

## What We Should Educate For

By Devora Steinmetz

When the editors of the *JOFA Journal* asked me to write an article about how to educate boys to be feminists, I said that I thought that the critical question was *not* how to educate boys—or girls—to be feminists. I would guess that most of our sons and daughters, in fact, accept the basic assumptions of feminism as givens. Yet these basic assumptions are not in evidence in many key aspects of our lives as Jews, which makes the issue of feminism one—perhaps the most obvious and one of the most troubling, but still just one—of a variety of areas in which there is a conflict of values between different domains of our lives. The issue, then, as I see it, is not how to teach children to be feminist, but how to educate our children for integrity, responsibility, and commitment, so that they can address the challenges of feminism as well as other difficult challenges, conflicts, and problems that they will encounter. I want to explain briefly why I think that educating for these core dispositions is what we, as Jewish feminists and as people of truth, should be concerned with.

Given that we significantly embrace the values of contemporary Western culture, I see three possible explanations for the behavior of members of the community who, in their daily (or weekly) religious behavior, participate in, and thus support, the status quo in relation to

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From our President

## The Challenges Ahead

By Blu Greenberg



The Jewish day school, along with the *shul*, *mikveh*, kosher butcher and kosher bakery, is a staple of the modern Orthodox community. But more than any other institution, the day school reflects the philosophy of modern Orthodoxy: a synthesis of halakhic Judaism with values of modern culture. So the Orthodox day school, the subject of this JOFA journal, is an appropriate place to examine the impact on Orthodoxy of one of the most far reaching cultural values of our times — gender equality.

Three significant areas to examine are access to texts, availability of female role models, and involvement in prayer. In recent decades, Jewish girls and women have gained access to rabbinic texts that were off limits to their mothers and grandmothers. In my day, boys studied Talmud while girls practiced Israeli dancing. Later, in high school, we were given bi-weekly periods of practical halakha while the boys studied Talmud for several hours each day. And we never noticed the asymmetry. In contrast, my daughters were introduced to Talmud at the same age as their brothers. And they took this quite for granted.

True, the majority of day schools today still do not teach Talmud to girls. Yet that balance is shifting, year by year. One powerful reason is the encounter itself. Girls studying Talmud take to it with great enthusiasm, slaking a thirst

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## Teaching Difficult Texts:

### Exploring the David and Batsheva Story in the Creative Classroom

By Stephanie Newman Samuels

When I told a former seminary teacher of mine I was teaching II Samuel, he challenged me: "Where is the holiness in II Samuel?" I understood his question to mean: how do we teach "difficult texts" to young students? As a teacher of middle and high school students, I constantly struggle with how to inspire holiness while training my students to be critical learners. When it comes to texts

that challenge our moral sensibilities and stimulate questions about gender-related issues, I locate the holiness in the difficulties themselves. It is precisely in the grappling with difficult texts and the less than satisfying answers they provide, that students uncover the true holiness in the text — and in themselves.

In the story of David and Batsheva (II Samuel, chapter 11), the

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## The Challenges Ahead

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they never even knew existed. Not only do girls by the thousands study Talmud every day in Orthodox day schools, but many continue intensive Talmud study after high school and make this their life's work.

Regarding availability of models, the story is mixed. Yes, in many areas of day school life, female role models have greatly expanded — e.g., women principals, teachers of Torah and general leadership models. But in other areas, limits exist. One of these, oddly, is woman-as-teacher-of-Talmud. Although the likely address for her talents is the day school, the first generation of female Talmud scholars has found that the institutions that educated them will not welcome them back as educators, a loss all around. Clearly some affirmative action is needed so that women who

want to share their love and knowledge of Talmud with the next generation not be denied and our sons and daughters not be deprived.

In the third area, prayer, little has changed. Benign neglect seems to be the operational mode of day schools. Girls are required to attend teffilah, but the prevailing attitude is that "davening is for boys." Boys are taught early on that a community of prayer

ing but mixed interest in female role models and girl's prayer? Part of the answer lies in the general resistance of Orthodoxy towards women in public roles. Girls are encouraged to learn but not to display this learning in ways that challenge accepted gender power and authority structures. Similarly, while the value of teffilah is promoted, girls are prohibited from taking roles that would place them at center-stage.

