

# THE JOFA Journal

www.jofa.org

FROM OUR PRESIDENT

## NEW BEGINNINGS

By Judy Heicklen



I loved being pregnant. Not just because I could stop worrying about my bulging midriff—though that was nice too—but because I felt that I was engaged with God in an essential act of creation. Every ultrasound revealed to me another step in the master plan, every kick and turn, another miracle. Nurturing the life inside me made me feel more alive and more fulfilled as a human being than anything else I have ever done. And the births themselves were moments when I truly felt *yirat Shamayim*, awe of God.

My three children were born on a foggy, ethereal night atop a mountain in Hong Kong, in the middle of a summer's day in bustling London, and early on a Shabbat morning in a preternaturally quiet (and luckily traffic-free) New York. Each was welcomed into the specific Jewish community where we were living, and into the larger Jewish community as well. For my son, the welcome was fairly traditional, as *brit milah* is perhaps Judaism's longest-standing ritual. Nevertheless, his father and I did add some new flourishes to this ritual: naming him with both our names, both of us saying *hatov vehameitiv*, and learning together to make a *siyyum* for his *seudat mitzvah*.

For daughters, the established ritual is naming the baby in *shul*. The desire to commemorate the birth with something "more" is an opportunity, but also a challenge. Many people love the freedom to be creative and personal, to express their thanks to God in an individual way, rather than with rote words and actions. For me, creating new ritual felt like an oxymoron, because the power of ritual lies in its repeated use over time, connecting us to our collective community across the generations. We chose to use the *zeved habat* ceremony because it stretched back to the seventeenth century and so felt more "authentic," but we still made our own tweaks to add some personal flavor.

This issue of the *JOFA Journal* is dedicated to exploring how we commemorate the experience of bringing a child into the world and into a specific

family and community. Which rituals do we use for sons and which for daughters? What roles are there for fathers and mothers, and for the community? How do individuals and communities deal with different paths to building a family? Given that this March marks the ninetieth anniversary of the first official bat mitzvah, will the new choices for daughters' birth celebrations affect how we think about celebrating bringing a boy

*continued on page 3*

## Entering the Covenant of God and Israel

By Sharon R. Siegel

**Editor's note:** *The simhat bat ceremony that has gained popularity over the past three decades is not only a simha, a joyous family occasion commemorated with ritual and food. On a deeper level, it signifies the entry of a newborn girl into the Jewish community and, thus, into the covenant between God and Israel.*

The covenant is the eternal agreement between God and the Jewish people, which serves as the foundation for Jewish nationhood and the traditional Jewish belief system. This agreement encompasses both (a) the Jewish people's fidelity to God and their acceptance of the Torah and its laws and (b) God's promise to keep the Jewish people as His people and to give them the Land of Israel as an inheritance. The covenant serves as a national charter, provides the rationale for observing *mitzvot*, and captures the essence of Jewish existence.

All Jews—men and women—are members of the covenant; this status is attained immediately upon birth from a Jewish mother. The covenant is so fundamental that it transcends the biological, social, and ritualistic differences that define traditional gender roles and responsibilities within Judaism. As R. Eliezer Berkovits declares, "There is no doubt today that women are part of the Jewish people no less than men. The covenant was

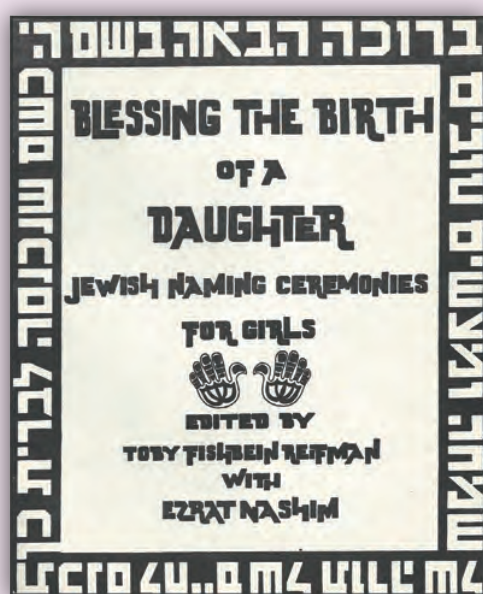
*continued on page 10*

## IN THIS ISSUE:

From Our President: New Beginnings by Judy Hecklen .....	1
Entering the Covenant of God and Israel by Sharon R. Siegel .....	1
How <i>Simhat Bat</i> Got Its Name by Giti Bendheim .....	3
From Generation to Generation: <i>Simhat Bat</i> Comes of Age by Joseph C. Kaplan .....	4
Women's Participation in a <i>Brit Milah</i> Ceremony: <i>Kayeim et Hayeled Hazeh Le'aviv U-le'imo</i> by Nathaniel Helfgot .....	6
<i>Brit Milah</i> : A Daughter's Perspective by Yardaena Osband .....	8
<i>Zeved Habat</i> by Anat Sharbat .....	9
On Being a <i>Sandakit</i> by Belda Lindenbaum .....	9
What Do We Name the Baby? by Gigi Yellen-Kohn .....	16
Welcoming an Adopted Child by Adena K. Berkowitz and Rivka Haut .....	18
A Single Mother by Choice Approaches <i>Brit</i> by Dvori Ross .....	20
Want to Learn More? Resources on Birth Rituals .....	23
Searching Our Past: Who Was the <i>Ba'alat haBrit</i> and What Did She Do? by Elisheva Baumgarten .....	23
<i>T'khine</i> for a Woman Experiencing Infertility by Renee S. Septimus .....	24
<i>T'khine</i> to Be Said by a New Mother Prior to Her Son's Bris by Renee S. Septimus .....	24
Book Corner by Israel Drazin, Rachel Lieberman, and Roselyn Bell .....	25

## JOFA NEWS

Putting Women Back in the Picture: A Celebration .....	14
Artists Put Women Back in the Picture .....	15
JOFA Campus Fellowship Receives Grant from Hadassah Foundation .....	21
Farewell to Robin Bodner .....	22



An early booklet featuring naming ceremonies for girls.

# THE JOFA Journal

A Publication of the  
Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance  
Volume X – Issue 1  
Spring 2012–Nisan 5772

### Editor:

Roselyn Bell

### President:

Judy Hecklen

### Past President:

Carol Kaufman Newman

### Founding President:

Blu Greenberg

### Executive Director Emerita:

Robin Bodner

### Editorial Committee:

Allie Alperovich  
Sharon Baker  
Carolyn Hochstadter Dicker  
Israel Drazin  
Rachel Kohl Finegold  
Viva Hammer  
Karen Miller Jackson  
Carol Kaufman Newman  
Pam Scheininger  
Zelda Stern

### Publications Consultant:

Deborah Wenger

### Graphic Designer:

Adam Rawson

### Founding Donors:

Belda and Marcel Lindenbaum  
Jewish Life Network/  
Steinhardt Foundation  
The Harry Stern Family Foundation,  
Zelda R. Stern

The JOFA Journal is published by the  
Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, a 501(c)(3) organization.  
Annual membership—\$36. All correspondence should be  
mailed to: JOFA, 520 8th Avenue, Fourth Floor, NY, NY 10018.  
We can be reached by phone at (212) 679-8500  
or email [jofa@jofa.org](mailto:jofa@jofa.org)

# How Simhat Bat Got Its Name

By Giti Bendheim

It's a sweet irony to be thinking about how the *simhat bat* ceremony got its name as I help the daughter for whom the name originated as she prepares for the *brit* of her newborn son. This new little boy's four-year-old sister came home from school the other day, visibly troubled by one of her classmates having told her that boys get a more special party when they are born than girls do. We explained, to her satisfaction, that boys get to have a *brit*, and girls get to have a *simhat bat*. We had to chuckle, however, when she proceeded to tell us on the following day that her brother's *simhat bat* was happening on Wednesday. So much for our hair-raising ride down the "slippery slope."

A few years ago I might have been afraid to retell this funny little anecdote, resonant as it is with feminist overtones. I can just hear the critical comments, see the eye rolls and raised eyebrows of those who fear that formalizing an event such as this signals the erosion of Orthodox practice and values. As a passionately Orthodox woman and a psychologist, I neither agree with this, nor am I afraid of these consequences. I'm much more afraid that little girls will absorb, at a very early time in their lives, fundamental and life-shaping erroneous ideas about how Judaism views them that will contribute adversely to how they view themselves. Yes, little boys are the visceral carriers of the covenant from their infancy. Precisely because of this, we need to make sure that little girls understand—from their earliest moments—how important they are, especially as our ability to do so rises easily from the depths of our tradition—as evidenced, for example, by the Sephardic *zeved habat* ceremony.

Thirty-seven years ago, having given birth to my second daughter, I felt determined to celebrate her arrival in a formal and public way. As she already had a brother and a sister, I was experienced in the differences between the celebrations of the arrivals of girls and boys. We had had a *kiddush* in honor of the birth of our eldest, a daughter—and I remember there being some difference of opinion between the in-laws about whether we should "do" even that. It struck me at the time that our tradition seemed somewhere between low-key and silent on the subject, but I was too immersed in the newness of it all to think about much more than how much time I had until the next feeding. As I write this, I am aware that it is precisely this immersion in mothering and schedules that defines a woman's exemption from time-bound *mitzvot*. But in my own mothering heart, I felt I had done neither ourselves nor our precious daughter justice.

With the birth of our second daughter, I knew I would find a way to mark properly her arrival. I have a vivid mental picture of myself a few days after her birth, surrounded by all the paraphernalia of babyhood, *sefarim* (books) open on the table beside me, telephone in hand as

*continued on page 13*

## From Our President, *continued from cover*

into the world, just as bat mitzvah choices have enabled bar mitzvah celebrations to broaden and morph?

### JOFA Celebrates Its Founders

We recently had the opportunity to honor three women who helped give birth to JOFA. At our first-ever dinner celebration in November, we paid tribute to Blu Greenberg, Carol Kaufman Newman, and Zelda Stern, who have worked tirelessly to "Put Women Back in the Picture." The gala event featured toasts, presentations, and an amazing art exhibition curated by Audrey Axelrod Trachtman.

This special dinner also marked the retirement of our long-time executive director, Robin Bodner. Robin has worked tirelessly for women and for this organization over the past ten years. She has been an amazing partner in helping to execute the vision of JOFA. Robin leaves JOFA with many victories under her belt, but there is still much work to be done.

### Women's Dignity Challenged in Israel

One area where work cries out to be done is in response to the distressing news coming out of Israel: the now-infamous incident in Beit Shemesh, where men harangued and spit on little girls for their "immodest" dress; the refusal of the Puah Institute to allow women speakers at its annual conference on gynecology and halakha; the denial by the Ministry of Health of the public presentation of an award to a woman doctor; and the lack of women on the panel that appoints religious judges to adjudicate issues of personal status, such as marriage and divorce. These are developments that we care about and have a stake in—and we will not let them go unnoted.

But not all of the news out of Israel is gloomy: The announcement earlier this year of the formation of Beit Hillel, a new national-religious rabbinical group that will include women Torah scholars, was certainly a step in the right direction. In February, two of JOFA's Board members and I met with the head of Koleh, Israel's feminist organization, to explore how we can work together more closely to support our mutual agenda.

These developments in Israel will certainly be among the key topics at our next conference, which we have already started to plan for 2013. By then, we also intend to have published the next halakhic source guides in our *Ta Sh'ma* series, including one on *birkat hagomel*, a blessing some women find very meaningful as part of their birth-related events. I hope everyone has had a chance to order our most recent *Ta Sh'ma* publication, *A Daughter's Recitation of Kaddish* (available on Amazon), and to attend one of the book tour events. JOFA is proud to support such outstanding works of scholarship that empower all of us to achieve greater ritual participation in life-cycle transitions and during the cycle of the year.

*Hag kasher v'sameah!*

# From Generation to Generation: *Simhat Bat* Comes of Age

By Joseph C. Kaplan

My wife, Sharon, and I were blessed in 1974 with the birth of our first—of four—daughters. Two weeks later, among family and friends, we celebrated Micole's birth with a *simhat bat* ceremony.

My article describing our *simhat bat* ("An Orthodox Simchat Bat") appeared in *Sh'ma* magazine and was subsequently reprinted in a booklet compiled by Ezrat Nashim titled *Blessing the Birth of a Daughter: Jewish Naming Ceremonies for Girls*. It was also translated into Spanish and appeared in the periodical *Maj'Shavot*, published by the World Council of Synagogues of Latin America. As far as I know, it was the first article on *simhat bat* from an Orthodox perspective that appeared in English—or Spanish.

As I wrote then, in addition to the great joy we felt upon the birth of our first child, that our firstborn was a daughter was of special personal and religious significance, as it gave us the opportunity to express our joy and thanks in a religious ceremony of our own choosing and design. As Orthodox Jews committed to halakha, we believed that we could create a *simhat bat* ceremony that would be within halakhic mandates, while still giving expression to our own deeply felt emotions, thoughts, and desires; and that we could introduce our daughter into the covenant between God and the Jewish people in a way that would have religious significance to us, to our family and friends, and to her as she grew older.

And so we did, not only for Micole, but, over a sixteen-year period, both in Manhattan and Teaneck, for Daniele, Raquel, and Gabrielle as well. A description of our *simhat bat* ceremony, adapted from my original article, appears as a sidebar on the next page.

Shortly after our second daughter was born, an article appeared in *Sh'ma*, "Birth Rituals and Jewish Daughters," by Daniel Leifer, which discussed "new birth initiation and dedication rituals for Jewish daughters which have been created," including our ceremony. The article analyzed each ceremony and criticized certain aspects of ours. Sharon and I responded to those criticisms with another *Sh'ma* article, "Innovation within Halakha for Daughters," in which we argued, on the one hand, for freedom and innovation with respect to the general form and timing of the ceremony, and, on the other hand, for adherence to tradition as, for example, in our decision not to create new *brakhot*. As we wrote then, although "somewhat schizophrenic,... that type of attitude perhaps best defines what Modern Orthodox Jews...go through in their quest for tradition in today's world."

