kept *limmud Torah* cloistered behind the walls of *yeshivot*.

Many of us who live far from the epicenters of Jewish living and learning can sometimes feel isolated and removed from the opportunities for learning offered in major Jewish centers. Even though successful learning programs do sometimes exist, like those offered by local *kollels* or national Jewish outreach organizations, they often fail to match our more modern and open sensibilities. Both Kevah and Merkavah offer sustainable and compelling models for rich and thorough Jewish learning, models that may very well reshape the way Jewish text study is incorporated into the fabric of Jewish living for Jews everywhere.

And so, five years after our journey out West, although we still miss our communities back East, and though we continue look to them for inspiration, with opportunities like Merkavah and Kevah burgeoning in the Bay Area, we feel we have also struck gold.

***Frayda Gonshor Cohen** lives in Berkeley, California. She was program chair of JOFA's 10th Anniversary International Conference on Feminism and Orthodoxy. She studied at Drisha Institute's Scholars Circle and is currently pursuing doctoral studies in Education at Mills College as a Wexner Graduate Fellow.*

The Affordability Crisis

Introductory Thoughts

The overall focus of this Education issue of the *JOFA Journal* is on topics relating to gender and education. As we worked on the journal, it became apparent that a critical subject that affects so many Jewish families—and, therefore, so many *JOFA Journal* readers—is the high cost of day school education for all our children. We considered that we would be remiss if we did not give some attention to the "affordability issue," which is on the minds of so many. What the gender implications of the economic situation might be for schools, communities, parents, and children is not clear at this point. It is unlikely that Orthodox Jewish parents will return to the days of long ago, when Jewish education was considered important only for males and not for females. Fortunately, we are way past that. But the question of how parents are going to be able to afford day school tuition in the current economic climate is a serious one. If they turn elsewhere for their children's education, what are going to be the consequences for the children and for the American Jewish community?

Many possible "solutions" to the crisis are being discussed, such as campaigning for increased federal and state funds for nonpublic schools in the form of tax credits and the funding of specific programs; vouchers; schools joining together to reduce costs through shared services; building up individual and family philanthropic endowment funds; and shifting the financial burden of day school education to the community as a whole. Many Jewish national organizations are now focused on the affordability issue, including the AVI CHAI Foundation, the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education (PEJE), the Jewish Community Day School Network (RAVSAK), Yeshiva University's Institute for University–School Partnership, and the Jewish Funders Network. The Orthodox Union has recently created a Task Force on Jewish Education Affordability.

Jerome Chanes writes in this issue that the solution to the crisis lies with the Federation system and its allocation of funds. As he points out, Federations around the country vary in the support they give to day school education. Many Federations are expanding their support of Jewish day schools; some give per-capita amounts to schools in their community according to the number of students; others work to catalyze community endowments dedicated to education, while others do not consider it a priority.

PEJE, using a grant from the AVI CHAI Foundation, is partnering with Jewish institutions in Baltimore and Los Angeles, and is in discussion with UJA-Federation of New York to work with twenty schools to build endowments that will pay at least $20,000 per student. Day schools around the country are receiving training to raise funds for endowments. The aim is for the schools to develop their own capacity to raise endowment funds and to obtain matching grants from outside the parent body. Schools well realize that if tuition scholarships are left to be paid solely by full-tuition parents, this will just push more families into the scholarship pool as tuition is raised.

We need to raise funds outside the parent pool and extend the responsibility for bearing the costs of day school education to the whole community. As such, schools are reaching out to alumni and local families, and synagogues are setting up programs to award supplementary scholarships. Foundation grants have also been awarded to schools to provide scholarships to middle-class families—often large families—who are struggling to pay multiple tuitions, but who do not qualify for financial aid. Other grants focus on improving programs within day schools for students with special learning needs.

... to ensure that no family be prevented from choosing a day school education for their children for financial reasons.

Among different efforts to reduce the costs of day school education, there are also plans to create lower-cost day schools that charge less tuition. One method is to use parent volunteers for many administrative functions. Another approach is to use online learning. Proponents of this strategy are aware that cutting services and costs entails the risk that the educational product will no longer be considered satisfactory to parents, and therefore they will lose students, especially those who have special needs of different sorts.

The aim of all these strategies is to ensure that no family be prevented from choosing a day school education for their children for financial reasons. It is nevertheless the case that some families are turning to public schools and home schooling because of economic considerations. Charter schools add a new aspect to the mix. There are now a number of Hebrew language charter schools in different parts of the country (including one, the Shalom Academy, projected to open in the fall in Englewood, New Jersey, although now apparently it will not open until the fall of 2012).These are proving attractive to some Orthodox parents, who are planning to supplement the Hebrew-based curriculum with religious instruction on their own initiative. Critics rightly point out the serious differences between what the Hebrew language charter schools can provide "Jewishly" and a day school education. The complexity and deeply felt anxiety around these issues have led us to include in this *JOFA Journal* the perspective of an Orthodox mother who is planning to send her children to the new charter

school in Englewood, as well as a *d'var Torah* by Shmuel Herzfeld, a congregational rabbi from Washington, DC, who expresses his strong concern about the potential loss of Jewish content and spirit in alternative forms of education, and explores some of the issues to be considered by parents looking at charter schools as an educational alternative.

Although we are including only a few perspectives on the important issue of day school affordability and reducing the tuition burden, we hope that this section will stimulate discussion and understanding. May our commitment to Jewish education for all our children lead to the best choices on the part of communities, schools, and families as to the nature of that education, and the best methods of making that education available to all our children.

Perspectives on Education in American Orthodoxy Today

By Jerome A. Chanes

JOFA Journal readers will look at a general overview of education in the American Orthodox Jewish community today for an understanding of gender issues. The situation is mixed. The good news is that, in an increasing number of schools, day school leadership is in the hands of women. A substantial pool of highly talented women is now being recognized and employed. Education for adult women, once a stepchild in the Orthodox world, is now a reality in many communities. Indeed, adaptation of the traditional Jewish model of education, the *beit midrash* model, has become more widespread, because of its successful use by New York's Drisha Institute, a pioneering vehicle for sophisticated Jewish text study by women.

Gender pressures in Orthodox education continue to present themselves in a variety of forms. In many communities, there is a perception that coeducation in day schools is on the decline. This perception is fueled by the highly visible and vocal *haredi* community, which views "separate but equal"—and often "separate and entirely unequal"—as optimal. Even though the perception of an attack on coeducation in the modern Orthodox community is not supported by data, the perception is there. Additionally, gender pressures include unequal compensation of male and female teachers, lack of parity in some schools in the allocation of resources between boys and girls, and lingering stereotypes about gender roles for male and female students.

In my opinion, however, the major problem facing Jewish education today is the economic one. The education of our children, boys and girls, depends on the strength and expansion of the day school system. The remainder of this piece will focus on current economic factors affecting day school education in the United States.

The Basic Question: Who Pays for Jewish Education?

Middle-class Orthodox parents find themselves increasingly stuck between the Scylla of rising day school tuitions and the Charybdis of declining real-dollar income. Add to this the continuing controversy surrounding the commitment to Jewish education by the Federation system around the country, an issue that has been with the Jewish community for decades.

Federation campaign stagnation is not the only cause for the dearth of support for Jewish education by the Jewish communal system. In fact, there is a continuing controversy about the level of commitment on the part of the Federation system to Jewish education at all. Particularly with respect to Orthodox day school tuitions, the question is why Federations should subsidize these schools when the money could and, arguably, should be used to help the needy—especially when we are in the midst of a recession; and whether the commonweal is truly enhanced by supporting institutions that, in large measure, support the most insular parts of the community. As one Federation director put it, "Many of those who are most vulnerable—both in terms of financial need and in terms of paucity of Jewish content—lie outside the Orthodox community." The reality of nonfunding, though, is that non-Orthodox schools suffer too, as when the Conservative Solomon Schechter high school in northern New Jersey was forced to close three years ago.

Additionally, financial pressures come from *within* the education arena: support of supplementary schools, child care, camping and other forms of informal education and adult education all tug at the Jewish communal elbow for attention and support.

These two challenges—the stagnation of Federation campaigns and the very real controversy over whether hard-won dollars should be used to underwrite Jewish education—create economic pressures that are particularly intense within the Orthodox community at a time when many families are suffering from the current economic decline.

Long ago, the Orthodox community established two related norms for education: First, day school education is non-negotiable for Orthodox Jews. Second, Jewish education is, and has been for decades, a matter of *right* for every Jewish child, male and female. Today, many Orthodox families are paying $20,000 to $30,000 or more in tuition per child. Consider the possible implications of this financial burden.

First, Orthodox families may be forced to limit the number of children they have.

Second, a small number of families will retreat from

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the day school—not to public schools, but to charter schools and to home-schooling and tutoring.

Third, day schools will reduce faculty pay, increase class size, and eliminate "discretionary" education (the creative arts, gym) that enriches a curriculum.

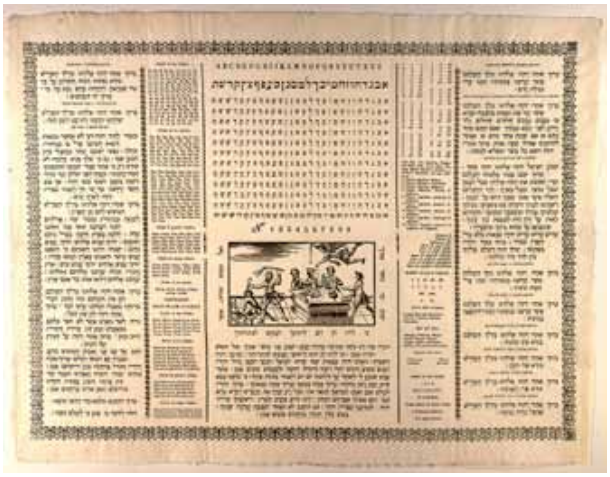
It may be that the only schools that will manage to keep the financial lid on a boiling pot will do so by finding philanthropists to pay the bill. The day-school tuition crunch could very well be alleviated by philanthropic resources.

In recent years, American mega-donors, represented by a handful of foundations, have engaged Jewish education with a vengeance; they are funding research, demonstration projects, and pilot programs. The single greatest—indeed, revolutionary—change in American Jewish life is the growth and impact of Jewish family foundations. Steven Bayme, the director of the American Jewish Committee's Contemporary Jewish Life Department, asserts that mega-donor initiatives have nothing less than a "normative impact" on the Jewish community. The activities of mega-donors, says Bayme, constitute "a powerful statement that there is no greater priority in the Jewish community than the funding of Jewish education. This represents an unprecedented shift in philanthropic norms, and has in effect created a new agenda for American Jews." Donors have begun having their own say on issues dear to them—including, in some cases, Jewish education—and, in response, Federations are creating "Federation foundations," or Federation endowment funds designed to give the donors a voice.

In my opinion, the answer to the economic pressures of the day school system is not the philanthropist or the voucher. Vouchers—however fashionable at present—will never provide very much money, in any case. Many large donations from individuals or families come with strings attached. The answer to the tuition crunch and other economic pressures on Orthodox education needs to come from the Federations. The question of support by the Federation system—the network of associations responsible for most local communal allocations—is the real question.

Many Federations have committed to Jewish education in a serious way. Examples include the $300 million matching campaign awarded two years ago to the UJA-Federation of New York to support Jewish education, and similar initiatives in Los Angeles and MetroWest, New Jersey. Notwithstanding the new focus on Jewish education, however, Federations in many communities continue to raise arguments against funding Orthodox schools.

Basically, it is a question of priorities: Is Orthodox Jewish education discretionary, or is it a necessity? The Federation system, more than a century old, continues with many of its old litanies: (a) "It's not healthy to segregate"—a variation on the "insular" theme, supporting schools that may not be participating fully in the life of the community. (b) Public schools can fulfill the needs of our children. Indeed, for generations this was the Federation ideal: The Federation leadership was traditionally committed to a different vision of Jewish life—not to this "religion stuff," which for decades was not taken seriously; theirs was a classic vision that involved doing good for others. These, of course, are arguments coming out of a universalist ethic of the past: Doing good, to be sure, is a good thing—but it is not clear that the issue is that of the stark alternative: fund the day school, or fund the soup kitchen.



Aleph Bet chart intended for use in classroom. Livorno, Italy 1846

Courtesy of The Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary

It might well be worthwhile and legitimate, perhaps, rather than questioning whether to fund Orthodox schools, when evaluating funding requests, that the Federations ask questions about the quality of the education provided, the religious ideology, and commitment to Israel.

The bigger answer, of course, is for the Federations to look seriously at re-allocations: moving funds from less essential programs—and perhaps some for Israel—to Jewish education. But this is anathema to many within the Federations. The Federation model, one of consensus, does not lend itself to visionary approaches. Family foundations and Federation endowment funds go only so far without a consideration of the issue of reallocations by the Federations. The reality is that if the Federations do not "step up to the plate," day schools will continue to remain on their own, or be limited to seeking out philanthropic angels. As always, it is a question of communal priorities.

***Jerome A. Chanes** is the author of four books on Jewish communal affairs, including* A Dark Side of History: Antisemitism Through the Ages. *Forthcoming is* The Future of American Judaism, *a volume in the Trinity/Columbia University Press series, "The Future of American Religion."*

Why I Will Send My Children to a Charter School

Anonymous

First of all: Just because I am "pro-charter school" in no way means that I am anti-day school education. I have had children in various northern New Jersey Orthodox day schools for the past seven years, and I definitely see the benefits of a formal yeshiva or day school education. That being said, my husband and I have chosen to enroll our children in Shalom Academy—a charter school in Englewood, New Jersey that was to open in September 2011 but will probably now open in September 2012. This was in no way an easy decision for us, and we have faced criticism from both family and friends.

Several main factors influenced our decision to send our children to Shalom Academy—and the major one was financial. My husband I both work—in fact, I have both a full-time and a part-time job. We own a home that is priced well within our means. I drive a leased minivan, and my husband drives a car far older than I would like to admit. We do not go away for Pesah or Sukkot and go no farther than the beach for summer vacations. I work every weekend and holiday to lower our child-care costs; my children go to a "bare bones" camp only because I am at work and need child care; "haute couture" to my kids is Target. Despite living so frugally, we cannot even begin to cover our tuition bill, and every year we have to apply for financial aid. It is impossible to maintain one's dignity during this process, which is often downright heartbreaking. I hate the guilty feeling that I get when I want to splurge on something small, like a weekend away that my children would love and that sometimes we just need, but agonize over spending extra money when I am asking for charity from their schools.