In balancing the desires of conflicting constituencies, day schools, conservative by nature, tend to affirm the status quo. To effect change, it will take more than inspired educators of which, thank God, we have many. It will take the pressure and encouragement of dedicated parents and community leaders, asking the right questions and helping shape the answers. And if these joint efforts yield schools in which gender equality is embraced as a positive value, the future of women in Orthodoxy — and of Orthodoxy itself — will be greatly enhanced.

In sum then, in the matter of day school education as in so many other areas of Orthodoxy integrating women's equality, we must press on with the agenda even as we celebrate the enormous strides our community has taken. ■

*"...the first generation of female Talmud scholars has found that the institutions that educated them will not welcome them back as educators..."*

exists and that they expected to be part of it. In contrast, girls remain passive and unconnected, eyes glazing over at the morning minyan. JOFA has not been apprized of a single day school that has instituted a girls' teffilah with Torah reading, though women's teffilah has proven to be both a learning and spiritual experience.

Why is there pride in girls' learn-

Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance  
**jofa** Journal

A publication of the  
Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance  
Volume III, Issue II  
Summer 2002 — Tamuz 5762

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JOFA Journal is published quarterly by the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, a non-profit organization. Membership is \$36 per year, \$18 for students. All correspondence should be mailed to: Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, 459 Columbus Avenue, Suite 329, New York, NY 10024. We can be reached by phone at (212) 752-7133 or by email at: [jofa@rcn.com](mailto:jofa@rcn.com).

Save the  
Date!

Saturday night November 9 –  
Sunday November 10, 2002

Fourth International Conference  
on Feminism and Orthodoxy

New York City

Entitled "Discovering/Uncovering/Recovering Women in Judaism," the conference will explore women's invisibility in Jewish ritual, halakhah and culture. Particular attention will be paid to the implications of such concepts as *tzniut* (modesty) and *kavod ha-tzibbur* (women's public presence and community sensibilities) on private relationships, public policy and Jewish religious discourse.

We anticipate an exciting conference with challenging lectures, workshops and discussions. Check [www.jofa.org](http://www.jofa.org) for updated information.

# Conflicting Messages: Feminism in Religious High Schools

By Elana Sztokman

Last week, I had a conversation with a fourteen year-old religious Israeli girl that would have made any feminist proud. This young woman, whom I will call Yael, recently participated in a mixed prayer service in which women read Torah and led services. Not only was she excited and inspired, but she used the experience as a springboard for thinking about the status of women in Judaism, taking responsibility for her own actions, and aspiring to work at ensuring women's rights in society at large. Yael's seemingly natural ability to connect between the personal and political, between religion and culture, and between Jewish practice and gender messages, stirred in me the hope that today's teenage girls will throughout their lives carry a feminist consciousness embedded in their Judaism.

This hope, though, was short lived. Not an hour later, I sat with another eighth-grader, whom I will call Sara, who learns at the same school and is in the same class as Yael. Sara, who is one of the top students in her grade and has been accepted to the most exclusive modern-religious high schools in Israel, expressed with equal eloquence the age-old anti-feminist notion of gender differences based on biology and "nature." She believes that girls are "meant" to be different, that our main charge in Judaism is to be "modest" (*tznu'ot*), and that women who want to read the Torah or participate in women's prayer groups are "strange." She sees feminism as antithetical to religious Judaism, and, I must admit, she seems to be as comfortable as Yael in her gender identity.

If I were to try to make an assessment about how girls in religious high schools are processing feminism, it would necessarily be incomplete, since it is clear that they speak in many varied and diverse voices. Clearly both Yael and Sara are working through the feminist agenda, but they are moving in very different directions, and are likely to emerge

with contrasting identities, despite their very similar social settings.

*"...while the presence of a feminist consciousness can be detected in many religious educational institutions for girls, there exists alongside it confusion or ambivalence..."*

Although this quality of "diversity" can be viewed as a positive attribute – from the post-modern perspective of multiple truths and realities – I sense that this particular multiplicity of identities among young religious women reflects something else. I suspect that young women's struggles with Judaism and gender are a reflection of the mixed messages that girls receive in religious schooling and society.

Certainly, Yael and Sara are alike in the fact that they are both grappling. Indeed, these young women are the first generation of religious girls to be exposed to aspects of feminist ideology. They are actually forming opinions about whether women should read from the Torah or form their own prayer groups. Concepts such as "equality" and "voice" are part of their lexicons. And most junior-high school students will have been to a bat-mitzvah of an Orthodox girl who participated in some Jewish ritual that her mother could not have been part of twenty-five years ago. In that sense these girls have grown up in a different environment than did women even ten years ago.