And here we are, thirty-seven years later. More to the point, where *are* we thirty-seven years later? I am not a sociologist and have not conducted any surveys, but I have informally tried to discover what is happening in the Modern Orthodox community today to celebrate the birth of a daughter. My personal observations, as well as discussions with a number of younger friends and family members, indicate that there is a wide range of responses to the arrival of a daughter, similar in some ways to the diversity of practice that has developed with respect to bat mitzvah.

There are those—thankfully, a small minority—who still do nothing more than send out an e-mail with the news of the birth and the baby's name. But most in the Modern Orthodox community do something to mark the occasion, ranging from sponsoring a shul *kiddush*, to having family and friends over for a simple, or lavish, Friday night *shalom bat*, Saturday night *melaveh malka*, or Sunday morning brunch, perhaps accompanied by a repetition of the *Mi sheberakh* naming their daughter and usually including speeches (often about the choice of name). Some have called this "a *brit* without blood and *brakhot*." Yet others create a celebration that, like ours, attempts to transform a festive party into a ceremonial gathering by incorporating religious and ritual elements.

I believe that parents who use ceremonies like ours are still fairly rare. Yet even here there are signs of change. In the latest version of the Koren siddur, which is quite popular in Modern Orthodox shuls, the "Cycles of Life" section contains liturgy for twelve life-cycle events, including a two-page *zeved habat* daughter-



A pregnant woman, perhaps in the midst of childbirth, represents the nine months of pregnancy of *Ehad Mi Yodeah*, from a miniature Haggadah manuscript created in Germany in 1739. This Haggadah typifies the revival of decorated Hebrew manuscripts during the first half of the eighteenth century in the Hapsburg Empire.

Courtesy of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary



## Searching for a Guest Speaker for your Shul or Institution? Looking for a female scholar to lecture on a particular topic?

Visit our Speakers Bureau at [www.jofa.org](http://www.jofa.org)



naming service. Thus, unlike the case when my wife and I had our daughters and, of necessity, created a *simhat bat* ceremony *yesh me'ayin* (ex nihilo), parents today simply have to open a siddur to find an established ceremony to use.

Indeed, that is what my daughter and her husband recently did, as they celebrated the birth of my first granddaughter with a combination of my daughter's reciting the *birkat hagomel* and a prayer on the birth of a child during *shaharit*, and then performing a *zeved habat* following davening. Not only did the canonization of this liturgy in the siddur ease the way for the rabbi to allow these prayers and ceremony in his shul, but two of my daughter's friends who were present liked it so much that they decided to use the *zeved habat* ceremony when they named their daughters later that week.

My feelings regarding this turn of events are mixed. Putting aside my youthful flight of fancy that our *simhat bat* ceremony would serve as a template for more such ceremonies throughout the Modern Orthodox community, I am disappointed that so few young couples take the opportunity—a rare one within Orthodoxy—to be at once religiously creative and loyal to tradition and halakha. I thought that more would have realized the importance of utilizing a ceremony that allows for the increased participation of women in ritual events, especially when compared with the usual lack of any female participation—including that of the mother—in a *brit*.

However, I am still hopeful for the future because of the significant progress made over the past few decades. I grew up in a Modern Orthodox world in which absolutely nothing was done to commemorate two major rites of passage for females—birth and bat mitzvah. Indeed, in my family's Modern Orthodox shul and our day school, the refusal to recognize the existence of bat mitzvah was such that neither my parents nor sister received even a simple *mazal tov* from either of these institutions when she reached *gil mitzvot* (the age of mitzvot). And although brides were, of course, present at weddings, neither they, nor any other female, played any active participatory role in the religious aspect of that important and joyous day. Thus, I am gratified to see our community move to viewing some type of birth celebration (with the *zeved habat* liturgy becoming canonized), bat mitzvah, and *Shabbat kallah*

as the norm. Perhaps the Modern Orthodox community that my grandchildren will one day inhabit will more closely match what I had hoped to see in my and my children's worlds.

*Joseph C. Kaplan, a lawyer, lives in Teaneck, New Jersey. For the past thirty-six years he has been writing articles, for a number of publications, about matters of interest to the Jewish community, with an emphasis on Orthodox feminism and Modern Orthodoxy.*

### Our Simhat Bat Ceremony

1. The baby girl is brought into the room by the family matriarchs and passed among other family members to the front table, where she is laid on a white pillow on an antique silver platter. This is accompanied by the singing of two verses from the Bible starting and ending with the first and last letters of her Hebrew name.
2. Donations are made for planting trees in Israel, symbolically perpetuating the ancient talmudic custom (*Gittin* 57a) that, upon the birth of a daughter, her parents plant a pine tree whose branches could be used for the *huppah* under which she and her beloved will someday stand.
3. The mother thanks God for the past and present by reciting two blessings of gratitude: the *birkat hagomel*, thanking God for bringing her through this wonderful experience in good health, and the *birkat she-heheyanu*, thanking God for bringing all to this day of joy and *simha*.
4. Female family members read from the prayer of Hannah (1 Sam. 2:1–10), expressing gratitude to God upon the birth of her firstborn.
5. The baby is blessed by a *kohen*—in the Kaplan daughters' case, their paternal grandfather—with the traditional Priestly Blessing (Num. 6:24–26).
6. The special prayer from the Song of Songs and the *Mi sheberakh* found in the *Book of Prayer: According to the Custom of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews* by David de Sola Pool are recited, announcing, perhaps for a second time, the baby's name and proclaiming her a true daughter of Israel.
7. The baby's name is inscribed in a family tree.
8. The father recites the blessing of *Hatov vehameitiv*, the God who does good, recognizing all the good that God has bestowed on the baby and her family.
9. A blessing is recited over wine, words of Torah are spoken, and, as in all traditional Jewish ceremonies, a sumptuous spread—indeed, a *yom tov* feast—is enjoyed by all.

# Women's Participation in a Brit Milah Ceremony: *Kayeim et Hayered Hazeh Le'aviv U-le'imo*

By Nathaniel Helfgot

The past three decades have seen an explosion of women's involvement and participation in various life-cycle events and public and familial ritual roles, especially in the more progressive and open parts of the Modern Orthodox community. These include activities such as women reciting *hamotzi* on the hallah at the Shabbat meal on behalf of the family, reading the *ketubbah* under the *huppah*, delivering *derashot* in the synagogue or eulogies at funerals for relatives and friends, reciting one of the *sheva berakhot* at a meal during the seven days of rejoicing for the groom and bride, reading *Megillat Esther* on behalf of a group of women (or, in some instances, for a mixed-gender group), reciting the prayer on behalf of the IDF on Shabbat in the synagogue, responding as a bride with a verbal assent or various biblical verses to the *harei at mekudeshet* formula recited by the groom, and a host of other acts.

These developments have, in turn, led to an examination of various areas of ritual life to find possibilities for the expansion of the role of women. For example, women are rightly looking to be more fully involved in the momentous life events of their family and friends, within the parameters of halakha, as fully engaged *ovdei Hashem*. These moments of transcendence have been consecrated by our tradition as special times that offer opportunities for great spiritual and religious experiences, as well as times when the wellsprings of human emotions rise to the surface and let us touch eternity and feel the presence of God.

At the same time, the discussion surrounding greater participation for women cannot be divorced from the larger questions with which the Modern Orthodox community is struggling, including the weight that should be assigned to traditional Jewish practice and custom versus other halakhic and Jewish values and our attitudes toward feminism in general. Coupled with these issues are debates revolving around the parameters of rabbinic authority and who should be part of the decision-making process, the value of innovative practices on sensitive issues that may cause division within the Orthodox community, and the weight that we should assign to the sincere desire of women according to the precept of *la'asot nahat ruah l'nashim* (to give spiritual satisfaction to women). In addition, fear of the "slippery slope"—the notion that certain innovations that find parallels in non-Orthodox denominations are ipso facto invalid—the proper pace of halakhic change and innovation, as well as how we manage the tensions between the real lives we lead versus the perceived values reflected in traditional practice all lie at the core of these important discussions.

This short essay does not attempt to tackle these

meta-issues, but simply examines the opportunities for women, and especially the mother, to participate in the various stages and rituals of the circumcision ceremony as practiced today in most communities. This essay does, however, begin from a worldview rooted in a belief that when Jewish law permits such, inclusion is the proper path to take.

## History, Traditional Practice, and Contemporary Applications

In most contemporary traditional Orthodox communities, women's role in the circumcision ceremony is limited. The mother or some other relative passes the baby to the *kvater* or *kvaterin*, often a couple who bring the baby to the *bimah* and the mohel. (There is a beautiful tradition among German Jewish communities for women to prepare an embroidered *wimpel* to swaddle the baby during the ceremony; later the *wimpel* is fashioned into a sash for fastening the *sefer Torah* for the boy's bar mitzvah.) After that point in the service, the circumcision, the blessings, and the various *tefillot* are executed entirely by men. Later on, at the *seudat mitzvah*, the mother or another female relative may, in some instances, return to offer words of Torah or an explanation of the source of the name of the newborn. The mother could, alternatively, explain the choice of the name when it is announced during the circumcision ceremony.

Let us now turn to see the history of women's involvement in the ceremony itself, as well the halakhic possibilities for participation that exist in our contemporary framework.

## Mohalot

The Talmud records a dispute in B.T. *Avodah Zarah* 27 as to whether women may serve as *mohalot* to circumcise a boy or a man, based on different exegeses of verses in the Torah. The Talmud leaves the dispute unresolved, leading to a subsequent debate between major decisors as to the permissibility of this practice. Whereas Rambam and the Mehaber, the author of the *Shulhan Arukh* (R. Joseph Caro), deem it permissible for a woman to serve as a *mohellet*, Tosafot and other *rishonim*, as well as the Rema (R. Moshe Isserles), take a strict view and do not permit it. Nonetheless, it is clear from some of the responsa literature and scholarly discussion in the works of Profs. Daniel Sperber, Elisheva Baumgarten, and Avraham Grossman that there continued to be occasional instances of a woman serving as a *mohellet* in parts of Ashkenaz.

By the late Middle Ages and the modern period, women as *mohalot* seem to have fallen out of practice entirely, except in instances where no male *mohalim*

A wimpel created by Freda Birnbaum used to swaddle a baby boy at his brit; the wimpel will later be used as a sash for a sefer Torah.

Photo by Freda Birnbaum



could be found. Moreover, in contemporary society there are no *poskim* or Modern Orthodox communities that I know of that have formally endorsed such a practice. Even Sephardi *poskim*, such as Rav Ovadiah Yosef, who traditionally follow the rulings of the Mehaber, rule that one should not use a woman *mohel*. This reticence can be understood in the context of the natural halakhic conservatism of rabbinic decisors, who generally work to ensure that in sensitive areas of halakhic rituals reflective of personal status there is a bias toward “playing it safe.” Specifically, there is an effort on the part of the rabbis to encourage fulfillment of the ritual in a way acceptable to all opinions, or in rabbinic parlance, to be “*yotzei lekhoh hadei’ot*.”

### Sandakiot

It is equally clear from the responsa literature that in Ashkenaz in the Middle Ages, there were numerous instances when women served as *sandakiot*, holding the baby during the performance of the circumcision. On purely halakhic grounds, there does not seem to be any room to object to this practice, as it does not involve any formal halakhic act. Despite this, the practice was forcefully objected to by the great leader of German Jewry, R. Meir of Rothenberg, who frowned upon women entering the men’s area of the synagogue in beautiful clothing and perfume, which he saw as breaking the bounds of modesty and propriety (*p’ritzut*) and potentially leading to inappropriate mingling and socializing between the sexes. As a result of his own and his students’ influence, the original practice was discouraged and eventually seems to have died out, to the point that it was codified in the rulings of the Rema that a woman should not serve in the capacity of *sandak* unless there are no men available.

Given the very different social reality in which we currently live, where men and women interact on a regular basis, and the practical reality that in most contemporary synagogues during the *brit milah* ceremony many women regularly come into the sanctuary to be close to the baby and the family (and even more so in the context of a *brit milah* taking place in the home), the sense that having a woman serve as

a *sandakit* would constitute an act of *p’ritzut* does not reflect our lived reality. As such, as a matter of halakha, a woman serving as a *sandakit* should be permitted. In fact, the anecdotal evidence indicates that in a number of open Modern Orthodox communities, there have been instances in the last decades in which female relatives or esteemed female members of the community have served as *sandakiot*. It is, of course, critical to discuss such a course of action in advance with the *mohel* who is officiating to ensure that this relatively “daring” innovation (or return to more ancient custom) does not come as a surprise or become a cause for tension at the ceremony and in the community.

### The Blessings and Tefillot

The formal blessing on the act of circumcision is recited by the *mohel* and is a *birkat hamitzvah* (a blessing on performance of a mitzvah) recited by the father or his agent, as the father, and not the mother, is the one who is formally obligated in the mitzvah of *brit milah*, according to Jewish tradition. The second blessing, “*lehakhniso bev’rito shel Avraham avinu*” (to bring him into the covenant of Abraham our father), is recited by the father himself, as the recitation is incumbent on the person obligated in the mitzvah.

Two other elements come into play after those blessings. The first is a blessing from the geonic period, which begins with the words “*asher kideish yedid mibeten*” (“who sanctifies the beloved from the womb”). This blessing is not a *birkat hamitzvah*, but rather a *birkat hashevah*, a blessing of praise. As such, there is substantial room to suggest that this blessing may be said by anyone in the community, whether male or female. From my cursory inquiry into practices in various communities, even in contemporary open Orthodox circles, women are not generally given the honor of reciting this blessing. Besides the general force of common *minhag* and tradition, this reticence may be rooted in the view of some *aharonim* who believe that this blessing should be recited by those who are *b’nei milah*, within the parameters of the obligation to be circumcised, which would exclude women. (However,

*continued on page 20*

# Brit Milah: A Daughter's Perspective

By Yardaena Osband

I have always loved the mitzvah of *brit milah*. As a woman, this might seem surprising, as I have heard from many friends how terrified they were at their sons' *britot*. However, for me, my three sons' *britot* provided some of the most spiritually significant moments of my life.

