

THE JOFA Journal

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FROM OUR PRESIDENT

"THE MEASURE OF OUR LIFE IS SEVENTY YEARS"

By Judy Heicklen

At a JOFA Board meeting three years ago, when I was forty-six, I referred to myself as middle-aged. Two Board members, both in their sixties, immediately responded, "Judy, you're not middle-aged. You can't be, because *we're* middle-aged." How could I argue with that? They are active, vibrant women, involved in family, community, and career. Yet I too feel very much in the middle of my life. I am part of the proverbial sandwich generation, with both my parents and my children living with me, each making their own demands on my time. I have been working professionally for close to thirty years, yet I see many more years of work ahead of me. I have buried friends, and have also helped friends welcome grandchildren. I have accomplished some of my dreams, but I have so many more that I want to achieve. And there are some that I have become reconciled to never achieving.

I will turn fifty this summer and have been trying to figure out how to commemorate that milestone. A big



party? A *siyyum*? An exotic adventure? A charitable dedication? How does one age wisely? What does our tradition tell us about this stage of life? Lifespans are clearly expanding, as we live not just longer lives, but also healthier ones. How should we spend those newfound years? What can we explore in our second careers that we were too busy or too afraid to pursue in our first?

I recently read a *New York Times* wedding notice about a bride marrying in her nineties. Two items in the article fascinated me. The first: "The bride, 97, is keeping her name." You go, girl! She married an eighty-six-year-old widower whom she had met at her retirement community. She initially turned him down because "'there's a great difference in our ages, as you can see,' she said. 'I didn't think it was the thing to do because I don't have that many years ahead of me, but he said, 'That's all the more reason.'" If only each of us could approach the coming years and decades with that optimistic *carpe diem* spirit!

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Living with Joy in the Third Stage of Life

By Rachel Cowan

"Sarah lived one hundred years and twenty years and seven years."

Genesis 23:1

Why does the Torah split up the tally of Sarah's years into three parts ["one hundred years," "twenty years," and "seven years"]? To tell us that every day of her life was the equivalent of them all. At the age of one hundred years she was like age twenty in strength, and at age twenty she was like age seven in modesty and purity; at age seven she was like age twenty in intelligence, and at age twenty she was like age one hundred in righteousness.

Midrash HaGadol

The Torah describes Sarah's life in three stages. We know few details, but we are told that she lived a long first stage as a courageous journeyer and a beautiful, dutiful wife and partner; a shorter second stage, in which, very late in her life, she bears a child and guides the destiny of the Jewish people as a protective

mother; and a third stage, in which she is an old and dotting mother who suffers a terrible loss of power and love. According to the *midrash*, the shock of Abraham's taking Isaac off to be sacrificed actually killed her.

The *midrash* also teaches that every day of Sarah's life

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Liz Lerman, a highly acclaimed American Jewish choreographer, founded the multigenerational Maryland-based Dance Exchange, whose dancers range in age from the 20s to the 70s. Her choreography has incorporated older dancers into ensemble works and has explored Jewish themes through dance. In this photo, Bea Wattenberg dances a Liz Lerman work, *Reenactments*.

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From Our President, continued from cover

My kindergartener and I have a plan. When she finishes eighth grade, we will take a year to travel the world. She has already informed me that we must go to Paris first because she very much wants to visit and has never been (out of the mouths of babes...). After the year, we will settle in Israel and send her to high school, and I will start the second half of my life—whatever that might be. Will this really happen? Who knows? Right now we are enjoying the delicious tingle of anticipation as we plan, and perhaps by talking about it enough we will breathe it into being.

Psalm 90:10 states, “The measure of our life is seventy years.” From this verse arises the tradition that life starts over at age seventy, inspiring some men to celebrate a second bar mitzvah at eighty-three. Will this new ceremony catch on with women turning eighty-two, especially those who were not afforded the opportunity to celebrate publicly when they turned twelve? What other rituals exist (or will be created) to celebrate milestones? Will the expansion of women’s roles in the synagogue and the community make saying *kaddish de rigueur* for women? What impact will the presence of active senior role models have on the next generation? How can we come to value the experiences of older women against the cultural backdrop of our youth-obsessed society?

I hope you enjoy this issue as we explore some of these themes. I look forward to seeing all of you at our conference later this year. *Chag kasher v’sameach!*

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FROM THE EDITOR

On the Passing of a Matriarch

Between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur 5773, the matriarch of our women’s *tefillah* group, Rebbetzin Chava (Eva) Oles, *halkha le’olamah* (went to her eternal reward). And our world—her family and our community of Highland Park-Edison, New Jersey—lost an inestimable religious and feminist role model.



Some of you may remember her as the white-haired poster grandmother on the publicity for the 2002 JOFA Conference. Others may recall seeing her taking courses at Drisha during the 2000s. For our *tefillah* group, she was a mainstay, often reading Haftarah and giving *divrei Torah*. For me, she was an “adopted mother,” and the mother of my oldest dear friend, Miriam.

She set an example for the rest of us, fighting the feminist fight in our local Orthodox institutions. She called on her *shul* rabbi to encourage women to bring *lulavim* and *etrogim* on Sukkot and to march around in their own *hakafot*. She demanded of the principal of the local *yeshiva* that he make the curriculum of the girls more like that of the boys: Why weren’t the girls learning *Gemara* from a *sefer*, instead of *Torah she-b’al peh* on photocopied sheets? When the teen *minyan* was not attracting teenage girls, she knew the solution and told the rabbi: Give the girls a meaningful halakhic role in the service.

She could have such conversations with the rabbi because he was also her *chevruta*. She loved to study Torah—as she had with her husband, Rabbi Arthur Oles, *z”l*, and as she continued to do with the younger generation of her family and community.

Most inspiring was her intergenerational way of living her Judaism. For so many years at our annual Simchat Torah women’s *hakafot*, there were four generations of the Schindler-Oles-Weinberger family participating: First it was her mother, herself, her daughters, and her granddaughters. Then the generations shifted, and it was herself, her daughters, her granddaughters, and her great-granddaughters. No one else could come close to that many generations involved in women’s *tefillah*.

That is why Eva Oles will be remembered as the beloved matriarch not only of her own family, but also of our women’s *tefillah* group and of the wider *olam* (world) of Jewish feminism.

—Roselyn Bell

Living with Joy, continued from cover

had the same inner quality, reflected the same soul. Every day mattered—the last years as much as the first.

We, too, live our lives out in stages. We are children, adolescents, and young adults, adults with children and with complex family relationships, careers, and serious interests. Then what? Most of us fear the next stage. We give it the generic label of “old age” and see it as decline—as our youth-obsessed culture has taught us to do. We see loss, pain, and loneliness, the burden of caring for aged parents or of being dependent on children. So we try to avoid aging by struggling not to change: striving to look young (even with economic and physical costs), claiming that 70 is the new 50, working as hard as we can at what we have been doing, sticking to our opinions.

Now is the time to pick up these threads, to make new choices.

I imagine that many of you know what I am talking about. I kept dreading those big birthdays—40, 50, 60. But I didn’t really panic until I turned 69: “Oh, no, there is the horizon! I can see it clearly, even though I don’t know exactly how far away it is.” I mentally piled creaky joints on top of irretrievable names on top of forgetting to turn off the oven—making towers of imminent senility. My friends and I would laugh at ourselves, but the shadow of fear grew darker. One friend said to me, short of breath, “Time just keeps going faster and faster—like the end of a roll of toilet paper. It will run out before we know it!”

Opportunity for Growth

And yet I also knew there was a way to view these coming years as a rich opportunity for growth in all dimensions of mind, body, and soul. When my husband died young, I found my direction in the Torah’s command to “choose life.” I affirm at *Yizkor* each year that there is a “time for everything under the sun.” And I have always found this verse from Psalm 90 to be powerful: “Teach us to number our days, that we may get a heart of wisdom.”

My first step of exploration of the future, natural to a Jewish woman, was to read. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot’s book *The Third Chapter* reinforced my intuition that I was entering a new chapter in my life, rather than dwindling away:

For men and women in the Third Chapter, the process of learning something new feels familiar and strange, exciting and terrifying, mature and childlike, both in character and out of body, like returning home and setting out on an adventure to an unknown destination. That is true whether we are talking about learning a new skill, craft or art form—like learning to speak a foreign language, play jazz piano or become a playwright—or whether we are learning to express a broader and deeper emotional repertoire—freeing us

from the bondage of rigid requirements of decorum forged in our childhood—or whether we are learning to grieve for the death of a loved one—learning to make ourselves vulnerable and not retreat from intimacy—or whether we are talking about shifting the focus of our energy and priorities from solitary, individualistic, and competitive, to community-based and collaborative; from making it up the ladder of success to making an imprint on the lives of others.¹

It turns out that a lot is known now about the elements of “successful aging.” Among the findings in Dr. George Vaillant’s *Aging Well: Surprising Guideposts to a Happier Life from the Landmark Harvard Study of Adult Development* are that:

It is not the bad things that happen to us that doom us; it is the good people who happen to us at any age that facilitate enjoyable old age ... that healing relationships are facilitated by a capacity for gratitude, for forgiveness and for taking people inside ... that learning to play and create after retirement and learning to gain younger friends as we lose older ones add more to life’s enjoyment than retirement income ... and that objective good physical health was less important to successful aging than subjective good health. By this I mean that it is all right to be ill as long as you do not feel sick.²

Vaillant calls success “the ability to live with joy past 80.” This “second adulthood”—when we have energy, experience, wisdom, and more time—presents much possibility. To learn, to discover our deepest authentic self, and to begin to do things—big and little—that we have always wanted to do. Most of us have lived lives of caring for others, supporting others, making choices that, of necessity, limited possibilities for personal growth. And mostly, we are glad we made those choices. But in the process, we have inevitably denied important parts of ourselves.

Now is the time to pick up these threads, to make new choices: Do we have to keep working? Do we *want* to keep working? What relationships would we love to cultivate and nurture? Which ones would we like to let go? Are we spending too much time with our grandchildren? Or not enough? What have we always wanted to know how to do? What risks did we not dare take? Are we caring well for our bodies? What injustices do we want to tackle? What has happened to our relationship with God?

Making Changes

With this perspective, I have made a lot of changes. I realized I could retire from my job—for my sake and for the sake of the organization. I decided that I could be brave enough to attempt some kind of memoir writing. I can spend more time in nature, take more photographs. I have chosen the two communal boards that I care about most, and let the others go. I make more time for meditation, prayer, and study. I can go to movies and museums during the day on weekdays. I exercise more. Above all,

"Summon the Mekonenot (Dirge-Singers) and They Will Come"

By Sara Hurwitz

A decade ago, when I formally began the process of joining the clergy of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, I could not imagine synagogue members turning to a woman to officiate at lifecycle events. I was convinced that congregants would gravitate toward custom and tradition during such life-altering moments, and that there would be no room for a female spiritual leader during these times. But I was proven wrong.

When I received a phone call saying that Lily Margules's son had suddenly and tragically passed away, I dropped everything and ran to meet her at the hospital. Lily was a Holocaust survivor, a prolific speaker, and a personal friend. I arrived at the hospital moments before Lily, and when she saw me, she collapsed on my shoulder and cried, "My David ... my David. ..."

I began to make the necessary funeral arrangements. I called the funeral director, made sure the death certificate was duly signed, and did everything I could to limit the chance of an autopsy in order to preserve the dignity of the *meit* (deceased). Then, while comforting Lily, I waited for the *chevrah kadishah* (burial society) to pick up her son, organized the burial plot, and scheduled a time and place for the memorial service and burial. It was then time for the final, delicate step: securing a rabbi to officiate at the funeral.

The burial and funeral arrangements could have been done by anyone—a close family friend, a relative, any Jew willing and able to offer comfort and support to the family. Traditionally, and as a practical matter, only male rabbis are called on to officiate at funerals. In fact, some communities still heed the custom that women refrain from going to the cemetery and participating in the rituals of the funeral altogether. This custom has its roots in the Zohar. In a rather obscure statement, the Zohar implies that the Angel of Death can be found among women whom "he sees on the way to the cemetery and on the

way back."¹ Rabbi Yosef Caro, relying on this statement from the Zohar in his *Beit Yosef*, rules that "women should be prevented from going to the cemetery, because if they go, they cause injury to the world."²

Thus, the custom developed in certain communities that women should refrain entirely from participating in any of the rituals associated with burying the deceased, even a loved one. This *minhag* (custom) is adhered to in many communities in Israel, among Sephardi communities in America, and among the Breuer's community here in New York. According to this *minhag*, women are not permitted to eulogize, accompany the deceased, or take part in the funeral proceedings at the cemetery. At the memorial service, separate seating is instituted.

Female spiritual leaders will model full participation in every aspect of the funeral process.

The *Beit Yosef's* custom, however, appears to go against what seems to have been the common practice in the time of the Talmud. (Indeed, the Zohar itself appears to have been addressing or commenting on a common occurrence.) For example, the Yerushalmi, in Masechet Sanhedrin 2:3, and the Bavli, in Masechet Sanhedrin 20a, cite a discussion regarding whether a woman should walk in front of or behind a man in the funeral procession at the cemetery. The implication, of course, is that women were permitted to attend and participate in funerals.³

Women as Dirge-Singers and Eulogizers

In Jeremiah 9:16–19, the prophet, acting as a mouthpiece
continued on page 6

I have begun to learn to say no to things I don't really want to do!

A wonderful new part of my life is the Wise Aging groups I have helped bring together—people my age who are trying to figure out their path through this stage of life now that we have reached 60, 65, 70, or 75. We study Jewish and secular texts, we meditate, we share stories, we protest, we laugh, and we eat. And each of us cries at some points. For sad things happen, and more frequently now. What we are learning about loss is that intimate, trusted community makes it easier to bear. And that, although we cannot control much of what may happen in our future, we can strengthen our spirit—becoming more loving, more generous, more grateful, more forgiving, more patient, and more joyful.

As older women, we have wisdom and experience

to contribute to our communities and our world. In a youth-dominated culture, we may feel invisible at times, but we are truly powerful and have much to teach. We need to take our place—as souls, as individuals, and as role models. And as Sarahs, making each day count.

Rabbi Rachel Cowan is the former director of the Institute for Jewish Spirituality, a grandmother of four, a writer, and a teacher of Jewish contemplative practice and Wise Aging.

¹ Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, *The Third Chapter: Passion, Risk, and Adventure in the 25 Years After 50* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009), p. 6.

² George Vaillant, *Aging Well: Surprising Guideposts to a Happier Life from the Landmark Harvard Study of Adult Development* (Little, Brown and Company, 2002), p. 13.

Summon the Mekonenot, continued from page 5

for God, states: “Summon the *mekonenot* (dirge-singers) and they will come.” Here, God actually commands women to take an important part in the funeral service, and to set the tone for the public mourning with their hymnal wailing. Indeed, according to Rabbi Yehuda, quoted in the Mishna (*Ketubot* 4:4): “Even the poorest man in Israel should not hire fewer than two flutes and one professional wailing woman [for a funeral].” The Gemara in *Sanhedrin* 47a goes so far as to say that one is permitted to delay the burial if the *mekonenot* have not yet arrived at the ceremony. The presence of *mekonenot* is required, not just recommended or preferred.