Still, while the presence of a feminist consciousness can be detected in many religious educational institutions for girls, there exists alongside it confusion or ambivalence, as well as a pronounced resistance. The combination results in an educational environment in which navigation of the tension between religious ideals and feminist ideals is neither explicit nor examined.

Girls are indeed exposed to conflicting messages. Orthodoxy

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## Eight Things to Look for in a Jewish Day School

We encourage you to ask the following questions when investigating schools for your daughters and sons:

- ❖ Is feminism among the values that the school encourages?
- ❖ Are there both male and female role models in the school?
- ❖ Is the school sensitive to the issue of teaching gender-biased texts?
- ❖ Are girls taught Talmud?
- ❖ Are leadership roles shared by both boys and girls?
- ❖ How do girls participate in prayer?
- ❖ Does the curriculum explicitly address feminism and women in relationship with halakhah?
- ❖ Are women in prominent positions on the school board?

### Correction

In our previous issue, we incorrectly stated that Kayama, a non-profit organization, was affiliated with Agudath Israel. Kayama is not affiliated with any particular organization.

## What We Should Educate For

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women's role in Jewish life. 1) They do not see the problem. 2) They see the problem but do not see it as their responsibility (or do not see themselves as having the capacity) to change things. 3) They see the Jewish ritual component of their lives as peripheral in importance to who they are and to how they spend most of their time and energy—given everything else we do and care about, why bother about what happens during three hours of our lives on Shabbat morning? To state matters boldly, if perhaps a bit too simply, *not* taking action to change the status quo derives either from (I will define each of the following terms in a moment) lack of integrity, lack of a sense of personal responsibility, or lack of sufficient commitment to Judaism.

Let me explain the first and part of the third of these possibilities in relation to each other. If we actually believe that Judaism is important, that it is a way of life, a set of beliefs and values, a way of being in the world, then there ought to be a constant dialogue between what we learn within Judaism and the beliefs, values, and ideas that we inherit from our place within the general culture. Since clearly some elements of one are in conflict with some elements of the other, we should be always in the process of questioning, challenging, and making judgments about each of the worlds that we inhabit. The response, of course, might not be to embrace feminism at all; it might well be to challenge the feminism of the general culture (from the right to vote to the desirability of women becoming doctors and lawyers) if it seems in conflict with the values that are implied by and embodied in traditional Jewish life, culture, and halakha. So I am not saying what judgments anyone must end up making as one struggles with the challenges that Jewish tradition and contemporary culture pose to each other. But I am saying

that not to recognize the power of these challenges means either that we are not looking at things with real integrity (by which I mean an honest, straight-in-the-eye look) or that we do not see Judaism as having implications for the totality of our lives.

The second possibility is more straightforward and, I would guess, more familiar to many readers. That is, we see the problem (at least to some degree), we have a sense that things should be different (though how different we might not have dared to think about, since we are so far from being there anyway!), but we do not see ourselves as the people who can make things the way they should be. We are not the ones who are responsible, or we are not the ones who have the power, to shape Jewish life. Or—to take that power would be to make ourselves, our families, our

*"The issue, then, is not how to teach children to be feminist, but how to educate our children for integrity, responsibility, and commitment."*

communities uncomfortable, and that is not a responsibility we believe we should take. I do not want to suggest that the leadership of our community does not have the lion's share of responsibility, but I do believe that it is the responsibility of each person who believes that things should be different to make them different. Minimally, and very powerfully, that means to refrain from supporting the status quo by participating in it. And, yes, that does mean making oneself, one's family, and one's community uncomfortable, at least at the start, as we strive to create a better Jewish community.

Returning to the third possibility, that it just doesn't matter enough to us—our community has done a fine job of immunizing Jewish life from the challenges of contemporary culture.

This, of course, comes at the huge cost of making Judaism functionally irrelevant—so that Judaism, in turn, loses its power to challenge contemporary culture and to shape our lives. There is no greater disrespect to Judaism than to put it in a box, tie it up, and put it on a shelf, only to be taken down on occasion amidst great public fanfare. We have essentially cordoned off our Judaism from our life—and so, at the expense of having to decide that it's not really important enough to us, or maybe because we have already come to that conclusion—we grin and bear the lies we live on Shabbat morning and in occasional other ritual settings.