We are going to have to be extra diligent in making sure that our kids have supplemental religious education and truly reinforce it at home.

Another major factor for us in choosing a charter school is the response to special needs children in the day school system. Two of our four children have mild "special needs," requiring a little extra learning help and some occupational and speech therapy. In response to these needs, we were asked by one day school to hire a "shadow" for one child at the additional cost of $900 a month; another school gave us the "option" of placing our child in the extra support program at the cost of an additional $12,000 a year or accepting that she might be unable to successfully complete the school year. I do understand that the extra resources required to help children who have greater needs than their peers is costly, but to charge a parent an additional tuition to meet these needs is unreasonable.

For the past three years, one of my children has been in public school to be able to receive additional support services, and I can see how he has benefited from the district-wide special services. I have come to recognize that if my children can receive the special services they are entitled to by law while still attending a Hebrew immersion program, without forcing us to shoulder the cost of a day school tuition as well as the additional cost of their services, I simply cannot refuse this option.

Another small factor for us, though not a major one, is the effect of school hours and the day school calendar on our professional lives and responsibilities. Most employees receive two to three weeks of vacation a year. With this time, we are expected to be home for all the Jewish holidays, *hol hamo'ed*, Christmas, New Year's Day, winter vacation, and a bunch of randomly selected dates set aside for teachers' professional development days. Two to three weeks' vacation doesn't even come close to covering all those days, and we are left with no vacation days for the rest of the year. Now you could say, "Well, then, take vacation when the kids are off for *hol hamo'ed*." Sadly, I do not have the luxury of taking twelve days off in one month (which is what I would need to do to accommodate the *hagim* and a vacation during Elul). Indeed, why isn't there school on *hol hamo'ed* anymore? When I went to yeshiva, we went to school on *hol hamo'ed* Sukkot; we all ate in the sukkah and went on trips, and more time was not lost from the school calendar.

We haven't publicized our decision to send our children to Shalom Academy, mainly because of all the (for lack of a better term) "trash talk" from the community, including the day school parents and administration. The question that I hear most is: How can you put a price on a Jewish education? True, you cannot put a price on educating your children—and we want nothing more for our children than to grow up with strong roots in their faith. But even though our children are getting this strong background at school now, unfortunately I am not sure if it is being reinforced at home.

The main reason that I question our ability to reinforce Jewish education and values at home is because to pay for this education, for most of the school week my children are being cared for by our wonderful and loving—but not Jewish—babysitter. Unfortunately, there are some weeks during which I will not see my children for several days at a time, and my husband will only see them off in the morning and tuck them in at night. We work right up until the last minute before Shabbat and the holidays, and are so stressed by everything that we have to do that sometimes my full heart isn't into Shabbat and *yom tov*, and I know that my children sense it. To be honest, I get downright hostile every September between having

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to juggle holiday preparations and covering child care on all the days off from school, especially every *erev hag*.

So, if you had the choice to cut back on your hours a little, be at home a couple of times a week when your children are doing homework, and not have to approach a holiday with a mix of resentment and exhaustion coming off a "work bender," what would you choose? Yes, we are taking a step into the unknown, and we are going to have to be extra diligent in making sure that our kids have supplemental religious education and truly reinforce it at home—but at least we will be able to be there to do it.

This is a very personal and difficult decision for every family. I hope that the community understands that the charter school was not started to undermine the yeshiva or day school system, but rather to offer a choice to people who literally cannot keep afloat with the cost of day school education or have kids for whom day school is not an option for educational reasons. It is a choice that we have made and are happy with—and hey, at least, you won't have to subsidize our financial aid anymore.

The writer of this piece has chosen to remain anonymous so as not to arouse strong feelings in her community.

Charter School or Day School?

By Rabbi Shmuel Herzfeld

A Hebrew-language public charter school called the Shalom Academy is opening in Englewood, New Jersey. There are already a number of Hebrew-language charter schools in the country, but this will be the first one in an area with a large number of Jewish day school students. Many day school parents will now be able to choose between sending their children to day schools that they cannot afford and enrolling their child in an attractive, free Hebrew-language school.

For many families, this difficult choice will be related to another dilemma that many Orthodox families are facing. It is an issue that strikes at the core of the future survival of Jews in America. Young, committed Orthodox Jewish families are saying to themselves every day: We want to have a large Jewish family, because it is a mitzvah to be fruitful and multiply and settle the earth; but we also can't afford it. We make respectable salaries—but we can't cover day school tuition.

Should people opt out of the day school model so that they can have more children? Or should people have fewer children and provide their children with their vision of an ideal Jewish education?

I think these issues are weighing heavily on families who would ordinarily never consider taking their children out of a Jewish day school and would ordinarily have much larger families. The public charter school model presents an attractive alternative to the yoke of high tuitions.

This is also why the Shalom Academy is seen by many as a great threat to the community. It has been accused by supporters of Jewish day schools of marketing itself as a viable alternative to day schools, as an attempt to draw people to the school who otherwise might attend Jewish day schools. This development has caused some faithful followers of the day school model to question the charter school model and nervously suggest that the development of Hebrew-language charter schools bodes ill for day schools.

It should be noted that not all Hebrew language charter schools are the same. However, it still seems fair to raise the question: Is it time for the Orthodox Jewish community to accept that the day school model is not the only paradigm of how we should raise and educate our children? Is the public charter school model a better paradigm, or an alternative one?

The public charter school model presents an attractive alternative to the yoke of high tuitions.

For every family and every student, this is a personal decision that requires a personal answer. It is not fair to give one answer for the whole community. For many people, the day school model would work really well, were it not for the high cost of tuition. Others, regardless of the tuition costs, feel that the day school model simply does not work for their family.

I want to make two general points about this whole debate that I hope will help both those families that are struggling with this question and our entire community.

The last days of Pesah celebrate the occasion of the splitting of the sea. The sea was split on the seventh day of Pesah. This act is known as *keri'at yam suf*, and it is considered the most important miracle that God ever performed for the Jewish people.

Rabbi Shmuel Borensztain, the author of the *Shem Mishmuel*, asked a question about this in the name of his father, Rabbi Avraham Borensztain, the author of the *Avnei Nezer*.[1] He asked: Why were the Jewish people not given any particular mitzvah to engage in prior to the

[1] I first saw this citation to the first two *rebbes* of the Sochatover dynasty after hearing it referenced in a *shi'ur* by Rabbi Baruch Simon, *rosh yeshiva* at Yeshiva University.

splitting of the sea? We know that when the Jewish people left Egypt there was a specific mitzvah associated with it—namely, the paschal lamb and the eating of matzah. These *mitzvot* allowed the Jewish people to have the merit necessary to be redeemed in a miraculous manner. So why was no mitzvah recorded with respect to the splitting of the sea? In fact, at first glance, the seventh day of Pesah seems uniquely bereft of any *mitzvot*. It is the only holiday when the blessing of *sheheheyanu* is not even recited!

According to the *Shem Mishmuel*, there *is* a mitzvah associated with the splitting of the sea; it is the mitzvah of being *moser nefesh*, dedicating one's life *in toto* to service of *Hashem*. The Jewish people walked into the sea up until their nostrils, believing fully that the sea would eventually split. They were ready to sacrifice their entire lives in order to achieve redemption. This act of being *moser nefesh* is a great mitzvah, and I think it is related to why there is no *sheheheyanu* on the last days of Pesah. The blessing of *sheheheyanu i*s not said over something that is difficult or painful, only over something that is joyous.

When I think about parents who send their children to day schools, I am in awe of their *mesirat nefesh*. In most families, both parents must work very hard at demanding jobs. Both parents must be aggressive in trying to secure as much money as possible. And the money is all going to a Jewish education, not for frivolous consumption.

This *mesirat nefesh* of our community is inspiring to see, and also to live. And I believe that children see and appreciate the *mesirat nefesh* of their parents. This total and central focus and dedication is what is required for a successful transmission of Torah from one generation to the next. One of the most important things about providing our children with a Jewish day school education is that it shows the children how their parents prioritize the value of a Jewish education. It is the central motivating factor of many of our lives.

A day school model is *not* the only model, however; there are other ways in which one can give their children a proper Jewish education. Many parents deeply and successfully commit to a Jewish education and do not follow the day school model. In my view, the common denominator is that an educational experience that comes with *mesirat nefesh* of the parents is the only model. Only parents who make Torah first and foremost in their child's life will be able to transmit the full breadth of Torah successfully. This can be done in a non–day school environment, but only if one's life takes on that same totality of focus on the transmission of Torah values.

That will be one of the main challenges of those who opt out of the day school paradigm: to show their children that they are being *moser nefesh* for the sake of a Jewish education. (The same challenge also exists for parents of day school children, but in a different way.) If a Hebrew-language charter school becomes a model with which people can take the easy way out of an enhanced Jewish education, then future generations of children will opt out. But if it becomes an alternative model with parents and children who are *moser nefesh* for Jewish education, dedicated to Torah, and fully engaged in the totality of Judaism, then it may succeed.

This leads me to my second point: There is another major advantage to the day school model. It is a model that encompasses a totality of life. Instilling a proper Jewish education in our children is not just about making sure that they gain technical skills and knowledge of Hebrew. It is about giving them a total and infinite love of Torah. We must never replace a total immersion in every aspect of Jewish spiritual life with an education that focuses on the more technical aspects of Jewish education.

Instilling a proper Jewish education in our children is not just making sure that they gain technical skills and knowledge of Hebrew.

This too is a lesson we learn from *keri'at yam suf*. After the splitting of the sea, the Torah tells us (Exodus 18:1) that when Yitro, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard what God had done for Moshe and the Jewish people, he traveled from his home in Midian and joined the Jewish people in the desert. What did Yitro hear? Rashi explains that Yitro heard about two things: *keri'at yam suf* and *milhemet Amalek*, the war against Amalek.

The problem with this approach is that after Yitro arrives in the presence of Moshe, the Torah says (Exodus 18:8) that Moshe told his father-in-law all that *Hashem* had done for the Jewish people. Thus, our commentators ask: If Yitro already knew about the splitting of the sea, as this was why he traveled to Moshe in the first place, then why did he need to hear from Moshe about the splitting of the sea a second time?[2]

The *Noam Elimelech* (the hasidic rabbi Elimelekh of Lyzhansk, 1717–1787), explains that even though Yitro knew the facts intellectually, he still needed to hear them from Moshe himself—it was through his proximity to Moshe that he became spiritually inspired.

One cannot compare hearing something from a spiritual mentor to hearing it in an academic setting. Even though Yitro had known about the splitting of the sea, he needed to travel and hear it directly from Moshe to arouse his own spirituality. In the same way, just learning the "facts" of Judaism is not sufficient. It is necessary to always have a spiritual mentor who can transmit the facts in an experiential manner.

The setting and context of our lives is so fundamental

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[2] Again, I am indebted to the *shi'ur* of Rabbi Baruch Simon for these references.

Charter School or Day School? *continued from page 31*

to the education we are trying to give our children. When we choose a day school model, we are not just choosing a curriculum; we are also choosing a life-style and a community that revolves around Torah and its teachings. If parents choose a charter school model, then they also need to choose a manner of spiritually supplementing their children's education. By definition, a charter school is legally not permitted to teach spiritual Judaism. Therefore, parents need to figure out how to bridge that important gap. It can be done, but only with a sustained and conscious effort on the part of the parents.

Thus, when people send their children to a day school, in addition to the intellectual knowledge they gain, these are two additional aspects of their lives that people are committing to: *mesirat nefesh* on the part of the parents for a Jewish education and immersion in a spiritual life under the tutelage of spiritual mentors. For many people who are extremely serious about their love of Torah, the day school model is not working and they are planning on a switch to a charter school. These sincere parents must keep these two values at the forefront of their mind and at the center of their mission.

Our Torah commands us to recite the *Shema* in the morning and in the evening. The *Shema* begins with the commandment of *veshinantam levanekha,* you must teach your children, and ends with the paragraph about God leading us out of Egypt. If we want to successfully educate our children, we must remember to keep in mind these lessons of *keri'at yam suf*.

Above all, I want to emphasize what Rambam (*Pirkei Avot* 5:4) teaches in his discussion of *keri'at yam suf*. In his opinion, the Jewish people did not cross from one side of the sea to the other, but rather circled back to the same side: "The paths [of the tribes] were designed as rainbows, one within the other." So too, with respect to receiving a proper Jewish education, as a community we must acknowledge that there are different paths that lead to the same place, and each family must struggle to decide on the proper path for itself.

***Shmuel Herzfeld** has been rabbi of Ohev Sholom–The National Synagogue in Washington, DC since 2004. This article was adapted from a* d'var Torah *given at Ohev Sholom–The National Synagogue on the seventh day of Pesah 2011.*

JOFA Community Engagement 2011

The JOFA Campus Fellowship: Conversations on College Campuses and Leadership Development

In the 2010-2011 academic year, the seven JOFA Campus Fellows organized fifteen programs on their campuses. The programs reflect a wide diversity of what Orthodox feminism means to different women and different campuses. Examples include: a Muslim-Jewish women's discussion regarding women's roles, a lunch seminar on Jewish women's education in nineteenth-century Russia, a text study of the sources around women reading Torah, and a women's *tefillah* group for Shabbat morning *davening*.

JOFA Campus Fellow Adina Goldberger at a program at Columbia Hillel, with Ronnie Becher, speaker on "Women and Prayer in a Traditional Community"

Judy Heicklen, JOFA's President, in leadership seminar with JOFA Fellows Donna Iken, Rachel Schwartz, Bernie Hodkin, and Peninah Feldman.

In Your Community: Previewing *A Daughter's Recitation of Kaddish*

Sara Wolkenfeld teaches at Congregation Bais Abraham, St. Louis, MO

Sara Wolkenfeld teaches at Ohr Torah Congregation, Skokie, IL

This May, JOFA previewed the Ta Shma Halakhic Source Guide, *A Daughter's Recitation of Kaddish* by Rahel Berkovits, in four communities: Skokie, Illinois; St. Louis, Missouri; Livingston, New Jersey; and Boca Raton, Florida. We thank these communities for their warm welcome and enthusiastic response to the program.