One of the reasons I have always cared for this mitzvah is because my beloved father, Michael Osband, ז"ל, was a *mohel*. My father was a pediatric oncologist, and while my mother was pregnant with me, he learned how to do *milah* in the event I would be a boy. He performed the *britot* for my three brothers, for many children of close friends, and sometimes for sick children who needed their *britot* to be performed in the hospital. We even had a special tree in our backyard where the *orlahs* (foreskins) were buried. One of my brothers' and my favorite pictures of my father, reproduced here, is the one we refer to as the *brit* picture. The picture reminds me of a Caravaggio: The background is dark and black and was taken immediately after completing my brother's *milah*. My father is wrapped in his *tallit* as he is holding my brother in a pillow with his hand wrapped in *tefillin*. My father's right pinky is in my brother's mouth, comforting my brother, as he looks outward, not focused on the photographer, but clearly very deep in his own thoughts. To our family, this picture represents my father's commitment to our tradition and the tight embrace of love and faith in which we were all wrapped.

My father loved to take his daughter (me) and sons with him to perform this special mitzvah. In fact, one Yom Kippur, when I was young, my father was asked to do a *brit* in an adjacent town. He took my brother and me with him so that we could accompany him to perform this mitzvah on Yom Kippur. When I think back to the times I went with him, I am touched by the fact that my father loved to take his daughter with him as much as his sons. Accompanying him taught me to appreciate the power and mystery of *brit milah*, even though it is a mitzvah that many women find difficult to connect to.

I know that there are some who may question how one can love one's child and at the same time inflict pain on him through *brit milah*. I have never felt this contradiction. Instead, I have understood how the *britot* of my three brothers were some of my father's holiest moments on earth, when he brought his children into the *brit* of Avraham.

I have also been blessed, like my parents, to be the mother of one daughter and three sons. Each one of my sons' *britot* was a different experience and unique in its own way. The *brit* of my eldest son, who is named for my father, was performed by my husband and was an intensely inclusive experience. There was much pain in knowing that my father was not there to perform



The author's father at his son's *brit milah*.

Courtesy of Yardaena Osband

his *brit*, and some comfort in that this baby would be given my father's name. The rabbi who officiated at the *brit milah* gave us a few ideas of how to incorporate women into the ceremony. Some of these ideas included women entering the main sanctuary to observe the *brit*, and a chain of women consisting of aunts, sisters, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers forming to pass the baby from the entrance of the sanctuary to the *bima* where the *kvatarim* (godparents) were standing. Last, our rabbi suggested that I stand up front alongside my husband, allowing me to be a full participant in the mitzvah and not an observer trying to peer through a *mehitza*.

The *britot* of my other two sons were, for a variety of reasons, not as inclusive as the first. But when I reflect on the *brit* of my eldest son, and share its memory with others, I am reminded that this ritual can be expanded within the Orthodox world to be more inclusive of women.

Entering my sons into the covenant with God was a mystical moment in my life, greatly influenced by the experiences I was blessed to have with my father, ז"ל. These moments were made even more powerful when I was given opportunities to participate in the ritual of my own sons' *britot*. It is my prayer that my husband and I will be able to transmit the meaning of *brit milah* to our daughter and sons as it was taught to me.

Dr. Yardaena Osband is a pediatrician who lives in Riverdale, New York, with her husband and four children.



## Zeved Habat

By Anat Sharbat

There is no longer much controversy over the right of women to be acknowledged publicly within the Modern Orthodox community. Therefore, a formal ceremony to celebrate a daughter's birth is natural and necessary, allows her to feel she has a place within the community, and reciprocally encourages the members of the community to celebrate her place among them.

The ceremony for a new baby is a rite of passage that marks a monumental event in one's life. Despite this, there is no one accepted way to acknowledge the birth of a daughter in the prescribed religious life-cycle ceremonies. In the past, when a daughter was born, the father would usually announce the birth in the synagogue on Shabbat or on any day when the Torah was taken out. Sometimes the birth was acknowledged by a *kiddush* for the congregation. This type of acknowledgment was usually accompanied by the announcing of the name of the newborn child and the mother's recitation of the *birkat hagomel* (blessing on being saved from danger), if the mother was present. Under less favorable circumstances, which were more common, there was no public acknowledgment at all.

During the past twenty years, new traditions have become more common, and new ceremonies

acknowledging the birth of a daughter have flourished. These ceremonies are not organized in a uniform way; rather, as an evolving tradition, the form of the ceremony and its content are different from one family to another. Consequently, the name of the ceremony differs: There are those who call it a *simhat bat* and those who dub it a *brita*, a Hebrew word coined (mistakenly) to emphasize that the ceremony bespeaks a dedication of the daughter, in parallel to the ceremony of a *brit*. Then there is *zeved habat*—the name, based in Sephardic tradition, that we chose for the ceremonies we conducted for our daughters.

### Origin of the Term Zeved Habat

The name *zeved*, gift, comes from the verse in *Bereishit* (30:20) in which Leah thanks God for the birth of Zevulun, saying: "וַיִּבְדְּנִי אֱלֹהִים זֶבֶד טוֹב" ("God has endowed me with a good dowry"). In the following verse, the birth of Dina is announced. Ibn Ezra, commenting on this verse, links Leah's gratitude for the birth of Zevulun to the subsequent birth of Dina in *Bereishit* 30:21, because they had shared one womb as twins. Thus, the word *zeved* is a combination of the first two letters of the name Zevulun and the first letter

*continued on page 12*

## On Being a Sandakit

By Belda Lindenbaum

When my daughter had her first child, a boy, sixteen years ago, she called and asked me to fill the role of *sandak*, or, in my case, *sandakit*. I was excited to take part in this ceremony, as I remembered from the *britot* of my own three sons that I had been pretty much a nonparticipant.

Quite apart from that memory, it seemed so right to be performing this mitzvah. I remember hearing Reuven Kimelman, a Brandeis professor of rabbinic literature, speak at the first JOFA Conference about the Israelite women in Egypt holding their babies for the *brit* until the men complained. They said it was a dishonor for the men to be passed over, and so the women were excluded. I think women *sandakiot* were the norm until the thirteenth century.

On that day, I held my grandson, watched the *mohel* enter him into the *brit*—without feeling the angst a male might have felt—and comforted him tenderly as his mother would have, and as I had tended her as a child. My son-in-law's mother held him for the naming, as he was named in memory of her husband. My husband was given a separate role, so we were all represented on the *bima*.

Since that *brit* I have been *sandakit* at number of my grandsons' ceremonies, and the thrill of holding and comforting them has never diminished. We have found *mohalim* who were sympathetic to the practice of using a woman as *sandakit*, and the synagogues we attend are welcoming—which is, of course, a precondition for such a service. Moreover, expanding one's rabbi's vision of what is permissible within halakha is also satisfying to me.

---

*Belda Lindenbaum, a JOFA board member, is past president of American Friends of Bar-Ilan University and past president of Drisha Institute.*

## Entering the Covenant, *continued from page 1*

concluded with the Jewish people, and the land [of Israel] and the Torah were given to all of the Jewish people.”<sup>1</sup>

The covenant thus lies implicitly at the heart of every *simhat bat*, when a baby girl is welcomed into the Jewish community. Why, then, is the covenant typically not mentioned as part of Orthodox *simhat bat* ceremonies, when it would appropriately frame the essential religious significance of newborn Jewish girls? More fundamentally, why does the association of girls with covenant often provoke an obvious sense of discomfort? What is it about the covenant that makes some people think that it is only for males?

The answer lies in the relationship between the covenant and circumcision. It is important to recognize that the covenant and circumcision are distinct. Circumcision is one biblically mandated symbol of the overarching covenant, among others, such as Shabbat, *mezuzah*, *tzitzit*, and *tefillin*. Significantly, the Torah explicitly mentions covenant and circumcision together only in Genesis 17, where circumcision is introduced. A small handful of other Torah passages implicitly portray circumcision as a symbol of the covenant (e.g., that a man must be circumcised to eat the Paschal lamb), but these references are the exception, not the rule. The Torah repeatedly uses the independent term “covenant” (“*brit*”) to mean the foundational bond between God and Israel, without any mention of circumcision.

### Covenant in the Torah and Rabbinic Sources

The covenant is the most prominent theme of the Torah’s narrative and the *raison d’être* of the Jewish people in this narrative. The Torah spells out the terms of the covenant every time it articulates God’s eternal love for the Jewish people and their obligations to worship God, observe the commandments, and remain holy. Likewise, every mention of God chastising the Jewish people for their idol worship and other transgressions reflects a violation of the covenant. Furthermore, the Torah associates the covenant with fundamental components of Jewish existence. For example, a covenant is made at *Matan Torah* (the giving of the Torah) (Deut. 5:2), and the Ten Commandments are the “covenant” or “the words of the covenant” that are inscribed on the “tablets of the covenant” (Ex. 34:28, Deut. 4:13, 9:9–15). Both men and women are initiated into the covenant (Deut. 29:9–12) and are included in the “nation” of Israel (Deut. 31:12). It is significant that none of these concepts or references is related to circumcision.

The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel endlessly plead with the people to stop desecrating the covenant and describe God’s forthcoming punishments and ultimate forgiveness. Yet these prophets do not mention the physical act of circumcision with respect to the Israelites (although circumcision is used a few times as a metaphor). In fact, these prophets go to great lengths to disassociate the covenant from ritual.

Whereas the theme of covenant suffuses the Torah, the Talmud focuses more on legalistic details than on fundamental philosophies. Nonetheless, we see that one

*mishnah* (Nedarim 3:11) refers to Jews as “circumcised,” regardless of whether a man is actually circumcised. Thus, we see that circumcision itself does not affect one’s covenantal status. An opinion in B.T. *Avodah Zara* 27a states that women “resemble one who has been circumcised.” At least five halakhic authorities, over the span of centuries, explain that this is so because both women and uncircumcised men are part of the community of Israel.<sup>2</sup> It follows that all Jews are covenantal members, irrespective of circumcision.

It is also significant that the Rambam does not characterize circumcision in terms of the special relationship between God and the Jewish people, nor does he refer to circumcision as “*brit milah*.” Rather, he devotes attention to the technical details of fulfilling the circumcision commandment and emphasizes the specific covenant between God and Abraham. The Rambam conceptualizes circumcision as a means of weakening a man’s lust and, at the same time, of creating a covenant, meaning an alliance or league, among believers in God’s unity (e.g., Jews and Moslems). The Rambam thus distances circumcision from the distinctive, exclusive covenant between God and Israel.<sup>3</sup>

Taken together, these sources demonstrate that circumcision is but one facet (albeit an important one) of the larger concept of covenant, and the metaphysical notion of covenant transcends the physicality of the circumcision symbol. Therefore, the symbolic entry of girls into the covenant, though not marked with circumcision, is as real and significant as that of boys.

### A Misleading Conflation

Nonetheless, circumcision and the covenant have been conflated for many centuries, and this misconception remains so entrenched today that the two have become practically synonymous. Circumcision “occupies the field” with respect to the covenant, and circumcision has become the primary, instinctive association with the word “covenant.” In essence, the physical symbolism of circumcision has subsumed the metaphysical covenant. The development of this mistaken belief was not inevitable, and is the result of historical factors.

One contemporary example of this phenomenon is the pervasive usage of the term *brit milah* (“covenant of circumcision”) rather than simply *milah* (“circumcision”). The *brit milah* terminology, which first appeared in the *Mekhilta* (on Ex. 19:5) in the third to fourth century, seems to have become accepted in the Middle Ages. By contrast, common usage does not covenantalize Shabbat, a prime manifestation of the covenant in Jewish life. The Torah refers to Shabbat as an *ot*, a sign or symbol, and as *brit olam*, an everlasting covenant, the precise terminology that the Torah applies to circumcision. The *Mekhilta* passage that first used *brit milah* interestingly also uses the term *brit Shabbat*, yet no one today refers to Shabbat as *brit Shabbat*. This observation highlights the point that circumcision today carries greater covenantal recognition than Shabbat.

Among English speakers, the semantic covenantalization



An engraving by Augustin Calmet, of Amsterdam and Leiden, from 1731, illustrates the various roles of the participants in the circumcision. Note the women standing at the door.

Courtesy of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary

of circumcision has become entrenched with the rampant use of “*brit*” or “*bris*” to refer to circumcision and the circumcision ceremony. Even though this usage is likely meant as a shorthand, it has unwittingly stripped the covenant of its independent, fundamental role in Judaism.

This conflation has been longstanding. In one particularly vivid example, *Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer*, a ninth-century *midrash*, has the Israelites putting on their doorposts, on the evening of the first Passover, a mixture of the blood of the Paschal lamb and the blood of circumcision. The *midrash* connects this mixture of bloods to Ezekiel 16:6, in which God states, “I said to you: ‘In your bloods live’; I said to you: ‘In your bloods live.’” This verse, whose recitation has become integral to the circumcision ceremony, speaks of the covenant in the context of an allegory of the Jewish people’s infidelity to God and their desecration of the covenant. Moreover, the blood referred to in Ezekiel is a mother’s birth blood, a “female” blood that bears no relationship to circumcision. Using this covenantal allegory to represent the blood of circumcision, therefore, demonstrates a blending of covenant and circumcision that has entered the circumcision liturgy.