And so that is why I maintain that we ought to be educating for integrity (the absolute requirement to look at things honestly), responsibility (the sense of obligation to make things right and the belief in our ability to do so), and commitment (the belief that Judaism is important and that we may not say "why bother"). Like for all dispositions, the most powerful educational setting is the home, but schools can also educate for these dispositions. To do so might require critical changes in the way we teach children and conceive of schooling, for dispositions can only truly be transmitted in the context of the entire culture of a setting; they are embodied in and read off of everything from the smallest details of curriculum, pedagogy, and human interactions to the largest and most explicit elements of an institution.

And I would also add the obvious—that dispositions, no matter how powerful and transformative they can be, are weak in the absence of strong knowledge which, when informed by the dispositions that I have outlined, is the most powerful agent of change. And, I believe, authentic Jewish learning—teaching children to become straight, bold, engaged readers of Torah—can be the most powerful teacher of integrity, responsibility, and commitment. ■

*Devora Steinmetz is the founder of Beit Rabban and Assistant Professor of Talmud at the Jewish Theological Seminary.*

# Orthodox Feminist Education for Boys

By Rabbi Zvi Grumet

For obvious reasons, many of the efforts of serious Orthodox feminism have focused on the education of women. There has, however, been little explicit focus on the educational implications of Orthodox feminism for the education of boys. My goal here is neither to describe the current situation nor to prescribe what should be, but rather to sketch a landscape of possibilities and lay out some of the challenges facing their realization.

My observations here are limited to all-male settings, although many are applicable to coed schools as well, especially those in which the sexes are separated for Jewish studies classes. Sensitizing people to issues which are not their own, as is often the case with feminist issues in all-male environments, is especially difficult. This creates a significant challenge requiring special effort and commitment, but it is eminently doable.

The overall goal of a feminist-sensitive educational program for boys is to help bring an awareness to young men that the Jewish experience for women is profoundly different from their own, that in many instances those differences are experienced negatively by women, and that there is room, both within the halakhic system and within social structures, to enhance the experience of women.

Let us imagine the possibilities of such an education. One of the rabbanim in the school serves on a *beit din* (religious court) that seeks out recalcitrant husbands and facilitates *gittin* (religious divorces). He involves his students in public activity aimed at pressuring the husband, has students help set up videoconferencing facilities for *shlibut* (the halakhic apparatus for appointing an agent) to empower the *beit din* to write the *get*, and gives classes on the importance of pre-nuptial agreements and the need to find vehicles to prevent and remedy *agunot*. In a class on prayer the blessing *she-lo asani ishab* (who has not made me a woman) is discussed,<sup>1</sup> a class on laws of Shabbat includes investigation of women's obligation in *kiddush* and *havdalah*, and preparatory classes for the

various holidays incorporate the status of women with regard to the various commandments, including reading the *megillah*, participating in the Pesah seder, and lighting Hanukkah candles.

*"The changing role of women in Orthodox society demands that young men educated in our schools be prepared to address, and perhaps adjust, their conceptions of what is possible and acceptable."*

While the issues mentioned above are certainly substantive, the discussion surrounding them does not raise the same level of passion and concern as do those that challenge traditional perspectives on male and female roles and impel boys towards a redefined masculinity. Even when matters are not halakhically problematic, there is often emotional and visceral resistance to change. For example, it is difficult to find halakhic opposition to women's *zimmun* (leading the grace after meals in the company of three women); indeed, most opinions hold that it is a requirement. Despite this consensus, the fact that until recently the practice was rare generates discomfort among boys when women actually recite *zimmun*. Similarly, it is hard to make a strong halakhic argument against women saying *kiddush* or *ha-motzi* at the Shabbat table, yet many boys (and men) react negatively to the suggestion. Even the question of advanced Torah study for women generates unease in traditional circles. When it comes to issues around which there is substantive halakhic debate, such as women's prayer groups, Torah reading for women, public *megillah* reading by women, and women in positions of public office, the resulting opposition is greatly magnified.

In a realm in which public policy

often weighs more than strict legal reasoning, schools can make an impact by teaching by example. Schools can sponsor communal study sessions on women and halakhah, appoint women to school leadership positions, and hire female faculty members to teach Judaic studies. While I have seen many of the above suggestions successfully implemented, the intensity of communal resistance to change should not be underestimated. I can still recall finding an outstanding female Bible teacher for an all-male class; unfortunately (Nehama Leibowitz's example notwithstanding), significant elements within the community were unprepared to have a woman teaching Judaic studies to boys.