With regard to the concern of *kol isha*—hearing the voice of a female dirge-singer—Rabbi Yehiel Yaakov Weinberg (in *Sedei Eish* 2:8), based on the ruling of the *Sedei Hemed* (section *kuf, kelal* 42), ruled that listening to a woman sing funeral dirges is not a violation because no sexual pleasure can be derived from such songs. Therefore, not only can a woman’s spoken voice be heard as she delivers a *hesped* (eulogy), but it is also possible that she is permitted to recite the memorial prayer (*Keil malei*) without any *kol isha* concern.

Custom Today

Thus, we see that not only did women attend funerals, but they played a key role in the burial rituals as well. And in Modern Orthodox communities today, the *minhag* is that female mourners do, in fact, attend and participate in the funeral ceremony. Women walk with the *aron* (casket), and, if they are physically able, can act as pallbearers. Women can participate in the actual burial, including shoveling earth to help cover the deceased. Women can certainly deliver *hespedim*. As recently as this summer, in fact, the Israeli rabbinate ruled that women are permitted to deliver eulogies.

Significantly, in Israel, Religious Services Minister Yaakov Margi (Shas) has recently adopted Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Yona Metzger’s ruling concluding that women must not be denied the opportunity to eulogize at a cemetery. “We’ve picked up the gauntlet and unequivocally announced that there will be no exclusion of women,” Margi told *Ha’aretz*, as reported by Yair Ettinger on January 5, 2012. Margi determined, “There is no halakhic barrier for a woman to give a eulogy, and in the exceptional case where the family might be upset by

Today’s Mekonenot: Wailing Elderly Yemenite Women in Israel

The tradition of *mekonenot*, women dirge-singers or wailers, is still alive and well and preserved among women of Yemenite descent in Israel. Tova Gamliel of Bar-Ilan University’s Department of Sociology and Anthropology has written a fascinating ethnographic study of the practice, comparing the way that ritual wailing was performed in Yemen and how it is performed today by elderly Yemenite Jewish women in Israel. Her study, “Performance versus Social Invisibility: What Can Be Learned from the Wailing Culture of Old-Age Yemenite-Jewish Women,”¹ challenges our notions of the social invisibility, low self-esteem, and powerlessness of older women in traditional cultures.

Gamliel describes in detail the dramatic performance that takes place during a traditional Yemenite *shiva*, in which women gather separately in the house of mourning for a social occasion of their own to honor the dead. Within the circle of women, one elderly woman begins to speak, cry, and wail, evoking a similar response from her audience. Emotions rise to a crescendo, followed by a “cooling-off,” and then another woman gently steps in and says, “Let it be your atonement; let me help you now”—and takes over. Gamliel calls the wailing “a cultural performance that embodies symbols, beliefs, values, and attitudes of women against the background of a death.”

In Gamliel’s view, the wailing goes beyond a ritualized expression of emotion, in that it “allows old-age women to demonstrate an altruistic and caring attitude” toward their community. The maternal-like care they extend has a therapeutic effect on the mourners, but also benefits the wailer, who is able to transmit the suffering and wisdom she has garnered through a lifetime. This “feminization of suffering” provides older traditional women with a form of religious leadership that would otherwise be unavailable to them in a patriarchal society.

Interestingly, Gamliel detects a difference between the way the ritual was observed in Yemen and the way it has been continued in Israel. In Yemen, it was a group performance undertaken by a circle of women in an egalitarian way that united older and younger adult women. In Israel, by contrast, it is a solo performance by an older woman surrounded by passive older and younger women. Who knows whether the younger women will take over the performance role when the older women are gone?

The study points out how the wailing ritual provides “a cultural performance of feminine identity in old age” and thus, in a salubrious way, “an alternative narrative about images and experiences of elderly women.” So may the *mekonenot* continue to wail!

¹ The article can be found at <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277539508000319>.

this, the matter should be brought to and resolved by the local rabbi.”

In truth, there are very few halakhic limitations to a female mourner’s full participation in the funeral ceremony, and by extension, there are few halakhic barriers to impede a woman from officiating at the memorial service and burial.

Why the Absence of Women at Funerals?

So why aren’t more women participating or officiating at funerals? I believe the answer can be summed up in one word: presence. As leaders, rabbis are present and available for community members during their most vulnerable and difficult moments. As an increasing number of women assume positions in the clergy and emerge as religious leaders for their communities, they too will be present and available to their congregants. Then we will begin to see women officiating at funerals on a regular basis. And, as a result, female spiritual leaders will model full participation in every aspect of the funeral process, thereby normalizing and encouraging female congregants to participate in the burial process of a loved one as well.

For myself, it is an honor and a responsibility to be present for members of my *shul* during these moments. Although I have yet to be formally retained as a dirge singer, I have had the privilege of writing and delivering eulogies, escorting the *aron* while reciting the appropriate verses from Psalms, and then helping lower the *aron*, and covering it with earth. I have led the mourners through the burial *kaddish* and then escorted them through the *shurah*, two parallel lines. Participating on this level has given me an opportunity to learn about the people who I have come to love on a deeper level. And I hope, in turn, that I have brought a modicum of comfort to my congregants who have suffered a loss.

And so, when it was time to ask Lily who she would like to officiate at her son David’s funeral, I turned to her and told her that my male colleague was available to officiate, if she so desired. In response, she looked at me through tear-stained eyes and said, “Rabba Sara, I can’t imagine anyone else continuing to help me through this difficult moment.” And with a heavy heart, I did. And, unfortunately, among the funerals that I have officiated at since has been that of Lily’s husband, Edward. And just this past year, I buried my dear, dear friend, Lily Mazur Margules, *Leah bat David v’Guta, zikhronah livrakbah*, may her memory be blessed.

Rabba Sara Hurwitz is a member of the rabbinic staff at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale and serves as dean of Yeshivat Maharat, the first Orthodox yeshiva to ordain women as spiritual and halakhic leaders.

Alissa Thomas, Ramie Smith, and Victoria Sutton, Yeshivat Maharat students, contributed to this article.

Restoration

By Nessa Rapoport

Sanctify me, Adonai	Never been so hungry
Choose me in Your name	Never been so full
I’m hungry for Your holiness	Consecrate me, Holy One
Greedy for Your grace	Turn me to Your will
Crazy lust a sacrifice	Name me new, Adonai
Raise me, raise me up	Speak me into being
I’m Your offering of spice	Let Your firmament of stars
Porous with Your praise	Be my sheltering wing
Pillar of mist	Pillar of mist
Pillar of fire	Pillar of fire
Walk me out of wandering	Walk me out of wandering
In this bitter hour	In this saving hour
Be my lover, Adonai	
Now the time has come	
I’m desperate for forgiveness	
Clawing toward Your home	

Nessa Rapoport is the author, most recently, of a memoir, House on the River: A Summer Journey. Her meditations are included in Objects of the Spirit: Ritual and the Art of Tobi Kahn and Tobi Kahn: Sacred Spaces for the 21st Century. © 2012 by Nessa Rapoport.

¹ Zohar, *Shemot*, VaYakhel 194b, “Rabbi Simeon said: Truly most people in this world do not die before their time, except for those who do not know how to protect themselves. For at the time when a corpse is brought from his house to the cemetery, the Angel of Death can be found among the women. Why among the women? For this is his way from the time when he seduced Eve and through her caused death to be part of the world. ... He has permission to kill people; he looks in the face of those he sees on the way to the cemetery and on the way back...”

² *Yoreh De’ah* 359.

³ “Certain texts say: Women walk in front and the men behind them. Other texts say: Men walk in front and women behind them. Those who believe women walk in front, is because women are the cause of death in this world. Those who believe men walk in front, is out of respect for the daughters of Israel, so that [the men] can’t watch the women [walking]” (*Yerushalmi, Masechet Sanhedrin* 2:3).

⁴ “Thus said the Lord, ‘Pay attention! Summon the *mekonenot* (dirge-singers) and they will come; and send for the *chachamot* (wise women) and let them come. Let them quickly start wailing for us, so our eyes can shed tears and our eyelids will flow with water” (*Jeremiah* 9:16-17).

⁵ “Come and hear! If he kept him overnight for the sake of his honor, to procure for him a coffin or a shroud, he does not transgress thereby. ... Come and hear! If he [the relative] kept him overnight for his own honor, so as to inform the [neighboring] towns of his death, or to bring professional women mourners for him (*mekonenot*), or to procure for him a coffin or a shroud, he does not transgress thereby, for all that he does is only for the honor of the deceased!”

⁶ Yair Ettinger in *Ha’aretz*, “*Moatzat haRabbanut haRashit L’Yisrael: Ein Miniyah She’Isha Tissa Hesped*,” June 11, 2012.

Celebrating a New Era: Mikvah and Menopause

By Carrie Bornstein

*“Embracing this new life stage, I see menopause as an indicator of a new era about to emerge—
and I rejoice in the wisdom I’ve acquired through the years.”*

—from the *Mayyim Hayyim* immersion ceremony upon reaching menopause

I first trained as a volunteer mikvah guide in the fall of 2006. A twenty-something not-yet-mom with three years of mikvah use under my belt, I was drawn to Mayyim Hayyim for the way it turned a potentially alienating ritual into a positive and beautiful experience. In 2000, best-selling author Anita Diamant, the founding president of Mayyim Hayyim, outlined her vision for a community mikvah and education center that would “encourage the prayers of the heart in Jews of every denomination and description, respecting the choices and modesty of everyone who visits. A beautiful, welcoming and inviting place, from the minute you walk through the door.” When I became a volunteer, menopause was probably the furthest thing from my mind.

I was delving into the study of *niddah* (the practice of separating physically from one’s partner following menstruation, followed by immersing in the mikvah to mark coming back together again) with my twenty-five fellow mikvah guide trainees when I suddenly grasped the power of this organization’s impact. Some of the older women in the group were saying, “I feel sad that it never occurred to me to mark my menopause,” and, “I haven’t had my period for years; I missed out on all this.” My perception of the mikvah-observant world had been that menopause was something to be desired, not least because it meant no more mikvah. I remember thinking about the big picture of what Mayyim Hayyim was accomplishing and saying to myself, “What is happening here? How are they doing this?”

Anita remarked recently that Mayyim Hayyim was founded almost exclusively by post-menopausal women. Remarkably attuned to the human need for marking life’s transitions, these women naturally associated the idea of the mikvah with celebration, healing, and change. They set out to make the mikvah experience beautiful, meaningful, and accessible to the full diverse range of the Jewish people. They tried to anticipate every need and emotion that a visitor might bring. They created resources to help aid a person’s *kavanah* (intention), recognizing that just as the commanded reasons for immersion are about marking transitions (from not Jewish to Jewish, from single to married, from a time of physical separation to a time of intimacy), that mikvah could provide a Jewish response to marking other life transitions too.

Using Ritual to Heal

Cookie Rosenbaum, an Orthodox mikvah attendant at a Boston-area mikvah, was instrumental in developing Mayyim Hayyim’s policies and procedures, which work to integrate the “Seven Founding Principles” (see <http://www.mayyimhayyim.org/About/Seven-Principles>) into the mikvah’s actions and decisions. Sometimes these

principles seemingly come into conflict with one another. For example, Cookie helps ensure that we maintain our commitment to *halakha*, by teaching volunteer mikvah guides about the technicalities and nuances of *niddah* and mikvah, while also ensuring that we remain true to our value of *ahavat Yisrael*, honoring and cherishing the differences among the Jewish people, by providing space for Jews to practice the ritual of immersion according to their own interpretations and understanding.

Until she became involved with Mayyim Hayyim, Cookie had never considered immersing in the mikvah for any reason other than the completion of *niddah*. She had a rich experience in observing *niddah* and wasn’t looking for anything more. But as she brought other women to the mikvah, she was moved. Surprisingly, she began to see herself in their experiences and imagined what it could mean for her. “Observing the transformation that takes place—especially for conversion—I wasn’t expecting it to be a powerful experience for me as the witness,” Cookie said. “I started to realize it could be important for me too.”

Cookie reflected on her struggles with infertility, having experienced three miscarriages in one year after ten years of trying to get pregnant. “I was never able to do anything to mark my miscarriages. I went to the mikvah, but not with that intentionality,” she said. “I participated in a support group, worked with a psychologist to deal with the finite knowledge of my menopause.... It was helpful, but not holistic. I started saying *Yizkor* for my unborn babies—and still do to this day—and I discovered that it was helpful to use ritual, even if not prescribed, to heal.”

Only following Cookie’s involvement with Mayyim Hayyim did she become aware of the possibilities for using Jewish ritual to mark menopause—and she decided to immerse. She had gone through the different stages of menopause and knew that menstruation, and thus her ongoing battle with infertility, was indeed finished. “I could move on now, deal with the rest of my life, celebrate my adopted daughter ... that was comforting, freeing. I wouldn’t say that it was magical, or that the sadness went away, but that wasn’t my goal. It helped me move on, in a Jewish context, through a ritual I was very familiar with.”

Although Cookie’s particular reasons for wanting to immerse were very personal, her experience can be instructive for anyone wishing to mark the onset of menopause. She reviewed Mayyim Hayyim’s immersion ceremony, “Upon Reaching Menopause,” and decided to incorporate elements from two ceremonies, “During a Time of Infertility” and “Toward Healing,” along with other resources she had found online. She invited her two sisters, her sister-in-law, and a few friends to join her. Cookie asked a volunteer mikvah guide to teach her

Upon Reaching Menopause

AN IMMERSION CEREMONY

Intention

כוונה KAVANAH

To be read before preparing for immersion:

My body no longer follows its monthly rhythms. My last blood marked the end of one stage of my life...My cycles of bleeding are over. I counted my life on the calendar of those cycles, I depended on their familiar rhythms, and now they are gone, irrevocably gone...¹

לכל זמן וזמן ולכל חפץ
תחת השמים.
Lakol z'man v'eit l'chol chayetz
tachat hashamayim.

A season is set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven.²

A time of flow and a time of stillness,
A time of ending and a time of beginning,
A time for menstruation and a time for menopause.

Immersion

טבילה T'VILAH

To be read at the mikveh's edge before you enter the water:

The word "woman" evokes all that is sensual, sensitive, knowing. It speaks to what is nurturing, nourishing, and life-giving. A woman is creator, provider, healer, warrior.

Embracing this new life stage, I see menopause as an indicator of a new era about to emerge—and I rejoice in the wisdom I've acquired through the years.³

As I prepare to step into the waters of the mikveh,
I will pause on each of the seven steps to honor the stages of my life.

My infancy
My toddlerhood
My childhood
My teenage years
My young adulthood
My mature adulthood

My becoming a *mitbogeret*, a menopausal woman

And when I reach the bottom step, I enter the water for the first time as a woman in menopause.

FIRST IMMERSION AS A MENOPAUSAL WOMAN: BEING PRESENT IN THE MOMENT

Slowly descend the steps into the mikveh waters and immerse completely so that every part of your body is covered by the water. When you emerge, recite the following blessing:

ברוך אתה, יי אלהינו, קלך העולם,
אשר קדשנו במצותיו, וצננו על הטבילה.
Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech ha'olam,
asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotai, v'tzivanu al hat'vilah.

Praised are You, Adonai, God of all creation,
who makes us holy with Your commandments and commands us concerning immersion.

SECOND IMMERSION: EXPANDING THE MOMENT

Before you immerse, reflect on the following:

Who have I become? Who am I, standing in this moment?
What are my joys, my fears, my hopes, my dreams?