Another familiar liturgical example is in the second blessing of *Birkat Hamazon*, in which we thank God for “Your covenant that You have sealed into our flesh.” This phrase attributes physicality to the covenant, transforming the metaphysical covenant into the physical mark of circumcision. This blessing thus portrays circumcision as the primary—or perhaps the only—manifestation of the covenant. While this liturgy is the product of the relevant discussion in the Babylonian Talmud (*Berakhot* 48b-49a), the Jerusalem Talmud (*Berakhot* 1:5) assumes that the second blessing of *Birkat Hamazon* references the generalized covenant between God and Israel.<sup>4</sup> This contrast demonstrates that the covenant has not always been principally associated with circumcision.

A scene from nineteenth-century Germany dramatically highlights the fallacy of equating the covenant with circumcision. There was a movement among Reform Jews to refuse circumcision for their sons. As a result, a number of community councils in Germany excluded uncircumcised boys from their registers, thus denying these boys entry into the Jewish community—a move that incited vigorous controversy. The traditional rabbinate, with the aim of compelling parents to circumcise their sons, supported this aggressive move. Addressing these rabbis at a conference, R. Chaim Soloveitchik asserted that circumcision is not a requirement for membership in the Jewish people, and that refusing to circumcise is no more violative than desecrating the Shabbat or transgressing in other ways. Relaying this story about his grandfather, R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik voiced his approval of the rabbis’ aim, but, significantly, agreed that his grandfather’s position was correct as a matter of halakha.<sup>5</sup> This story demonstrates the widespread belief that circumcision is required for inclusion in the Jewish people, but also confirms that this belief is erroneous.

### Covenant as an Independent Concept

The unfortunate result of this misconception is that the commandment of circumcision, which is a symbol of the covenant, has obscured and overshadowed the covenant as an independent concept. Many people, therefore, mistakenly believe that the covenant applies only to the extent one is or can be circumcised. Because women are not circumcised, many Jews today have a gnawing discomfort with associating women and covenant. A few may even believe outright that women are *not* members of the covenant. In other words, if the covenant is the same as circumcision, and if circumcision is only for men, then the covenant must also be only for men. Conflating covenant and circumcision, therefore, has the actual or potential effect of wrongly excluding women from the covenant as a matter of common perception.

It is my belief that this misguided understanding is the reason that Orthodox *simhat bat* ceremonies typically avoid any reference to the covenant. However, to the contrary, women can be—and, in fact, are—members of the Divine covenant, despite their inability to be circumcised. Moreover, inclusion in the covenant should be ceremonially recognized at birth, when this momentous status takes hold. Ritualizing covenantal membership at birth sets the stage for a life devoted to covenantal responsibilities and guided by *ol malkhut shamayim*.

It is important that we correct this misconception and explicitly ritualize the covenant as an essential pillar of the Jewish tradition for all Jews. A covenantal *simhat bat* does just that, by recognizing women’s rightful place in the covenant, the most fundamental expression of the special relationship between God and the Jewish people. Welcoming a daughter without symbolically entering her into the covenant misses an

*continued on page 13*

## Zeved Habat, continued from page 9

of the name Dina, expressing Leah's thankfulness for having a girl, Dina.

*Zeved habat* is a daughter's first ceremony, informing the beginning of her new place in her family, community, and the Jewish people. Welcoming ceremonies express belonging and symbolize the link between the individual and the community. During the ceremony she is surrounded by family and close friends, symbolizing the spheres of community into which she is being inaugurated. Her family, her friends, and her religious community embrace her.

The *zeved habat* ceremony is associated with Sephardic communities, and *minhag* (custom) may vary among them. In the Bukharan community, it is customary to sing the first stanza of *D'ror yikrah*, because every line of this Sabbath table song finishes with the word *bat* (daughter).

In general, ceremonies for the birth of daughters, whether called *zeved habat* or *simhat bat*, do not have any laws or established *minhagim* (customs) governing them; as a result, there are as many different forms of celebration as there are formats. The ceremony of *zeved habat* sometimes includes the giving of the name, and at other times, there is a separate ceremony for giving the name.

### זֶבֶד הַבַּת

דְּיוֹקָת אֶת הַתְּנוּקָה בְּיָדוֹ וְיֵאמַר

יוֹגֵרְתִּי בְּחַיֵּי הַמַּלְאָה בְּסִרְיָהּ הַמְּרֻנָּה דְּרֹאֲנִי אֶת מִרְיָם  
הַשְּׂמִיעִינִי אֶת קוֹלְךָ כִּי קוֹלְךָ עֶרֶב וּמִרְיָם נֹאדָה:

מִי שֶׁבָּרַךְ אֶמְרֵינוּ שֶׁרָה רַבֵּקָה רַחֵל וְלֵאָה וְזֵרָיִם הַנְּבִיאָה וְאַבְיגַיִל  
וְאַסְתָּר הַמַּלְכָּה בַּת אֲבִיחַיִל. הוּא יִבְרַךְ אֶת הַיְלָדָה הַנְּעִימָה הַזֹּאת  
וְיִקְרָא שְׁמָהּ (שְׁלוּמִית) בְּמוֹלַד טוֹב וּבְשַׁעַת בְּרָכָה וְיִגְדֵּלָהּ בְּבְרִיאוֹת שְׁלֹם  
מְנוּחָה. וְיִזְכָּקָה לְאַבְיָה וְלֵאסָה לְרֹאוֹת כְּשֶׁמַּחֲתָה וּבְחַפְתָּה בְּבָנִים וְזָכָרִים  
עוֹשֶׂר וְכַבֹּד דְּשָׁנִים וְרַעֲנָנִים יִגְוֹכֹן בְּשִׁיבָה וְכֵן יְהִי רָצוֹן וְנֶאֱמַר אָמֵן:

The text of a *zeved habat* ceremony from the  
Sephardic prayer book, *Tefillat Yesharim*.

## How We Celebrated Our Daughters' Zeved Habat

In our family, we separated the two ceremonies. We organized one ceremony to give a name to our daughter in the synagogue around eight days after her birth. In this ceremony, we blessed our daughter with this *Mi sheberakh*: "The One who blessed our mothers Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, Miriam the Prophetess, Avigail, and Esther the Queen, the daughter of Avihail, bless our pleasant daughter and call her name \_\_\_\_\_, the daughter of \_\_\_\_\_ [names of mother and father], with good luck and bountiful blessings, and may they raise her in health, peace, and restfulness. And may her father and mother be privileged to see her reach joyous occasions, and the wedding canopy, and success in the ways of happiness, richness, and honor. And so may it be Thy will that yet in old age they shall be pleasant and verdant and fruitful, and let us say, Amen."

The ceremony of *zeved habat* was held later, when it

was convenient for all members of the household, and when our home had returned to normal life after the birth. This could be up to a year after the birth of the baby. The reason we were able to be flexible was because of the gap created by the lack of an established ceremony in the tradition, allowing one to fill it in the best way suited to each individual family.

The ceremony that my spouse, Ariel, and I created for our four daughters was based on ceremonies that we had observed others doing and on research from the website of Machon Itim (<http://itim.org.il>).

For all our ceremonies we used a similar format. We created a booklet of *p'sukim* (verses) and *brakhot* (blessings), which we handed out. We opened our ceremony by explaining the meaning of *zeved habat*. Next, we read *p'sukim* to welcome our newborn baby girl, to empower her, and to welcome her into our world, expressing our happiness on her joining our family. The change we made from the first ceremony to the next was that at our first daughter's ceremony, we passed her from hand to hand among family members, as is customary at a *brit milah*. The family member holding her read a *pasuk* that we had chosen for him or her to read. At our second daughter's ceremony, we invited special guests to participate in the reading of the *p'sukim*. Each person we invited up reflected a special value that we hoped would inspire our child as she grew. When our fourth daughter was born, her oldest sister, then in first grade, was invited up on behalf of her sisters to read the *pasuk* in which Rivka is blessed: "Our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of ten thousands, and let thy seed possess the gate of those who hate them" (*Bereishit* 24:60). We hoped that this experience would empower both our oldest and youngest daughters, as well as those in between.

After the *p'sukim* were read, Ariel and I each gave a speech. Between our speeches we invited the guests to join us in singing a prayer from *Hallel*, beginning, "How can I repay unto the Lord all His bountiful dealings toward me?" (*Ps.* 116:12 ff.) We sang two modern Israeli songs, one after the second speech and another before the *seudat hodayah* (meal of thanksgiving). The first, titled "*Shir Leshira*" ("A Song for Shira"), is about a parent watching over her/his baby daughter. The second varied between two choices, either "*Halevai*," a song of hopefulness for our daughter's future, or "*Todah*," a song of gratitude.

We have also announced our planting of trees in Israel, in keeping with the custom reported in the Talmud (*Gittin* 57a). The Gemara tells us that when a baby girl was born, a pine tree was planted, and when a baby boy was born, a cedar tree was planted. Before the wedding of the child, the trees were cut down and a wedding canopy (*huppah*) created out of the branches of both trees.

Subsequently in the ceremony, we would call upon our baby's grandparents to bless our daughter with *birkat kohanim*, using the female-gendered verbs in Hebrew. Then everyone would join in the singing of "*Hamalakh*



*Hagoel*” (“The Redeeming Angel”), inviting all the kids to gather around.

At this point we would partake in the *seudat hodaya*. At the conclusion of the meal, we sang *Birkat Hamazon*, with added blessings that we adapted from the blessings added to *Birkat Hamazon* at a *brit milah*, to include the baby girl and her mother:

הרחמן הוא יברך את אבי הילדה ואמה, ויזכו לגדלה ולחנכה  
ולחכמה, לכבוד ולתפארת לכל עמה ויהי ה' אלוהיה עמה;

הרחמן הוא יברך את הרכה והעדינה, ויהיו ידיה ולבה  
לאל אמונה, ותזכה לראות פני השכינה, בשובך לציון ברנה;

הרחמן הוא יברך את הקהילה אשר ששו לעשות צדקה  
בגילה, וישלם פעלם ומשכרתם כפולה, ויתנם למעלה למעלה;

הרחמן הוא יגאלנו גאולת עולמים, בזכות שומרי בריתו  
הכולכי תמים, ויבשר בשורות טובות ונחומים, לעם אחד מפורד  
ומפרד בין העמים;

הרחמן אשר כונן צעדנו עד הלום, יקדש בנו את שמו אשר  
בעילום, ויאר אלינו כשמש ויהלום, בריתו תהיה אתנו,  
החיים והשלום.

In this article, I have reviewed the *zeved habat* ceremony for a baby girl in the context of the changes in the women's position in Jewish life and society. As these ceremonies were rare until now—and in some circles still don't take place—there is no traditional formal content for a *zeved habat*. Thus, there is space for personal, meaningful, and festive content to be added by each family. The ceremony that we created for our own family was such a personally meaningful occasion.

*Dr. Anat Sharbat graduated from Bar-Ilan University with an M.A. and a Ph.D. in Talmud. She studied at Midreshet Ein Hanatziv, Matan, and the beit midrash program of the Shalom Hartman Institute. Dr. Sharbat served as a board member of Kolech—Religious Women's Forum. In 2008, she moved to New York and is now a student at Yeshivat Maharat.*

### How *Simhat Bat* Got Its Name, *continued from page 3*

I consulted with our rabbi about what possibilities I could consider. The party took place in our home, as had her brother's *brit* two years before, on the Thursday evening of the day we named her. We invited friends and family by phone, calling our event a “*simhat bat*,” a term we also put into writing on the programs we distributed. The very simple ceremony consisted of our speeches, *birkat habanim* (the parents' blessing) delivered by my father-in-law, and *birkat Hatov vehameitiv* (the blessing of He who is good and does good), recited as we opened a new bottle of wine. At the time, I found this compromise acceptable and even innovative. Today I find it problematic and perhaps even insulting to recite a blessing of thanksgiving over a valued bottle of wine because one cannot recite that blessing over the birth of a new child. While it was, perhaps, an elegant halakhic solution, as the blessing could then cover both sources of joy, the implication that the new wine is more blessing-worthy than the new child still feels incongruous to me. It highlighted, rather than solved, the issue—but it was a start.

When it came to figuring out what to call this ceremony, the words *simhat bat* simply popped into my head. The rhyming phrase expressed simply, directly, and perhaps somewhat whimsically what I wanted to say: that the birth of a daughter is, in itself, a true *simha*, and that there is a particular joy unique to femalehood that is worthy of its own celebration. Marking a girl's arrival in a formal way was an idea whose time had come. I smile to myself that I had the opportunity to mark the moment at which it, like my own little daughter, could be given a name.

*Dr. Giti (Gail) Bendheim is a psychologist in private practice in New York.*

### Entering the Covenant, *continued from page 11*

opportunity to incorporate the framework articulated in the Torah itself.

Thus, the purpose of a *simhat bat* should be to enter a newborn girl symbolically into the covenant by means of a clear covenantal theme and a focal covenantal ritual. As our daughters begin their lives, we should declare that they are full-fledged members of the ancient covenant, with its eternal dynamic of Divine love and human responsibilities. Symbolically situating our daughters within this dynamic is our best means of setting them upon a lifelong course of Torah and *mitzvot*.

*Sharon R. Siegel's forthcoming book, A Jewish Ceremony for Newborn Girls: The Torah's Covenant Affirmed, will be published by Brandeis University Press in early 2013. Sharon lives with her husband and four children in Teaneck, New Jersey. A more extensive version of this article originally appeared in the Tishrei 5772 (2011) edition of Meorot—A Forum of Modern Orthodox Discourse. Reprinted with permission.*

<sup>1</sup> Eliezer Berkovits, *Jewish Women in Time and Torah* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 1990), 87.

<sup>2</sup> See Yael Levin, “A Woman Resembles One Who Is Circumcised” in *Mesechet*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Matan, The Torah Institute for Women, 2004), 29–31.

<sup>3</sup> *Sefer HaMitzvot*, positive mitzvah no. 215; *Moreh N'vukhim* 3:49; *Mishneh Torah*, *Sefer Ahava*, *Hilkhot Milah*; *ibid.*, *Sefer Shoftim*, *Hilkhot Melakhim*, 10:7–8; see also Shaye J.D. Cohen, *Why Aren't Jewish Women Circumcised?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 146–54.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 128–33.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983), 90.