The changing role of women in Orthodox society demands that young men educated in our schools be prepared to address, and perhaps adjust, their conceptions of what is possible and acceptable. Still, a number of challenges stand in the face of implementing an Orthodox feminist education for boys. Communal institutions often struggle with the question of who leads – is it the community that sets the agenda, hiring professionals to implement it, or is it the leaders who pave new paths for the community? In schools, the parent body, the educational committees, the financial powers, the communal rabbis, the teachers, and the educational administration each believe they should chart the course of the institution. It would be difficult, if not impossible, for any of the above to successfully pursue an agenda without garnering support, or at least avoiding opposition, from some of the others. For example, a principal may be committed to exposing the students to an Orthodox feminist agenda, but without appropriately sensitive teachers, or in the face of opposition from local rabbinic figures, he will find the task daunting if not impossible.

Vital to implementing any change is a realization that the Orthodox

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# Orthodox Feminism in Process: The Experience of the Pelech School, Jerusalem

By Shira Breuer

After thirty years of Pelech, perhaps one may be permitted to speak of its work as an educational model in Orthodox feminism. The challenges, struggles and triumphs have produced a generation of graduates who have made their impact as religious, professional women. They are returning as educators; they are sending their daughters to us. The Pelech experience is a model that is being replicated in other communities. In a welcome relief from the trauma of recent months of terror in Israel, I am happy to share some thoughts on this educational experience.

The primary goals of Pelech, an all-girls' high school, are to educate religious young women to confront the challenges of Judaism and modernity and to become successful, religious role models committed to values of democracy and tolerance. These goals are accomplished through a synthesis of high caliber Torah learning and modern scholarship, in an atmosphere of educational innovation, intellectual challenge and creativity. From its earliest days, feminism and Orthodox feminism have been high on the educational agenda of Pelech.

## Curriculum

Pelech was the first religious girls' high school to introduce Talmud into the curriculum. In those early years of the 1970s, Pelech was ostracized by certain rabbanim and community leaders for its insistence on teaching Talmud to girls. The growth of Torah learning for women and the overwhelming success of the women's study house is a milestone that has roots in the pioneering tenacity of a small group of women's educators. We have come a long way since then. Talmud is now a bona fide subject taken to the maximum Bagrut (qualifying exam) level at Pelech. In the

past two years our twelfth graders requested extra hours to complete a tractate, studying eight hours weekly, *lishma* – just because they love it.

Pelech has an innovative curriculum on "Judaism and Feminism," designed to investigate contemporary women's issues within the Jewish value system. The program focuses on halakhic, philosophic, communal and professional aspects of women's issues. It includes units on "Women in Tanakh," "Women in Literature," "Women in Zionism," and "Women in Theater" in which individual artistic expression is synthesized with textual study. Students discuss articles by Jane Baker Miller, Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan. They debate issues such as family and career and meet with their mothers to discuss the pros and cons of possible models. Following a vacation, a teacher told me that a student approached her with the comment: "I had no feminist feelings this entire month, I need my dose – when are we meeting?"

## Role Models

Feminist education within the formal curriculum sends a clear message that a school can serve as an agent of change. Within the school environment, real role models constitute the strongest educational message. At Pelech, a woman teacher takes the position of *morat balakhab* in place of the traditional position of school rav, a recognized title at most religious schools in Israel. The *morat balakhab* answers students' halakhic questions and writes a regular column in the school journal. Her status provides the students with an example of a *talmidat hakhamim* within our community.

## "Hands-On" Democracy

The prevailing atmosphere outside the classroom plays a pivotal role in

leadership development. School governance is democratic, encouraging girls to take initiative and responsibility. An elected student council leads the democratic process, and the school parliament, with equal student-teacher representation, meets approximately six times a year. Its decisions are binding on the entire school, including the administrative team. The disciplinary committee takes responsibility for issues that inevitably arise within a vibrant community of two hundred and sixty teenagers. These in-school institutions form an educational training ground empowering students to seek public positions of leadership in the future.

## Tefillah

One of the most significant issues debated by the student council involved a proposal to implement Torah reading (without a blessing) on Rosh Hodesh. Following in-depth study of the halakhic sources and consultations with rabbinic authorities within and outside the school, the issue was debated by students at a stormy and emotional session. Following a secret ballot, the council decided against holding an official monthly reading but gave permission to an informal group to hold their reading before Rosh Hodesh prayers.