בְּיָדוֹ אֶפְקִיד רוּחִי B'yado af'kid ruchi⁴

I rest my soul in the palm of God's hand. I trust that blessings will come.

Take a deep breath and exhale completely, while gently and completely immersing for the second time.

THIRD IMMERSION: OPENING TO THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE FUTURE

To be read before you immerse:

I don't know what the future will bring or how this great change in my body will manifest itself in my life. I open to what will be. I welcome this stage of Womanhood, the Bat Binah, the Wise Woman, and rejoice in the possibility of new creativity.

ושאתם נים בששון ממימי ממימי ניי השובה.
Ush'avtem nimm b'sason mimaay'nei hay'shuah⁵

Draw water in joy from the wells of regeneration.

Relax, and let your body soften, as you slowly and completely immerse for the third time.

When you emerge, recite the following blessing:

ברוך אתה, יי אלהינו, קלך העולם,
שהחיינו, וקיימנו, והגיינו לזמן הזה.
Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech ha'olam
shehecheyanu, v'kiy'manu, v'higianu la'zman hazeh.

Blessed are You, Majestic Spirit of the Universe, who gives me life,
sustains my body, and brings me to this moment of transition.⁶

I ascend the steps, open to the unknown and ready to receive what is to come.

ATTRIBUTIONS

This ceremony was created by Matia Rania Angelou, Deborah Issokson and Judith D. Kummer for Mayyim Hayyim Living Waters.

¹ Mansfield, Elaine. "Gathering in the Gorge: A Menopause Ritual" 1992.
² Ecclesiastes: 3:1
³ Fabius, Carine. *Ceremonies for Real Life*.

⁴ "Menopause: Celebrating Freedom and Wisdom" Wildcat Canyon Press. Tulsa, OK 2003, p. 161. Adapted.
⁵ Adon Olam
⁶ Isaiah 12:3

Interpretive English translation by Matia Rania Angelou, Deborah Issokson and Judith D. Kummer



Mayyim Hayyim Living Waters Community Mikveh
and Paula Brody & Family Education Center
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guests a song while she prepared, and they sang it to her as she came out to immerse.

Cookie went into the water privately, then asked that the doors to the mikvah be opened a bit so that her guests could read excerpts of her ceremony. She immersed, crying, and turned to her loved ones for support. After this experience, even her more traditional sisters understood why she had made this decision.

For Cookie, it was important to have her closest community of women right there with her. Others prefer a more private experience, as they may have done for years with every other mikvah immersion.

Halakhic Dimensions

Interestingly, immersing to mark having reached menopause is halakhically required for some women, while not required for others. Cookie, who had observed *niddah* throughout her years of menstruation, had already visited the mikvah following her final flow of blood. This immersion, therefore, was entirely optional for her, although she did not see it as outside the Jewish legal framework. Cookie decided not to ask a rabbi whether she could immerse for this reason; she felt that she had the knowledge to make her own decision and had determined that it was important to handle this ritual differently from a commanded immersion. Cookie made

a point of preparing differently than she always had—not cutting her nails as she had before, for instance. She did not say the usual *berakhah*, but chose a different *Yehi ratzon kavanah* instead.

"Noncommanded immersions, though stemming completely from the idea of traditional immersions, are often a foreign concept for the Modern Orthodox community," Cookie observed. "But I don't see them as anti-halakhic."

For those who have not observed *niddah* and did not specifically immerse to mark the ending of their *niddah* status, a menopause immersion is considered commanded, because it marks the point of their entry into a state of *taharah* (ritual purity, or ritual readiness).

Following her immersion, Miriam Rosenblum wrote in our guest book:

I appreciate the opportunity to mark my personal life transition of reaching menopause within a Jewish context. I first and last immersed in the mikvah before my marriage 32 years ago. Still happily married to my *hatan* (groom), I embrace my second immersion and this next period of my life. And the occasion is made even more special by sharing it with my daughter (age 24) and mother (age 81).

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Celebrating a New Era, continued from page 9

Miriam, like Cookie, was able to use the mikvah to mark her own transition into menopause, albeit under different circumstances. She chose to raise the consciousness and conversation around menopause with her closest female family members, each from a different generation. Her daughter Malka then wrote:

Being here today, witnessing my mom's immersion with my grandma, has been a very special, moving experience, one I will carry with me for many years to come.

Changing Attitudes and Perceptions

People sometimes think such experiences can happen only in Boston. To the contrary, nearly 30 percent of our 1,400 immersions last year were from those who traveled to Mayyim Hayyim from outside Massachusetts. We are working to ensure that this experience is not limited to Boston, and we provide resources and consultation for other communities who wish to follow our lead. Our blog (www.mayyimhayyimblog.com) offers new stories and personal accounts, and serves as a model for changing attitudes and behaviors. (See, for example, a post by Rabbi Margaret Frisch Klein, titled "Hope, Renewal, and Promise," on the topic of mikvah and menopause: <http://mayyimhayyimblog.com/2011/12/05/hope-renewal-and-promise>).

Fortunately, in part due to the work of organizations such as JOFA, the landscape of Jewish ritual and leadership is changing. Mayyim Hayyim is eager to serve as a partner in this work, and share what we have learned. For more information, go to www.mayyimhayyim.org.

Carrie Bornstein is the executive director of the Mayyim Hayyim community mikvah and education center in Boston.

More Precious than Pearls: Preserving the Stories that Matter

By Ilana Segal Robiczek

As a young girl, I cherished our winter-break visits to my maternal grandparents' bungalow in southern Florida. I remember every sensation vividly—the rush of humid air upon exiting the terminal, the breathless squeeze of my grandfather's embrace, the tanginess of fresh juice made from oranges picked out back, the satisfying click of shuffleboard pucks, and the thrill of stealing into my grandmother's powder-blue bedroom to try on pearls and peek at the mysterious framed photographs of her as a young bride in Germany after the war.

Unfortunately, I also carry vivid memories of the confusion and pain that surrounded my grandmother's long and heart-wrenching decline following a diagnosis of early-onset Alzheimer's. As I got older, I came to understand the magnitude of my loss. I had not been privileged to know and learn from my grandmother as a young woman, or even to hear her remarkable story first-hand. Her story was now in the hands of others—her sisters—and the clock was ticking. The story of my paternal grandmother, who had emigrated to this country from Safed, was similarly at risk. By 2000, the window of opportunity to preserve my family's quiet but significant legacy was small and rapidly narrowing. I decided to seize it and, with the help of an indulgent aunt, I purchased a recording device and went on the road to retrieve these precious stories.

I heard about how my maternal grandmother, bookish and reserved, taught herself to sew, enabling her to make fancy dresses for the wives of concentration camp commandants and provide extra food for her three sisters during the Holocaust. I learned that years later, as a housewife in the Bronx, she made those same grateful sisters dazzling replicas of Fifth Avenue dresses from her attic, stopping only when she smelled dinner burning. I heard how the women of my father's family escaped the Palestine riots of 1929 with the help of their Arab servant. I saw a tattered photograph of the mulberry tree that my paternal great-grandmother sat under while reading *Tzenah U'rena* to the illiterate women of the town on Shabbat afternoons.

The experience of collecting my family's stories, especially women's stories, had a profound impact on me and it planted a seed that years later, during a hiatus from my job as a museum curator, blossomed into Art of Memory Press. While taking a break to be home with my young son, it occurred to me that the process of curating exhibits was not so different from "curating" lives. Since then, I have been entrusted with documenting and preserving the stories of other fascinating women. Some have played prominent roles in the public arena—women such as Clara Peller, a Russian immigrant who



Old photographs and documents can serve as memory aids to reconstruct family stories. (Photo courtesy of Ilana Segal Robiczek)

at age 80 became an overnight sensation through the popular Burger King “Where’s the beef?” ad campaign—and others who are less known, but are no less cherished by their families and friends for their roles as talented household managers, fundraisers and forces for good in the community, behind-the-scenes players in businesses, and devoted and nurturing mothers and wives. (And of course there have been many impressive men as well!)

I would like to walk you through some of the general principles and guidelines that I have found to be effective in documenting these stories. I will focus on the oral history, which is generally the starting point for my memory books, and a great way for anyone to document his or her precious family stories.

A memory book is an excellent way of preserving family mementos. (Photo courtesy of Ilana Segal Robiczek)



One hundred questions. In advance of your interview session, develop a list of about 100 questions for your subject. Although major life/world events may be foremost on your mind, do not forget to ask about the more mundane aspects of everyday life, such as: How much did food staples cost when you were young? What was your first car? How were holidays celebrated in your home? Did you have a favorite dish? What did you do over summer break? Where was your first date with your spouse? Often the things that are most fascinating and surprising to learn are the details that never come up in day-to-day conversation. While developing your question list, I also recommend doing some basic research into the time, places, and world events that the subject has lived through. This will make your questions richer and better informed.

Come prepared. On the day of the interview make sure that you have a functioning recording device (audio or video), a backup device, as well as extra batteries or a charge cord. You should be sufficiently familiar with the setup that the technical aspects will not distract you from the task at hand. Good old pen and paper are also helpful for jotting down additional questions as they occur to you or points to clarify later on.

When someone tells you who they are, listen. Taking a life history requires a great deal of quiet listening. It is best to avoid sharing your own anecdotes and experiences and to focus instead on prompting your subject’s recollections. It is important that the subject feel supported and encouraged and that you be mindful of his or her stamina. Plan on regular breaks about every two hours, especially if your subject is elderly or if the subject matter

is emotional. You may also want to spend time together reviewing old photographs and documents. These serve as great memory aids and can highlight experiences that might have been forgotten.

Go with the flow. Although prepared questions are a great starting point, don’t be afraid to deviate from them. Stories tend to go forward and backward over time and to conjure up other reminiscences. It is important to follow the lead of your subject, even if it doesn’t conform to your plan. Recently, for instance, I interviewed the owner of a three-generation shoe business who is known to be a fabulous storyteller. After half an hour of struggling with my questions, I quietly put them away and let him take the lead. We passed the day in wonderful conversation and many of my questions were eventually answered—on his terms!

Don’t be afraid to ask. Often there will be subjects that your subject has never talked about or avoided talking about because they are scary, sad, or painful. These include such topics as periods of struggle (financial, marital, health, etc.), the death of loved ones, and even attitudes toward mortality. Give your subject the opportunity to speak about these things. I have found that my clients have generally embraced the opportunity to discuss difficult topics in the quiet, reflective, therapeutic environment that the interview setting offers. One subject told me, for example, that after discussing her Holocaust experience with me she now feels comfortable talking about it with her children and grandchildren for the first time. Of course, if your subject is having difficulty proceeding, give him or her the opportunity to take a break or move on to a different topic.

Ethical will. There is a strong tradition of the ethical will in Judaism, tracing back to the patriarch Jacob, and through the Middle Ages. Give your subject a chance to reflect upon and share the values and life lessons that matter most to her. Ask about her hopes and dreams for her loved ones. A modern ethical will need not take the form of stern admonitions. A young mother with cancer, for example, passed on advice in the form of humorous little tidbits that have contributed to her worldview. On a cold winter day in Communist Russia she discovered swarms of people eating ice cream. When questioned why, their response was simply, “Because today there is ice cream!” She took away from that experience that one needs to appreciate what one has and seize the moment. She did just that when she turned her own diagnosis of cancer into a national organization that supports tens of thousands of Jewish women in their fight against the disease.

My grandmother’s pearls, which I had so admired as a child, were eventually passed down to me, but my grandmother’s true legacy would not have without dedicated effort—my own small seizing of a moment. Even though we may not like to think about it, we are all

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Taking Leaps into the Unknown in Midlife

By Sandra E. Rapoport

For the past several years, about the time we read *parashat Lekh Lekha*, I have found myself remembering, briefly, “Sandra’s Big Adventure.” No, I did not go to live on a kibbutz for six months, or go on a “walkabout” in the red heart of Australia—not that I haven’t considered those as things I might one day like to do. Rather, I think about my semester as a resident scholar at Harvard.

So what? You might well sniff. But it was truly a “so what” of immense proportion for me. You see, the day I got the call from Harvard, I was nearing my fifty-ninth birthday. That’s a bit old to consider going away to college. I was living with my husband in New York City, the kids were grown and out of the house, and I was engrossed in writing my third book—my first solo venture.

I recognized the 617 area code on the screen of my cell phone. I remember odd things about those few moments: the way the August sun slanted into the room highlighting the dust on my computer screen, and the thought that I had better press “save” before answering the phone. Then all extraneous thoughts fled as I registered what the master of Lowell House at Harvard University was saying. *They remembered my lecture of the previous year on the Matriarch Sarah at the Harvard Faith and Life Forum; they had attended the interactive Passover Seder I organized and ran at Harvard this past spring; they were excited that I was an attorney who also had authored books on women in the Hebrew Bible. Did I recall they had mentioned the possibility of a resident scholar spot sometime in the future? A place had just become available; was I interested in taking the spot?* They needed an answer immediately.



Sandra E. Rapoport

I asked myself if I could do this new and unconventional thing.

I tried to process what I was hearing. I was being offered the spot of resident scholar at Harvard for the imminent fall term. I would have to live on campus in Cambridge, in Lowell House (hence the term “resident scholar”) alongside 400 undergraduates, dine with them, befriend them, teach them, mentor them. I was someone with “valuable career and life experiences” to model and share.

Could I take a day to think about this and get back to you?

I realized, after I hung up, that I would never be given a second chance. Either I accepted the offer or I would forever wonder and regret what I had passed up.

I opened a new file and started making lists. At the

top of the page the cursor blinked alongside the one word that could make or break my decision: the name of my husband of thirty-seven years. You see, the *sine qua non*—the nonnegotiable requirement—of a resident scholar was that I move into resident housing and live at Harvard for the entire semester. How could I take this position and leave my husband alone in New York City for months? He was a grown man, I rationalized; he had his absorbing work as a physician, spending sixteen hours a day seeing patients and teaching, and wouldn’t miss me. But, of course, there was much more to it. Throughout

the four decades of our married life we had never been apart for such a long stretch of time. The rhythm of our life was set, and we both relied on this steadiness. In this lovely hiatus when our children were semi-self-sufficient and living elsewhere, dare I shake up our lives so precipitously? I fretted.

Wouldn’t my husband be lonely if I were to leave him for a semester? We had been a “modern couple” back in the 1970s, but forty-odd years later we were more set in our ways. Women of my age and marital situation simply did not do this, did they? Could I? I had no blueprint.

That night, when my husband came home, I dropped “the H-bomb,” as I privately called my pending offer. I watched his face as he processed it. He smiled mischievously, and said the sweetest thing. “It’s a good thing I didn’t trade in the Suburban for a smaller car. This way I can drive you up to college!” He had no doubts. He was already thinking about how to get me and my computer, my books, clothes, and bedding up to Cambridge.

The next day I accepted the position.

In the few weeks between my acceptance and my start date, I sent an e-mail to my friends, letting them know where I would be from September through December. Almost everyone, knowing and loving me, gloried in the “crazy” thing I was doing. They had confidence I would make it work. But a few women acquaintances were outspoken in their disapproval. I was blindsided, stunned, and hurt by the few e-mails I received from Orthodox women with Ph.D.s saying they disapproved of my taking a position in Boston, leaving my husband in New York. One confessed that she would never have the nerve to do what I had done, leaving her husband—even temporarily—to follow her dream. They asked, in word and by implication, whether it was selfish of me, and neglectful of my husband, to do this. In essence, they said that I was altering, *de facto*, my marital agreement. It was one thing, apparently, for young women of today, in their twenties and thirties, to marry and then temporarily pursue their careers in separate cities from their husbands. But it was quite another thing for an older gal like me to decamp from New York City to

Harvard's dorms. What was I playing at?