# Putting Women Back in the Picture: A Celebration

Honoring Blu Greenberg, Carol Kaufman Newman,  
and Zelda R. Stern

Event Chairs:

*Belda and Marcel Lindenbaum, Giti and Jack Bendheim, and Barbara Dobkin*

Sunday, November 20, 2011

Three JOFA founders were honored for their visionary work at the organization's first-ever celebratory event, which took place on November 20, 2011, at Bridgewater's in New York's South Street Seaport. The evening's theme, "Putting Women Back in the Picture," conveyed JOFA's commitment to enriching the Modern Orthodox community by increasing women's inclusion in ritual, leadership, and scholarship.

The honorees, Blu Greenberg, Carol Kaufman Newman, and Zelda R. Stern, each represented an essential aspect of JOFA's leadership. Blu Greenberg is the spiritual mother of Orthodox feminism and the founding president of JOFA. Carol Kaufman Newman provided six years of inspiration and guidance as JOFA's president. And Zelda R. Stern is a strategic philanthropist who was essential to JOFA's founding and growth. Each of these women has played a critical role in actualizing JOFA's mission, and each continues to inspire us to carry it forward with the next generation of Orthodox women and men.

More than 420 women and men joined in the celebration. The evening began with an exhibition of artwork that addressed the organization's main



JOFA Celebration honorees  
Blu Greenberg and Carol Kaufman  
Newman with JOFA President  
Judy Hecklen

initiatives. (See accompanying article for more about the art exhibition.) Our dynamic MC, and longtime JOFA Board member, Bat Sheva Marcus, introduced Devorah Zlochower, who offered a thought-provoking *d'var Torah* about the *parasha, Hayei Sarah*. JOFA President Judy Hecklen spoke about JOFA and introduced the moving video. (Check it out on JOFA's website, [www.jofa.org](http://www.jofa.org).)

Nessa Rapoport, Idana Goldberg, Abigail Tambor, and Laura Shaw Frank toasted our honorees. The chairs then presented each of them with papercut artwork by Dena Levie, depicting Miriam leading the women and dancing with the timbrels, and engraved with customized quotations.

"At the end of the evening, celebration attendees had a richer sense of JOFA's mission," said Robin Bodner, longtime executive director of JOFA. "Through the art exhibition, the words of our founders and visionaries and our inspiring video, JOFA's deep hopes for women came to life, motivating all of us to continue our work and dream ever bigger."



JOFA Celebration honorees  
Zelda Stern and Blu Greenberg

## Artists Put Women Back in the Picture

J OFA's special evening featured an art exhibition, *Putting Women Back in the Picture*, which was both a celebration of women in Jewish life and a thoughtful critique of the ways in which the absence of women affects Jewish text—and, by extension, Jewish life. The eight female artists whose work was on display represent a cross-section of Jewish feminist artists today: They included old and young, American and Israeli, and engaged with new media and traditional styles. What was unique about the group of pieces was the central role that Jewish iconography and text played in these contemporary, personal works.

A number of themes ran through the exhibit—communicating with God, grappling with religious strictures, and incorporating the female into Jewish tradition. Prayer was a common space for exploration and reinterpretation. *Up*, a video installation by Hadassah Goldvicht, is a ritualistic enactment of the raising of one's heels in *kedusha* to better connect to the Divine. *Flinging Prayer* by Heather G. Stoltz, an interactive work inspired by a phrase in the Talmud, invites the viewer to write and toss individual prayers that mass into a mountain of collective wishes. *Women of the Balcony* by Jane Trigere is a window into the life of German Jewish refugees, their faces contoured by *t'khines*, a uniquely female prayer form. The incendiary mix of body, clothing, and the religious world is addressed in *504 Years Later* by Andi Arnovitz, a painful response to the conflicts that arise from a too-strict interpretation of the laws of modesty. *Pink Story* by Ilana Zeffren confronts the biblical injunction against

men wearing women's clothing with lascivious cartoon characters. On the other hand, *Fringed Garments* by Rachel Kanter gently reminds us that clothing can be used to beautifully connect Jewish ritual tradition to modern ideas of feminism and Judaism.

Female leadership was presented from historical, religious, and personal perspectives. *Dona Gracia* by Estelle Yarinsky proves that even in the world of sixteenth-century Christian Portugal, worldly Jewish women were valued. *If Only They Had Asked Us* by Andi Arnovitz posits that a Talmud with input from women would have been a much more vibrant work. Finally, *Pirkei Imahot, the Wisdom of the Mothers*, by Susan Kaplow adds maternal folk wisdom to our text-based tradition.

The media used most commonly in this exhibit were textile and fiber. Fiber art has, in the past, been viewed primarily as a female art form, with its overt references to domesticity and the softness of the female body. In the art displayed, it was used to several different effects—to create a colorful mantle of leadership (*If Only They Had Asked Us*), to appropriate and feminize traditional male ritual garments (*Fringed Garments*), and, in its most grim guise, to keep women imprisoned in dead marriages (*Coat of the Agunah*). This exhibit demonstrated how art can give voice to women who feel excluded from traditional life and how the questions they raise are relevant to all Jews.

Audrey Axelrod Trachtman  
Exhibition Chair



Rachel Kanter with *Fringed Garments*, which uses clothing to connect the concepts of Jewish tradition and feminism.



# What Do We Name the Baby?

By Gigi Yellen-Kohn

We send out a unique personal prayer when we name a newborn. Whatever public *brakhot* we may say, it is the quiet uniting of received tradition and imagined future that trembles within us at this moment of holy decision. Marking our child with a name, we link him or her to what we pray will be a chain of honor.

Is there halakha about naming? R. Aryeh Lebowitz, rabbi of Congregation Beis Haknesses of North Woodmere, New York, offers abundant rabbinic resources in his 26-page exploration, “Choosing a Name for a Child,” in the *Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society* (Vol. XLVII, Spring 2004, 33–59). R. Lebowitz cites R. Betzael Stern, who “explained that naming after the relative of a father or mother is a fulfillment of the mitzvah of *kibbud av v’eim* [honoring parents].”

How we fulfill that mitzvah is a matter of custom, or *minhag*. And customs, in our time, frequently collide. When Jews of different backgrounds marry, clashing

*minhagim* about names can create problems.

Given the emotionally fraught atmosphere surrounding a birth, it’s no surprise that avoidance of arguments over the choice of a name overrides any naming tradition. R. Lebowitz notes, “The *Chida* (Yosef Ometz, 288, 362) writes that it is especially important to avoid any sort of strife in the house of a newborn and [its] mother, as this can cause danger to the baby.”

My teacher, Rivy Poupko Kletenik, head of school of the Seattle Hebrew Academy, cites a tradition that parents have *ruah hakodesh* (Divine intuition) when naming their child. An important point she makes is that it is the parents, and only the parents, on whom the responsibility falls to name the child. Other family members may expect, hope, suggest, and urge, but it is the parents’ choice that remains the unannounced surprise when the baby is named in public.

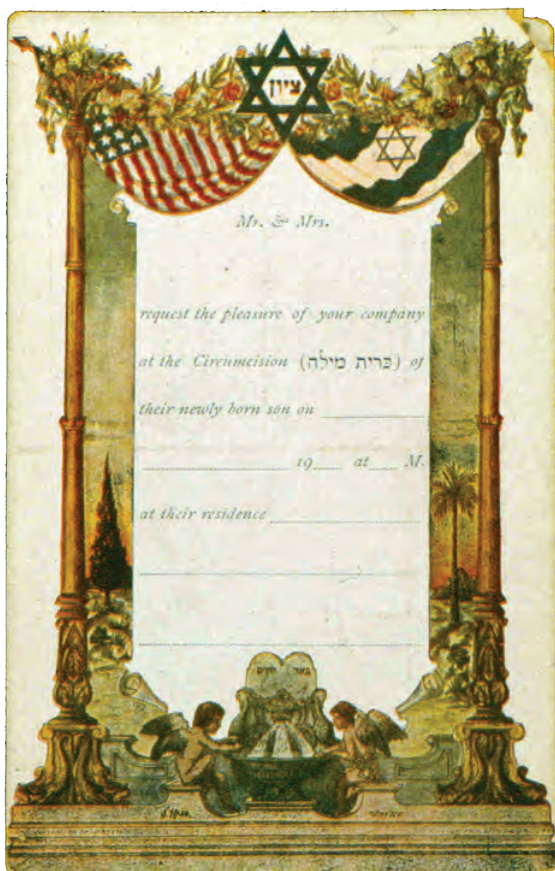
## Sephardic-Ashkenazic Differences

When a Sephardic Jew and an Ashkenazic Jew have children together, the naming decision has been known to get sticky. Many Sephardic grandparents expect the honor of seeing their names carried on in their lifetimes. However, most Ashkenazim expect to see their children’s children named for their departed loved ones, and may cringe at the idea of naming for a living forebear.

Sephardic naming practices, however, are far from uniform. For example, Miriam Levy, raising her large family in Seattle, didn’t really know that it wasn’t her Moroccan-heritage husband’s family custom to name for living relatives. Miriam’s expectation, following the practice of her Montreal Syrian-heritage family, was to do just that. And she did so, with children who carry names of all four living grandparents. Miriam’s mother-in-law, Beloria, delights in her special relationship with the granddaughter who lives nearby and bears her name, but admits that she hadn’t expected the honor, as it wasn’t part of her French-Moroccan background. Miriam has come to understand the practice of honoring living grandparents as “a Seattle tradition,” a heritage of the community’s founding Turkish immigrants.

Rabbi Simon Benzaquen, the *rav* of the Levys’ synagogue, Sephardic Bikur Cholim, comes from a Spanish-Moroccan background. In contrast to the French-Moroccan tradition, his family does, indeed, name for living relatives. He and his Ashkenazic-heritage wife fully expected that their grandchildren would carry their names, and, in fact, they do.

Blogger Hannah Katsman, writing at [www.amotherinisrael.com](http://www.amotherinisrael.com), has posted lists of the “Top 20 Israeli Baby Names,” with labels H (Haredi), NR (National Religious), and S (Secular), demonstrating that names are very influenced by community. But, interestingly, the top name for boys on all three lists is “Noam,” and “Shira” comes in second for all three girls’ lists.



A circumcision invitation from New York, circa 1925, reflects the Americanization of the customs around *brit milah*. Traditionally, one would not issue a formal invitation to a *brit*, because the invitee could then not refuse the opportunity to do a mitzvah.

Courtesy of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary



## Unusual, Dangerous, and Troublesome Names

Most intriguing are Katsman's postings about the recent Israel-centered controversy over unusual baby names. She writes: "My all-time favorite unusual girl's name is Kefira. The parents saw the feminine form of lion on a list of baby names. Unfortunately, Kefira has a much more common meaning—heresy." This leads us to take note of the proposed Knesset bill to create a Public Names Committee, composed of an educator, a psychologist, and a social worker, to intervene in cases where parents choose a name that could be damaging to a child. Has it come to this?

Of course, there are traditional notions, as well, of names that might cause harm to a child. "If someone died before having children, you should add another name too," says Rabbi Moshe Kletenik, former chair of the Rabbinical Council of America and *rav* of Seattle's (Ashkenazic) Congregation Bikur Cholim-Machzikay Hadath. "It's also discussed in the responsa literature whether one should name for someone who died young. There's an extensive *teshuvah* from R. Moshe Feinstein, that if the person died a tragic death, one should add another name." That is why one does not name after the prophet Yishayahu, who was murdered, but rather uses the name Yeshaya.

**The names we choose for a child connect us to lives beyond this new life. The power of naming humbles us.**

What about naming a child Yishmael? According to R. Kletenik, "A midrash says the original Yishmael did *teshuvah* [repented], but when we use the name now, we are naming for the *tanna* [Mishnaic rabbi]."

"The idea," he continues, "is not to name for a *rasha* [an evil person]." The understanding is that if you want to use a family name, but feel that the person named for was not worthy, you can have in mind as well a different person with that name.

## Choosing a Name Out of a Hat

Sometimes, even when you pick a name just because you like it, you never know its significance. This recalls the story, published in *Hadassah* magazine, of an American couple who ran out of family names and chose the name Simcha, whether a boy or a girl, because they liked the name and were planning to make *aliyah*. Years later, while doing a family search at Yad Vashem, they discovered that their son, Simcha, was carrying the name of a relative who had perished in the *Shoah*.

We all have name stories, whether our names are in Hebrew, English, Ladino, Yiddish, Russian, Spanish, or some other reflection of the geography of Jewish life. The sources are familial, literary, aesthetic, Zionist, or just hopeful. The names we choose for a child connect us to lives beyond this new life. The power of naming humbles us. Will this new person like the name? Will



Invitation to a girl's naming ceremony.  
Courtesy of Viva Hammer

someone else in the family be glad or disappointed?

In my own extended family, we have four different "G" names among our cousins—Golda, Golda Sue, Gloria Golda, and Gay Claire—all for my grandmother, Golda Simon Yellen, who immigrated from Poland via Ellis Island to Beaumont, Texas, around 1910. She lives on in hand-me-down memories. Each of us remembers the tender voice of her parent—Golda's child—telling stories of her kindness and strength. Our shared Hebrew name, Haya Golda, taught us, through our parents' stories, the tradition of adding "*hai*" to a name in hopes of fooling the Angel of Death—and the limited power of that tradition, as it didn't work for our grandmother, whose two daughters and five sons mourned her early passing. I named my first son for two of hers. May his children's lives be blessed with the faith his great-grandmother inspired in hers.