I found this outcome exceptionally interesting as a mirror of the attitude of the modern Orthodox community towards women's Torah reading. Overall, it is neither sanctioned nor rejected. Our school community was similarly ambivalent: they did not officially adopt it, nor did they remove it from the agenda. Adolescent girls tend to be more conservative than rebellious, looking to accepted norms when making decisions. Since that memorable day over two years ago, Torah reading takes place every Rosh Hodesh before

the official prayer service of the school. I have no doubt that with the passage of time the Torah reading will become part of our regular public prayers on Rosh Hodesh.

### Learning from the Experience of Pelech

While we are making significant progress in setting the stage for the future, it must be emphasized that such progress will only be effective if it is simultaneously addressed within boys' schools. It is essential that we work with teachers of these schools to ensure that the entire community – men, women, boys and girls – is engaged in rethinking established gender roles.

I believe that the process of change within our school community is a microcosm of the process of the

broader modern Orthodox community. One might think that adolescence, with its particular social, physical and emotional turmoil is not the ideal time to begin a process of questioning established gender roles. However, the experience of Pelech shows that this age group is well able to deal with the complex ideas and issues affecting their developing identities as religious women. The powerful combination of innovative curricula, inspiring role models, democratic institutions of school governance, and deep probing of Jewish texts succeeds by allowing students to confront the complexities faced by the modern religious woman ■

*Shira Breuer is principal of the Pelech School in Jerusalem, and is one of the founders of Kolech, the Religious Women's Forum.*

## A Student Perspective

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Many of these issues relate to the culture of the school and more generally to the culture of the Orthodox community, and will change over time. Solutions to these problems are not easy or clear-cut. But each girl in the school is only there for a limited number of years, and many of her life choices and attitudes will be shaped by her experiences in the school. ■

*Sara Breger is a senior at the Melvin J. Berman Hebrew Academy in Rockville, Maryland. Next year she will be studying at Midreshet Lindenbaum in Jerusalem, after which she will attend the University of Pennsylvania.*

To continue to receive the JOFA Journal, please be sure to renew your membership.

# New & Noteworthy

Compiled by Abbie Greenberg

JOFA wants to hear what is happening in your community! Please let us know of events of interest to Orthodox feminists so that we can inform our readership.

### New Minyanim

Recent months herald the formation of several minyanim that have a *mehitzab* and include both men and women in Torah reading. For a halakhic discussion of women's participation in Torah reading, see "Women's Participation in Qe'riat ha-Torah," by Mendel Shapiro, at [www.edah.org](http://www.edah.org). ■

### Jerusalem

At minyan Shira Hadasha women lead *kabbalat Shabbat* on Friday night and young girls lead *yigdal*. On Shabbat morning, women lead

*pesukei de-zimrah* and the prayers surrounding removal of the Torah from the ark. Both women and men read Torah and receive *aliyot*. Shira Hadasha meets weekly. For more information contact Tova Halbertal at [mshaltov@mssc.huji.ac.il](mailto:mshaltov@mssc.huji.ac.il). ■

### New York

At minyan Darkhei Noam, women lead *pesukei de-zimrah*, the Torah service, and both women and men fully participate in Torah reading. *Tefillah* is followed by a brief text study. Darkhei Noam meets monthly. For more information contact [theminyan@hotmail.com](mailto:theminyan@hotmail.com). ■

### Women's Daf Yomi

Each weekday women gather to study *daf yomi* at 8:30 a.m. at the Drisha Institute. Women are

welcome to come regularly or to drop in when they can. For more information contact [roselandow@aol.com](mailto:roselandow@aol.com). ■

### Boston

At a satellite minyan of Harvard Hillel's Orthodox minyan, women lead *kabbalat Shabbat* and at least ten men and ten women must be present before evening prayers begin. The minyan meets monthly, on Friday night, during the academic year. Additionally, the community is beginning weekly study sessions surrounding gender issues and halakhah. For information contact Evan Hochberg at [evhochbe@law.harvard.edu](mailto:evhochbe@law.harvard.edu). ■

## Difficult Texts ...continued from page 1

moral issue is clear: David is culpable for taking another man's wife, and ordering that her husband be killed in battle. "*Va-yeira ha-davar asher asa David be-einei Hashem*" — David's actions were as evil in God's eyes as they appear to our own. However, when we consider the role of Batsheva in this episode, we encounter ambiguity and mystery. Did Batsheva desire to be with David? What type of relationship did she have with her husband? Did Batsheva know about David's attempts to "cover up" his crime? Was she aware of David's desperate plan to have Uriah killed? What caused her to so readily agree to marry David? And why are "*hara anokhi*," "I am pregnant," the only words we hear from Batsheva in the entire episode?