I agonized. I had taken small risks at every stage of my career, moving from one type of work to another, always after discussing the pros and cons with my husband. I had given up the go-go life of litigating in a law firm to be a management consultant in order to be home for dinner. I had switched to full-time child-rearing, then to studying Torah and writing books on Bible and Midrash. I asked myself if I could do this new and—even by my personal, zig-zag career standards—unconventional thing.

Move-in day came. I unpacked my books in my rooms on the third floor of Lowell House while my husband vacuumed. He stayed over the first night, then drove back alone to New York.

I met with the house masters at Lowell House. I arranged to give a semester-long series of lectures on Women in the Hebrew Bible. I was instantly absorbed into house life. I attended candelabra-lit “high table” dinners, wearing a black dress and pearls, and I appeared at all meals, sharing a table with undergraduates. My classes, composed of Christians, Jews, and a smattering of Muslims, were full. I realized that while my teaching legitimized me, it was the extra-curricular activities that made me one of them. I was expected to sing at the bi-annual house talent show (I did), appear at Senior Common Room lunches every Wednesday, participate in Lowell House teas every Thursday at 5 PM, and attend the Lowell House Opera. The students invited me to their classes (I reread *Wuthering Heights* one Shabbat in preparation for the Monday class), their football games, their study breaks. I took them out to lunch, answered questions about their relationships, their career choices, my kids, my husband, my hair, my new book, my dual life.

I met with the wife of the Hillel rabbi, a powerhouse of a young woman in charge of organizing the Harvard Hillel guest speakers. She was commuting to NYU pursuing her Ph.D. in Judaic Studies. She was also very pregnant. She liked my idea of teaching Wednesday evening Torah Roundtables, and was eager to announce my classes on the Hillel listserve, reaching out to undergrads, graduate students, and the greater Cambridge community. She clued me in to the cheapest commuter bus schedule between Cambridge and New York City, and I gave her thesis-writing advice.

My son coached me, long-distance, on how to connect my laptop to the Harvard server. I slowly learned how to use the Widener Library, and walked the stacks of the Judaica section breathing in articles I could access nowhere else.

My husband came up on the weekends he was not on call. We had Shabbat meals with students, watched the Head of the Charles Regatta, reminisced about our undergraduate years, and felt young and happy. I introduced him to my new friends. We Skyped when he got home so he would have company as he ate his lonely dinners. I learned to sleep with my cell phone under my pillow so I would hear the ring when my daughter phoned from Israel. My kids couldn't get over the fact that their mother was at college. My daughter quipped,

“Hey, Mom, no sooner do you finish with your own kids, than you adopt twenty-five new ones!” She wasn't wrong.

I traveled back and forth to New York several times to be with my husband and to teach an evening class I had committed to before receiving the Harvard offer. I felt like a visitor in my own home. My world had tilted, and I found myself thinking of my other desk, my work, my Lowell House “kids.”

The semester sped by, and Hanukkah arrived at Harvard. I had brought along an electric menorah and set it up in the bay window of my sitting room. No candles were permitted in the house, so this was the best I could do. That is, until I received the e-mail summons from the house master: “Sandra, could you light the Hanukkah menorah at the masters' residence after tea tonight, and lead us all in blessings and songs?” I prepared 50 song sheets: *Ma'oz Tsur* in Hebrew and in transliteration, and “Rock of Ages” in English. I placed the masters' small menorah in the recessed window ledge of their large living room, lit the candles, sang the blessings, and couldn't stop smiling. I added the *berakhah* of *Shehecheiyanu*. *Pirsumei nissa*—publicizing the miracle of Hanukkah—was not just theoretical for me that winter.

I had taken a risky leap into the unknown in midlife—my very own *lekh lekha*—and had an unforgettable time.

I stuck to my schedule and finished writing my book. I began repacking the cartons I had unpacked—was it a semester ago? I sponsored a farewell open house and invited all my Lowell House friends. With the promise of vegetarian pizza, everyone came and signed my guest book: house masters, tutors, their very small children up past their bedtimes, and my undergraduates. There were tulips and photos, and one young math professor uncovered the grand piano and began to play. They presented me with an official Lowell House fleece. They invited me back for a book party at the Harvard Book Store when my book came out. They wondered why I couldn't stay for the spring semester, too.

I couldn't sleep my last night at Lowell House. My husband was so glad to be taking me home that I knew he would arrive before breakfast. He was done being lonely. I watched the sun come up over the gabled roofs of the quadrangle. I recited my morning prayers and added a special thank-you for the gift of the choice to fulfill a dream I never even knew I was harboring. I had taken a risky leap into the unknown in midlife—my very own *lekh lekha*—and had an unforgettable time.

Sandra E. Rapoport is the author of the award-winning book Biblical Seductions: Six Stories Retold Based on Talmud and Midrash (2011). Visit her website at biblicalseductions.com.

Portrait of a Modern Jewish Woman Philanthropist

By Ann Baidack Pava

When I graduated from college in 1980, my two younger sisters made me a tee-shirt that said, “Save the Female Whales in Ethiopia.” They were, of course, sweetly making fun of me. They saw me as a bleeding-heart liberal: Give Ann a cause and she’ll jump right in. I was a feminist. Gloria Steinem was my idol. At age 21 I bought my first subscription to *Ms.* magazine. I believed passionately in women’s rights and human rights.

Shortly after college, I landed a job as an organizer with the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union. I was always broke even though I was working—and was proud of it. We were an idealistic group of young people, and the organizers on staff always went on strike with the workers. I was on strike quite a bit in those first few years. I completely identified with the maids and dishwashers I was organizing. In fact, I didn’t much like rich people, as for me in my “just-out-of-college mentality,” they were usually the hotel owners I was organizing against.

My goal was to make the world a better place—through my deeds and my work. I certainly did not consider myself a philanthropist. Actually, I was anti-philanthropist, if there was such a thing. Then something happened that changed my life and my attitude toward philanthropy.

My aunt offered to send me on a Jewish Federation singles mission to Israel. I took her up on her offer, quite honestly, in hopes of meeting a Jewish husband. My going had nothing to do with the Jewish Federation or Israel, about which I knew absolutely nothing. The only catch was that I was required to make my own \$200 donation to the Jewish Federation to go on the trip. I was embarrassed to tell my aunt (who was paying for the whole trip) that I couldn’t swing \$200. The organizers of the trip agreed to let me pay the \$200 over the course of the year. And off I went.

I didn’t fall in love with a Jewish boy on that trip, but I did fall in love with Israel. I also fell in love with the Jewish Federation movement. When I realized that I could stand up for human rights and everything I believed in using a

Jewish lens and through a Jewish organization, I made my first-ever donation of \$200. It felt like a privilege and not a burden.

Upon my return, I was a changed woman. I couldn’t wait to tell all my friends about my Israel experience. I then had a rude awakening: I learned that many of my friends, the people with whom I spent all my time trying to change the world, were anti-Israel. I was shocked. That same year Jesse Jackson was running for president, with the full support of my friends. During the campaign, Jackson made his notorious anti-Semitic “Hymietown” remarks. He was pro-PLO when it was considered a terrorist organization whose goal was to wipe the Jewish state off the map. Yet all my friends supported him; this

was a nonissue for them. It was then that I decided to focus my time and efforts in the Jewish community.

As luck would have it, I landed a job with the Jewish Federation of Western Massachusetts. I finally did

meet and fall in love with a Jewish boy. My husband, Jeremy (not yet my husband), was an Orthodox Jew on the board of the Federation. We married six months after I began my new job, and I began a religious, spiritual, and philanthropic journey all at the same time.

Women in the Jewish Federation Movement

The type of philanthropy practiced by the Women’s Philanthropy Movement of the Jewish Federation spoke to me as a feminist and shaped the type of philanthropist I am today. The UJA Women’s Campaign began after World War II. The war had taught women that they needed to educate themselves Jewishly and to make their own gifts of *tzedakah* if they wanted to become policy makers and be heard by the community. The formation of the Women’s Campaign in 1946 meant that each woman—as an individual, and not just as part of a family—could take responsibility for doing her share to provide for Jews not able to provide for themselves. This philosophy still holds true. Today the Women’s Campaign, now known as National Women’s Philanthropy, raises \$170 million

Women in the Jewish Federation movement have produced the most powerful women’s philanthropic enterprise in American history.

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conscious of the highly ephemeral nature of our family stories. Just because we sometimes talk to our loved ones about the past, it doesn’t mean that we truly know their stories and it certainly doesn’t ensure that they will be preserved intact for future generations. The broad biographical information may endure, but the things that animate the story—the humor, the anecdotes, the colorful details, the specificity—will disappear without dedicated efforts to preserve them. These stories, preserved and handed down, allow something precious of the storyteller to endure—something more precious than pearls.

Ilana Segal Robicsek is the founder of Art of Memory Press and curator of collections at Spertus Institute in Chicago.

of the Jewish Federation of North America's (JFNA's) annual campaign. And that number is expected to climb in coming years.

Women in the Jewish Federation movement have produced the most powerful women's philanthropic enterprise in American history. I grew up in this movement, and my philanthropy has been strongly influenced by this model. Although my husband and I have grown together in our philanthropy, I continue to give in my own name. From the first \$200 gift I made as a young single woman until I became a Lion of Judah for my fortieth birthday, I have made this my philanthropic model. (The Lion of Judah pin that many women wear represents a \$5,000 or more gift to the Jewish Federation in a woman's own name.) I have educated myself Jewishly to be a better Jew, a better wife, a better mother, and a better Jewish philanthropist. I have sent all my children to Jewish day schools (K-12) because I want them also to be secure and knowledgeable Jews and informed philanthropists when they grow up.

Philanthropy in the Orthodox Community

But my work in the Jewish Federation world did not prepare me for what I would find when I turned my time and attention to the Orthodox community. Following the birth of my third child, I left my position at the Federation to devote myself full time to an effort to start the first Modern Orthodox high school in the region. I set up a home office, built a committee, and functioned as an unpaid staff person and a lay leader in organizing this project. Within a year, we had three Jewish Federations committed to supporting a new school and had raised enough money to open. We had identified families and students committed to attend the ninth and tenth grades, secured space in a local synagogue, and begun interviews for a principal. This was all before the age of cell phones (except the ones for emergency hooked up to the car). Computers were still new, and e-mail was not yet what it is today. In other words, it was an enormous amount of work (for me, in particular) done in the old-fashioned way.

The committee met one evening as we started our principal search. It was time to set up an official board and to become a 501(c)3 organization. We opened the meeting with our top agenda item—appointing a president. Admittedly, I puffed up. I had led this endeavor every step of the way. I was sure they would ask me. Who else could the committee possibly ask? Well, first they turned to a wonderful, smart man, dean of a local law school. He refused. He was new to his position and simply did not have the time to take on this big job. OK, maybe I'd be the second choice. Nope. They turned to another man (also, wonderful), and he too said no. Heads were down. There was a collective sigh of dismay and then silence. "I'll do it," I volunteered. More silence. Finally, someone said OK and, with very little fanfare, I became

the founding president of the Hebrew High School of New England.

My feelings were hurt at first, because I didn't understand their hesitation. I had been a feminist far longer than I had been an Orthodox Jew. I knew women couldn't be rabbis, but it never occurred to me, in my naiveté, that there would be a problem with a woman president. The president of our Federation was a woman. In fact, the president of our local Orthodox *shul* was a woman. (Looking back, I realize now that she must have been one of the first in the country.) I didn't know that this was not the norm.

This situation taught me another lesson about philanthropy and leadership. Donating in my own name was not enough. Fundraising for the cause was not enough. As a president and a donor, I was now also in the powerful position to shape policy and to make sure that this would be a school that I felt comfortable investing

in. The school is now sixteen years old. Many of our young women are Talmud scholars and are accepted into the finest seminaries in Israel. Women teach Talmud to both boys and girls in the school. Leadership oppor-

tunities for girls abound. There have been other women presidents of the board.

It has been thirty-two years since I graduated from college and embarked on this journey. Today, I proudly consider myself a Jewish philanthropist. I am blessed to be able to give significantly to organizations that I believe in passionately. In particular, I focus my personal philanthropy on Jewish day school education, the Jewish Federation system, Israel, and organizations that promote women's leadership in the Orthodox world.

Most pointedly, I have learned over the years that philanthropy is not only about giving of your time and money—it is about making transformational change in the world. To do so, we must add a few components to our personal philanthropic repertoire:

1. Think strategically; give strategically. This mantra presents a constant challenge, especially in smaller Jewish communities. Although older and wiser, I'm still a "bleeding-heart liberal." I feel for everyone and am tempted to give to everyone who asks. Ideally, as philanthropists, we should identify our passions and invest our largest gifts in the areas that mean the most to us. Where will our dollars do the most good, according to what we believe? In today's economy, it is not always easy to focus exclusively on one's personal goals. There are many pressing needs in our local Jewish communities, and caring Jewish philanthropists have many organizations knocking on their doors for help. The conflict between remaining true to your personal vision and showing compassion for those in need at your doorstep is a challenge. I suggest that, even though you

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Philanthropy is not only about giving of your time and money—it is about making transformational change in the world.

New JOFA UK Ambassador, Dina Brawer

JOFA is thrilled to announce the appointment of Dina Brawer as JOFA ambassador to the UK. Ms. Brawer, originally from Italy and schooled in Israel and London, is a London-based educator and feminist activist who has been involved in premarital education, adult Jewish education, and strategic community development. She contributed to the curriculum of the Kolot Mother and Daughter Bat Mitzvah Programme in London and was the first (and only) woman to address a British Orthodox congregation at a Kol Nidre service.

Her interest in and passion for Orthodox feminism were seeded at the 2003 Koleh conference in Jerusalem

and nurtured by JOFA conferences and events. As UK's first JOFA ambassador, she aims to "support and facilitate educational programs for women and men focusing on women and Jewish law, encourage greater participation of women in leadership positions and ritual life, and create a community of like-minded individuals committed to the values of Orthodox Judaism and feminism." To hear an interview with Dina Brawer on BBC radio on the issue of women *shul* presidents in the UK, go to www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01pf6dj.

Contact Ms. Brawer at dina.brawer@jofa.org or follow her on Twitter @DinaBrawer.

JOFA's Teen Leadership Committee

Are you a teenager who cares about Orthodox feminism and wants to get more involved? Or perhaps you are a passionate feminist eager to meet like-minded people your own age. If this describes you, come join the JOFA Teen Leadership Committee, where you can have your feminist say and make a real difference.

The committee is open to teen girls and boys who identify with Orthodox feminism. For more information, contact Rachel Lieberman at rachel.lieberman@jofa.org.

SAVE THE DATE!