*Gigi Yellen-Kohn, a Seattle-based teacher and broadcaster, has written for Hadassah, JT News, and ParentMap magazines.*

## 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](mailto:jofa@jofa.org) for more information.

# Welcoming an Adopted Child

By Adena K. Berkowitz and Rivka Haut

A well-known *midrash* teaches that before birth, God matches each soul with its future mate (B.T. *Sotah* 2A). We like to think that God has another task relating to those as yet unborn: matching those whose biological parents will be unable to raise them with their future families. The Babylonian Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 19b) states, “Whoever raises an orphan in his home, it is considered as though he gave birth to that child.” Biblical adoptive parents include Michal bat Shaul, Naomi, and Pharaoh’s daughter, who was given the name Batya, daughter of God. Because she adopted Moshe, a nonrelative and a child of another religion, it was as though God had adopted her.

The *halakhot* relating to adoption are complex. A scholarly article on this issue states: “Indeed, adoption as a formal legal institution does not exist in Jewish law. Nevertheless, as a social reality, adoption always existed in Jewish societies and was acclaimed.”<sup>1</sup> Adoption is increasingly common today. In many *yeshivot*, day schools, and synagogues, it is no longer unusual to find Jewish children of color, children from the Far East, from Central and South America, from Africa and Europe. Welcoming them as new members of the community is important both to the newly constituted families and to the community as a whole. Yet although ceremonies welcoming biological children to the Jewish community are standard (*shalom zakhar, brit, simhat bat*), there are few established rituals welcoming those who are adopted.

## A Personal Story

Both of Rivka’s daughters adopted boys from outside the United States. Both are named after their grandfather. Each family celebrated their new additions’ arrivals in a different way. One grandson was introduced to his new community at a Shabbat afternoon gathering of friends and neighbors in the family home. The baby was passed around, his story was told, and everyone present was invited to greet him with words of welcome. A rabbi friend of the family gave a *d’var Torah*, and the baby was blessed by all. It was a beautiful and meaningful welcome.

The other grandson was welcomed in his *shul*. His father received an *aliyah*, and his mother also received an *aliyah* in the *shul*’s women’s *tefillah*. The family sponsored a *kiddush* for the congregation. In both cases, the boys’ communities welcomed them with great joy.

Rivka conducted a personal ritual of welcome for each grandson. As each was given her late husband’s name, she gave each a gift of a *sefer* her husband held dear. For her first adopted grandson, Rivka took a *Sefer*

*Tehillim* that belonged to her husband’s grandmother. It was quite old; its well-thumbed pages, yellowed by age, were amazingly well-preserved. Rivka’s husband had had it rebound, and it was in good condition. Rivka inscribed it for the baby, expressing the hope that the child would always feel linked, through his name, to his larger family and its beliefs and traditions, as symbolized by the cherished volume.

For her second adopted grandson, Rivka took an old volume of Talmud that her late husband had saved that belonged to his grandfather. He had treasured it and also had it rebound, and had studied from it himself. It too was about 150 years old and in very good condition. Rivka similarly inscribed this volume as well. This was her personal way of welcoming these boys into her family, of linking her late husband’s namesakes into our faith and heritage.

## Creating a Welcoming Ceremony

As welcoming adopted children into their larger communities has not yet been ritualized in specific ways, creativity is the norm. Each family can choose a way of welcoming their child that is most comfortable for them. When we were editing our mini-siddur, *Shaarei Simcha, Gates of Joy*, we decided to offer a welcoming ceremony for adopted children in the section containing other life-cycle events. We included a welcoming ceremony appropriate for both boys and girls. The ceremony for girls follows the pattern of a *simhat bat*, with material inserted that is relevant for a female child who has been adopted. In the case of a boy, we felt it especially significant to include a welcoming ceremony that would take place after the male child had undergone both a *brit* and immersion, when necessary.

When children who were not born Jewish are adopted by observant families, they must undergo conversion, with the understanding that those below the age of bar or bat mitzvah will reaffirm their conversion upon the age of consent. After an adopted male child has been converted, through a *brit milah* (a circumcision), and immersion in a *mikvah*, and a female child through immersion in a *mikvah*, both in the presence of a *beit din*, it is fitting to have a festive ceremony. Just as *simhat bat* ceremonies can occur at any time after birth, so, too, can welcoming rituals for adopted children. Because boys must first heal from their *brit* before they can be immersed in a *mikvah*, for them, welcoming ceremonies are usually postponed for a few months after they have been adopted.

In the ritual we created for welcoming adopted children, as well as for our *simhat bat* festivities, we added words for other siblings, and for grandparents, in order to integrate them as active participants, welcoming their new family member.

A major part of the ceremony is the official naming

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Pollack, Moshe Bleich, Charles J. Reid, Jr., Mohammad H. Fadel, “Classical Religious Perspectives of Adoption Law,” *Notre Dame Law Review*, Feb. 2004, p. 696.

of the baby. Baby boys are named at their *brit milah*, and girls in *shul* the first Monday, Thursday, or Shabbat after their birth. Often, having just given birth, many mothers do not attend the *shul* namings. Therefore, *simhat bat* ceremonies and those welcoming adopted children are ideal settings to explain the given name.

Adopted children pose special issues regarding their names—specifically, how to call them formally when giving them a *Mi shebeirakh*, or at their bar or bat mitzvah, or on being called up for an *aliyah*. Here, too, there are a variety of choices. There are three basic ways of dealing with this matter. If the child has been converted, parents may choose to call them son/daughter of our ancestors Abraham and Sarah. Another choice is to call them by their adoptive parent/s' name/s, adding the phrase “raised by... (*ploni ben (bat) ploni hamegadlo/lab*).” Yet another choice is to call them by their adoptive parent/s' name/names, as any other child is called.

Most adoptive families today are choosing creative and festive ways of introducing their new addition to their families, as well as to the larger Jewish community, which has been enriched by their inclusion.

*Dr. Adena K. Berkowitz is a bio-ethicist, a lawyer, and scholar-in-residence at Kol HaNeshamah, a Manhattan congregation she co-founded. Rivka Haut is an agunah advocate. She co-edited, with Susan Grossman, Daughters of the King: Women and the Synagogue (JPS), and with Phyllis Chesler, Women of the Wall (Jewish Lights). Adena and Rivka are visiting lecturers at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School and the co-authors of Shaarei Simcha, a mini-siddur.*

## Excerpts from *Shaarei Simcha* for an Adopted Child's Welcoming Ceremony

### A Prayer to Be Said by an Adopted Child's Grandparent(s)

I/We stretch out our arms widely to welcome you. I/We thank our Creator, the Divine Parent of us all, for sending you to me/us, and for bringing you safely home. May I/we merit watching you grow in good health and bring *nahat/ nahas* to your parents and to me/us. May you be a source of blessing and joy to your family and to all of Israel, which is newly enriched because you have joined our holy community. May you grow in Torah. May your parents lead you under the marriage canopy, and may you do good deeds all the days of your life. Amen.

### A *Harahaman* to Be Said during *Birkat Hamazon* by a Sibling(s) for the Newly Welcomed Girl/Boy

*Harahaman Hu y'vereikh et*  
for a girl: *ahoti/ahoteinu hak'tana*  
for a boy: *ahi/ahinu hakatan*  
*b'hokhma b'shalva u'vigvura*  
*drakhav v'orhotav*  
*yelamed ota/oto*  
*u'tihi torat*  
*hesed al l'shonah/l'shono.*

May the Merciful One bless my/our little sister/brother with wisdom, serenity, and strength. May God guide her/him on a righteous path and may a Torah of kindness always be on her/his lips.

Copyright © 2007 *Shaarei Simcha*, Gates of Joy (KTAV Publishing).



## A DAUGHTER'S RECITATION OF KADDISH

by Rahel Berkovits

A JOFA TA SHMA: COME & LEARN HALAKHIC SOURCE GUIDE



Reciting the mourner's *kaddish* for a parent stands at the heart of the Jewish bereavement experience. Even though traditionally this public recitation has been seen as a son's responsibility, a daughter reciting *kaddish* is not just a modern concept. The halakhic literature addresses questions such as: May a daughter recite the mourner's *kaddish*? May she recite *kaddish* alone or must it be in conjunction with a man? Should her *kaddish* be said aloud or quietly?

This ground-breaking guide, written by Rahel Berkovits, provides a thorough analysis of the sources, thereby enabling meaningful conversation and practice.

*Rahel Berkovits lectures in Mishnah, Talmud and halakha at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem. She has published entries in the CD-ROM, Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia, and lectures widely in both Israel and the United States on topics concerning women and Jewish law.*

Already available in the Ta Shma Halakhic Source Guide Series:

**May Women Touch a Torah Scroll?** by Devorah Zlochower  
**Women's Obligation in Kiddush of Shabbat** by Rahel Berkovits



# A Single Mother by Choice Approaches Brit

By Dvori Ross

For me, the *brit* of my firstborn son was, first of all, a celebration of the start of my family. I didn't have a wedding to celebrate: I had never married, and my pregnancy had been achieved using the sperm bank. The beginning of the pregnancy was something too private to celebrate in public. The *brit* was the first public acknowledgment of my new path as a family.

The celebration of a *brit* is often a male thing, with the mother standing far behind, sometimes in the *ezrat nashim*. However, for the *brit* of both my sons, I wanted to participate in the *brit*, rather than being a mere spectator. I would have wanted to be involved even if the children had a father, but as it was, it was even more important for me to be part of this mitzvah.

The halakha does not acknowledge the part of the mother in the *brit*. The mitzvah of making the *brit* is on the father; the mother has no formal obligation to perform a *brit* on her son. When there is no father, it is actually an obligation of the *kehillah*, the community, to make the *brit*.

I wanted my role as the mother of my sons and the person who is going to bring them up in the covenant of Abraham to be acknowledged. It was very important for me to be the one making the *brakha* of the *brit* and saying the *p'sukim*.

One of the *mohalim* whom I first asked about this before I gave birth refused. He said that he is a Yemenite, and in the Yemenite tradition, if there is no father, no one says the *brakha*; therefore, he could not agree to my saying it. I wondered if he would have given the same answer had I said my father would say the *brakha*. Anyway, I found another fine *mohel* who checked to see that there was no halakhic problem in my reciting the *brakha*, and then agreed.

After the *brit*, the *mohel* told me that he doesn't often feel such *simcha* at a *brit*. I think many people were celebrating my new family with me, and were happy to see a single woman finding a way to start a family on her own. There were very few such religious families at the time. Since then, it has become more common.

At the *brit* and *simchat bat* of my twins, three and a half years later, there was also excitement and *simcha*, but of a different kind—my twins were born into an already existing family.

---

*Dvori Ross is the single mother by choice of three children: two sons and a daughter. She and Yael Ukeles have recently launched a new organization in Israel for religious single mothers by choice called KayamaMoms.*

---

## Brit Milah Ceremony, continued from page 7

one could mount a counterargument, based on the position of the Ritva and other *rishonim*, that women are within the universe of *milah*; it is just that they are considered halakhically *mahul*, already circumcised, from a technical halakhic viewpoint.)

After the recitation of "*asher kideish yedid mibeten*," the ceremony continues with the naming of the child, which begins with the prayer *Elokeinu veilokei avoteinu kayeim et hayeled hazeh* ("Our God and God of our fathers, preserve this boy"). This prayer is not a blessing at all, but simply a beautiful prayer that can be recited by any honored guest. Indeed, there should be no grounds to refrain from inviting a woman to recite this prayer, and this practice has become fairly widespread in select Modern Orthodox communities.

Finally, during the latter section of *birkat hamazon* after the festive meal, a custom arose in the medieval period to add a list of *Harahamans*, short petitionary prayers beseeching God for a diverse list of needs and desires including protection of the newly circumcised baby, sustaining him to his parents in good health, and hopes to bring the ultimate redemption and the Messiah, in the merit of the fulfillment of this cardinal mitzvah of circumcision. The general custom is to divide these blessings up and ask honored relatives and friends to recite one of them out loud with the assemblage responding "Amen." These prayers do not involve any

*devarim shebekedusha* (prayer elements that require a *minyan*), nor are they obligatory in a formal sense, and thus there is no reason to exclude women from partaking in this honorific role as well.

## Conclusion

In this short essay we have briefly examined the halakhic sources that touch on women's participation in various aspects of the *brit milah* ceremony. In those sources we found a number of possibilities for expanding the role of women beyond what was the accepted norm. These possibilities beckon toward a more inclusive ceremony in which the mother and other female relatives and friends may partake in meaningful parts of the ceremony. As we noted at the outset, however, beyond the technical issues involved, meta-halakhic issues that are highly debated and contested in the Orthodox community will certainly come into play in the decisions that individuals, rabbis, and their communities will make in navigating the implementation of these options in the years to come.

---

*Rabbi Nathaniel Helfgot is the spiritual leader of Congregation Netivot Shalom in Teaneck, New Jersey. He is chair of the Departments of Bible and Jewish Thought and director of Continuing Rabbinic Education at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah. Ordained by RIETS and a recipient of the Jerusalem Fellowship, he is also a faculty member of the Wexner Foundation Heritage program.*

---



# JOFA Campus Fellowship Receives Grant from Hadassah Foundation

## Fellows Conduct Programs on Seven Campuses

**J**OFA's Campus Fellowship Program, now in its second year, was awarded a \$14,000 grant from the Hadassah Foundation to support its leadership development goals and to create innovative feminist programming on college campuses in 2012. The grant represents a vote of confidence in JOFA's initiative to promote dialogue on Orthodox feminist issues among the next generation of Jewish leaders.

This year's cohort of JOFA Campus Fellows consists of nine outstanding women on seven campuses, including Barnard, Brandeis, MIT, Stern College for Women, University of Maryland, University of Pennsylvania, and Yale. The fellows attended a leadership seminar in September, and have been mentored since then by JOFA Board members. The program is under the direction of Laura Shaw-Frank.