Two excellent teachers and scholars, Sara Wolkenfeld (curently a JLIC co-director at Princeton) and Lynn Kaye (former Assistant Congregational Leader at Congregation Shearith Israel, the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York) taught these sessions. The attendees were captivated, asking a wide variety of thoughtful questions. Clearly this topic is a very emotional and powerful one in Jewish lives.

Sara Wolkenfeld teaches at home of JOFA Board Member, Hinda Bramnick, Boca Raton, FL

Lynn Kaye teaches at private home in Livingston, NJ

Kallah Teacher Training

This March we held our second *Demystifying Sex and Teaching Halakha: A* Kallah *Teacher's Workshop*. Eighteen *kallah* teachers joined us for a four-day intensive workshop, unique in its emphasis on a broad range of halakhic positions and open and frank discussions on sex. This program was co-sponsored with Yeshivat Chovevei Torah and Yeshivat Maharat.

Kevod HaRav, Kevod HaMorah = Kevod HaTorah

By Roselyn Bell

As this issue of the *JOFA Journal,* focusing on Jewish education, came together, a topic of concern emerged—like an elephant in the room—that cried out for further investigation and analysis. This topic is the disparity in salaries between male and female teachers and heads of school in the day school/yeshiva system.

To be clear, these two categories of school personnel are different in significant ways. The head of a school is a unique position that cannot be compared precisely to the head of another school, as day schools differ widely in size, complexity, socio-economic level of the community, and wealth of major supporters. Within a school, however, many of the teachers have roughly the same job description and hours, with certain specialties—such as coaching a team or teaching children with special needs—involving some extra remuneration. Teachers' salaries, presumably, come from one budget line that covers faculty compensation. However, within the *limmudei kodesh* faculty, it would seem (as we have no published data to present at this time) that *rebbe'im* and *morot* (female teachers) are compensated on different scales, even though they have roughly the same job description: teaching Torah to children in a classroom for equal numbers of hours a day.

This is not to say that the attainment of *semikha* should not be valued and compensated for, but because this degree is not available to Orthodox women teachers, their post-baccalaureate study should be evaluated on the same scale of years of higher education plus teaching experience as their male colleagues' study in yeshiva. Advanced education at institutions such as the three-year Drisha Scholars Circle, the Stern College Graduate Program in Advanced Talmudic Studies (GPATS), Yeshivat Maharat, or the Pardes Educators Program in Jerusalem; post-BA degrees in Jewish studies; or study at women's seminaries should be rewarded on a scale that looks at years and depth of study—not on scales that automatically start *rebbe'im* at a higher salary level than *morot*.

A Call for Data from the Day Schools

Because, to the best of our knowledge, there are no published data on teachers' salaries in Jewish day schools, we cannot be sure that this inequity exists. Therefore, we are calling on the audience of the *JOFA Journal,* in their capacities as board members, administrative personnel, or concerned parents of day school students, to find out what salary policies exist within their schools and report the results to the JOFA office (see box on next page).

Although it is understandable that schools would want to keep their salary scales confidential, creating some transparency on the overall guidelines would promote a communal good. It may become evident that some or many schools do not have fixed teacher salary scale policies and that every teacher negotiates for himself or herself—which is not the healthiest of situations.

We do, however, have data about the relative compensation of male and female heads of school from a study done by Marvin Schick for the AVI CHAI Foundation in August 2007, titled *A Survey of Day School Principals in the United States*. That study found that "[g]ender is a powerful factor in salary determinations, with women principals being paid significantly below what men earn." The data were based on 380 responses to a questionnaire (with a response rate of 75 percent), of which 42.5 percent of the principals said they were in Orthodox schools, while about 12 percent identified their school as belonging to the "yeshiva world." Principals of Solomon Schechter, Reform, and community (nondenominational) schools comprised the remaining 57.5 percent. Even with the survey group skewed to the "modern" end of the spectrum, the survey found the following disparities among heads of school:

> In the first year of service at their current school, no men earned below $60,000, while 10% of the women did. At the other end of the pay scale, there were men who earned above $180,000 in their first year, but no women. … For principals who have served between 5 [and] 10 years at their present school, one-quarter of the women were paid above $120,000, while for men the figure is close to 60%. A statistical analysis of the data demonstrates that there is a significant gender difference at $p < .05$.[1]

If so wide a differential exists at the head-of-school level, particularly in a survey sample weighted heavily toward the modern end of the spectrum, then one might expect that the salary spread between male and female *limmudei kodesh* teachers would be even greater. To prove this, however, we need data.

Parsonage and Other Benefits

Compensation for teachers in Jewish day schools is usually constructed as a package that includes both outright salary and additional benefits, some of which may be worth as much as the stated salary. Among the benefits sometimes provided are babysitting for infants and young children of teachers, free tuition at the school for children of faculty, and parsonage. This last benefit, parsonage, is a tax exemption offered in the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 (Section 107), to any "minister of the gospel" or rabbi, father, or imam. This tax benefit is generally made available to male but not female *limmudei kodesh* teachers, because the former are ordained but the latter are ineligible for ordination.

There has been considerable discussion in the legal literature as to the scope of the parsonage exemption and

[1] For the full statistical comparison of salary, years in school, and gender, see Marvin Schick, *A Survey of Day School Principals in the United States* (New York: AVI CHAI Foundation, 2007), p. 21.

A Call for Data

Does the day school or yeshiva with which you are associated have an established teacher compensation scale? Are there formal increments of salary for years of study and for years of teaching experience? Do men and women start at the same point on this scale? Are men and women compensated equally for the same job function, taking into account years of study and experience?

Do salary packages include benefits such as free tuition for children of teachers and parsonage benefits where applicable? Are these benefits made available equally to male and female teachers who have the same roles in the school?

If you have data on these issues, please convey them to the JOFA office at 520 8th Avenue, Fourth Floor, New York, NY 10018 or email to jofa@jofa.org or fax them to 212-679-7428. You may omit the name of the school, if necessary, but please include your contact information for follow-up.

who comes within its definition. The IRS does not require ordination per se, but does insist that a minister provide "sacerdotal functions and the conduct of religious worship." Thus, an unordained cantor employed by a congregation would be entitled to parsonage.[2]

Rabbi Michael J. Broyde, professor of law at Emory University Law School and member of the Beth Din of America, has suggested that female Orthodox teachers, despite their lack of ordination or formal certification, could be entitled to parsonage if they are hired to perform "sacerdotal functions." He defines these functions thus:

> [I]f the yeshiva expects a woman teacher to conduct what are core religious services, mandates that this teacher adhere to a specific level of religious conduct in her personal life, and expects this conduct to continue outside school grounds, that woman is engaging in conduct the functional equivalent of ordination. This "licensing" in a ministerial function by her employer is what allows the granting of parsonage, and the corresponding exclusion from gross income.[3]

Broyde specifies that this designation would apply only to "women who teach Judaic studies, supervise prayers, and provide religious counseling of the kind provided by rabbis in the school."[4] To prevent abuse, he suggests that some formal degree or certification of a theological nature (such as completion of the Stern Graduate Program in Advanced Talmudic Studies) might be required of the woman teacher.

The parsonage benefit is not universally recognized as appropriate to the day school setting (see your local attorney or tax advisor), but insofar as it is applicable to some religious studies teachers, it should be available to male and female teachers on an equitable basis.

The "Breadwinner" Argument

Some have argued that male yeshiva teachers (whether or not they have earned the title "rabbi"—and in some cases, unordained male Judaic studies teachers are loosely called "rabbi") deserve to be paid more than female yeshiva teachers because they are the breadwinners of their families. The argument is ludicrous in this day and age, when many *morot* are the sole financial supports of their families, while their husbands study in *kollel*. Moreover, the necessity of the female teachers' salaries to their family's income is especially evident in the current economic climate. The myth of the sole male breadwinner deserves to be demolished.

On this issue, Jewish feminists may make common cause with right-wing traditional teachers. Because the economic fortunes of *haredi* families fall more and more on the shoulders of women, right-wing Orthodox *morot* may be willing to speak out on these bread-and-butter issues.

The "*Kavod*" Issue

Although gender differentials in salary are the most salient matter of fairness to be addressed, a Jewish feminist analysis must raise other, more subtle distinctions as well. In many schools, rabbis are addressed as "Rabbi [Last Name]," whereas female *limmudei kodesh* teachers (unlike, usually, their female secular studies counterparts) are addressed as "Morah [First Name]." Using a first name creates a sense of familiarity, often reflecting the custom in Israeli schools, but having different honorifics for male and female teachers suggests differing relationships of honor and respect. All teachers should be addressed in the same way—either with their title and their first name or their title and their last name.

"*Kavod*" is a hard-to-define and multifaceted concept within the culture of a school. It includes opportunities to expand one's knowledge, to represent the school in public fora, to engage in supervisory roles, and to be given public honors. All of these forms of *kavod* should be equally available to male and female teachers.

When the *kavod* shown to *rebbe'im* and the *kavod* shown to *morot* mirror each other, then the goal of both groups of teachers—to increase the students' appreciation for and giving of *kavod* to the Torah—will be achieved.

Roselyn Bell *is the former publications director of American Jewish Committee and the editor of record of the* Hadassah Magazine Jewish Parenting Book. *She will be taking over as the new editor of the* JOFA Journal *after this issue.*

[2] For a discussion of the legal issues around parsonage, see Michael J. Broyde, "Orthodox Yeshivas, Female Instructors, and the Parsonage Allowance," *Taxation of Exempts* 18:1, 44–48 (July–August 2006). Also see Jacob Lewin, "Orthodox Jewish Women and Eligibility for the Parsonage Exemption," *Cardozo Journal of Law and Gender* 17:139–71 (2010).

[3] Broyde, "Orthodox Yeshivas, Female Instructors, and the Parsonage Allowance," 47.

[4] Michael J. Broyde, "May an Orthodox Yeshiva Day School or High School Provide Parsonage to Women Teaching Judaic Studies," *Ten Da'at* 18:12 (2006).

A Lifetime of Learning

By Rose Landowne

I initially set out to describe the process by which I enrolled in the Drisha Scholars Circle program, spending eight hours each day for three years engaged in dialogue with students half my age who were preparing for careers in Jewish scholarship and service, and to shed light on that experience. But I realized that this story would be incomplete without a description of the path that I have taken through Jewish learning and what it has meant for me.

My first exposure to studying Jewish text *lishma* (for itself) was a series of sessions on Mishnah at the Torah Leadership Seminar, a Yeshiva University initiative that exposed high school students to Jewish learning and practice in an informal camp-like setting. This took place about six months after I had discovered the joys of participating in Shabbat and Jewish life in general, at age 16 at a NCSY *shabbaton* staffed by students of Yeshiva University. At the summer seminar we studied *Berakhot*, and I enjoyed its structured simplicity. I found that I enjoyed this type of learning much more than trying to understand the narratives of *Tanakh*. My mind tends to lead more toward the mathematical than the narrative, toward subjects that have some sense of closure rather than those that remain forever open.

Having attended elementary and high school in the Great Neck public school system, I wanted to increase my Jewish knowledge to more fully participate in the Orthodox community. At Stern College, I enrolled in the introductory program, but after one year, spent a term at Machon Gold in Jerusalem, where a full day of courses was all taught in Hebrew, including some Mishnah, in particular tractates *Yoma* and *Sotah*. I was able to move up to a higher intermediate level at Stern, but in terms of text study, I studied only *humash* for four terms. My other courses were Hebrew language and Jewish history. Jewish studies at Stern were not yet as intensive as they are today.

In 1973, after finishing a master's degree in social work, I found my evenings free. Lincoln Square Synagogue was offering an introductory course in Talmud for women, taught by Professor Judith Hauptman, and I enrolled, along with a group of friends. It was easier for me to find my place in learning in Oral Torah because most women, even those with a yeshiva background, were on the same beginner's level as I was. In courses in *Tanakh*, the other women were already familiar with the stories and were looking for greater depth and more analysis of language. We studied *Masekhet Gittin* of the Babylonian Talmud. Although none of us had the background to prepare material ourselves, we were required to review each week and learn the vocabulary covered for the next class. I enjoyed the process of deciphering the code, and went on to study with Professor Hauptman at the Jewish Theological Seminary, accruing credits but never enrolling in a degree program there.

Advantages of *Hevruta*-Style Learning

When Lincoln Square Synagogue offered summer *Kollel* courses for women, I took the half-day Talmud courses taught there in *hevruta* style. When Rabbi David Silber opened his own program, Drisha, I continued to study Talmud with him in evening courses, on a part-time basis, for many years; at the same time, I was acquiring a master's degree in education from the Bank Street College of Education and teaching young children during the day.

One of the principles on which Bank Street's educational approach is based is that learning must be active to be meaningful and for the material studied to be truly internalized. The traditional *hevruta* style of learning of the *beit midrash* is an example of this type of active learning, where students struggle independently to master the text. To me, it is a much more meaningful method of study than attendance at lecture courses, where the teacher has done all the work and conveys the knowledge verbally to the students. The extra effort of looking up every word and piecing them together as if they are parts of a puzzle gives the student more of a sense of ownership of the text. More of the five senses are involved, as study partners argue with each other to figure out the meanings of the text, and create for themselves a clear understanding of what is meant. Simply put, when more personal effort is expended, one will understand better and retain more.

When my youngest child entered kindergarten, I started spending my mornings at Drisha, studying Talmud with Rabbi Silber as part of the recently opened full-time program. From studying with Rabbi Silber, I came to internalize the idea that to be an educated Jew, it was important to have a broad familiarity with the texts of our tradition. I saw Gemara as one of the primary texts that encompasses the traditional narratives and methodologies of Jewish learning. I spent mornings in the full-time program for about two years. Subsequently, I took part-time intermediate courses at Drisha and courses in *Rishonim* at JTS. After this, I began participating in Drisha's *daf yomi* course and taking Drisha courses in halakha. I found that *daf yomi* enabled me to develop a sense of the flow of talmudic argument. By covering a lot of ground, one gets a feel for the structure of the give-and-take of the arguments. It also helped a lot with my ability to parse the sentence structure of the Aramaic.