JOFA CONFERENCE 2013

December 7-8, 2013 • NYC

For more information, or to get involved,
e-mail conference@jofa.org

Recent Events

JOFA Panel Discussion on "The Status of Women in Israel"

A packed crowd attended the high-profile JOFA panel discussion on November 28, 2012, at which Koleh director Dr. Hannah Kehat, *Forward* editor-in-chief Jane Eisner, Center for Women's Justice founding director Susan Weiss, National Council of Jewish Women CEO Nancy Kaufman, and our own Blu Greenberg discussed and debated the status of women in Israel. The JOFA event was attended by communal leaders across denominations, and received excellent coverage in the *Forward*. It showcased an important and sophisticated analysis of the tension between gender and religion in current events in Israel.

"Educating Jewish Girls" Panel Discussion with Hadassah, December 4, 2012

JOFA board member Laura Shaw Frank did a phenomenal job representing JOFA at a Hadassah panel titled "How Can the Jewish Community Better Serve Girls and Young Women?" Co-panelists included Eve

Landau, founding executive director, Ma'yan; Deborah Meyer, executive director, Moving Traditions; and Ronit Sherwin, executive director, University of Delaware Hillel. The event generated intense interest and conversation about gender issues in Jewish education, and was an excellent opportunity for JOFA to be a leading voice advocating for gender change in the Jewish community.

"The Israeli Chief Rabbinate and American Jewish Identity" AJC Colloquium, November 27, 2012

JOFA executive director Elana Sztokman represented JOFA on a panel at the American Jewish Committee leadership colloquium on the chief rabbinate in Israel. The colloquium, coordinated by Dr. Steven Bayme, examined issues of divorce and conversion in Israel and their implications for American Jewish identity. Dr. Sztokman offered an analysis of the gender dynamics and power structures involved in the Israeli rabbinate. The event received widespread coverage and stimulated many communal discussions. Read a thought-provoking

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Best of the Web

Have you been following the JOFA Spotlight blog? Here are some highlights:

"My Daughter at the Pulpit," by Chaye Kohl

The mother of a young woman with an advancing career in religious communal leadership recounts with pride her own experience of watching her daughter break gender barriers in Orthodox life.

http://www.jofa.org/Community/JOFA_Blog/My_Daughter_at_the_Pulpit/

"Inclusive Language: One Reason Why We Still Need Jewish Orthodox Feminism," by Ilanna Newman

A young Orthodox feminist explores her own experiences of engaging with feminist ideas and language in different settings.

http://www.jofa.org/Community/JOFA_Blog/Inclusive_Language_One_Reason_Why_We_Still_Need_Jewish_Orthodox_Feminism/

Women Shul Presidents:

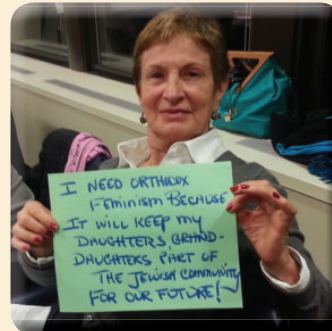
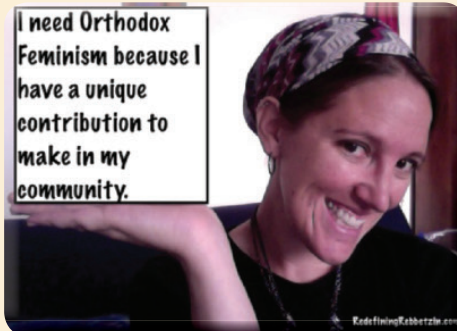
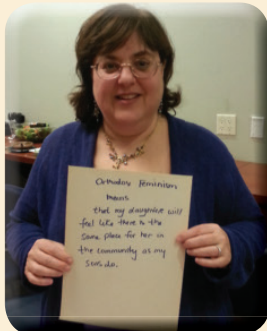
Interview with Elanit Z. Rothschild Jakabovics, President of Keshet Israel, Washington, DC

In the first profile in a series on women *shul* presidents, the JOFA staff interviews Elanit Z. Rothschild Jakabovics, recently elected as the first woman president of Keshet Israel Synagogue in Washington, DC, learning about the excitement and challenges of her new position.

http://www.jofa.org/Community/JOFA_Blog/Interview_with_Elanit_Z_Rothschild_Jakabovics/

Why Do YOU Need Orthodox Feminism?

JOFA has been asking people why we need Orthodox feminism, and followers have been posting their answers on the JOFA tumblr page. Here are some highlights:



Why do YOU need Orthodox feminism? Submit your answer at <http://jofaorg.tumblr.com/submit>.

Daf Yomi for Women

Dafyomi4women.org is the first *daf yomi* class for women, given by a woman, and available on the Internet around the world in real time. The classes are taught in Israel by Michelle Cohen Farber, and are uploaded and available for podcast and downloading. Additionally, worksheets that organize the *daf* and help facilitate understanding can be found on the website. Dafyomi4women.org, providing access to a woman's perspective on the most essential Jewish traditional text, represents a revolutionary step in moving women's Torah study forward around the globe.

For more information, please contact dafyomi4women@gmail.com.

Partnership Minyanim GoogleGroup

Do you belong to a partnership *minyan*? Then come join the conversation.

A GoogleGroup has been formed for participants in partnership *minyanim*—men and women, from around the world—to share ideas, experiences, challenges, and their visions for the future.

To join, go to <https://groups.google.com/d/forum/partnershipminyanim>, or send an email to partnershipminyanim+subscribe@googlegroups.com.

For more information, contact Heather Stoltz at heather.stoltz@jofa.org.

Portrait of a Philanthropist, continued from page 15

may try to do both, it is wise to stay focused on your philanthropic goals, even if it means giving less (or not at all) to organizations that are not your priority.

2. Be public about your personal philanthropy. I wear my Lion of Judah pin just about every day. I am delighted to have my name listed on an organization's honor roll, in a program book, on a plaque. Some people believe that this type of public display smacks of poor taste, exhibitionism, or elitism. I do not. Even if, at first blush, the publishing of names feels contrary to our tradition's belief that anonymous giving is the highest form of *tzedakah*, it is more important than ever that women serve as role models to one another. Although, the statistics regarding the future of women's wealth in America bode extraordinarily well, this does not necessarily mean that women will think as philanthropists. We who do must let others know that we are passionate about the Jewish world, and that it is a joy and an honor to give in our own name. A friend recently commented, "You know, when you speak about your philanthropy work, you wear your heart on your sleeve." Then she paused, adding, "Actually, you wear your pin on your lapel!"

3. Encourage people to join you—become a fundraiser for your charities. We can make transformational change within the organizations we support, but only if we couple it with securing the organization's financial health. In fact, not doing so can be dangerous. If I have decided to give significantly to an organization, I always take on a public role in helping to raise more funds. I have been a president of a Federation and a Women's Philanthropy Campaign chair. I have given matching grants to encourage more giving, hosted parlor meetings in my home,

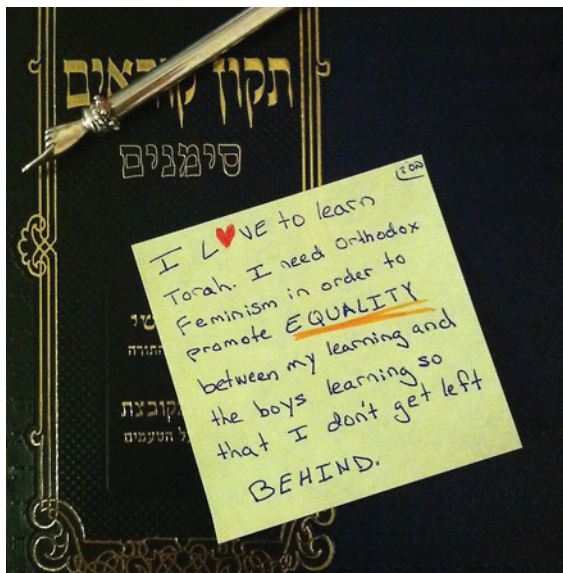
made phone calls, and met with people to ask for funds. If I have made a commitment and want an organization to grow, I don't want to be the only one making an extraordinary commitment. When one or two philanthropists are seen as "taking care" of an organization, the community may not feel compelled to give or to ask and, as result, will not feel ownership of that organization. The greater numbers of people who give to an institution, the stronger the institution is. Lead donors must lead the way for others to participate.

4. Learn to speak passionately about your charity. Always have a powerful positive story on hand to share, one that will resonate with most people. Practice your story with a friend. Know how to answer nagging, commonly asked questions in an honest and positive fashion. Invite potential donors to visit your institution. Invite them to have a Jewish conversation about what interests them. Invite them to make a donation. A woman philanthropist recently told me that she has always been a donor, but has never been a fundraiser. This view of ourselves is common. We sit on boards and chair committees. We donate our time and our money. But, as I hear over and over again, we say, "I'll do anything; just don't ask me to ask people for money." There are many reasons that women feel this way. Fundraising has traditionally been a "male" thing. Women are more polite. It feels rude sometimes to ask for money. We fear rejection. We have a million reasons not to ask. But ask we must. Philanthropy is an investment in what we believe. To be successful, we must inspire others to invest and believe as well.

5. Consider yourself a philanthropist, regardless of the size of your contribution. If you make a gift that is meaningful to you, think strategically about your giving, can articulate your passions, are proud and public with what and to whom you give, and inspire others to join you—you are a philanthropist!

Today, a Jewish woman philanthropist faces a complicated and time-consuming task. In fact, being a successful philanthropist is a full-time job. Trust me, there are days when I long for the opportunity to simply make a donation and walk away. I'd like to visit an island, get to the gym more often, and remember to schedule a manicure. OK, I only long for such lighter pastimes occasionally. Mostly, I long to change the world for the better, and I truly believe I'm doing just that—one donation at a time.

Ann Baidack Pava, a JOFA Board member, is the newly appointed chair-designate of the National Women's Philanthropy Board (NWPB) of the Jewish Federations of North America. She currently serves as vice chair for education and leadership development for the NWPB. She is a past president of the Jewish Federation of Western Massachusetts and currently serves as women's philanthropy campaign chair of the Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford.



Why do you need Orthodox feminism?
(from JOFA's tumblr page)

Grandparenting Today

By Rochel U. Berman

Every Shabbat morning, as I arrive in *shul* and take my usual seat toward the back of the women's section, I notice that the front row is still empty. Soon Grandma Anita arrives, carrying a tote bag bulging at the sides, and takes her seat in the front row. Shortly thereafter, Grandma Harriet, Anita's *machateimiste* (daughter-in-law's mother), enters the sanctuary, also carrying a bulging tote. She sits next to Anita. Before long, the stars of the show make their appearance—all eyes turn to Karen, Harriet's pretty, petite daughter, and her three beautifully dressed, adorable children.

Harriet and Anita move to the ends of the row—dividing the Red Sea to make room for Karen and the grandchildren. The little ones are plied with lollipops, toys, books, and endless hugs and kisses. When the tote bags are emptied, and the children have had their fill of their grandmothers, they march themselves off to the men's section, where they are eagerly enveloped by the loving arms of their grandfathers.

I look on with envy, fantasizing that these might be my children and grandchildren—if only they didn't live an ocean away.

But such is not my reality, nor is it the reality of more than 40 million people living in the United States who came from places thousands of miles away or whose children have moved to other corners of the earth.

Our son Josh studied in Israel for two years following high school. He returned to the States to attend Princeton, and following graduation, he immediately left for Israel, where he met a lovely American woman who shared his commitment to *aliyah*. They were married in Israel and have four children between the ages of six and twenty, all sabras.

Even as I have struggled to maintain ties and to bridge the gap that the distance creates, I don't feel hopeless or helpless. Long-distance relationships can be infused with intimacy, satisfaction, and respect, and we can find ways to sustain the solidarity and security of our families.

There are a number of salient issues that inform grandparenting in the twenty-first century. Greater longevity has produced more frequent cases of two older generations in one family. The 65-year-old retiree is a generation apart from her 85-year-old parent, now a great-grandparent. Many more now experience the privilege of grandparenting and great-grandparenting.

Senior citizens are generally healthier, wealthier, and

better educated than in the past. It is not uncommon for grandparents to continue to be involved in their careers for a decade or more after the birth of their first grandchild. Postponement of marriage and parenthood and the increased divorce rate is also having an impact on intergenerational relationships. Following a marital breakup, divorced children and their offspring may return to the parental nest for emotional support and caregiving.

There is greater geographic mobility, not only for young people, but for the elderly as well. Maintaining family connections over a long distance presents special challenges in terms of staying connected between visits, as well as maximizing the use of time during visits.



Grandparents can provide learning experiences during their visits. (Photo courtesy of Deborah Wenger)

Staying Connected Between Visits

To enable grandparents and grandchildren to stay connected between visits, it is helpful if the grandchildren's parents actively participate. Michal, my daughter-in-law, is vigilant about taking every opportunity to include grandparents in the daily lives of the children. The following are some simple yet successful strategies, as described by Michal:

- On rainy days, we look through family photos of visits we had together and review some of the experiences we shared.
- If I'm preparing a recipe passed along by one of the grandparents, I discuss with the kids where and when they first ate the dish.
- When one of the children asks about my childhood, I suggest that we call Granny and ask her what she remembers.
- Each of the four grandparents has special interests and skills. The children might have a school project or hobby relating to one of them. When this is the case, I encourage the children to call or e-mail the relevant grandparent. For example, one of the boys became interested in horseback riding, so I suggested that he e-mail his grandfather, who was an equestrian. Papa George sent back a lovely slide show documenting his riding days.
- From time to time, I send an anecdotal update on each child, describing what he or she is doing in school and in extracurricular activities.

Another way to stay connected is to have regular
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Grandparenting Today, continued from page 19

and frequent communication between grandparent and grandchildren. For example, one grandfather told me that he calls or Skypes each of his grandchildren on their cellphones or computers once a week. “I want each of them to feel that this is an exclusive gesture just for them,” he admits. He usually starts out with something humorous and then asks about school and their social life. He is interested in the highs and lows of their everyday lives, so his other questions include, “What wonderful things happened this week?” and “What disappointing things happened this week?”

Pre-Planning for Visits with Grandchildren

Whether in your home or in theirs, a key to successful visits, especially if they are short, depends very much on pre-planning. Pearl, a grandmother who lives in Florida, talks about planning to visit her seven Israeli granddaughters, who range in age from four to twenty. The religious practices in their home do not permit the children to watch television or go to the movies or the mall.

“Given the many restrictions on activities, we decided that craft projects were the best solution. Before I leave the United States, I scour the craft shops for appropriate projects and purchase all the necessary supplies to complete them. Every day we work on another project, such as greeting cards, paper flowers, and face-painting. We rent an apartment in our children’s neighborhood during our visit so that we have our own space and can still be close to the family. Each afternoon after school we divide the children into two groups according to age, first the younger and then the older. The projects usually take an hour, following which we have a snack. We then take the younger group home, pick up the older children, and start all over again. As an added bonus, each of the children is invited to dinner at least once during our two-week visit. The children love the time we spend together. We don’t see them for very long or very often, so we attempt to make it quality time.”

Grandchildren Visiting Alone

Today, it is not uncommon for children to travel the world alone. Major airlines offer services that allow children between ages five and seventeen to travel without a parent or a legal guardian. These children, known as unaccompanied minors, are ushered onto the aircraft, introduced to the flight attendants, chaperoned during connections, and turned over to the designated person upon arrival at their final destination.

Our three older grandchildren have been making these trips since the age of seven. As grandparents, we have found that visits from one or two of the grandchildren are a wonderful bonding experience. We get to know them, and they us, in a way that is not possible when their parents are present. When they come alone, we give them our full attention and are totally oriented to their needs and interests. This is also an opportunity for us to share our values and lifestyle. For the grandkids, this is a win/win situation. Traveling alone builds confidence, and becoming intimate with grandparents builds another layer of love and security in their lives.