*"It is precisely in the grappling with difficult texts and the less than satisfying answers they provide, that students uncover the true holiness in the text — and in themselves."*

Let's start at the beginning: who is Batsheva? When David inquires as to the identity of the woman he saw bathing from his palace roof, we find out that she is "*bat Eliam*," whom the rabbis equate with Amiel from *Lo Davar* (I Chronicles 3,5), a prominent and wealthy man who later supports David in his struggle with his son, Avshalom. The rabbis also mention that Batsheva is the granddaughter of Ahitophel, a chief advisor of David, who later betrays him to side with Avshalom. Batsheva's husband, Uriah ha-Hitti, is one of David's top military generals. Thus, Batsheva is certainly no stranger to royalty and its advantages. What else do we know about her? We are told: "*ve-bi mitkadeshet mi-tumata*," she was purified from her state of uncleanness. At the time David took her, she had just marked the end of her menstrual cycle with immersion in the mikveh. The phrase clearly indicates that the child Batsheva conceives is David's; it also informs us that she was a religious woman, scrupulous in observance of the commandments.

After establishing the identity of Batsheva, we can examine what transpired on that night. It is here, in the list of verbs in verse four, where we first encounter ambiguity regarding Batsheva's role. The verse reads: "David sent messengers to fetch her; she came to him and he lay with her — she had just purified herself after her period — and she went back home." The list of verbs reads: *va-yishlah*, *va-yikabeha*, *va-tavo*, *va-yishkav*, *va-tashov*. Three out of the five verbs have David as their referent. We look carefully at the inflected verb, "*va-yikabeha*," "he took her." Where else have we seen this verb? My students recall that when David took back his wife Mikhal, the text employs the same verb: "*va-yikabeha me'im ish, me'im Paltiel ben Layish*," "he took her

from a man, from Paltiel ben Layish" (3,15). We had discussed that Mikhal was not consulted; we don't know how she felt about leaving Paltiel and returning to David. Similarly, Batsheva is not consulted when David takes her. The only hint to her feelings is the verb "*va-tavo*," "she came to him," which, as Uriel Simon points out, indicates that she was not forced to do so (*Reading Prophetic Narratives*, 105). However, can we truly say Batsheva had a choice when approached by the royal guards? Perhaps she was cognizant of the status afforded by her new position as queen, but was it really Batsheva's choice? These are the issues we grapple with in class.

The end of the chapter helps shed light on these questions. Immediately after David receives news that Uriah was killed in battle, the scene shifts to Batsheva: "*Va-tishma eisbet Uriah ki met Uriah isbah, va-tispod al ba'alab*" — "The wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband died, and she mourned for her husband." We note the repeated emphasis on Batsheva as the wife of Uriah. Does the epithet *eisbet Uriah* emphasize her part in the crime, or is it a restatement of David's sin? "*Va-ya'avov ha-eivel, va-yishlah David va-ya'asfeha el beito, va-tehi lo le'isha ...*" — "The mourning period passed, David sent for her, gathered her to his house, and she became his wife..." It seems that Batsheva did not mourn very long for her husband, since she married David so quickly and readily. And so the question becomes: what is the extent of Batsheva's culpability in this episode?

At this point, I invite my students to assume the voice of Batsheva. Through a diary entry, a dialogue, or a drawing, the students explore Batsheva's feelings and motivations. This type of activity enables the students to connect with the story in a personal way. I find this "ownership" of the story allows them to approach it more maturely and thoughtfully. Over the past few years, I have collected some very poignant responses of Batsheva. Here is one example:

<i>Ab! The aggravation, the guilt</i>	<i>I cannot shed enough tears</i>
<i>My wonderful Uriah</i>	<i>To make up for what has transpired</i>
<i>Lost because of greed,</i>	<i>I will live my life in misery</i>
<i>The greed of the king</i>	<i>Knowing of the shed blood</i>
<i>When he saw me bathe . . .</i>	<i>of so many.</i>

In the end, we are left with more questions than answers about Batsheva and her role in the events of chapter 11 of II Samuel. Later, in I Kings, we see Batsheva maneuvering to ensure that Solomon — a product of her union with David — becomes the heir to the kingship. Perhaps she knew something about the future of the Jewish people that was not obvious to those surrounding her. We discuss the Talmud in Sanhedrin 107a, which states that Batsheva was predestined for David since the six days of creation. How does this statement impact upon the way we view Batsheva and the events of chapter 11? By leaving the questions open, I attempt to present Batsheva as a complex character — not quite a victim, but not quite an initiator either.