Over the years, I participated in full-time study during the summer, spending time at Michlelet Beruria in Jerusalem, Drisha, and the Yeshivat Har Etzion summer program for women in Alon Shvut. In 1999–2000, I had a *hevruta* at Lincoln Square Synagogue with one of the Torah MiTzion fellows. My *hevruta* encouraged me to think about studying Talmud and halakha on a deeper level, suggesting that he could get me the materials for the Israeli *Rabbanut semikha* course, and if I studied the materials, maybe they would let me take their test. In his dreams...

How I Came to the Drisha Scholars Program

In the fall of 2001, when I heard that Devorah Zlochower would be teaching *Hilkhot Nidah* and that Rabbi Moshe Kahn would be teaching the fourth chapter of *Bava Metzia,* I decided to take both courses at Drisha. One was five mornings a week for three-and-a-half hours, and the other was four afternoons a week for three-and-a-half hours. It didn't occur to me at the time that I would be getting myself into a full-time three-year professionally oriented program. I just intended to take those two courses.

We started out on the first day, and I immediately had two *hevrutas*. One was the age of my second daughter, a year or two out of college, the average age for most in the group. The second was even younger, an Israeli student, after National Service but before university. Age was really not a problem. What I may have lacked in quick thinking, I made up for in vocabulary and experience. I was thankful to my *hevruta* partners that as their skills increased, they had the patience to continue studying with me. I became part of the group, and we stuck together throughout the three-year program.

A long day of learning can be quite draining, but one quickly gets into a groove. Some days there is a real sense of flow, while on other days it is harder. As in any yeshiva-style program, there are the occasional *hevruta* problems, extra people needing to be fit in, or other students lacking focus. Although the program is three years long, everyone participates in the same classes together. Therefore, many different levels of ability participate together in classes that involve active give and take. Sometimes it was difficult for each student to feel that she was getting what she needed, with third-year students complaining about the more concrete textual questions of first-year students, and first-year students having to fight to make sure that their questions were answered in class. Sometimes a new student would join, and she would have to become a third participant in a group of two, until someone else would come along. Any group that spends so much time working closely together develops its own culture, and it can be difficult to assimilate new people into the group. These are all issues that, I am sure, come up in any yeshiva setting, but in a group of women, there were sometimes conflicting feelings of how competitive or aggressive we were supposed to be. In the end, most of the difficulties seemed to work themselves out.

Why We Did It

Most of us had ambitions to take on roles in the Jewish community often filled by (male) rabbis. One student did an internship at an Orthodox synagogue and discovered that she did not like being on call for congregants' needs all the time, although she did enjoy giving *divrei Torah*. Another was hired after graduation as a Hillel director. One taught in a Jewish high school. Another has enrolled in medical school after some years teaching Jewish high school Talmud courses. Some teach at Drisha. Although the word was out that some Drisha Scholars Circle graduates were paid an equivalent salary to recently ordained rabbis, all in all the Drisha certificate did not easily open doors for employment in the Jewish community. If the certificate had been a master's or doctoral degree, perhaps it would have been more useful in a practical way.

For myself, the years I spent at Drisha have been very worthwhile. I have a fluency in Jewish textual materials that is useful to me in my everyday life. Although I am still struggling to complete the study of *Tanakh* with another *hevruta*, I feel that my experiences with Talmud have enabled me to feel comfortable in classes on every level and have given me some respect in the synagogue community—as evidenced by the fact that a couple of years ago, I was appointed as the first female member of the Ritual Committee in our synagogue. The fact that I have the certificate from Drisha, as well as the familiarity with halakhic issues, the vocabulary, and the points of reference, gives me a sense that I can speak out on issues in the synagogue, and can expect the other members of the committee to take my comments seriously.

Learning must be active to be meaningful and for the material studied to be truly internalized.

As a woman, sometimes I see areas of halakha in which there may appear to others to be a lack of fairness. However, knowing the process and discussions that led to the formulation of the *halakhot* enables me to have an understanding of the social forces in effect at the times they were formulated; as a result, I sometimes find these things less upsetting. In general, I am not the kind of person who finds her main source of spirituality in talking to God through prayer or saying *Tehillim*. Rather, I find it in study, in working on understanding God's will through the texts which have been passed down through the generations.

Although I haven't gone on to fame and fortune in Jewish communal service, I feel competent to study Jewish texts independently with my current *hevruta*, a Drisha graduate older than myself, who completed the program two years after I did. In the five years we have been studying together daily, we have completed the study of two *masekhtot*, and are about forty pages into our third. I often meet people who have been observant for about the same forty years that I have, but who still consider themselves beginners in Jewish study and feel that they will never catch up to the learning of even their own children. I am glad to state that I feel I have overcome that barrier. I feel capable of participating in the discussion, knowing that I possess the requisite body of knowledge.

***Rose Landowne** is a 2004 graduate of the Drisha Scholars Circle.*

Learning and Teaching on Campus—Where Are the Women?

By Michal Dicker

There is a strong sense of "Jewishness" in the air at Barnard College/Columbia University. Whether one is strolling down College Walk or eating lunch in the cafeteria, the sight of familiar faces is a constant reminder of the Jewish campus community. At the Kraft Center, which houses the Columbia/Barnard Hillel, the *beit midrash* is a hub of activity, filled with students learning in their private *havrutot*, preparing to participate in *shi'urim*, or to present their own.

From an equal-opportunity gender perspective, the Columbia/Barnard Orthodox programming meets all expectations: myriad opportunities are available to both female and male students to partake in *talmud Torah*. Learning options are offered on a wide range of levels, in both single-sex and coed environments. Seemingly, those who aspire to advance women's learning and increase women's participation should be thrilled with the potential that exists for women's learning.

As exciting as the framework is—one in which women are entitled to study *Tanakh* and Gemara alongside their male peers, and one in which women and men are taught by one another—I am surprised at the unbalanced ratio of women to men who take initiative in the *beit midrash*. At a university that is 60 percent female, and consequently, hosts a Jewish community that contains far more women than men, it is intriguing that the majority of student-presented *shi'urim* are led by male, as opposed to female, students.

Among the pool of learned Orthodox students in the community, it would seem that there are as many knowledgeable women as men, if not more. I myself have taken advantage of the opportunities for female leadership, and am currently co-chair of the daily halakha program at *minyan*. However, with regard to *beit midrash* activities, the only formal *shi'ur* that I have presented so far has been in the context of a *Shi'ur* by Your Peers (S.B.Y.P.), a program in which the college community is invited to attend different presentations on the individual's topic of choice. Unlike the more formal student-led *shi'urim*, the number of male and female students who volunteer to speak at S.B.Y.P. is about the same. In my case, I felt comfortable committing to present at S.B.Y.P. rather than presenting a series of *shi'urim*, because a one-time Friday night *shi'ur* is both a less involved and a less time-consuming endeavor. I have to wonder whether this is the reason that many other women are not volunteering to lead more regular *shi'urim*, as well.

My Orthodox female friends at Barnard and Columbia all exude confidence and poise—both in the classroom and in social contexts—and possess plenty of brains to go around. Yet lately, I have become skeptical as to whether this multi-talented group of women is as confident about their Judaic textual abilities as their male contemporaries, and if not, whether their feelings are legitimate. These are women who have gone to the same coed day schools as the learned men of the Columbia Orthodox community, or have gone to single-sex schools that are on par with regard to high-level Judaic learning. Their point of divergence was their year in Israel where, although they did not study together, they all attended prestigious learning institutions.

It is not novel to say that there is much room for improvement with regard to the level of women's textual learning, and the opportunities available to women for such advancement. Many articles have been written on the topic, and numerous solutions have been proposed. I realize that over time, the creation of institutions of higher learning for women has improved the quality of women's education and their overall knowledge base. Further, I am well aware that things don't change overnight, but rather are part of a process. I also appreciate that, at Columbia/Barnard, the level of female participation in Orthodox synagogue and *beit midrash* activities has also increased over the years. Nevertheless, I am still confused as to why, quantitatively, student-led female and male teaching initiatives do not even out.

My intent is not to offer a solution, but rather to suggest additional reasons that may impede women from aspiring to the same leadership positions in the *beit midrash* as their male counterparts. I do not believe it is because of the specific *sugyot* that all-female institutions teach, or the style in which the women learn. Rather, I would attribute the lack of female initiative to women's overwhelming lack of confidence about their depth of Jewish knowledge and textual skills (despite their otherwise confident demeanor). There will always be a select group of women who spend the same number of hours a day "*hevruta*-ing" as do men who attended an elite yeshiva. This sort of woman on campus may have reached the same level of learning as the men. However, I am not speaking about this small group, but rather about the women who know (or after their year in Israel, are dismayed to discover) that they did not advance to the same level of learning as their male contemporaries.

Whereas the majority of men's *yeshivot* have a talmud-oriented curriculum, most of the women's institutions place their focus on *Tanakh*, *Makhshevet Yisrael*, and *hashkafa*. Even those that are known for their strong Talmud programs host non-academic activities that detract from the overall seriousness of the learning environment, as well as from the amount of time that students are able to spend in the *beit midrash*. This disparity in treatment is even reflected in calling the women's advanced learning institutions "*midrashot*," in contrast to "*yeshivot*," for men. Although many aspects unique to the women's programs are positive, it is Talmud that tends to be valued more highly in the Judaic studies arena, because it constitutes the underpinnings for halakhic decision making. By providing women with less Talmud education, coupled with programming

that deviates from the standard men's learning routine, I believe that the women are disadvantaged during their year in Israel. As a result, when they return from Israel, many are inhibited from taking learning/teaching initiatives within the elite group of ritual, spiritual, and educational leaders on campus and in their communities. Even though the women may be more learned in *Tanakh* than the men, they still feel inferior to their male peers with regard to their Jewish knowledge base and opt for the seemingly logical choice—namely that those most qualified (who are most often male)—should occupy teaching and leadership positions.

Despite the "issues" with women's advanced Judaic education, and the reality that some women may not be as knowledgeable as their male contemporaries, it is important to remember that many women on campus still know a lot. They have taken advantage of the learning opportunities available to them. Along with many girls my age, I have attended Drisha winter programs, have been on the MachHach Ba'aretz *Hesder* track, and on the Torah v'Avodah Institute (TVI) Beit Midrash track, and have spent large chunks of summers learning and teaching in the Camp Moshava Indian Orchard Beit Midrash Program. With my friends in Manhattan, we continue to *shi'ur*-hop, and choose among the many *shi'urim* and *yemei iyyun* offered at Columbia/Barnard, YU, Stern, NYU, and Drisha. We have the luxury of attending whatever catches our fancy!

With these opportunities in mind, I exhort the women of my generation, regardless of their level of education, to continue to learn and teach in any way that they are able. If we women make the decision to take the initiative and teach, our collective strength will aid in elevating women's overall level of learning. By redefining our own view of our knowledge base and teaching others, rather than leaving the process to men, we will advance our own learning and further the objective of closing the textual knowledge gap.

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Between Mother and Daughter: Perspectives on the Teaching of *Tanakh*

By Meryl Jaffe and Talia Hurwich

MERYL: In each day school I have worked for or consulted in, the goals have been to shape Jewish identity while exposing students to text, ritual, and Jewish law. These schools teach classic Jewish texts in Hebrew and Aramaic, using primary and secondary sources. Some schools use packaged pre-made curricula (with prepared tests, worksheets, and teacher manuals), whereas others encourage teachers to create their own curricula, incorporating specified texts, topics, and guidelines. Students examine—and often have to memorize—key texts, terms, laws, and arguments. The key and the challenge to reaching these goals lie in making the content interactive, relevant, and vibrant.

Photograph by Alter Kaczyne published May 9, 1926 in the *Jewish Daily Forward*.

Original caption: 'A Young Ladies Seminary--Feige Schnur, a Rebitzen of Biala, Poland, who instructs young Yiddish maidens how to pray '

Courtesy of Forward Association.

Throughout my career, I have drawn on Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget's theory of learning and cognitive development, as it so aptly addresses active learning and concept building. According to Piaget, the more children relate to, define, and predict the world around them, the more they will learn. When learning, we assimilate (or incorporate) new information or text into our existing schema (rules of understanding). If, however, we are exposed to something we cannot define, predict, or understand, or when faced with inconsistencies, we enter an (uncomfortable) state of disequilibrium, in which we try to "tweak" and work out the inconsistencies until they make sense. We will either ignore what we cannot understand, or construct newer levels of understanding that accommodate the conflicting information. Sometimes this new understanding will hold over time; sometimes it won't. These states of disequilibrium provide effective learning opportunities because the learner actively wrestles with material to relieve the dissonance, bringing in additional sources, details, or observations to help reach a more encompassing level of understanding. In

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10th grade students in chemistry lab.
Melvin J. Berman Hebrew Academy, Rockville, MD
Photo by Bob Stein

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a way, Rashi exemplifies this type of learning. He often notices inconsistencies in the text; wrestles to address this disequilibrium, sometimes using outside sources and opinions; and, in doing so, raises his (and our) level of understanding.

Incorporating Piagetian theory into Jewish education dictates that teachers find *meaningful* discrepancies, create moderate disequilibrium, and facilitate student interaction with the content material. Students must wrestle with the material, ask questions, take risks, and chart new roads. One hurdle for Jewish education is making a male-dominated text meaningful for girls. Given the day school's dependency on biblical text, how many appropriate role models or relevant "stories" are there for girls? How do we make curriculum based on ancient text meaningful and engaging to students of different social and religious homes in today's world? Moreover, how and when do we build in opportunities to wrestle with beliefs and identities, much as Jacob wrestled with the angel? How much time in an already short day can teachers devote to these mental exercises?

The following is a narrative from my daughter Talia, who was able to find a deeper relevance to Exodus while in college. She describes one college professor's attempt to read Exodus critically and conduct a vibrant, meaningful analysis of the ancient text. Talia's experience illustrates her efforts to assimilate new data into her existing framework and the deeper understanding she reached through this process.