About the Next Generation

The passage in Leviticus, “Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head and honor the face of the old man” (19:32), is a reminder that modes of behavior are passed from generation to generation. A child is guided into socially appropriate ways of thinking and behaving through the example set by parents. If the middle generation looks with respect on their aging parents, a model for positive behavior is set for the next generation.

Rochel U. Berman, a Koret International Jewish Book Award winner, served as director of community affairs at the Hebrew Home for the Aged at Riverdale for two decades. She is the author of three books and numerous articles and essays. Parts of this article are adapted from Oceans Apart: A Guide to Maintaining Family Ties at a Distance (KTAV, 2010).

A GRANDPARENTING GUIDE

- Parents are the portal to good relationships with grandchildren. Each generation should share the responsibility of developing long-lasting, meaningful grandparent/grandchildren bonds. Life-cycle events are opportunities to include grandparents in announcements and invitations, as well as in ceremonies and services.
- When visiting grandchildren, it is important to respect the lifestyle that their parents have chosen for them and to plan activities that fall within the parameters established by the parents.
- In the event of divorce, the grandparent’s goal is to maintain the children’s connection to a family beyond the nuclear family. If you are a step-grandparent, make an effort to get to know and respect your step-grandchildren as individuals and to be as inclusive as possible.
- Grandparents are the custodians of family history. If we want children to feel a part of the generational chain, an effort to share some aspects of the family’s past should be made during every visit.

Preserving the Past, Defining a Legacy: Archiving Personal Papers

By Judith Rosenbaum

How do we measure the worth of a life? How do we share our legacy with the generations that come after us? These questions are intimidating at any age, but take on increasing urgency as we grow older and seek to understand the meaning of the life we've led.

There are logistical challenges, too, that accompany the assessment of legacy. Over the years, we accumulate personal papers and mementos. When it is time to downsize—or, at the very least, declutter—what do we do with the photographs, letters, and clippings we have accumulated?

There are many ways to preserve your legacy. We pass on our values to the generations that come after us by sharing experiences, telling stories, writing letters, creating ethical wills. Many of us save pictures, memorabilia, correspondence, and other personal items with future generations (or, in some cases, researchers) in mind, but often what we have saved ends up in our attics or basements, disorganized, inaccessible, and unprotected from environmental threats.

Doing Justice to Our Lives

Tackling your personal papers can be emotionally fraught and physically tiring work. But it is also an opportunity to take stock of and celebrate your accomplishments. The task is particularly important for women, who are often the caretakers of family history and yet tend to minimize their own achievements and the importance of their role in the family and community. At the Jewish Women's Archive (www.jwa.org), we believe deeply that every person has a story and every story matters, contributing its unique colors to the Jewish tapestry.

As JOFA founder Blu Greenberg wrote, reflecting on archiving her personal papers at the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, "Women in general do not properly value their time and work. The message of the Jewish Women's Archive and the Schlesinger is that we must save selectively, with posterity in mind. ... An adult life that doesn't have the equivalent of three inches of a file cabinet or carton per year does not do justice to itself." In twenty-first-century terms, doing justice to your life might mean filling a thumb drive with your personal records every year or two.

Who Am I Saving For?

The first step in organizing your papers is to define your goal. Are you saving primarily for your children and grandchildren? Do you want to preserve the history of a small organization with which you have been involved over the years? Do you want your experiences to be available to historians who will one day want to

understand the lives of American Jewish women in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries?

If you would like your papers to be preserved in an archive, consider which one(s) might be appropriate. Local or state historical societies, Jewish or secular, are increasingly interested in acquiring material from the recent past. Colleges and universities often collect the papers of their alumnae and faculty; many professional organizations archive the records of their members.

How do we measure the worth of a life?

If you want to keep your papers in the family, you should still make sure to follow archival standards for preservation so that your materials do not fade or decompose. If you have photographs, you might want to have them scanned so that you can make multiple copies without a loss of quality. Include as much information (names, dates, locations) in the scanned files as you can. (See the sidebar on the next page for preservation tips from the Jewish Women's Archive.)

Where Do I Begin?

Begin at the place that feels least overwhelming—maybe by organizing your desk or home office or by making a digital copy of your yearly calendars (which contain a great deal of information about your daily life). Don't forget digital files, if you have them. Get into the habit of creating folders on your hard drive and backing them up regularly. Whether you are using manila folders or virtual ones, be sure to label them clearly.

If the primary impetus to your organizing project is that you are, or will soon be, short of space, you might want to consider professional storage. It is relatively inexpensive to store a few file boxes; your descendants will be glad you did.

If you're the keeper of family stories—or even just stories from your own life—write them down. Memory is not a very reliable archival system! Don't worry about literary style. You can revise later, but if you wait until you have the time to produce elegant, polished prose, you may never get around to it. You might try putting your words in a letter to a loved one; you don't have to send it.

What Do I Get Out of It?

Legacy isn't important only for the future. Organizing your papers can also provide an opportunity to look back at your life and see your experiences in a larger context and with new perspective. As you go through the files of yesteryear, you may rediscover experiences or friendships you thought you would never forget, or gain

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new awareness of your place in larger historical trends or movements. You may feel an emerging sense of pride as you realize the value of things no auction house would bother with.

Blu Greenberg described the changes in her own perspective in this way: “I had long known that conferences, lectures, and organizations were a large part of my life, but the boxes offered scale: several conferences, a score of lectures, and dozens of meetings each year, for forty years. Seeing it all together, I reflected on how significant these conferences and organizations were in shaping my thought, how vital in making change in the world, and how precious to me in creating personal friendships that I continue to savor. My mother was wrong: all those meetings and ‘running around’ were not a waste of my time.”

Most of us have not made the public impact of leaders such as Blu, but the daily business of our lives nevertheless adds up to more than just “running around.” Revisiting our journeys—whether they took us around the world or around the block—is a valuable exercise for ourselves and our descendants.

Thinking Ahead

You might think that in this digital age, archiving is easy and automatic. Many of our personal materials are “born digital” and already saved on a computer, and we likely have access to a scanner. But even digital records require organizing, labeling, and thoughtful preservation in a backup system. And we now suffer from an embarrassment of riches—so many photos and emails that it is not clear what to save. Regular culling through the year’s photos and messages is a useful habit to cultivate.

Our habituation to digital records, which are not tangible in the same way as “hard copies,” makes the paper records all the more meaningful. In the age of two-line emails, a long letter in a grandparent’s handwriting is a special treasure. You have the power to give the gift of history to your family. If not now, when?

Judith Rosenbaum, Ph.D., is a second-generation Jewish feminist, historian, educator, and writer, and former director of public history at the Jewish Women’s Archive (www.jwa.org).

Preservation Tips from the Jewish Women’s Archive

When thinking about preserving your family papers and photographs, keep two ideas in mind: the storage enclosure (the box, album, or folder that contains your items) and the storage environment (the conditions, mainly temperature and humidity, that the items will encounter).

Here are the top three things you can do to protect your personal archive over the long term:

1. If you have stored it in the basement or attic, remove it as soon as possible. The best place to store valuable documents and disks is in a room with stable temperature and humidity. Ideal temperature is 68°F and humidity is 40% (give or take a couple of degrees and a few percentage points). The key is consistency. The linen closet, which is generally away from outer walls, vents, and overhead pipes, is a good solution, especially if you can make room on a shelf/off the floor. Light is deleterious to photographs and documents, so limit light exposure as much as possible.
2. Keep similar items together. Mixing photographs with documents or newsprint leads to problems. The chemicals from one type of paper can be absorbed by other types and cause discoloration and disintegration. Newsprint is highly acidic and unstable. It is better to photocopy clippings onto acid-free paper rather than risking damage to the rest of your collection.
3. Handle with care.
 - a. Make sure the enclosure you choose is strong enough to support what you are storing in it. A sturdy box not only provides a barrier between your precious memories and the elements, but it also minimizes the chance that the box will collapse if/when you move it.
 - b. Do not use conventional cardboard; it contains chemicals that are harmful to your materials. Make sure to use acid-free products, easily available on the Internet.
 - c. Boxes should be sized according to what you want to store in them. If the box is too big, the documents and prints will slouch and crease; if it is too small, they will be cramped and the pressure can lead to sticking.
 - d. When you need to handle photographic prints (especially older ones), wear a pair of lint-free cotton gloves. If gloves are not available, eliminate oils and grime from your hands by washing them thoroughly before touching photographic objects.

Finally, remember to enjoy your memories! Just because an object or document is old, this does not mean you cannot look at or handle it. In fact, if it is just kept in a box, out of sight, there is little chance that the next generation will appreciate it and take the trouble to preserve it.

(See more at <http://jwa.org/stories/how-to/preservation>.)

On Being an Older Learner

By Suzi Brozman

At the age of 60, I embarked on a life-changing journey—one I never expected. Born into a secular Jewish family, I grew up without even a glimmer of Jewish knowledge. My family lit the menorah before putting up our Christmas tree; we attended Easter egg hunts and had a Seder. That's about it for me—no Hebrew school, no ritual, no learning other than my mother telling me I was expected to marry a Jewish man. Surprisingly, given the depth of my Jewish upbringing, I did. We were hardly observant, although I did make a great brisket and matzah balls.

Some things in life are easy, or so we think, especially when we're young. College? A breeze. Marriage? Everybody's doing it. Kids—why not, I raised a puppy, how hard could having a home, career, and kids be?

Then we age, mature, and learn. Sometimes this leads to confidence, sometimes to fear. And depending on our mindset, some of us grab at opportunities for new experiences, and some of us run away and hide. I used to be a hider, but a series of fortuitous coincidences led me on a totally unexpected, and often amazing, path. It's a story I want to share with you—not because I'm special; on the contrary, if I can take advantage of life's offerings, so can anyone.

An Educational Journey

My educational story ended—or so I thought—with college graduation. I chose not to attend graduate school, but went to work, while my fiancé put in his time in the military. This was the Vietnam era, and men, even Jewish ones, were being drafted. He opted for the Navy, preferring a couple of years at sea to any time at all in the tropical jungles of Southeast Asia.

We married, and I worked as a writer for different companies. We moved around for my husband's career, and I worked in each city we lived in. Our friends, our pastimes, our customs were anything but Jewish. We never discussed it. That's just the way it was, for a woman who hadn't seen models of observant behavior as she grew up.

When our son was born, we joined a Reform *shul*. Several years later, I got involved in some Jewish study groups, including the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School courses at my local JCC. I helped to found a Conservative *shul*, but still didn't adopt a more religious lifestyle. At the same time, I continued to pursue a career in writing, editing, and public relations.

Then, a few years ago, I was hired to write for a Jewish weekly newspaper in Atlanta. After several years, my editor asked me to cover the Orthodox community. I

didn't even know where in the city it was located. But, of course, I accepted the challenge, donned a hat, and drove to the Modern Orthodox synagogue on Shabbat.



Suzi Brozman

Taking my seat in the back row on the women's side of the *mechitzah*, I hadn't a clue what was going on. I couldn't read Hebrew; wasn't familiar with the prayers (all in Hebrew); didn't know when to stand up, sit down, bow, sing, or be quiet. So I asked a woman sitting in front of me. She graciously moved back and patiently answered my questions. If I hadn't believed in Providence before that day, I do now—she was the rabbi's wife, one of the smartest, gentlest people I've ever met, and we have become dear friends. And from that week, I have virtually never missed a Shabbat at *shul*.

People began inviting me to stay in their homes, to share meals. I was quite fortunate that my husband was willing to agree to this arrangement.

As luck would have it (and if I were writing fiction, I wouldn't expect you to accept this as a possible plot turn), earlier the same week the president of a prestigious local university had invited me to audit classes on campus. I'd been covering stories at his school for some time, and had worked closely with him to keep them accurate and positive.

More luck—I didn't know it, but my Modern Orthodox synagogue turned out to be the spiritual home of a number of professors at the university, and I was destined that first Shabbat to meet several of them. On hearing my story, they all invited me to audit their classes—in topics as divergent as Jewish law, Jewish ethics, Holocaust studies, American Jewish history, Hebrew, archaeology, and anthropology.

Being an Auditor

I was hooked. At almost retirement age, I began thinking of going back to school! But why not? Being an auditor puts you in a very special position, as professors decide your level of involvement. Most wanted class participation, but after getting to know me, few demanded I write papers or take tests. The benefits went both ways: I loved the learning and grew from it, and this was a revelation to the undergraduates I shared classes with. They learned that education doesn't have to stop with graduation, and it was a joy to be able to help them with my skills and life experiences. I have since found that many colleges offer this kind of continuing learning to seniors at reasonable fees. Check out the options in your state—especially with state schools. It's worth the investment of time and a few phone calls.

Because most of the teachers I knew were Jewish and

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taught in the Jewish studies field, I tended to concentrate on those courses. And I quickly developed a passion for *Humash* and Talmud. One of my professors, seeing my fascination with talmudic logic in his Jewish Ethics class, invited me to join the *shul's daf yomi* class, which meets seven mornings a week. That meant leaving my home, a forty-five-minute drive away, before 6 AM most days.

But the time investment didn't bother me. I was addicted—to the logic, the law, the glimpses I was offered into ancient Jewish life and the rules we still live by today. Talmud study for women is not a time-honored Jewish tradition, Maggie Anton's excellent novels notwithstanding, but it is catching on today, both in female-only and mixed groups. There can be uncomfortable moments when a woman studies with men. The rabbis of antiquity were not, shall we say, always complimentary to women, and there is not an imaginable topic that the Talmud does not deal with. But as my *daf yomi* teacher tells me, "We'll just deal with it." And we do.

More Intensive Jewish Study

After three years of study, one of my professor friends suggested to me that I try a more intensive immersion experience in Jewish study. She contacted the Drisha Institute for Jewish Education in New York, a school that specializes in teaching text to women of all ages. With her help, and the help of Drisha, I spent five weeks in Manhattan, learning about topics I hadn't even known existed just a few short years before. I studied Talmud, painfully translating words from Aramaic into English with the help of a dictionary and a very patient *chevruta* (study partner). There were classes in *halakha* (Jewish law), *tefillah*, *kashrut*, Hebrew, and many other topics—too many to make choices easy! I wanted to learn it all. Meeting and getting to know other women—some who had grown up observant; others, like me, tasting this phenomenal culture for the first time—made me sad, thinking of all the years I'd wasted. But rather than focus on the past, I resolved that this would be just the beginning of a new life for me, that I wanted to try on the observant life, see what it held for me, and learn all I could about Jewish law, practice, ritual, and custom.

I entered into talks about the coming year with the people at Drisha, though financially I knew that living in New York and paying school tuition was a real stretch. And then, as if God were playing a game of chess with my life, I met Rabbi Daniel Landes, the director and *rosh hayeshiva* at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies in

Jerusalem. Rabbi Landes was speaking at Mechon Hadar, a co-ed learning center where young Jews study. I had attended several evening events at this vibrant institute. When I met Rabbi Landes, he suggested I come to Israel for a year at Pardes. Thoughts of staying in New York flew out of my head. Me in Jerusalem? Not in my wildest dreams had I ever envisioned the possibility!