The fellows were asked to plan a program on their respective campuses in both the fall and spring semesters relating to Orthodox and feminist issues. The following are descriptions of four of these events:



### Agunah Awareness: University of Maryland

In November, the University of Maryland JOFA Fellows held an event to promote awareness about one of the most painful challenges in the Jewish community: that of the *agunah*, a wife trapped in a dead marriage, chained to a husband who refuses to grant her a religious divorce. The first speaker was Yael Cortell, a teacher at the Melvin J. Berman Hebrew Academy and sister of Tamar Epstein, a local *agunah*. She spoke about her sister's experiences and a rally being held to support her. Rabbi Shmuel Herzfeld of the National Synagogue, an advocate for *agunot*, discussed the halakhic ramifications of the *agunah* situation and how rabbis work to free such women. We then screened the Israeli film *Mekudeshet: Sentenced to Marriage*, which chronicles the struggles of three young *agunot* who find themselves ensnared by the rabbinical system. An impressive turnout of more than 60 students from Hillel was about evenly divided between males and females. This event served as a motivating precursor to the rally that several students attended to show solidarity with *agunot*.

Illanna Newman

### Jewish-Muslim Dialogue: Yale

As a board member of the Jews and Muslims organization (JAM) on my campus, I had long been hoping to find a forum in which Jewish and Muslim women could talk comfortably and openly about women-related aspects of our traditions. Because both of our communities have fairly strong modesty ideals, I knew this conversation needed to be in a really comfortable setting and could not happen around men. The JOFA fellowship provided the perfect opportunity for such an event. With funding from JOFA, we were able to buy ingredients and cook a meal in the home of our JLIC (Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus) couple. I extended an invitation to female members of the Jewish and Muslim communities, but capped the event at fifteen attendees. Sarah Cheses (our JLIC-*yoetzet halakha*-rockstar) and I co-led the discussion, which ranged from modest clothing to menstruation and *yihud*. The cozy environment encouraged a relaxed but serious and fruitful conversation about how we live our old traditions on a modern college campus. I think everyone learned a lot, and I hope this will be the first of many such events.

Leah Sarna

*continued on page 22*

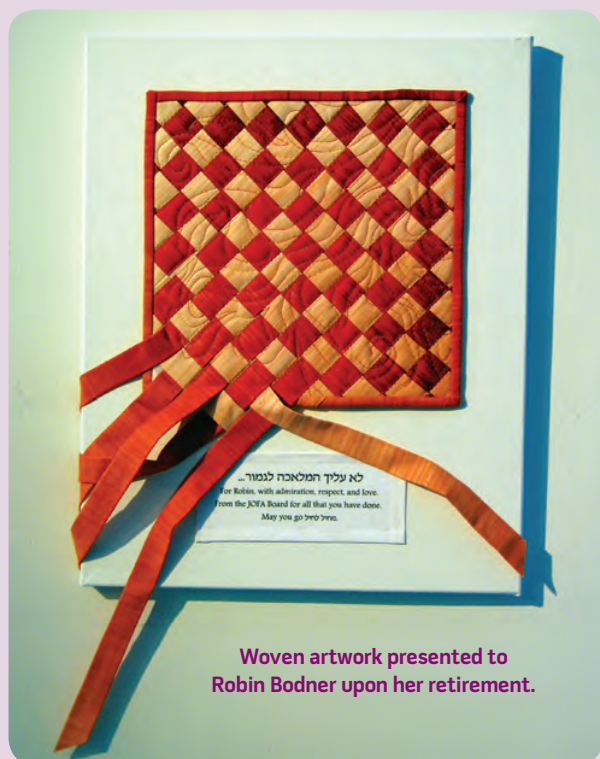
## Farewell to Robin Bodner

After ten years of exemplary leadership, during which time the organization has grown to become a significant presence in the Orthodox world, Robin Bodner retired as JOFA's executive director at the end of December. Her crowning achievement was the organization of JOFA's celebratory event in November, but her passionate commitment to Orthodox feminism has shown through every conference, every project, and every publication that she supported and shepherded to success. Her steady hand and warm wisdom were appreciated by both the staff and the lay leadership, whom she mentored and guided.



At the December Board meeting she was thanked and presented with a commissioned textile artwork by Heather Stoltz, inscribed with the rabbinic saying, "*Lo alayikh hamelakha ligmor*" ("It is not your responsibility to complete the task..."). To prove the statement true, Robin stayed on part-time through January and February to transition the new staff in the office. She will now assume the title of JOFA's executive director emerita.

"JOFA's mission will always be in my heart; it will inform my learning, and direct the work I engage in," Robin said, in parting. Robin will retain a permanent place in JOFA's heart, as well.



Woven artwork presented to Robin Bodner upon her retirement.

## JOFA Campus Fellowship, *continued from page 21*

### Religious Feminism: An Oxymoron?: Barnard/Columbia

Our program took the form of a dialogue between Barnard President Emeritus Judith Shapiro (1994–2008) and Yeshivat Maharat student Ruth Balinsky Friedman (BC '07). The two discussed leadership positions and opportunities for women in the public and private realms. Both women spoke about their leadership positions, neither of which was stereotypical for women. In the process, they discussed the challenges they had encountered and disconnects they have felt between the way that they are treated in the public and private realms of their lives. They placed their stories within the context of the Jewish and feminist narratives and situated themselves in the balance between progress and tradition. They described how being in the single-gender environment of Barnard had affected them as feminists. The question-and-answer session was extremely interesting, as students challenged both speakers to discuss how the role of women in leadership positions today had changed from what it was when each had started out in her endeavor.

Ariella Pultman and Michal Dicker

### A Rebbetzin's Role: Brandeis

Our first JOFA program was a panel discussion featuring our two *rebbetzins* on campus: Toby Kaplowitz, the JLIC *rebbetzin*, and Chanie Chen, the Chabad *rebbetzin*. I asked the *rebbetzins* how they viewed their leadership roles within the Orthodox community, including how they portrayed themselves both independent of their husbands and dependent on their husbands' roles in the community. After their initial remarks, the floor was opened to questions, and the dialogue got personal and very meaningful, as the two *rebbetzins* shared thoughts that resonated with students. They both discussed their personal struggles to balance family life and their commitment to students. They spoke about learning to prioritize and to be flexible.

The topic was very intriguing to many students, who thanked me for starting a dialogue about women's leadership roles in the Orthodox community. They appreciated having an insider's perspective from the two *rebbetzins*, who provided two fabulous role models to a room full of college girls. About half the attendees were freshmen who had just returned from seminary studies. This program showed them that just as they had had role models in seminary, the *rebbetzins* on the Brandeis campus are tremendous mentors and approachable, dedicated women who were there to help the students further develop their feminine Judaism.

Dana Kandel

## Want to learn more about Jewish women's participation in birth rituals?

As part of its series *The Orthodox Jewish Woman and Ritual: Options and Opportunities*, JOFA has created a comprehensive booklet on *Birth*, edited by Jennifer Breger and Lisa Schlaff. It can be accessed at [http://www.jofa.org/pdf/opt\\_Birth.pdf](http://www.jofa.org/pdf/opt_Birth.pdf). A number of topics not covered in this issue of the *Journal* are addressed there, including recitation of the *gomei* blessing, roles for women at a *pidyon haben*, and weaning ceremonies. An article on "Historical Precedents of Welcoming Ceremonies for Girls" by Jennifer Breger provides a historical perspective on today's rituals.

If you are looking for new liturgies or scholarly materials, check out the Eleanor Leff Jewish Women's Resource Center, which is a part of the New York section of the National Council of Jewish Women. In the Jewish Women's Resource Center library, one can browse through some 15,000 items including books, unpublished theses, and new rituals, including many birth rituals for girls. The library is open to the public by appointment.

Online resources for ritual materials can be found at the Israel-based site Itim: the Jewish Life Information Center, at <http://www.itim.org.il/eng/?CategoryID=203>, and Ritualwell, which provides rituals for Jewish holidays and lifecycles, at <http://www.ritualwell.org>.

*Blessing the Birth of a Daughter*, a printed collection of "Jewish Naming Ceremonies for Girls," was created several decades ago by Ezrat Nashim and was edited by Toby Fishbein Reifman (see photo, p. 2).

## Searching Our Past: Who Was the *Ba'alat haBrit* and What Did She Do?

By Elisheva Baumgarten

*Ba'alat haBrit*: ...[T]he *ba'al brit*... appears in a number of texts. In one manuscript of the *Mahzor Vitry*, dated to the first years of the thirteenth century, one extra line appears that tells of another participant, the *ba'alat brit*, a female *ba'al brit*. The line reads as follows:

They brought the baby into the synagogue. The father of the son takes him from the *ba'al brit* and gives him to the *ba'alat brit*, and the people standing there say, "Blessed is he who comes," and the *ba'al brit* says, "In the name of God," and goes and sits in one of the chairs and takes the baby on his knees and they circumcise him.

This source reveals the existence of a female figure and locates her as part of a synagogue ritual, in which the baby was passed from one person to another.

Additional sources provide further information about the *ba'alat brit*. One group of sources mentions her washing the baby before the circumcision ceremony. These sources discuss restrictions applying to circumcision ceremonies held on the Sabbath, particularly concerning the heating of water to wash the baby before the ritual. Ordinarily, a woman washed the baby. On the Sabbath, the task was sometimes performed by a Christian servant, supervised by a Jewish woman. In *Sefer Hasidim*, a story is told about a woman who is called *ba'alat brit*.

It happened that there was a woman who washed her two sons and one drowned the other and their

mother vowed never to wash during the day. Once she was a *ba'alat brit* and she washed during the day and died...

R. Jacob the Circumciser's book *Klalei haMilah*, as well as a number of other later fourteenth- and fifteenth-century sources, also mention the *ba'alat brit*. In these writings, however, she is the wife of the *ba'al brit*. Her role consists of bringing the baby to the synagogue:

And the wife of the *ba'al brit* carries him with splendor to the synagogue. As soon as the congregation has finished their prayers, her husband comes out of the synagogue to meet her. He receives the infant from her and brings him into the synagogue to be circumcised, and the congregation stands for him [when he enters] and says, "Blessed is he who comes."

...In my opinion, the paucity of information and the variety of details in each source stem from the evolution of the role of the *ba'alat brit*...

The changes in female involvement in the ritual may account for the wide variety of roles linked with the *ba'alei brit* in the fragments that have reached us. ... In addition, the fourteenth-century sources' insistence that the prerogative of bestowing the honor of the *ba'al brit* was that of the men, testifies both to women's desire to be part of the ritual process and the struggle around the appointing of a *ba'al brit*.

*From Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe* by Elisheva Baumgarten.  
Princeton University Press, 2004, pp. 70–71. Reprinted with permission of the publisher.

## T'khine for a Woman Experiencing Infertility

By Renee S. Septimus

*Ribono shel olam*, I stand before You, as did Sara, Rivka, Rachel, and Hannah, women who also came to You in sorrow, their dreams of motherhood as yet unfulfilled, their souls in despair.

Dear merciful God, You carried the people of Israel like an eagle who gently and protectively carries its young on its wings. You created the world out of a womb of water. Hear my prayer and be our partner in the creation of a new life. Guide my husband to provide a strong seed to join with mine. Create a safe, healthy haven within me to hold a child. Grant me the ability and fortitude to carry full term so I will be greeted with a cry of joy as Your new creation enters this world and so I may sing You a song of gratitude and praise.

Dear God, my eyes are full of tears and my heart aches. Give me the courage and faith to go on and bear whatever pain I must in the pursuit of motherhood. Do not allow my womb to remain empty of life, my breasts empty of milk, my arms empty of child. Grant me and my husband our deepest heart's desire and may we merit sons and daughters to teach Your holy Torah, to learn *hesed* and *mitzvot*.

Dear God, I believe and I trust in You and I come before You, my soul in my hands, and I beg You, my creator, the force which sustains all life, to accept my prayer with mercy, this prayer which comes from the depths of my heart. Amen.

## T'khine to Be Said by a New Mother Prior to Her Son's Bris

Written in honor of the birth of my first grandson

By Renee S. Septimus

February 2004

God of my foremothers and forefathers, I gratefully acknowledge all that You have blessed me with. You have redeemed me from the discomfort of pregnancy and the suffering of childbirth. May it be Your will, dear God, that this new baby have enough milk from my body and that my sleep will be light, so I will hear his cries just as they begin.

As I look at this beautiful baby boy, Your most perfect creation, about to seal his covenant with You, I pray that You will be at my side as I raise him together with my husband. Protect him from suffering and keep him safe from any and all misfortune. Imbue him with a pure, holy spirit and grant him a long life filled with awe of heaven, a soul filled with goodness and compassion, a life in which his material wants will be easily satisfied. Help my son grow to be a fine man, aware always of Your presence, his will poised to do Your bidding, his heart wise and dedicated to good works, charity, and acts of loving-kindness.

May my son easily find the *zivug* [match] You have chosen for him, and favor me and my husband with the good fortune to *fier* [accompany] him to the *huppah* together, in good health. May he, and we, live to see his sons and daughters marry well, and dedicate themselves to Torah and *mitzvot*.

As the covenant is sealed on his body, look upon him with mercy. May his pain be brief, may he heal quickly, and may his cries reach the heavens as prayers for a long, blessed life.

*Copyrighted. May be used in print only with permission of the author.*



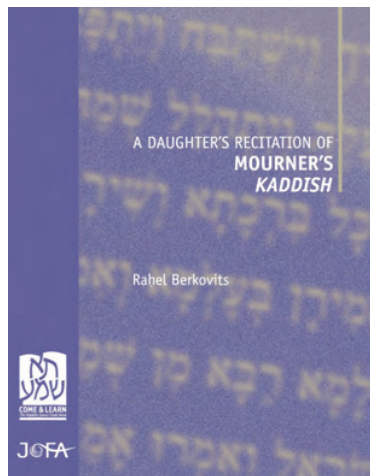
## A Daughter's Recitation of Mourner's Kaddish

By **Rahel Berkovits**

JOFA, 2011, 93 pages, \$19.95

**Editor's Note:** *The third study guide in JOFA's Ta Sh'ma series deals with the complex and emotionally fraught topic of a daughter's obligation or permissibility to say mourner's kaddish. Because the question has a long and fascinating history, this volume gives a more extensive presentation of sources than did its predecessors. The primary source material gathered and explained by the author lends itself to learning in hevruta or in an adult study group over a number of weeks.*

Rahel Berkovits lectures in Mishna, Talmud, and halakha at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem. She has published entries in the Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia and lectures widely in Israel and the United States on topics concerning women and Jewish law.