TALIA: As a senior at the University of Chicago, I enrolled in a "Law and Legislator: Exodus" course, amid both encouragement and warning from my peers. Some friends urged me to take the class, saying that the professor—Dr. Leon Kass—was a brilliant person with whom to study and a great facilitator of class discussion. He recently published a book that provided a close reading of Genesis, aiming to "[seek] wisdom regarding human life lived well in relation to the whole."[1] Although Dr. Kass's examinations recognized the existence of religious Jewish commentators as well as academics supporting the documentary hypothesis (espousing that the Bible had multiple human writers), he chose to ignore their contributions, exploring instead how the unadulterated text remains an influential keystone of modern, secular values. Kass's Exodus course set out to study that text in a similar philosophic manner. Those who could read the Hebrew text were encouraged to contribute that knowledge to the class, and Kass himself offered some notes about the biblical Hebrew. As this was Kass's last year of teaching, he handpicked his students, and the class promised to be a collection of diverse individuals meeting to discuss a rich and rewarding text.

I had been warned by other friends—particularly those of the Orthodox community—that their experiences were neither what they expected nor rewarding. Professor Kass—while an accomplished close reader—was, in their view, no biblical scholar, and at times, his understanding of the text ran counter to what we had previously learned from studying *midrash*. The goal of the class was to read the text closely without commentary or secondary sources (except for translator's notes) in order to tease out and reflect on philosophical questions fundamental to modern society. There was a danger that such fundamental questions and answers might contradict some closely held traditions. I was cautioned that this is not the traditional Jewish way to study *Tanakh*.

When studying *midrash* or commentary, sometimes students aren't asked enough what they themselves think the issues are.

In retrospect, these warnings were not ill-founded. However, I discovered that I was able to take from the class certain perspectives and methods that make the Jewish text—rabbinic sources included—all the more meaningful to me. I can think of no better example than our study of *Bat Par'oh*—Pharaoh's daughter.

Generally, my day school classes had skipped or quickly glossed over the character and story of *Bat Par'oh*.[2] It was understood that she was a moral and courageous woman, given her decision to take in a Hebrew child. Beyond that, however, her narrative was glossed over and my classes had instead focused

[1] Kass, Leon. *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 1.

[2] Although she is not named in Exodus, many readers know *Bat Par'oh* as Batya or Bitiah from Chronicles.

[3] I recognize that many other schools spend time studying *Bat Par'oh* and her actions. Given that middle school is a distant memory for me, it is possible that I have forgotten my own middle school study of *Bat Par'oh*.

on studying Moshe, the young Egyptian prince. The reasons are understandable. There is only so much time, and in deciding what to study, between a Jewish leader and a non-Jewish princess, the former was preferred.[3] Yet to understand Moshe as a young leader, one must understand his moral environment, including the significant influence exerted on Moshe's life, as he grew up, by *Bat Par'oh* as his adoptive mother.

Our university class, interested in Moshe's philosophical and moral upbringing, studied *Bat Par'oh* and her influence on Moshe. What developed through discussion was a picture of a strong character who was an exemplar for Moshe. *Bat Par'oh* displayed many positive characteristics in the text. Seeing Moshe as a "lad weeping" and choosing to help him—despite knowing he was an Israelite—demonstrates her moral outrage and desires to help all people.[4] Her naming him "Moshe" showed courage as well as intelligence and wit in subverting the Egyptian language. The name Moshe is originally Ancient Egyptian. However, *Bat Par'oh* imposes on it a Hebrew meaning that announces her "crime.[5]" Such action is intensified by the fact that ancient Egypt was xenophobic, and its language was integral to its identity. Despite *Bat Par'oh*'s beliefs, though, she was still her father's daughter—both literally and figuratively (being identified only as Pharaoh's daughter). However, one of *Bat Par'oh*'s traits that emerged from our class discussion particularly interested me. She believed that divine law should not be independent of morality. *Bat Par'oh*'s actions weren't simply treasonous, but they also disobeyed Pharaoh, a god among men—disobeying him was disobeying divinity. *Bat Par'oh*'s actions displayed a strong moral code to which she held her gods accountable. Her resulting belief that divine law must agree with morality ultimately saved Moshe's life.

It wasn't until fairly recently, when we read *Parashat Ki Tisa* in shul, that I reflected further on *Bat Par'oh* and her influence on Moshe. I realized that the lessons she offered were greater than I originally thought. This *parasha* is a pivotal moment in Moshe's leadership. When God tells Moshe of *B'nei Yisrael*'s sins, and of His determination to eradicate them and create a new nation though Moshe, Moshe successfully challenges God's decision, saving *B'nei Yisrael*. Many people have rightly compared this action to Avraham's attempt to save Sodom and Gomorrah. However, on further reflection, I believe that Moshe learned from *Bat Par'oh* that people should stand up for their moral beliefs, even if it means standing up to God. True, there are similarities between Moshe's and Avraham's actions (for one, Moshe and Avraham disagreed and argued with God—but they didn't disobey Him). However, even if Moshe had known of Avraham's actions, lessons learned through direct observation are usually stronger than those derived from stories. It seems to me that Moshe more likely incorporated the beliefs and actions of the woman who raised him, through her own example, to be concerned and empathize with the plight of others. Perhaps Moshe intended to emulate Avraham—but he would have done so knowing that *Bat Par'oh* would be proud of his actions.

Kindergarten children in the Ivrit immersion program practicing Hebrew letter writing. Ramaz School, New York.

What I learned from this experience is the importance of keeping one's mind open to unorthodox resources to instigate intellectual and moral growth. Moshe must have learned from his experiences as a prince in Egypt, including from sources outside his tradition and faith. We, as students of *Tanakh*, must similarly be open to nontraditional sources.

One hurdle for Jewish education is making a male-dominated text meaningful for girls.

I think the challenge for Jewish day schools is to encourage exploration of the text. Exploration does not mean abandoning *midrash* or commentary to create a narrative based on the *p'shat* or simple text, but includes asking questions that have no right or wrong answer. By asking such questions and attempting to answer them, students build personalized narratives and reinforce their own ideas about the text and about themselves. Professor Kass's Exodus class worked not because it was strictly based on *p'shat*, but because it studied the text through a particular philosophic lens. When studying *midrash* or commentary, sometimes students aren't asked enough what they themselves think the issues are. Are there dangers to asking unanswerable questions? Perhaps. But, by asking and struggling through such questions, and by creating my own understanding of the narrative, I hope that I have developed an increasingly meaningful relationship with fundamental texts.

MERYL: Our kids don't have to attend university to gain valuable insights or shape their beliefs and identities.

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[4] Ex. 2:6.

[5] Ex 2:10. In Hebrew the root means "to draw out of the water."

Lessons on Gender: A Class on Jewish Family Life

By Chaye Kohl

A year into my high school teaching career, I began teaching a class called *Mishpacha: Jewish Family Life*. My previous nine years of teaching experience had been with elementary and middle school students in *yeshivot* and congregational schools. This opportunity, at Yeshivah of Flatbush [in Brooklyn, New York], enabled me to craft a course that would provide high school seniors with a forum to discuss teen issues. I taught the class from 1982 to 2000.

The class focused on teenagers' development. We discussed the challenges they faced, using Jewish ideas and attitudes as a guide. We explored—through general and Jewish-themed texts and discussion—healthy and unhealthy family relationships and the temptations of drugs, alcohol, and risky behavior. We examined dating attitudes, as well as the nature of true love and marriage.

Whenever I discussed the class with colleagues outside the school, they were shocked to find that a class like this did not require the separation of boys and girls. What I discovered, however, was that having both girls and boys in the same classroom created a real learning-lab atmosphere. During the first few weeks of the term, we established a *de facto* code of honor: what we discussed in the classroom could be discussed outside the classroom only if no student names were mentioned. The *Mishpacha: Jewish Family Life* class quickly garnered a reputation for being a class in which a student could share confidences.

Educators can often predict how students will react—I was getting to the point in my career at which I thought I would be able to read their innermost thoughts. This class dispelled that notion for me. Many times class discussions took us all into uncharted territory, especially when I moderated heated discussions between the boys and the girls.

Gender issues had an interesting way of playing themselves out in the class. Yeshivah of Flatbush is a school with a high percentage of Syrian Jewish students. Gender roles and expectations are clearly defined in the Syrian community. Syrian girls in the *Mishpacha* class at that time automatically perceived their future selves as wives and mothers, whereas Ashkenazi girls were planning for a year in Israel and college. Often there were Syrian girls who became engaged during senior year. Their fellow students offered *Mazal Tov*/*Mabruk* wishes, but were puzzled: Why would someone want to get married right after graduation? Meanwhile, the Ashkenazi boys were mildly critical—but somewhat envious—of the Syrian boys, who would "sow their wild oats" while rising in the ranks of the family business and delaying marriage.


Schulnachricht

Report Card of Luise Pappenheim, Privat Volkschule fur Knaben und Madchen, Vienna, 1930

Collection of Yeshiva University Museum Gift of Lucy Lang

Years of teaching, observing, and reflecting on this course have taught me many things about boys, girls, and their views of themselves. Here, then, is (almost) Everything I Needed to Know about My Students I Learned in *Mishpacha* Class (with apologies to Robert Fulghum):

Teenage boys don't understand how girls think. Girls may miss some of the nuances, but seem more attuned to what boys think.

No matter what the discussion, the amazed looks and comments always crossed the gender gap; inevitably, there were "no way" and "I can't believe you think that" retorts when boys and girls discussed topics related to family, teen behavior, dating, and marriage. The seventeen-year-old girls were more emotionally mature than the boys. On occasion, during discussions, the boys were unable or unwilling to consider the serious nature of a topic in relation to their own lives. The girls would be attuned to this right away, however, and would demand seriousness.

Self-esteem issues cross gender lines.

When the issue of self-esteem was the topic, many girls admitted that they placed emphasis on wearing the "right" clothing and having the "right" friends in order to "fit in." The Syrian girls admitted to worrying about clothes more than the boys or the Ashkenazi girls did. The Ashkenazi girls said they were careful about dressing well for out-of-school events but had no problem dressing down for school.

Girls raised the issue of bravado exhibited by boys of all ages. Boys eventually and reluctantly owned up to masking feelings of inadequacy by annoying other kids. The situations in which boys said they felt the most pressure were usually in social situations involving girls. Reckless behavior and clowning helped them protect themselves.

Girls countered by admitting that they sometimes pretended to like certain boys' behaviors or they helped the boys look smarter, as a way to make themselves more socially acceptable. Female students said they consciously

"dumbed down" to gain social acceptance when boys were present in the classroom, and some confessed they were afraid to sound too smart in front of a boy they liked.

Teens believe their parents believe that boys will be boys, but girls have to behave. … Male chauvinism is alive and well and breeding in the high school classroom.

One class session was always spent on the following group activity: The class broke into groups of four or five. Class members could choose their own groups, but each group had to be single gender. I gave them large sheets of newsprint and asked them to make lists as follows:

As a boy I should… should not…

As a girl I should… should not…

Each group had a representative who presented the group's findings, and the lists were hung around the room. Discussions ensued and spilled over, after class, into the halls. The examination of stereotypical expectations held by parents, the students themselves, and society at large sometimes clashed. There was much exasperation: "This is the twentieth century, for God's sake!"

Years of teaching, observing, and reflecting on this course have taught me many things about boys, girls, and their views of themselves.

For example, in discussing the comment, "Boys should not show emotion," they all agreed that anger was an acceptable emotion for boys (but not for girls), but that boys should never cry. Both boys and girls believed that boys should not show emotion. Girls thought that this societal norm was not healthy. Boys admitted that it was sometimes tough to hold back the tears, but they would control themselves. The consequences were dire: being labeled a sissy or a mama's boy.

One class session was devoted to reading and reflecting on the story of teens involved in a life-threatening accident, one that resulted from drinking and driving. Boys were seen as the major culprits in drinking, and girls claimed to be more responsible drinkers. Boys thought smoking was cool, and girls thought smoking was unfeminine. The majority in both groups agreed with these assessments: Boys could smoke and drink (despite the illegality of underage smoking and drinking), but girls should not.

Students believe apologetics are used when discussing halakhic issues vis-à-vis women.

There was discussion about the place of religious practice in community and in family. The girls often asked "Why do rabbis always make us feel second-class?" and expressed the feeling that being placed behind a *mehitza* made them "hidden." The boys would often counter with "*shelo asani isha*" and retort, "You girls have it easy!" (They cited the liturgy of the morning blessing, where a man thanks God for not making him a woman, ostensibly because he is blessed with many more time-bound *mitzvot*.)

Scholastic achievement, tied to financial potential, results in high pressure put on boys. Girls are expected to marry and raise the children, even if they have careers. Sometimes girls will not have a choice—family will have to come first.

These topics came up later in the year, when we discussed dating and marriage. Debate raged over matchmaking and dating exclusively for marriage, as opposed to dating for fun. Dating for fun, they believed, would help one make an educated decision about choosing a spouse. Some students were fascinated by the *shiddukh* (matchmaking) approach used in right-wing communities. Others said that it was unnatural to separate the genders so much, but that dating should be done only when one was ready to marry.

As a group, we discussed qualities to consider when choosing a mate. Not surprisingly, financial issues came up again and again. The debate about the right age to marry was fanned by the presence of Syrian girls in the classes who, at seventeen, were already dating for marriage. Others, mostly the Ashkenazi boys, saw this discussion as abstract and not personally relevant. They would be attending college and perhaps postgraduate education before being able to establish themselves. Fellow Syrian male students had family businesses with which they were already involved.

* * * * *

I taught the *Mishpacha* class at the Yeshivah of Flatbush for almost twenty years. Looking back at the class, many of the points separating the genders were specific to the makeup of the Flatbush population. Some things have changed over the years, but others have not. Syrian girls are still more traditional in many ways than the Ashkenazi girls. Now, however, more of the Syrian girls go to Israel for a gap year. I recently met a former Yeshivah of Flatbush graduate in Israel who is helping to run a school in Israel for young women of Sephardic communities. According to her, although there is still a reluctance to send girls to Israel, more families are willing to do so if the school is one that is from "the community." It was clear while I was teaching at Flatbush that the Syrian girls were dating for marriage, and they often still do get married straight out of high school. In some cases, families may begin to do preliminary planning while the girls are still at school, but the engagements are not celebrated or announced until after graduation. More of the girls are now attending college, and most of them finish—even those who marry while in college.