Three weeks later, passport in hand, I was on a plane to Israel. I was most fortunate that my son was grown and living independently. My husband, who travels for a living, said, when I broached the idea, "For forty years you've gone where I asked, done everything for our son and me. It's your turn now."

Living in Jerusalem

Living in Jerusalem, traveling around the country, studying Jewish text in the places where it happened, was more like a dream than a reality. To read about biblical Israeli fighters trekking through Emek Refaim, and then returning home on a street of that name, brought a whole new reality to Jewish history. Visiting the Israel Museum with one of the Pardes teachers, seeing the charred ruins of a palace that the Bible tells us was burned, taught me about the confluence of Bible story and archaeological

history. Looking out the windows of Pardes, seeing the hills of Jerusalem while reading the Psalm, "I will lift my eyes until the hills" (121:1), knowing this was the landscape David had in mind when he penned those words, was beyond description.

The streets and shops of Mea Shearim, the *mechitzah* at the Kotel, davening with the Women of the Wall, experiencing the devotion and exuberance of the women of Shira Hadasha, these are topics for another day. Shopping in stores where just about anything you might buy has a *hekhsher* (rabbinical supervision)—what a pleasure, except, of course, that the directions were in Hebrew, and mine never got good enough to read product labels or follow directions. The *shuk* (marketplace), the buses, just being where most people are Jewish—outside of Boro Park, where could you find that in the United States?

And Pardes! I was double or even triple the age of many of my fellow students—even of some of my teachers. But age didn't matter. The most important thing I have learned in this quest is that if you're an inquisitive, attentive learner, the color of your hair or the wrinkles on your face are irrelevant. It bothered me at first that I knew less Hebrew than just about anyone. But I was able to offer expertise in other ways, and kids were eager to work with me where I fell short.

And I wasn't alone. As at Drisha, there were a number of "older" learners at Pardes. I think the biggest thing I



Gilah Kletenik teaches a multigenerational Talmud class at Kehilath Jeshurun in New York. (Photo courtesy of Rose Landowne)

Israel's Savta Brigade

By Rachel Levmore

Israeli women of retirement age (62 to 64)¹ are not considered old or “out of it.” They comprise a respectable part of the population—10 percent of the population is over 65 years of age, and 30 percent over 55. Older Israeli women remain active, whether within the family, volunteering in the community, or participating in adult education.

Israeli *savtas*, grandmothers, are a vital part of the national scene. A case in point: During the weekend of December 16-17, during Operation Pillar of Defense, as missiles were flying (primarily in southern Israel), *savtas* filled a crucial role. Some hosted children and grandchildren who came north for Shabbat and a long weekend, trying to find respite from the missiles and the sirens they triggered. Others joined their children in their homes, poised to gather the grandchildren at a second's notice and rush them into the shelter. And still others—whose sons and sons-in-law had been called up to the IDF as part of the emergency draft—assembled their daughters and grandchildren, bringing them to the warmth of “*Savta's* house” to relieve the anxiety of it all. Without a doubt, the role played by older women under circumstances such as these is an essential ingredient of the resilience of Israeli society.

In normal times, it is commonplace to see women of retirement age picking up their grandchildren from day care, if their mother cannot make it at the end of her workday. Young families tend to live in the same geographical area as at least one set of grandparents,

which affords grandparents the opportunity for active involvement. Furthermore, the need for two incomes in young families, together with the fact that Jewish society and culture has long been strongly based on family values, results in the grandmother hosting her adult children for many a Shabbat and Seder night.

The role of family caretaker does not define the lives of older Israeli women.

Nevertheless, the role of family caretaker does not define the lives of older Israeli women. Life expectancy in Israel is the fifth highest in the world—83.4 years for women and 79.5 years for men (in 2010). As women are entitled to retire at the age of 64 (and men at 67), a woman generally has quite a few years to fill with meaningful activities. Approximately 50 percent of Israelis over age 65 take part in at least one of the following activities: community volunteer work; assistance to family, friends, or neighbors; ongoing education; sports or social clubs; and religious organizational life.² Between the various women's organizations, the high-level Torah programs for women, exercise opportunities, and community activism, there are many attractive options from which to choose. There is even a project for housebound women to contribute by knitting wool hats for soldiers.

Benefits for Israeli Seniors

Although 62.9 percent of citizens between the ages of 55 and 64 are employed, the figure declines to 14 percent for those over 65 (which is much higher than any other state in Europe). In any case, the National Insurance Institute does provide a pension for those who have retired—at a minimum rate of 1,481 NIS for an individual or 2,226 NIS for a couple. This entitlement is in addition to any employment-related pension. However, health insurance premiums are deducted from the elderly's pensions at a rate of 189 NIS for an individual or 274 NIS for a couple. The coverage from this insurance entitles one to all the extensive health care services the State of Israel provides for all its citizens. Additionally, when becoming an elder pension recipient, one is entitled to discounts of various types: on municipal land taxes, for public transportation, on the purchase of medications, on cultural events, and on electric and telephone bills, as well as possible assistance with rental costs. Nevertheless, approximately 50 percent of seniors report difficulties balancing their monthly income and expenses.

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took away from the school was that we're each unique in our own ways, from the boy with shoulder-length *peyos* (sidecurls), to the natural poet whose “I Am a Jew” YouTube video has gone viral, to the teachers who live in towns over the Green Line. I have learned that my age doesn't matter. I wish I'd done all this when I was 20 or 30, but who knows if it would have clicked then?

I know that as a woman, an older person, I have been offered amazing opportunities. But the lesson I learned is not to ignore those chances. Take them, savor them, learn from them, and give them the openings to let you grow, change, evolve. I'll always be grateful that circumstances, good friends pushing me and encouraging me, and a supportive family helped, but in the end, we all have to be willing to grow our own wings and employ them. What I want to know now is—where next? I'm looking for the answer to that question. Your turn now!

Suzi Brozman, a writer and scholarly editor, has spent her professional life in various editorial fields. She currently writes for the Atlanta Jewish Times, and in her spare time audits classes in Jewish studies, attends a daily daf yomi class, and creates fused glass objects.

Thinking of Retiring to Israel?

Many retirement residences and assisted living facilities are to be found across the country, including several in the Jerusalem area populated by English speakers. In the autumn of 2012, the number of retirement residence units reached 35,000 and is increasing. The trend of many Jews from the United States and England retiring to Israel has caused many retirement homes to adapt to English speakers. Seniors often move to such residences because of the need for companionship and the opportunity to lead active and socially interactive lives. The warmth of the staff and fellow residents provides a strong feeling of belonging, safety, and security.

For those who prefer to live in the general community

rather than in an age-segregated setting, there are governmental and private organizations that offer day care or club facilities providing not only care and activities, but hot meals and transport as well. In addition, there are nursing support organizations for those in need of care but who prefer to remain in their own homes. The National Insurance Institute can also provide financial assistance to defray the cost of a caretaker or nurse. Statistically, 86 percent of persons over the age of 65 reside in a home that they own. This number is the second highest in Europe (after 87 percent in Spain) and is an indication that the elderly tend to remain in their own community.

The government ministry that is responsible for the retirement population and the elderly is the Ministry for Senior Citizens (<http://vatikim.gov.il/Pages/default.aspx>). This ministry is charged with solving the problems of the elderly, such as their inability to cover expenses. Cultural centers, clubs, community center, and adult education programs operate under its auspices as well.

To Grow in Wisdom

By Abraham Joshua Heschel

What we owe the old is reverence, but all they ask for is consideration, attention, not to be discarded, forgotten. What they deserve is preference, yet we do not even grant them equality. One father finds it possible to sustain a dozen children, yet a dozen children find it impossible to sustain one father.

Perhaps this is the most embarrassing aspect of the situation. The care for the old is regarded as an act of charity rather than as a supreme privilege. In the never-dying utterance of the Ten Commandments, the God of Israel did not proclaim: Honor Me, revere Me. He proclaimed instead: Revere your father and your mother. There is no reverence for God without reverence for father and mother ...

The typical attitude to old age is characterized by fear, confusion, absurdity, self-deception, and dishonesty. It is painful and bizarre. Old age is something we are all anxious to attain. However, once attained, we consider it a defeat, a form of capital punishment. Enabling us to reach old age, medical science may think it gave us a blessing; however, we continue to act as if it were a disease....

What is necessary is a revision of attitudes and conceptions. Old age is not a defeat but a victory, not a punishment but a privilege. In education we stress the importance of the adjustment of the young to society. Our task is to call for the adjustment of society to the old.

(Source: Address to the
White House Conference on Aging, 1963.)

Sunshine and Satisfaction

Need we say a word about the weather? Although one generally thinks of Israel as a warm and sunny climate (which is true, and it can be glorious), there are a number of sub-climates that range from the hot and humid seashore through the cool mountains to the arid desert. Everyone can find her comfort level within that range.

When Israelis over 65 were asked to rank their level of satisfaction with life on a scale of 1 to 10, the resulting score was 7.4—on a par with the average in Europe. One might assume that American women coming on *aliyah* at a stage in their lives when they are full of energy and time would be extremely satisfied with life in Israel. The opportunities for self-fulfillment as well as for contributing to Israeli society are manifold.

There is an oft-used expression in Israel, used to denote “doing the impossible”: “*Im la-savta sheli hayu galgalim az ani...*” In English: “If my grandmother had wheels, then I would...” It is telling that *davka* a *savta* is used as a metaphor to accomplishing the impossible. Come and join the *savta* brigade.

Rachel Levmore, Ph.D. in Jewish Law, is a Rabbinical Court advocate (to'enet rabbanit); coordinator of the Agunah and Get-Refusal Prevention Project for the Young Israel in Israel and the Jewish Agency; one of a team that developed the prenuptial Agreement for Mutual Respect, the Heskem L'Kavod Hadadi; and author of the book Min'ee Einayikh Me'Dimah, on prenuptial agreements for the prevention of get-refusal. She is a not-old-enough-to-retire savta.

¹ Due to changes in Israeli law, retirement ages for women vary depending on the person's date of birth. See <http://www.eshelnet.org.il/?catid=%7B0D506E2D-B6FA-4B25-8EA9-E1E6B0116294%7D>.

² Statistical data were taken from the site of the Ministry for Senior Citizens at <http://vatikim.gov.il>.

EMERGING VOICES:

One Small Step for a Feminist, One Giant Leap for Womankind

By Eden Farber

A crisp fall morning. A march of beautiful, resonating voices. Joyous celebratory dancing. Tears; tears of both simchah and longing for more. One Torah reading by women, for women.

For the first time ever, this year my *shul* held a for-women-by-women Torah reading for Simchat Torah. Practicing with the Torah the day before *yom tov*, I was excited to have the opportunity to *lein* again—this was something I’ve done before and feel is one of my most connected religious experiences. Yet what made me emotional was not when I stood at the Torah—but when my mother did. Hearing her read from the Torah for the first time in her entire life—her perfect cantillation, her poise—I just stood there, in front of the entire group, and cried. My *Ima*, reading the Torah—it was then that I realized how important this really was. This was about mothers showing daughters, daughters showing mothers that religion is for us, too. Three generations of women would read Torah the next day—bonding and unifying with each other through this incredible religious experience of reciting the words of our God.

A religious experience it was indeed, as after the last *hakafah* the women of my *shul* danced through the streets singing songs of the Jewish nation with a Torah in hand to what we had transformed from a spidery, musty garage to a decorated prayer room. The room was clad with streamers in the colors of Israel, and on the wall was a large banner with the verse from *Shir HaShirim* (Song of Songs): *Hashmi’ini et kolekh, ki kolekh arev*—Let me hear your voice, because it is so pleasing. (This verse was specifically chosen to honor femininity—we are proud to be Jewish women, not ashamed to ceremoniously recite the words of our Torah.) The room overflowed with listeners—there was standing room only and women were even piled out of the garage, peering in through the windows and door just trying to get a taste of the beauty. Wonderful and inspirational *divrei Torah* were given by our trope teacher, a woman from the community who graciously dedicated her time to this project, and another amazing woman, who has seen this community grow from its start; it was an quite honor to learn from them. We had enough readers to go through the reading twice, and everyone read so beautifully and differently—hearing the differences in age, dialect, and style really made me appreciate the diversity of women we had in our community who, for the first time, had a voice. Afterward, we paraded back to the *shul* to finish davening. Our march was proud and strong—I felt a genuine *simchah* for the Torah, one I personally had never felt in this *shul* before.

One woman told me a beautiful thought at *shul* right before the reading, while her granddaughter held the Torah: “The first time I held the Torah, I was seventy; she is seven. My granddaughter is going to grow up without having to fight for her Torah.” She was right, of course. Some twenty younger girls who came to hear their mothers, babysitters, grandmothers, or friends *lein* are not going to have to fight for their Torah—by the time they are *b’not mitzvah*, their recitation will never be tainted by taunts or ridicule. A little girl and her mom came up to me after the reading; the mom told me that her daughter came up to the Torah to peer in while I was reading. “I never knew what it looked like. Now I could even read it!” she said. How beautiful that this seven-year-old had the opportunity to see the Torah—what a connection she built.

This is not an egalitarian community, and that’s fine. The women reading Torah did not read it to say, “Hah!”—they read it to read it. These women, whom I am proud to know, wanted a genuine religious experience. They wanted to connect to God in a way they never had before—yet in a way they knew they must; they wanted their daughters to see their future as strong and independent *talmidot Torah*. They are building *Am Yisrael*.

Watching one of my own *hanikhot* (campers), who was too young to *lein* at this reading (though she did learn to *lein* with us) but got to watch her mother and grandmother read, reminded me of the other side of why this was so important. It’s not only the mothers setting religious examples for their daughters, but entire communities creating new models. It was not just important to me; it was not about a personal opportunity to *lein*. Because at the end of the day, I am an individual, and this was an event of a community—a community of women that wanted to to learn and develop a skill, and teach unto their children, as the Torah tells us; a community that would defy gravity if they had to, just to learn. The message was loud and clear: We matter, our daughters matter, and this Torah is our Torah too.

Eden Farber is in the tenth grade at Yeshiva Atlanta. She is seganit of her local Bnei Akiva chapter and a columnist for the Atlanta Jewish Times. She has spent several sessions studying at the Dr. Beth Samuels High School Program at Drisha.

EMERGING VOICES:

Teen Feminists Find Facebook

By Avigayil Halpern

It is incredibly easy to start a group on Facebook. A few clicks of the mouse, a name and an icon, maybe a picture selected for the top of the page, and there you have it. I did this myself one night, upon the realization that I had a few friends with similar interests, and unwittingly created something amazing. The name I gave this group was “Teenage Orthodox Feminists”; since September, it has been my great joy to participate in fascinating discussions with other interested people my age on an almost-daily basis. The membership of the group has grown from seven on the first night to more than eighty-five as of this writing.

Since I am from “out of town,” and thus am not often around peers who share my ideas enough to have an articulate discussion, the group has played a crucial role in helping me not to feel lonely—and I am far from alone in this. Ricki Heicklen, a junior at SAR, has found that “the group is an incredible haven for teenage feminists to openly discuss their thoughts with one another. I am frequently in feminist environments, yet this forum is one of the only places I feel I can comfortably share my feelings about feminism without being judged or ridiculed. It’s such a phenomenal medium for discussion, and it allows me to share everything I’ve always felt and never had a place to say.”