By **Israel Drazin**

Orthodox Jewish legal decisions are based on precedent, not just on what moderns think is correct. Thus, to learn whether a woman may say *kaddish*, Rahel Berkovits inspects the history of the mourner's *kaddish* by examining, explaining, and commenting on 53 rabbinic sources, with 254 footnotes. This very readable, interesting, yet scholarly book is part of the *Ta Sh'ma* series,

designed to be studied in groups or *hevruta*, but can also be appreciated if read alone.

### What Is the Kaddish?

The *kaddish* is a prayer instituted to praise God, and contains no reference to death. It is not mentioned in the Bible or the Talmud. Originally, there was a single *kaddish*, but today different *kaddishim* are recited for different purposes, such as a complete *kaddish* read at the end of services; a half *kaddish* for the conclusion of parts of the service; a *kaddish* said at a burial; a rabbinic *kaddish* recited after learning certain texts, said today by mourners; and the mourner's *kaddish*, which is the same as the complete *kaddish*, but without the sentence "may their prayer be accepted."

### Mourner's Kaddish Is Based on a Tale

The source for saying the *kaddish* by a mourning minor boy, but not an adult, has nothing to do with the *kaddish*. The story goes that Rabbi Akiva (some texts say Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai) saw a naked dead man carrying a load of thorns. The man said he was being punished for misdeeds during his life, but if his son would recite *Barkhu*, and the congregation would respond, "May His great name be blessed," he would be released from punishment. Although this legend doesn't mention the *kaddish*, people began to think that saying *kaddish* and prompting the response would save dead parents from punishment.

It isn't until the thirteenth century that we find rabbis speaking about the mourner's *kaddish*, and they identify it as a custom, not an obligatory practice, recited once at the end of the service by a minor boy and only for a parent; the minor is not leading the service because *kaddish* is not part of the service. Rabbis in Vienna and Germany mention the Rabbi Akiva story and write that minors say the nonobligatory *kaddish* to save their parents from hell.

By the sixteenth century, Rabbi

Moshe Isserles, although relying on the Rabbi Akiva tale, rules that even adult children can say the mourner's *kaddish* for twelve months, but only for a parent, and only one mourner can say it during the service. Isserles establishes a hierarchy of which mourner has priority to recite the *kaddish*. Thus, while the practice was changing, it retained its customary status and its requirement to be said by a male in a quorum of ten males.

### Customs Continued to Change

Once the recital of *kaddish* became ubiquitous, many males felt that they must aid their departed parent by saying the *kaddish*. Some communities insisted on retaining the early practice that only orphans under age 13 say *kaddish*, for when they attain bar mitzvah, they are part of the congregation and can lead the service with mandatory prayers and have no need to say *kaddish*. Others only permitted one congregant to recite *kaddish*, as Isserles wrote, because the object, as is clear in the Rabbi Akiva story, is to prompt the congregational response. If more than one person said the *kaddish*, there would be cacophony and the congregants would not know when to respond. But in fairly recent times, the practice arose that every mourner may recite *kaddish* at the same time, at different speeds.

Customs also changed regarding how long mourners would say the *kaddish*. At one time it was said for twelve months, based on the mystical notion of how long a dead person is punished. Then the concern arose that this implied that the parent was wicked, so the time was reduced to eleven months. Soon, people were allowed to say *kaddish* for any relative and could hire a nonrelative to say it. Later customs include the saying of *kaddish* yearly on the day of death, the *yahrzeit*, and the insertion of the memorial prayer *Yizkor* during certain holidays.

### Women Saying Kaddish

Despite the clear history showing that *kaddish* is a custom that changed over time, many rabbis

*continued on page 26*

had problems with allowing women to recite the *kaddish* based on the notion that a long-established Jewish custom is tantamount to law. The reason for saying the *kaddish* is to prompt congregants to say, "May His great name be blessed," and only males can lead a service. Many male Jews feel they must avoid hearing *kol isha*, a woman's voice in song, and the woman's chanting of the *kaddish* might be considered *kol isha*.

Some rabbis allowed women to say *kaddish*, but insisted that they recite it silently. Thus, they ignored the original purpose of *kaddish*, to trigger a response from the congregation praising God. Other rabbis disagreed. They pointed out that a daughter is as much an offspring of a parent

as a son, both may pray, and we learn many of the laws about prayer from the prayer of Hannah. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, earlier, and Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef in 2010 allowed women to recite *kaddish* in the presence of men, on the basis that saying *kaddish* was not singing. Rabbi Yehudah Henkin wrote in 1999 that the change in the custom is negligible, and a woman saying *kaddish* from the women's section is not likely to be confused with a woman leading the service. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik permitted a woman to do so loudly, so that men could give the traditional response.

Rahel Berkovits makes a moving and practical statement near the end of her analysis: "A number of authorities suggest that communal

leaders and rabbis should be sensitive to women's feelings at this emotional time, and look to bring them closer to the synagogue and ritual practices. Refusing them the option of reciting mourner's *kaddish* when they sincerely desire to do so may push them away from traditional Judaism."

*Dr. Israel Drazin is the author of eighteen books, including a series of five volumes on the Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible, which he co-authored with Dr. Stanley M. Wagner, and a series of four books on the twelfth-century philosopher Moses Maimonides, the latest, Maimonides: Reason Above All, published by Gefen Publishing House.*

## The Men's Section: Orthodox Jewish Men in an Egalitarian World

By Elana Maryles Sztokman  
HBI Series on Jewish Women/  
Brandeis University Press, 2011,  
\$29.95

By Rachel Lieberman

Elana Sztokman's book *The Men's Section* peeks across the *mehitza* of the partnership *minyans* to examine the ways in which men are affected by Orthodox feminism. Whereas the majority of feminist

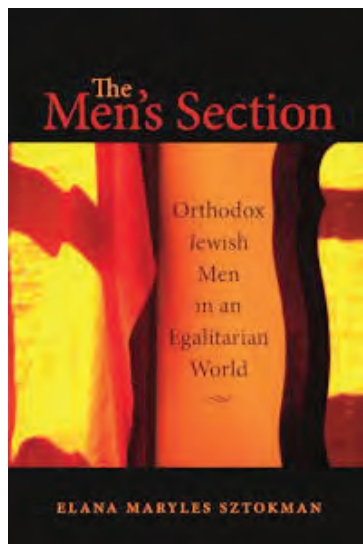
literature questions women's changing roles, Sztokman aims to give men and women the language to explain masculine identity. She examines how men have been affected when they make the choice to join partnership *minyanim* and put their Orthodox reputations and their *hiyuvim* (religious obligations) on the line to support women.

Sztokman found that men do not join partnership *minyanim* only to support their wives, but have their own reasons as well. Some are searching for a more emotional *davening* experience, a friendlier community, or an opportunity to explore halakha on their own. As women take on traditionally male roles and obligations in synagogue, men question their masculine identities. If women can take on those roles as well, then what is left for the men? Sztokman suggests that men must reevaluate what it means to be a committed and religious man when they can no longer define themselves in opposition to women's absence from public religious life.

The book concludes that as men struggle with welcoming women into their religious communities, they will hold women to a high

standard—expecting them to become "Orthodox men," arrive on time, *leyn* perfectly, and watch the children as well. She suggests that Orthodox masculinity is changing to become less rigid and meticulous, but it is not changing quickly enough that some women are not getting caught in the crossfire. Some men in partnership *minyanim* may be setting women up for failure, by demanding more of religiously committed women without changing their halakhic status.

JOFA members will be especially interested in this book because it speaks to their lived experience and evaluates the tensions that arise for individuals and communities as they struggle to hold onto religious traditions while also pushing against the boundaries. This book will raise questions for anyone who has attended a partnership *minyan*, on either side of the *mehitza*, and will challenge us to locate our own prayer and community experiences in the larger conversation about Orthodox feminism and changing gender identities. This book is a "must read" for anyone interested in women's and men's changing roles in Orthodoxy and will spark many



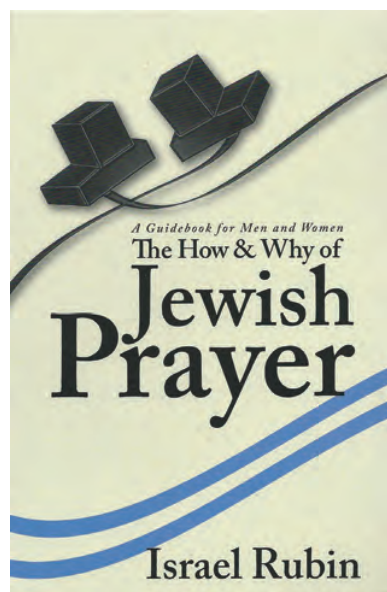
discussions at the Shabbat table and beyond.

**Rachel Lieberman** is JOFA's program associate. She graduated from Princeton University in June 2010 with an A.B. in Religion and a certificate in Judaic Studies. Her senior thesis, "Reaching across the Mechitzah: Feminism's Impact on Orthodox Judaism," was awarded the Isidore and Helen Sacks Memorial Prize in Religion.

### The How and Why of Jewish Prayer

By **Israel Rubin**

Arba Kanfot Press, 2011, \$31.96



By **Roselyn Bell**

This large compendium tells you everything you wanted to know about davening but were afraid to ask. It is useful in clarifying what to say and how to move at every prayer opportunity, public and private, daily and seasonal.

The book is, unfortunately, less helpful when it comes to women and prayer. The author observes, "On the whole Jewish women, by and large, do not attend synagogue services regularly." Even though this may be an accurate statement in the world in which he lives, and perhaps in the Orthodox Jewish world generally, it does not take

into account trends toward women's increased participation in public prayer.

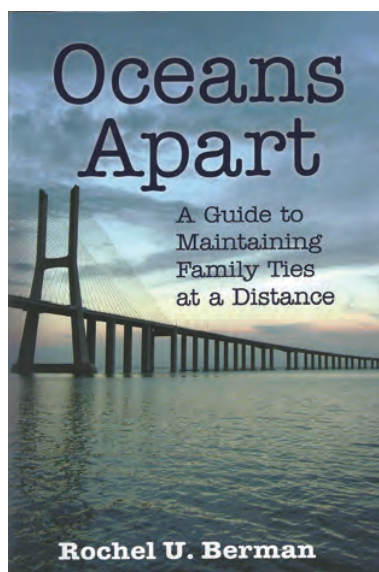
The one sentence that mentions JOFA errs in a number of ways, stating: "The issue [participation in synagogue ritual], so burning with passion by the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA), and of course non-orthodox movements, surfaced once again with the recent publication of *Women and Men in Communal Prayer Halakhic Perspectives* by Prof. Tamar Ross." A two-sentence bio of Professor Ross follows; but if the author had examined the book, he would have discovered that although Tamar Ross wrote the introduction, the main argument was presented by Rabbi Dr. Daniel Sperber.

*The How and Why* needed an editor and a fact-checker. It could also have used—despite its seemingly comprehensive table of contents—a broader perspective.

### Oceans Apart: A Guide to Maintaining Family Ties at a Distance

By **Rochel U. Berman**

KTAV, 2010, \$18.95



By **Roselyn Bell**

With *aliyah* and extended stays in Israel on the upswing, as well as international assignments

for professional advancement becoming common, members of our community will have much use for the practical wisdom amassed in this advice-packed book. The author, a social worker, came to her subject because of the *aliyah* of her older son and the subsequent birth of her grandchildren living "oceans apart," yet she has taken her topic of maintaining loving family ties at a distance and universalized it. Her subjects include recent and long-term immigrants to the United States, American professionals who choose to live in Europe, Chabad emissaries who devote themselves to far-flung Jewish communities, and a variety of *olim*. All must deal with adjusting to cultural differences, coping with parental illness and death at a distance, and trying to maintain traditions and closeness despite separation from their family of origin.

Given twenty-first-century technologies such as e-mail and Skype, many families manage to communicate frequently and in a variety of media, but the author points out that these are not the same as being a physical presence in a grandchild's life. She offers sensitive suggestions on how to preplan visits with distant grandchildren, deal with the tensions arising from turf issues, and extend a trip's afterglow by creating a photo album of the stay. Each chapter has a practical "take-away"—and the reader feels in the presence of a wise and savvy grandmother sharing her life's learning.

This is a warm and helpful book for the kin-keepers among us, no matter how much distance separates us from our loved ones.

**JOFA Fellows:**  
A leadership development  
program for Orthodox  
college women

Applications available at [www.jofa.org](http://www.jofa.org)



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

NONPROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
LANCASTER, PA  
PERMIT #299

## SPONSOR A JOFA PUBLICATION OR PROGRAM!

Are you, your family, or group of friends committed to promoting female scholarship, facilitating dialogue about contemporary issues of women and Orthodoxy, and advancing women's participation in Orthodox communal life?

You can make a difference by supporting JOFA's publications and programs!

- **The JOFA Journal:** Helps facilitate dialogue about significant and relevant issues in the Orthodox community.
- **Shema Bekolah: Hear Her Voice:** Enables women's voices to be heard and fosters emerging female scholarship.
- **The JOFA Campus Fellowship:** Provides opportunities for female students to gain leadership skills that help them serve the Orthodox community on university campuses and beyond.

Individual and group sponsorship opportunities are available from \$1,800.

*All sponsorships may be dedicated in honor or in memory of a loved one and will be featured in the relevant publication or publicity material.*

For more information about JOFA's programs and sponsorship opportunities, please email [jofa@jofa.org](mailto:jofa@jofa.org) or call 212-679-8500.

If you do not currently receive our email updates and would like to, please send your email address to [jofa@jofa.org](mailto:jofa@jofa.org).