There is still a wariness among the Syrian girls about the increase in women's participation in religious leadership and ritual. In the early years of my teaching, it was clear that although the girls could learn Talmud at Flatbush,

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they were very conscious of expectations to be an "*eishet hayil.*" This stemmed from attitudes at home, their place behind the *mehitza*, and the position of the synagogue rabbis. Many of these attitudes have changed in the past decade. The girls now know that there are young women who learn full-time, become *yo'atzot* halakha, or take on other religious leadership roles. The girls often meet these accomplished young women and in some cases have had these scholarly women as teachers. The more visible women become in public life in the Jewish community, the more the girls feel that they too can achieve great things. There is less "dumbing down" in class, although there are still girls who defer to the boys when it comes to leadership roles.

Syrian boys were not expected to marry as early as the girls. The Syrian families still expect the boys to get settled in business or a career first, and not marry as early as the girls. Although in the 1980s few attended college, there is now a big push to get boys to college, as the economic reality in today's world is that a family business cannot absorb everybody in the family. Indeed, I found that by 2000 the Sephardic community was already being serviced by its own doctors and dentists.

Despite certain changes, the majority of my impressions from the class at Flatbush are still true today. Wearing the "right" thing is more important today than ever—for both genders. There is also valid concern about wider experimentation with drugs and alcohol, which now crosses gender lines.

The *Mishpacha* class provided a forum for young people to exchange ideas and learn about each other in a coed class. For me, my years spent teaching the class truly embodied the adage from *Pirkei Avot: "Mikol melam'dai hiskalti, u-mitalmidai yoter mi'kulam"*—"I have learned from all my teachers, and from my students [I have learned] more than from all of them." With each new set of classes I was provided with the teens' candid view of what life was like for them in a world I lived in, but experienced and saw through adult eyes. It was imperative for me to see the world through their eyes so that I could teach them in ways in which they were able to learn—whether in halakha or English literature, and that applied to both my male and female students.

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The New Tehilla: Ethnic Diversity and Religious Feminism

By Elana Maryles Sztokman

Women in Israel seem to be breaking barriers on nearly every front. A female head of the Supreme Court (MK Dorit Beinisch), a female head of the opposition (MK Tzipi Livni), a female Major General (Maj. Gen. Orna Barbivai), and two female heads of major banks (Shari Arison and Galia Maor) are a few of women's striking accomplishments. Nonetheless, when it comes to education, Israeli girls still lag way behind the boys. In fact, according to the World Economic Forum's International Gender Index, Israel ranks 52nd in the world in terms of gender equity, and a shocking 68th in terms of girls' education—this, despite the fact that there is complete gender equality in elementary school enrollment. In other words, Israeli girls are going to school, but they are not necessarily being educated *well*.

Dr. Beverly Gribetz is trying to change all that. Founding principal of the Tehilla Religious Girls' High School in Jerusalem, Beverly (as she is known throughout the city), sees herself as fighting for the right of every girl to gain equal access to the highest quality education available.

"Everyone can succeed," she said in a recent interview. "We have proven that you can have a school in which everyone is accepted—no entrance exams, no criteria for acceptance beyond being a religious girl—and still everyone can get exactly what they need and reach their potential."

The Tehilla School—soon to be the Tehilla-Evelina School—founded in 2006, after years of bureaucratic turbulence, has an ethnic and socioeconomic mix of 165 students in grades 9 through 12, who represent the panoply of religious Jerusalem life. The school comprises a mix of Sephardi and Ashkenazi girls with seven different native languages spoken at home, 30 percent of the students receive significant financial aid, and 12 families are on public assistance and do not pay tuition at all. Even with all that diversity, 96 percent of the students graduate with a matriculation (*bagrut*) certificate—an astounding figure, considering that the national average is 56 percent. Moreover, some 50 percent of the girls have elected science as their specialty, and many also choose Gemara, difficult subjects that are also often dominated by boys.

"People told us this couldn't be done," Gribetz said. The native New Yorker who originally moved to Israel in the 1970s and returned for a period of time to New York, where she worked as headmistress at Ramaz, was not daunted. "I believe that this is how all schools should be. It's not heterogeneity by default; it's heterogeneity as an *ideal*."

In fact, when Gribetz was asked by Mayor Nir Barkat, for example, if she would be willing to take in a remedial class, she immediately said yes. He said that hers was the only religious school that did not resist the request. "I told him that this is what the parents want," she explained. "They seek out the diversity." The Ministry of Education was so impressed that it granted the school status as an experimental school, offering funding for the next six years to prove how this model works.

The Israeli educational system is one of the few public educational systems in the Western world that offers a state-backed religious public school system. Separation of religion and state does not exist in Israel in general, and certainly not in the educational system. As such, religious families have the ability to receive a religious education at the cost of public education—with all the diversity of public education. In recent years, however, groups of religious parents have joined together and opened up semiprivate religious schools that are religiously and ethnically selective. This trend, known as "gray education" in that it is neither entirely public nor entirely private, has become increasingly popular in Israel, especially in the religious sector, in which classic debates between educational "excellence versus equality" conflate with debates over religious excellence versus openness.

Certain elite religious girls' schools, such as Pelech, offer an outstanding, feminist religious education, and have very tight entrance policies in order to maintain standards. Such is also the case with the Midrashiya, the Hartman High School for Girls, founded in 2007, which is slated to move into a permanent home in the German Colony in September.

Gribetz has introduced a new paradigm into these discussions about education, arguing that a school does not need strict selection in order to have high standards—that is, it is not "either excellence or equality," but both excellence and equality simultaneously. Ironically, Tehilla is one of the most heterogeneous religious schools in the city, but it is currently a completely private school. Unlike other private schools, though, Tehilla has neither academic nor socioeconomic selection criteria. In effect, everyone who wants to register can, and everyone who is there wants to be there.

Shlomo Swirski, author of *Politics and Education in Israel: Comparisons with the United States,* argues that religious groups have been at the forefront of trends toward ethnic and socioeconomic segregation out of a rationale of "stricter adherence." Perhaps the most well-known example of the way in which semiprivate schools use the reasoning of "stricter adherence" to promote ethnic segregation is in the community of Emanuel, where a state-funded religious school refused entry to Sephardi students, even after the Supreme Court ruled on enforced integration. The Emanuel story highlights the troubling connection between academic, ethnic, and religious segregation and selectivity within the religious educational system. In the religious world, academic selectivity is increasingly conflated with religious selectivity.

For Gribetz, academic excellence amid socioeconomic integration is an ideal interwoven with a vision of inte-

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The New Tehilla, *continued from page 45*

gration in religious identity as well. "I want the school to include the entire range of religiousness in one place, from traditional to Chabad," she said. "I don't believe in hashkafic niches. Everyone can live in the same school without one claiming to be more religious than the other." This approach flies in the face of trends in the Orthodox communities in Israel, in which there are many educational streams within the religious stream, and every group of parents that considers the local school to be less than satisfactorily "frum," pressures the government and municipality to open a new school.

Perhaps Gribetz's greatest triumph, then, is that Tehilla was rated the number one school in the city in the parameter of "social atmosphere" in a recent parent satisfaction survey commissioned by the municipality. In fact, Tehilla was close to the top on nearly every parameter of satisfaction. "The students here are truly happy in school," she said proudly, "because we are not coercive. I do not want to be alienating. I'm less interested in whether a girl puts on lights on Shabbat and more concerned that her spiritual experience at school is a positive one. I want her to love religion." For this attitude, she takes a lot of flak from critics who see her as not religious enough. But Gribetz is unfazed. "That's the advantage of being an independent school," she explained. "Anyone who doesn't want to be here doesn't have to be."

Gribetz paid a high price for this independence. She first became the principal of the Evelina de Rothschild girls' high school, a state religious school, in 1998, but after several years she became embroiled in a very public bureaucratic battle that left her without a school and without a job. Parents eventually came to her rescue, protesting at City Hall to bring her back as principal. Mayor Barkat, who was then opposition leader, came out to find out what the brouhaha was about, and was astounded. "He had never heard of a group of parents protesting because they love their children's principal," Gribetz said. "From his high-tech background, he understood that the clients were expressing their satisfaction." She was not able to return to Evelina, but instead opened Tehilla in 2006 as a private school. Today, Barkat is one of the principal's greatest allies, and is leading the process of merging Tehilla with Evelina. Gribetz feels vindicated, as though she is coming full circle.

Now the school is ready to transition from private back to public, which may make Gribetz's vision easier to implement. Up to this point, the school's growth belied its private status. Indeed, the numbers of girls who chose Tehilla surprised everyone—the municipality, the Ministry of Education, and not least of all, Gribetz. They had been prepared for 30 to 40 girls in the first year, with a slow growth rate of 10 percent to 20 percent each year. In the first year the school had 60 girls, and five years later, the school has nearly tripled in size. The school currently has almost no public funding at all, one-third of the girls are on heavy scholarships, and tuition is competitive with all the semiprivate schools in the city; the school relies on fundraising to supplement its budget. But as soon as the merger with Evelina, planned for September 2012, goes into effect, the school will be able to rely more on public funds to achieve its goals.

Meanwhile, perhaps one of the greatest challenges within this approach of "empowerment of the masses" is the way it conflicts with religious feminism. Although Gribetz is in favor of women's ritual participation—and, in fact, when the school holds Shabbat seminars, girls are given the option of reading from the Torah in parallel services—she does not enforce that approach, and during the regular weekday schoolwide prayers, there is no Torah reading for girls. "It's not about men and what I want," she explained. "The way I see it, the girls all come from different shuls, so to speak. They all have different customs. The school has to be able to bring them all together and reflect that diversity without making one particular custom its own, making it dominant. We try on different customs, from all the different '*edot,*' and they are all equally valid. If we make one custom our own, like women's Torah reading, we are forcing one version over the other, and that's a mistake."

Beverly Gribetz, who was already fighting the feminist fight in Israel in the 1970s and was the first woman to teach Gemara in a religious school in Jerusalem, is thus confronting the religious world with a dilemma around diversity versus Orthodox feminism. To be accepting of all girls, she feels that she has to put aside the goal of ritual equality for women. In her view, ethnic diversity trumps religious feminism.

Dr. Elana Maryles Sztokman *is a writer, researcher and consultant on Jewish education, gender issues, and Jewish organizational life. Her doctorate, from the Hebrew University, examines gender and ethnicity in the education of adolescent religious girls. She writes a regular column on gender issues at the* Forward Sisterhood.

Teacher and students at a girls' *kheyder*, Lazkarzev, Poland
Photograph by Alter Kaczyne, 1920s

From the Archives of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York.

Emerging voices

We welcome future submissions from all high school students. Please email jofa@jofa.org

Being Comfortable with the Uncomfortable: A Perspective from a Coed High School

By Talia Jubas

Although I go to SAR High School, a progressive, coeducational modern Orthodox institution, I am not particularly ideological about educational models. I believe that some girls learn better in single-sex environments, whereas others thrive in coed schools. However, my years at SAR have made me realize that coeducation has many benefits that a single-sex education could not provide. I deeply appreciate coeducation, and I would like to explain why I think it is an important mainstay in modern Orthodox society.

I have never attended a single-sex school. From nursery through high school I have always been in religious and secular classes with both girls and boys, taught by men and women. It has always seemed normal to me that a woman taught me Gemara or that I was in *hevruta* with a male classmate. However, this year, there have been several moments when I was more aware of the tensions that may arise when learning the same material as boys. When we studied the rules of *tzitzit,* my rabbi conceded that women are not actually forbidden from wearing *tzitzit* and that in this day and age, the main restriction is to prevent "haughtiness." Women who wear *tzitzit* are seen as instigators, wearing the garment for the statement it proclaims rather than out of devotion to *Hashem*. As my rabbi broached this idea, my class was forced to confront the notion that much of our tradition has historical context and many of the limitations on women today are a product of society, rather than textual prohibition.

Naturally, Jews are wary of change, because we are ultimately rooted to the Torah, and it is difficult to call a Divine text transient, mutable, or, God forbid, archaic. These kinds of class discussions help us understand how to balance progression and adherence to the word of the Torah. Aside from the issue of *tzitzit*, which I personally do not find so pressing, I know several boys who are uncomfortable with the idea of women's *tefillah* groups; many of them reject this movement simply because they are unaccustomed to it and have not taken the time to study the sources delineating the *halakhot* of *tefillah*. Confronting the opinions of these boys has made me want to go back to the root of our tradition, and educate myself sufficiently so that I am well equipped to debate combatants against change. I believe that the boys in my class have gained in equal measure. If not convinced, they are, at least, opening their minds to the notion of change and beginning to reformat their perception of women and their role in the Jewish community.

At SAR, our dedication to the inclusion of women within the education sector extends beyond having a coed student body learning in coed classes for all subjects. SAR is unique in that we have female Gemara teachers, who join our rabbis as models of serious Torah study. They show both male and female students that women are capable of a deep level of learning Torah, which, as a Jewish girl, I find to be very inspiring. These are formative years in which I am really establishing a vision of who I want to be and what I want to contribute to the Jewish community now and in the future. Seeing female teachers teach male and female students has made me realize that, even though women cannot necessarily participate in every Jewish practice, education is one front in which women can be, and I believe should be, equal to men.

Despite its benefits, there are some drawbacks to coeducation. There are times when it is difficult to go to class with boys. Boys seem more

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Coed High School, *continued from page 47*

naturally inclined to criticize what they perceive as "dumb questions" or shortsighted resolutions to a problem in a *gemara*. This definitely inhibits girls, such as myself, from fully engaging in class conversations. When I feel confident in a particular insight of mine, I have no problem voicing it. However, I am more wary when taking educated guesses or offering my own interpretations. Over time, my comfort has increased, and I think this exercise in discomfort has been crucial to my growth as a competent Torah learner. There are still times when I am free to explore the text without these limitations, such as in *hevruta*, when I can pair up with one of my girl friends to learn the text. In class, though, I am challenged to dissect and interpret the text alongside my male peers. Although many girls naturally discount themselves and their scholarly abilities because gender inequality is a natural product of our tradition, learning in a coed environment has forced me to hone my confidence. Because I am physically sitting in the same classroom as the boys around me, which means I am in the same Gemara track, I can consider myself equally qualified to study the text.

Another issue that many people cite as a hazard of coeducation is that it leads to unseemly interaction with boys. I strongly disagree. The issue of sexual tension interfering with education has had little impact on my experience, although it is not an unfounded concern. Even though it is possible to get a little distracted, I think being in school together actually sublimates our natural desire to hang out with boys and relocates our interaction from surreptitious hangouts to the classroom.