It has been fascinating to see what issues we disagree about most, and which values we all share. For example, the idea of women wearing tefillin, which is not common among older Orthodox feminists, has been something we all support; several of the members of the group have worn tefillin before, and many more of us plan to in the future. Ironically, it has been our discussions of clothes and relationships that are the most frequent and contentious. *Tzniut* is among the favorite topics of the group, and we have together written paragraphs upon paragraphs exploring the nuances of the social versus halakhic status of pants, the implications of day school dress codes, and the radically different observances of

tzniut by members of the group. We have also spent a great deal of time dealing with high school relationships and *shmirat negiah*, along with “classic” Orthodox feminist topics such as titles for female spiritual leaders.

Our members come from a variety of backgrounds and places, identifying as Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform, with many who hover between denominations or actively reject labels, and are from three continents. We come from public schools and Orthodox day schools; some of us have had years of Jewish education, and some are just beginning to study Torah seriously.

Our group is not solely female; for example, Josh Rosenbaum, a senior and student council president at Maimonides School in Boston and regional president of New England NCSY, is among the most active members. “As a male feminist, I have often found myself isolated in a female-dominated movement. A few months of being the only active male participant in Teenage Orthodox Feminists taught me ... that my gender was irrelevant to the issue at hand. ... The discussions and debates I have had over the past few months have allowed me to learn and to teach, to inspire and be inspired, but most of all, to stand up for what I believe in and further myself on the

path to becoming the best advocate of equality I could possibly be.”

We have all found more than we thought possible through our keyboards and screens. The Internet has been a medium for powerful connection, even personal growth. As we tap away on our laptops and phones, more than eighty-five teenagers have begun to build a network that I have no doubt will help us change the world.

Avigayil Halpern is a junior at the Hebrew High School of New England in West Hartford, Connecticut. She has spent the past two summers studying in the Dr. Beth Samuels High School Program at Drisha.



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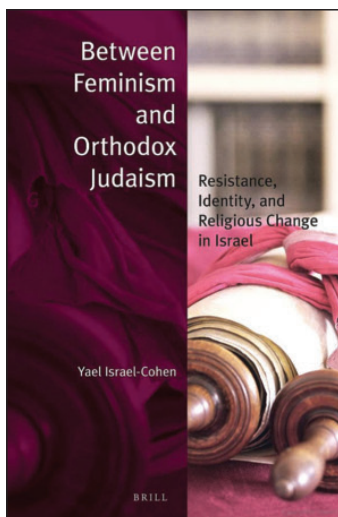
Between Feminism and Orthodox Judaism: Resistance, Identity, and Religious Change in Israel

By Yael Israel-Cohen

Brill, 2012, \$133

By Roselyn Bell

Using the tools and methodology of qualitative sociological research, Yael Israel-Cohen plumbs the religious identities, strategies for effecting change, and aspirations for the future of forty-five Israeli Orthodox feminists. Her interviewees are our Israeli sisters (and brothers, as some pro-feminist men are included) who are on the cutting edge of Modern Orthodoxy—in Kolech, Kehillat Yedidya, Shira Hadasha, Nishmat, and Women of the Wall, as well as in religious courts as *to'annot rabbaniot*.



Israel-Cohen describes the balancing act her subjects employ between strategies of active and passive resistance in order to bring about change in their communities—for example, in lobbying for a more woman-friendly *mechitzah*, while not wanting to alienate one's home community. She cites the creation of Congregation Shira Hadasha as a "key example of active resistance on a wider scale" and acknowledges that "by implementing changes that go against religious norms and rabbinical dictum, the congregation is pushing for a pluralization

of power within Orthodox life." Interestingly, she argues that the development of such "counter-hegemonic groups" expands the space for more conservative observant women to "negotiate their status on less ideological and symbolically charged issues."

On the topic of ordination of women, Israel-Cohen observes that in the ever-expanding *midrashot* (women's learning programs), students often turn to their female teachers for spiritual and halakhic guidance. This trend, combined with the turning to *yo'atzot halakhah* on questions of ritual purity, provides "a positive model for the advancement of women as *poskot* at a later time."

Relevant to the theme of this issue of the *JOFA Journal*, Israel-Cohen describes the relationship between age and feminism, noting that women who are middle aged or slightly older are more likely to identify with feminism than younger women. She finds that the "middle age years are most formative to the shaping of feminist identity," while younger women may resist the feminist label "because of the stigma and social price they may have to pay for such affiliation."

Israel-Cohen's observations are very specific to the situation of Israeli feminists. For example, she cites the resentment some feminists (and Israeli women in general) feel toward the Orthodox rabbinate for being government-enforced in matters relating to marriage and divorce. She also finds among her interviewees an unexpected degree of openness to denominational pluralism that she believes goes beyond liberal tolerance to a belief in the need to offer Israelis "meaningful religious alternatives."

Her observations are on less firm ground when describing developments in American Orthodox feminism. Her account of the controversy surrounding the ordination of Rabba Sara Hurwitz is largely based on a *New York*

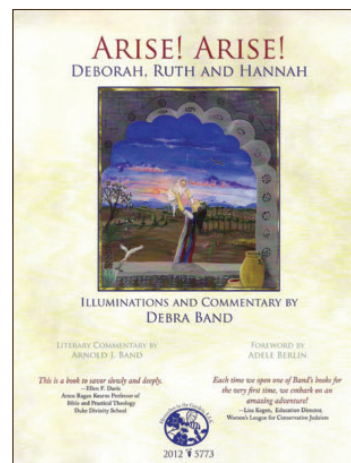
magazine article and has a second-hand story quality.

Nevertheless, JOFA readers will find much of interest in Israel-Cohen's research into how Israeli Orthodox feminists perceive themselves and their experiences. Her takeaway from the many interviews is optimistic about the prospects for expanding the boundaries of Orthodoxy so that religious feminists can find a comfortable home within Orthodox society.

Arise! Arise! Deborah, Ruth, and Hannah: Illuminations and Commentary

By Debra Band. Literary Commentary by Arnold J. Band

Honeybee in the Garden LLC, 2012, \$39.95



By Roselyn Bell

This luminously illustrated volume is both a literary and a visual commentary on the biblical passages dealing with Deborah, Ruth, and Hannah and also a deeply felt tribute to the memory of David Louis Band, the husband of Debra and the son of Arnold. It is clearly a labor of love on every level.

Band has selected three biblical heroines who are portrayed with extensive dramatic narratives, thus providing both continuous texts for illumination and rich material for *midrash*. Each text is presented with a literary commentary by Dr.

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Arnold J. Band, professor of Hebrew and comparative literature at UCLA, who draws on classical rabbinic sources as well as modern critical scholarship. Following the literary commentary come magnificently illuminated pages of the text itself, in Hebrew and in English, with illustrations that work on narrative, symbolic, and emotional planes.

These illuminations are the creative heart of this volume because they provide a highly original visual *midrash*. Debra Band's explanations of her artwork following each section spell out the symbols and draw attention to details. For example, at the beginning of the Deborah section, we see a harp leaning against a palm tree, foreshadowing the Song of Deborah, while also alluding to the sweet harpist of Israel, David—the namesake of the man to whom the book is dedicated.

The texts are scribed in a beautiful calligraphic handwriting in both Hebrew and English. Other traditional Jewish artistic modes, including papercuts and micrography, are employed. The use of micrography provides an interesting textual gloss upon the main illustration. For example, on the page where Ruth goes down to the threshing floor and uncovers Boaz's feet, the bordering text is from *Shir Hashirim* 1:9–13. The opening illustration of the Hannah section is framed with a calligraphic border based on the text of a nineteenth-century Moravian woman's *techina*, "For a Childless Wife." Band's use of art deepens the interpretation of a text, putting her in the elite company of Jewish midrashic artists such as David Moss and Archie Granot, who center their art on sacred texts.

Of course, as feminists we appreciate Band's choice of texts—three genuine biblical heroines about whom there is much to say. But most of all we appreciate the variety and originality of her artistic styles. This is a volume to put on your coffee table and to bring to *shul* on Shavuot.

Rav Hisda's Daughter
By Maggie Anton
Plume/Penguin, 2012, \$16

By Adina Gerver

I clearly remember first reading Milton Steinberg's *As a Driven Leaf* (1939) when I was sixteen, after happily studying Talmud for five years. Up to then, the characters whose words I had parsed and whose intentions I had deciphered in the classroom were two-dimensional and without lives outside their opinions about the earliest time to recite the evening Shema. As I read *As a Driven Leaf*, the Tannaim from the Mishna shifted from flat figures on paper into entire societies of men, women, children, rabbis, and ordinary Jews, alive in three dimensions. Still, *As a Driven Leaf* was mostly about men—men with wives, children, and political adversaries, but men nonetheless. In contrast, the women of the Talmud remained a curious lot: sometimes heralded, sometimes vilified, often anonymous, and mostly simply absent.

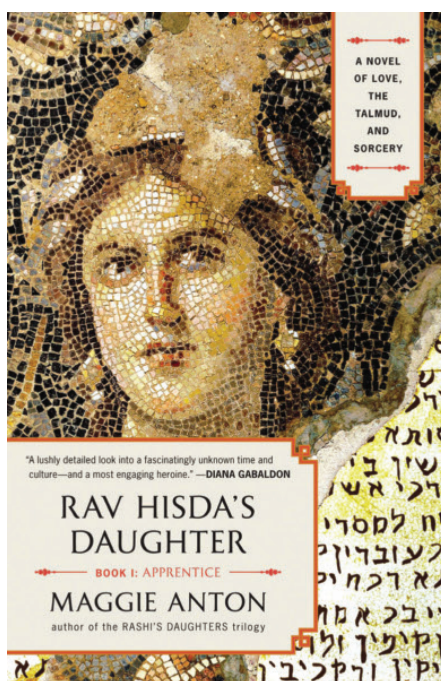
When I first heard of Maggie

Anton's latest novel, I wondered what sort of tale one could weave about Rav Hisda's daughter. Although historical fiction is a genre meant not to reflect reality but to imagine it, it was hard for me to understand how a full-blown reality could be imagined out of this one character, presumably mentioned a handful of times in the Talmud, but entirely unknown to me.

I needn't have worried. I was enthralled by Maggie Anton's *Rav Hisda's Daughter* from the start. Here, finally, were the Amoraim in their study halls, at their Seders, stomping on dates to make date wine, and spending time with their families. The world first glimpsed in *As a Driven Leaf* did not end with the closing of the Mishna. Anton deftly weaves a novel full of characters in whom the reader finds herself invested, even those who are less likeable. The scope of time and geography is breathtaking. Particularly enthralling were the descriptions of travel between Babylonia and *Eretz Yisrael*, and the comparisons made between life under Sasanian Persian rule and life under Roman rule. Having visited the excavations in Sepphoris and

Caesarea, I found reading the descriptions of tile works in *Eretz Yisrael* great fun, as was reading about the magic incantation bowls and amulets that Jews, just like gentiles, produced in Persian Babylonia and Roman Palestina.

Anton does particularly well at introducing us to the many tensions present throughout the Jewish Babylonian and Palestinian societies. First were the tensions between Rabbinic and non-Rabbinic Jews, including the "am-*ha'aretz*" (Jews who did not accept Rabbinic authority, in Anton's communal structure) and between Rabbinic Jews and early Christians. Additional tensions existed between free Jews and enslaved gentiles; between Jews more assimilated into Babylonian



Recent Events

Zoroastrian society (often women) and those who remained more separate (often men); between parents and children; between the Rabbis of Bavel and those of the Land of Israel; and between scholars and students. The latter two tensions are likely most familiar to those who study Talmud, but all were present. Especially interesting was how these tensions played out differently among women and men in the novel.

Of course, every historical novel has its detractors, who argue about the proper amount of creative license that an author may take or the necessity and nature of its sex scenes. (There are such scenes in *Rav Hisda's Daughter*.) The only historical error that I noticed was that there was likely no Christian community in Sepphoris during this period in history, but the academic Talmud scholar may find more. Anton excels at the creativity inherent in historical fiction, and, as with her novels about Rashi's daughters, no one should mistake it for a sober or authoritative scholarly tome with academic apparatus—although a useful map, timeline, cast of characters, and glossary are included. Although an afterword that describes her methodology and lists some relevant talmudic sources was useful, this book would have benefited from an appendix with English translations of the major passages on which the book was based. It would be helpful to easily reference the texts that Anton had available about the main character, which she wove into such a mesmerizing tale, rather than having to look them up oneself.

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essay on the panel by Gary Rosenblatt in the *Jewish Week* at <http://www.thejewishweek.com/editorial-opinion/gary-rosenblatt/calls-change-chief-rabbinate> and a reflection by Elana Sztokman on the JOFA blog at http://www.jofa.org/Community/JOFA_Blog/The_Agunah_Issue_Goes_Mainstream/.

“Women in Judaism” Theater J Performance and Panel Discussion (Washington, DC JCC), January 6, 2013

“Women in Judaism” was the subject of a panel discussion at Theater J of the Washington JCC, following a production of *Apples in the Desert*, an Israeli play by Savyon Liebrecht about a *chareidi* Sephardic girl who runs away from her troubled home to move in with a secular Ashkenazi kibbutznik. JOFA executive director Elana Sztokman spoke as part of a panel, moderated by *Forward* editor-in-chief Jane Eisner, with the participation of *Lilith* editor Susan Weidman Schneider. The engaging panel discussion explored issues of gender, religion, Israel, and Jewish life. “The play was more about a girl running away from an abusive father than running away from religion,” Dr. Sztokman observed. “That’s evidenced by the fact that she actually brought many religious practices to the kibbutz.”

For JOFA, this stance reflects much of what the organization is about. “The story resonates with many women who want to embrace the religion but want to strip it of its abusive or oppressive practices,” Dr. Sztokman added, “because the two are not the same. This is the life of Orthodox feminism—a love of the tradition, a deep desire to hang on to the heritage, coupled with very painful experiences that do not have to be what religion is.” The panel was very well received, as the JOFA mission of embracing tradition while eliminating its hurtful practices resonated with many members of the audience.

“The Eruv and the Jewish Community,” YU Museum Exhibition and Panel Discussion, February 4, 2013

The transformation of Orthodox women’s lives as a result of community *eruvim* was the subject of a riveting panel discussion co-sponsored by JOFA and the Yeshiva University Museum, titled “In the Mix: Building Community and the Eruv.” The event, which took place on February 4, included a tour of the museum’s exhibition “It’s a Thin Line: The Eruv and the Jewish Community in Manhattan and Beyond” and a panel discussion on the importance of the *eruv* in creating and transforming Jewish communal life. The panel was moderated by Rabbi Adam Mintz, who reviewed the history of the *eruv* in general and detailed the several iterations of the Manhattan *eruv*. JOFA board member Dr. Sylvia Barack Fishman described how the *eruv* served to bring Jews together, and sometimes aroused passionate opposition, driving them apart. JOFA founder Blu Greenberg spoke from personal experience about how the *eruv* has transformed the dynamics of synagogue life by making *shul* attendance an expectation for women as well as for men. Rabbi Yaakov Kermaier of the Fifth Avenue Synagogue discussed the efforts to extend the Manhattan *eruv* to the Upper East Side, and the diverse groups that came together to support it.



Rabbi Yaakov Kermaier, Rabbi Adam Mintz, Blu Greenberg, and Dr. Sylvia Barack Fishman at the “In the Mix” event at the Yeshiva University Museum.



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