Overall, my experience at SAR has made me comfortable with studying Torah and deep analysis of Jewish texts in the presence of boys, but it has also made me comfortable with being uncomfortable at times. Jewish coeducation is a system built on both tradition and modern values, and thus is often confronted with these dueling tensions. Grappling with certain *halakhot* that apply only to men strengthens my Jewish education and identity, and engaging in these struggles alongside my male peers assures me that women are not the only ones who are facing challenges in Judaism and halakha and that we are not the only ones accepting change.

***Talia Jubas** is a recent graduate of SAR High School in Riverdale, New York. Next year she will be studying at Migdal Oz in Israel, and then plans to attend Cornell University.*

Taking Charge, Pressure-Free: A Perspective from a Single-Sex High School

By Yael Herzog

It was when I was four that my educational adventure began. I went to a nursery school where little girls and little boys played together. Those were the wild days—when we would play tag together and the boys and girls would hide in the same spot during hide-and-seek. (There were even a few scandalous kissing chases around the classroom.) When it came time for first grade, I (sadly) parted from my nursery friends and made my way to Yavneh Academy, a coed elementary school in Paramus, New Jersey. Since that was the only yeshiva I've ever attended, it never crossed my mind that there were other schools out there that weren't coed.

When it came time to choose a high school, however, I had to choose between two schools—one coed and one not. To be honest, when making my decision, I thought about the boys-versus-no-boys aspect only because I was told to. My friends made a fuss about it, and it was an obvious difference between the schools, so it naturally became a major factor in my decision. At that time, though, I had no idea what it meant, socially, academically, or religiously. In fact, I had never even been in a single-sex environment before, as I had always spent my summers in coed camps. So I began high school in my new single-sex environment merely with the thought that "this is kind of weird"—nothing more and nothing less.

Considering that I have only attended a single-sex high school, I, of course, cannot speak firsthand of the distinctions between the two. I have, however, spoken in depth with many friends who attend coed schools, and with those who have attended both, about the pros and cons, and the similarities and differences, as we have tried to help one another understand each other's experiences—and this has helped us each understand our own.

I'll start with my own experience. Between eighth grade (which was coed) and ninth, I noticed one major difference. In a single-sex environment, girls feel less pressured in how they look, more comfortable around other girls, and more open to pursue hidden talents, to clothe themselves in the strangest things. Indeed, the

moment I stepped into Ma'ayanot, my high school in Teaneck, it became clear that every day here would be a "dress up" or costume day. Dress up like monkey day, tree day, banana day.… When describing the atmosphere of a single-sex high school to a parent, one of my classmates explained that in her coed middle school she would look forward to gym class because that was the only time during the week when she was not with the boys. High school for her, she explained, was simply gym class all day long.

In our school's all-girls environment, we have become more and more comfortable with our surroundings, and consequently, become more and more comfortable with ourselves. Because there is inevitably less social pressure, as the pressure associated with boys is simply nonexistent, we feel more willing to express ourselves to the fullest. There are no boys watching, no one to impress other than ourselves. I have found this to be exhilarating, and, at times, quite liberating.

This freedom, this willingness to be ourselves, carries over, I believe, into the classroom as well. The girls in my school are unafraid to ask questions, to share their insights, to present a project to the entire class, let alone the entire school. This lack of timidity in my classmates continues to astound me. At times, this lack of timidity in myself astounds me even more.

My friends who attend coed schools with both separate (e.g., for Talmud and other Judaic subjects) and coed classes have observed that girls in coed classes tend to let the boys take charge of the classroom, and are more hesitant to express themselves fully, whether in their opinions or their questions. In the all-girls classes, many of these same students suddenly participate in class discussions with enthusiasm and confidence.

Of course, as high school personalities differ vastly from one another, this generalization is not always the case. Many girls do carry over the confidence gained from the single-sex classroom to coed situations. My friends in coed schools have also noticed that many female students have a distinctly positive reaction to coed classrooms. Some find it empowering to take charge of a class discussion, especially in a coed environment. They strive to compete not only with the girls in their class, but with the boys as well, aiming to get the highest grades, to be the best student, and to conquer the classroom with all that it encompasses. For it is not only the girls who are impressed with their success, but, perhaps more satisfying, the boys as well.

As for those of us who attend completely single-sex schools, I have noticed in many, but certainly not all of my friends, that the eagerness to lead and to fully express ourselves subsides in coed environs and is replaced by a certain social anxiety. For some, I think this manifests itself in a sudden urge to be noticed. Many of my peers have confided in me that in coed situations they automatically revert to a "look at me" mode, anxious to be the center of attention. Others, though, naturally shy away from the spotlight, slightly uneasy, slightly uninterested.

I think that the reaction to coed environments differs greatly based on whether or not a girl has been in a single-sex environment her whole life. I have gone to coed camps since I was in sixth grade. These summers were the best in my life, a time for me to truly be myself, express myself to the fullest without hesitation. The coed environment has never stopped me from feeling so comfortable, so at home. It is an environment I've grown up with. Thus, when I started going to Ma'ayanot, it was so engrained within me that it still felt natural. For others though, who have not gone to coed camps for years, or, more significantly, who had not gone to coed elementary schools, I think that they do feel a sense of uneasiness.

This freedom, this willingness to be ourselves, carries over, I believe, into the classroom as well.

Aside from the academic and social aspects, there is, of course, the religious aspect. Even though it would be nice to believe that one type of school nurtures more spirituality than the other, that attending a coed school or an all-girls school leads to a stronger sense of religious self, I unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately) cannot reach such a conclusion. In my view, it is all the different hashkafic and religious approaches of a school, not just whether boys and girls learn together, that foster the religious and spiritual growth of its students.

Of course now, as I am graduating from this single-sex environment and very soon moving on to the coed aura of the world, I naturally wonder if going to an all-girls school was the right decision for me—or, equally important, was it a choice deserving of so much consideration at all. To tell you the truth, throughout my high school years I rarely thought about it much. Now, however, as I reflect back and realize the role that single–sex education at Ma'ayanot has played in my development and maturation, I am unbelievably thankful for how it has furthered my growth and all that it has taught me, and exceedingly proud of—indeed, astonished by—the confidence that I have gained through it.

***Yael Herzog** graduated this year from Ma'ayanot Yeshiva High School in Teaneck, New Jersey. Next year she will be studying at Migdal Oz in Israel. Her college plans are not yet determined.*

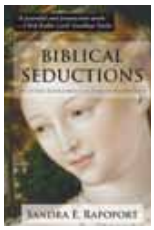
book CORNER

By Jennifer Stern Breger

Biblical Seductions: Six Stories Retold Based on the Talmud and Midrash

By Sandra E. Rapoport

Ktav, 2011, $49.50 (hardcover) $29.50 (paperback)



In this highly readable volume, Sandra Rapoport retells and explores six biblical episodes in which the sexuality of the female characters is "used or abused." The women in the stories vary, but all have, in the author's words, "stepped outside their expected roles." The stories are those of Lot and his daughters, Dinah and Shechem, Judah and Tamar, David and Batsheva, Amnon and Tamar, and Ruth and Boaz. The book is a fascinating weave of traditional commentary—incorporating Talmudic and midrashic sources—and modern scholarship. Rapoport suggests that there is a group of women in *Tanakh* who engage in sexually audacious behavior—including aggressive seduction, incest, and/or adultery—who are not condemned in the biblical text, but are actually rewarded with sons who are prophets and kings, who continue the Davidic dynasty and who become forebears of the Messiah.

But Rapoport does not ignore the nuances of each case. In a searching and detailed exploration of the episode involving Batsheva, for instance, Rapoport carefully considers the view suggested by some that Batsheva initiated her own seduction or at least was partially responsible for it; she then dismisses the theory as not supported by the text and lays the blame totally on the king. In discussing the story of Amnon's rape of Tamar, Rapoport underlines how Tamar, unlike precious victims of abduction, spoke to her attacker and tried to deflect him from his actions. In addition to offering a deep reading of the sources, the narratives are enriched by Rapoport's background as an attorney specializing in sexual harassment cases.

In Her Hands: The Education of Jewish Girls in Tsarist Russia

By Eliyana R. Adler

Wayne State University Press, 2011, $49.95

Although many know of the contribution to the education of Jewish girls by Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov network that began in Cracow in the 1920s, the private schools for Jewish girls that developed in Russian lands from 1831 to 1881 are far less familiar, This gap in Jewish history is rectified with Eliyana Adler's recent book. Using archival sources, Adler gives us information on more than one hundred schools that trained thousands of Jewish girls both in secular and Judaic subjects, beginning with the first school in the country for Jewish girls. Opened in Vilna in 1831, that school offered classes in European languages, Russian, Yiddish, and the Jewish religion for girls as young as eight in two-year courses of study. Fascinating details are given of funding sources, as the author concludes that the chief obstacle to the success of the schools was financial.

Looking at the way the schools developed over time, Adler adroitly explores how the schools responded to changes taking place in the Jewish community and wider society, and how they influenced their environment, paving the way for the modern schools that followed them. She raises interesting questions of how girls' education differed from boys'; whether, as has been argued, the relative "marginality" of Jewish women meant that Jewish girls' schools had more room to innovate than did boys'; and whether these schools were used by Jewish parents mainly as a gateway to further Russian schooling. The striking cover of this book shows the front of the 20th anniversary brochure for a school for Jewish girls in Vilna, 1912.

Safta's Diaries: Intimate Diaries of a Religious Zionist Woman

Translated and Edited by Shera Aranoff Tuchman

Ktav, 2011, $39.50

High school student Tamar Lindenbaum wrote a beautiful piece in the *JOFA Journal* Bat Mitzvah issue about her great-grandmother and her courageous stand on behalf of striking local miners in Harlan County, Kentucky in 1932. Now we have a whole volume of diary extracts written by that same deeply religious and independent woman, Bina Appleman, who came to America from Poland in 1910—selected, translated and skillfully edited by one of her granddaughters. During her lifetime, Appleman wrote 35 volumes of diaries; about 80 percent of the diary entries were written in Hebrew, with other parts in Polish, English, and Yiddish. Most of the extracts cover the period from 1945 to just before her death in 1978.

Diaries of Jewish women are very rare; this volume provides a valuable window into Orthodox Jewish life in America since World War II. It shows the texture of Appleman's family life and the value she placed on knowledge and education, as well as her wide communal involvements. Many of the details could be considered minor or trivial, but together they give a wonderful picture of a life, of a family and of a woman who gave her opinions freely in a forthright manner. Her writing is enriched by numerous quotations from *Tanakh* and other Jewish sources. In her later entries, Appleman often recalled events from the beginning of her life, which adds to their richness. Readers are fortunate that the editor of the book has included a vast array of photographs and copies of documents relating to Bina Appleman's life, including her wedding photographs from Danville, Virginia, and her *ketubba,* as well as letters both written to and received from family members and public personalities.

Women and the Messianic Heresy of Sabbatai Zevi 1666–1816

By Ada Rapoport-Albert

Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2011, $64.50

For those interested in traditions of female mysticism in Judaism parallel to those found in Christianity and Islam, this is a fascinating book. Ada Rapoport-Albert, Reader in Jewish history at University College, London, has been a strong proponent of the view that the Hasidic movement was not gender-egalitarian and neither promoted women's spirituality nor lent support to the phenomenon of female *tzaddikim* (she considers the Maid of Ludmir as a total aberration) as scholars such as Horodetsky had claimed. In contrast, Rapoport-Albert shows with great scholarly detail that women *were* actively involved in the Sabbatian movement that preceded the rise of Hasidism. In fact, Sabbatai Tzvi proclaimed that he had come to make women as happy and fulfilled as men by releasing them from the pangs of childbirth and the subjugation to their husbands that resulted from the sin of Eve in Genesis.

Rapoport-Albert explores the phenomenon of the hundreds or even thousands of female prophetesses who took part in the Sabbatian eruption of mass prophecy; the inversion of conventional gender norms in Sabbatianism, and particularly in its successor, Frankism; and the promotion of female celibacy as conducive to women's spiritual empowerment. Jacob Frank, who eventually converted to Christianity in 1759, maintained that the Messiah must be a woman.

Particularly fascinating are the descriptions of the roles of Sarah, wife of Sabbatai Tzvi, and Eva, daughter of Jacob Frank, who was venerated in Frankist circles as the female Messiah and the living incarnation of the divine *sefirah* of *malkhut*. Some of the details in this volume are startling, but the work opens up an intriguing and valuable window to the status of women in East European Jewish life.

In Her Own Voice: An Illuminated Book of Prayers for Jewish Women

By Enya Tamar Keshet

Maggid Books, 2010, $39.95

This beautiful volume, which would make a wonderful gift book for both Bat Mitzvah girls and women of all ages, presents 28 prayers and meditations recited by women, with illuminations by Israeli artist Enya Tamar Keshet. The artwork is inspired by the 15th-century Lisbon workshop of Hebrew manuscript illumination. The prayers, both traditional and modern, are rendered in exquisite calligraphy by Sharon Binder (whose work has previously graced the *JOFA Journal*). They include *Tefillat Chana*, prayers for candlelighting and the taking of *hallah*, devotions to be recited at a wedding by both the bride and the mother of the bride, and prayers connected with pregnancy and childbirth. Also included are a prayer for *agunot* and a prayer to be recited by a woman before engaging in Torah study. Particularly beautiful is a Ladino devotion to be said before going to bed, originating from the Jewish community of Crete.

Brief explanations of the texts add greatly to the book. In her introduction, Keshet thanks Dr. Joel Wolowelsky for his help in choosing the texts and writing the instructive explanations. The illuminations and decorations throughout the book are creative and diverse (see page 55 of the *Journal* for a reproduction from the book). For instance, the page illustrating "*Gott fun Avraham*," traditionally attributed to R. Levi of Berdichev and recited by many women on Saturday night, presents in micrography, text from prayers said at the conclusion of Shabbat —in the shape of a spice box, its fragrance in the form of blessings surrounding it and flowing upward.

On Changes in Jewish Liturgy: Options and Limitations

By Daniel Sperber

Urim Publications, 2010, $23

JOFA Journal readers are very familiar with the outstanding scholarship of Daniel Sperber, whose writings have often graced our pages. This volume, which explores the development of our liturgy, has its roots in a presentation at the 2007 JOFA conference and devotes much attention to the *berakha* in the morning prayers recited by men, *she-lo asani isha* ("who has not made me a woman"). Sperber addresses the question of the permissibility of introducing the names of the Matriarchs into the opening *berakha* of the *Amidah*, and the difficulty of the phrase in *Tahanun* that refers to the nations "who abominate us as much as the ritual impurity of the menstruant woman."

Sperber demonstrates with great erudition and historical knowledge that it does not make sense to talk of a single crystallized version of the liturgy; changes have always taken place in the prayers Jews have said through the ages. After discussing both Talmudic sources forbidding changes and the rulings and formulations of Maimonides, he concludes that it is quite permissible to make changes as long as one does not alter the overall content and structure of the liturgy or prayer. The reader will learn a great deal from the richness of Sperber's writing in this book, enhanced by its valuable footnotes and appendices, and the depth and breadth of knowledge demonstrated about the history of Jewish liturgy, including the introduction of new prayers, variants in liturgical texts, and the range of different views on the subject of liturgy held by scholars through the ages.

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Women Against Tyranny: Poems of Resistance During the Holocaust
By Davi Walders
Clemson University Digital Press, 2011, $19.95

In this unusual volume, original and sensitively crafted poetry by Washington poet Davi Walders tells the story of women from different cultural and religious backgrounds, who fought against tyranny during World War II. Some names will be familiar to readers, such as Hannah Senesh; Emilie Schindler, who worked with her husband to save Jews in their factory; and Gisi Fleischmann, who was a leader of the Slovakian resistance. A beautiful poem, centered on a wartime Bar Mitzvah, recreates the world of Recha Sternbuch, an Orthodox mother in Montreux, Switzerland, who, with her husband, headed the Swiss effort to save Jews. Sternbuch missed the Shabbat Bar Mitzvah of her son in order to negotiate for the release of Jewish refugees. Extolling the heroism of non-Jews who rescued Jews during the Holocaust, a poem gives a vivid picture of a German woman, married to an Albanian Muslim, whose family gave refuge to a Jewish family who had fled to Albania. Another poem recreates the story of a French parson's wife who shielded thousands of Jewish refugees from the Nazis in the village of Le-Chambon-Sur-Lignon.

Gender and Jewish History
Edited by Marion A. Kaplan and Deborah Dash Moore
Indiana University Press, 2011, $80 (hardcover) $27.95 (paperback)

This volume honors Paula Hyman, professor of modern Jewish history at Yale, who is one of the founders of Jewish gender studies. It asks how gender has influenced the lives and actions of Jewish women and the histories and stories told by scholars. What difference does a focus on gender make when we interpret the Jewish past? The wide range of articles by leading scholars extends to religious practices, politics, history, literature, and art.

Among many fascinating articles, David Ellenson explores the 19th-century writings of Rabbis Samson Raphael Hirsch and Ezriel Hildesheimer on the Jewish textual education of women; Chava Weissler discusses vernacular kabbalah and the popularization of kabbalah today as typified by the Jewish Renewal movement; and Claire Sufrin approaches the role of halakha in Jewish feminist thought by exploring the visions of Tamar Ross and Rachel Adler and the use they each make of the legal philosophy of the late Yale law professor Robert Cover, who wrote of a community's role in shaping law and legal meaning and insisted that "no set of legal institutions or prescriptions exists apart from the narratives that locate it and give it meaning." Shulamit Magnus asks the wonderful and important question, "How Does a Woman Write?" and looks for an answer in the work of Pauline Wengeroff, who began writing her memoirs in German in 1898 when she was 65.

FOR FURTHER READING ON EDUCATED JEWISH WOMEN OF THE PAST AND RABBINIC ATTITUDES TO THE TEACHING OF JEWISH TEXTS TO WOMEN

It is hard to remember that, until the modern period—indeed, until quite recently in many countries—formal Jewish education meant only the education of males. There were exceptional, educated Jewish women, ones who mainly came from rabbinic families and who were taught by fathers, brothers or husbands. Spanning the centuries from Mishnaic times, famous names include Beruriah, Dulcie of Worms, Hava Bachrach and Bayla Falk. An extensive description of many of these women is included in *And All Your Children Shall Be Learned: Women and the Study of Torah in Jewish Law and History* by Shoshana Pantel Zolty (Jason Aronson, 1993). The book is a study of the evolution of Jewish education for women from biblical times to the twentieth century, and also traces the development of halakhic literature regarding Torah study for women. For a range of perspectives on the halakhic approaches to teaching Jewish texts to women, see also Joel Wolowelsky (ed.), *Women and the Study of Torah* (Ktav, 2001); Yehudah Herzl Henkin, "Talmud Study for Women" in *Responsa on Contemporary Jewish Issues* (Ktav, 2003); and Aharon Lichtenstein, "Torah Study for Women" in *Ten Da'at,* vol. III no. 3, pp. 7-8, reprinted from a larger essay in *Halakha v'Chinukha* (Kfar Saba,1980).

Not all have such needs or opportunities. Admittedly, younger students shouldn't wrestle with difficult philosophical questions, as most are not yet capable of such analytic feats. Conversely, however, high school students are, by their very nature, struggling with and questioning their independent sense of self. Why not integrate this struggle into the curriculum, making it more meaningful? Our role as parents, teachers, and educators is to provide our diverse students with a variety of role models and ample opportunities to probe and wrestle with text and meaning, questioning, "How does this relate to me, my family, my goals, my beliefs?"

There should be different types of questions for different types of students.

How do we develop lessons that challenge students to wrestle with text in 30 to 40-minute periods with so much more curriculum to cover? How do we encourage students to explore texts for personal relevance? Here are some suggestions:

Vary the learning activities pursued and the questions asked. There should be different types of questions for different types of students. All questions should require students to relate to incidents and passages in the text, but some should be concrete, asking students to visualize descriptive images in the text or infer how characters might feel. Others might identify dissonance, as Rashi often does (either within the text itself or between *p'shat* and *midrash*), whereas still others might attempt to connect the text with current events, art, or music, or compare it to something in popular culture—creating different types and levels of dissonance, relevance, and understanding. Providing options and different types of questions and activities is important because some students love the intellectual challenge of open-ended questions, whereas others enjoy structured, concrete questions, and still others thrive on constructive projects that require less language. An excellent example of this type of approach can be found in JOFA's upcoming *Shemot* curriculum, for which I was a consultant. The curriculum creatively integrates the art of questioning with sensitivity to different kinds of minds in a classroom, while providing diverse opportunities to interact with the text and its underlying concepts.

Another option for educators is to use homework more appropriately. Homework assignments can offer different types of questions and options for students to wrestle with on their own time. Provide opportunities to mentally manipulate content material creatively, making it more meaningful and personal. Instead of worksheets, have students construct vocabulary word games to play during recess and classroom breaks; write a journal entry, screenplay, or song addressing Miriam's thoughts while watching Moshe float down the Nile and the danger she was about to encounter; or even create comic books depicting biblical stories using selected vocabulary and/or incorporating designated *midrashim*. Include an option for more abstract opinion questions that some love pursuing but others find too philosophical and unstructured.

The most effective way to help children grow in understanding and love of text is to provide as many age-appropriate opportunities as possible for students to construct knowledge. To do this, we, as parents and teachers, must be aware of the need to question, model, and provide ample opportunities supporting our students as they wrestle with their individual angels.

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Woman seated in her bedroom with open prayer book reading the *Shema*. The manuscript prayer miscellany belonged to Hannah, daughter of Court Jew Isaac Oppenheim. Scribe and artist: Aaron Wolff Herlingen of Gewitch, Vienna, 1724

Courtesy of The Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary

Understanding the Social Meaning of Women's Learning

There is general agreement that learning for Jewish women has increased exponentially in recent years. Naturally, we applaud this development, which we recognize has already affected—and will continue to affect—not only women's personal empowerment and spirituality, but also the texture of contemporary Orthodox Jewish society as a whole. We expect there will be much important research on the meaning and implications of the Jewish educational advances of women in the future. But even if we do not yet have answers, it is important to lay out very briefly some of the more striking questions.

These questions include:

- Is there a "woman's way" of studying *Tanakh* and Talmud?
- If there is, is it a question of the choice of texts and topics—such as the increased focus on female figures in the Bible and Talmud, and on particular halakhic topics of specific interest to women? (If women do choose to focus mainly on such topics, will their learning be judged by many as too narrow to be authoritative?) Or is it a question of the approach and style of learning, perhaps more collaborative than argumentative?
- Do women in general learn differently than men do?
- What does it mean to study Jewish texts from a female perspective?

One facet of these questions arises from the fact that women often come to Talmud study, in particular, at a later stage in life than men do. Even though one of the achievements of American Orthodoxy is that there is now a "path" that can take young women from high school study, to a year or two in a seminary in Israel, to high-level programs at Drisha or Stern College's GPATS, many women only start to learn Talmud as adults. Do they bring a different approach to their textual studies than men do, or offer different advantages because of their background, although they have to catch up with textual skills? Michal Tikochinsky, head of the Beit Midrash for Women at Beit Morasha in Jerusalem, discussed these issues in a *New York Jewish Week* (April 12, 2011) article that explores the different ways in which women's Talmud study is unique (http://www.thejewishweek.com/editorial_opinion/opinion/how_womens_talmud_study_unique).

Another complex question is the effect on the wider Orthodox community of the growing cohorts of young women who have already acquired advanced textual skills and are continuing to study seriously. In particular, what is the impact on today's male students and teachers of Talmud? Talmud study was until very recently the exclusive preserve of men. Commentaries were not written by women nor studied by women; women in Talmudic texts were, in general, "objects" of study, because the learning was an exclusively male enterprise. How does the fact that men may now be studying these very texts alongside women in classes, that men often attend *shi'urim* taught by women, and see women complete *daf yomi*, affect the way men study Talmud and how they look at halakhic issues?

The questions continue:

- Do communities and synagogues adequately support women's learning by providing classes at all levels in the most accessible ways possible? For example, are there programs for young women coming back from their gap year in Israel to maintain and increase their skills (as there are for young men)?
- Does shul scheduling allow for both men and women to attend and teach *shi'urim* on Shabbat? Is sufficient child care provided for this to happen?
- Are there opportunities for older women who have retired from professional careers to increase their level of Jewish learning in a serious and rigorous manner?
- Are women welcomed to synagogue classes, such as *daf yomi*, and made to feel comfortable?
- What more can be done to encourage women who are busy with professional, family, and volunteer commitments to find time for Torah study?
- What is the community doing to help women with high textual skills to use them as their career path to serve the public good, and to find appropriate professional employment commensurate with their skills and expertise? What more can communities, synagogues and schools do in this area? Furthermore, even though the achievements of *to'anot, yo'atzot halakha,* and the small but growing number of women in leadership positions in congregations are impressive, it is also important that women both sit on synagogue ritual committees and strive to influence the *beit din* system and the existing religious establishment.

Because women's achievements in Torah learning and leadership are so new, there is no clear path for women aspiring to be *talmidot hakhamim*. One model for women's study in contemporary Orthodoxy is that of women studying with other women "in a space of their own." This has helped both women who felt insecure about learning with men because of inadequate background and skills and also women who simply derive greater satisfaction from learning exclusively with other women. Is it possible that women–only study may prove to be a transitional stage as women acquire the background to be comfortable in a "mixed" adult education class? Could it be that Jewish women at certain stages in their lives have more interest in "women only" classes and at

On Raising Children, Enya Tamar Keshet, from *In Her Voice: An Illuminated Book of Prayers for Jewish Women*, Maggid Books, 2010

The theme of the prayer is taken from the story in Masekhet Ta'anit *(5b) of the blessing R. Yitzhak gave to R. Nahman.*

Enya Keshet is represented in the United States by Bleema Posner, Rimonim Booksellers, Englewood, NJ.

Social Meaning, *continued from page 53*

other stages in coed ones? Some women—college students, young marrieds, and retirees, for example—might specifically want their Jewish studying to be with their husbands and "significant others."

Of course, the classes available to women in a particular community are not only reflective of women's wishes and learning skills. Advocacy may be required to influence decisions made by rabbis and congregational bodies as to what classes are available and who teaches them.

Anyone seeking to address issues relating to Jewish education will invariably only succeed in touching the tip of the iceberg. This journal answers some questions, and raises many new ones. Future analysis, research, discourse, and collaboration will bring us closer to understanding how developments in women's learning are truly transforming Orthodox Judaism as a whole.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor:

I have not been a member of JOFA for long, but I think that the work that your organization does is really important. I have also read some JOFA publications and I found the journal issue about Bat Mitzvah very interesting. For sure, the observance of this ritual is not very old; it is not as ancient as Bar Mitzvah and is not done in the same way in every country, nor in every community or every synagogue. According to the Orthodox tradition, men have more duties in the synagogue and in *tefillah* than women; this can explain for me why Bat Mitzvah has not been as celebrated as Bar Mitzvah. But now that the role of women is changing, in the Orthodox world as well, I think that it is right that women too have their celebration to mark the important change that this brings in their lives.

In Italy today, both boys and girls who become Bar and Bat Mitzvah must pass an exam at the Rabbinical Office, so they have to study the Jewish tradition. The family can ask for a rabbi or a *Morà* for girls who is known by the family to prepare the boy or the girl; otherwise, the Rabbinical Office suggests a teacher. In Italy, officially, there are only Orthodox communities, but there is no uniform way to celebrate Bat Mitzvah. Within the Jewish Community of Rome you can find different rituals. In small synagogues, girls sometimes write a comment on the *parashah* that they then read during *Shaharit* on *Shabbat*. But usually—and this happens in the Great Synagogue of Rome—the girls are only called, together with any Bar Mitzvah boys, at the end of the *tefillah*, by the Chief Rabbi, to stand in front of the opened *Aron*: they read a statement that says that they take on themselves the observance of the *mitzvot* and receive a *berakhah* from the Chief Rabbi. At *Kiddush* time and sometime at *Mozzè Shabbat* too, the parents organize a party outside of the synagogue or somewhere else.

I write you this to share this experience with your readers and also because I would like to know what happens in other communities.

Kind regards,

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