At the end of the story, when David finally confesses his crime and repents, we have no parallel confession of Batsheva — again, we are confronted with her silence. Yet,

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# Gender Sensitive Education in the Early Years

By Dr. Adena K. Berkowitz

In the last ten years Orthodox day schools have seen unprecedented expansion and vitality. As schools grow, so do the challenges of educating Orthodox students in a pluralistic society. In an age of gender equality, how might Orthodox schools emphasize gender distinctiveness, yet still promote equality? What messages regarding gender are conveyed to our children, particularly in their early years?

A meaningful Jewish education involves serious engagement with our foundational texts. Yet how are students to approach those texts that appear problematic in their portrayal of women, or that write women out of the tradition altogether? While it is possible to engage high school students in a frank discussion of controversial texts, such a discussion requires a level of sophistication beyond the reach of the average first grader. We need to consider the long-term educational effects on students where there is an absence of a gender-sensitive curriculum, along with the impact these impressions make in shaping future familial and communal gender roles within the Orthodox community.

*"Teachers should be sensitive to language that excludes, demeans, or satirizes either gender."*

One way to mitigate this problem is to ensure that from the moment children begin learning Torah, they are exposed to women's voices and histories. Here it is possible to look beyond the biblical text to midrashim that accentuate the roles of the patriarchs and prophetesses. If boys and girls are encouraged to conjure the emotional lives of biblical women, they will leave lower school with a deeper appreciation of the feminine heroines of our tradition. Balancing

stories of patriarchs and matriarchs, prophets and prophetesses, kings and queens, helps children view the sacred texts they study as not altogether disparate from the modern world within which they live.

In addition, educators need to be cognizant of the increasing use in the non-Orthodox community of gender-neutral language in reference to God and should consider ways of addressing this challenge within the Orthodox educational system. As students are exposed to "our Father our King" imagery, so should they be exposed to powerful feminine biblical images of God, such as the image of a mother comforting her child. Imagine the changes in women's ritual and spiritual lives twenty years hence if the kindergarten children of today were exposed to the gender balanced images of God inherent in our tradition.

Consideration of the impact of gendered language needs to extend beyond references to God to general classroom discourse. Illustrative examples should be provided in alternating "he" and "she" formats, so that girls too, imagine themselves the subject of discussion. Teachers should be sensitive to language that excludes, demeans, or satirizes either gender. In that vein, extended thought must be given to the public recitation of the blessing *she-lo asani ishab*, in which males thank God for not creating them female. The silent recitation of this blessing in schools, for which there is halakhic precedent, would exemplify the value of sensitivity we wish to imbue in our children.

Schools should also consider the ways they model Jewish ritual. In younger grades, girls often serve as a *bazzanit* (prayer leader) along with boys. But what is their understanding of the evolution of this position as they grow older? Too often, middle school girls are relegated to the role of silent spectator. If women's prayer groups existed in day schools, young

girls would have real ritual responsibilities to which to aspire as they mature. And where it is halakhically acceptable for girls to lead prayers in a mixed setting, they should be encouraged. For example, visitors to our Shabbat table are always surprised when they hear our nine year old son and three daughters - ages seven, five and two, recite a full *kiddush*. Orthodox pre-schools should expose both boys and girls to the mitzvot of candle lighting, *kiddush* and *motzi*. If girls are accustomed to adopting ritual responsibilities at a young age, they will not shy away from Jewish public space later in life. Indeed, they will recognize the possibilities open within a vibrant halakhic system.

A key task facing all early childhood educators is to avoid "Balkanizing" the classroom. There must be equal expectations of boys and girls, even if they exhibit distinct classroom behaviors or disparate views of texts. Effective educators are reflective about whose voices are heard in the classroom, encouraging both boys and girls to adopt leadership roles in discussions, plays, and projects. Keen readers of adults, children pick up on subtle messages embedded in the curriculum and mindsets of their teachers.

We should be mindful of the teaching found in the Passover haggadah, in which the text, referring to the child who does not know how to ask, tells us "*at pe-tach lo*" — you provide an opening for him. Using the feminine second person pronoun, the rabbis remind us that the task of providing an opening for our children lies primarily with women. While men and women contribute to the education of our children, Orthodox Jewish feminists have a unique responsibility to open up the community to an education sensitive to gender within a halakhic framework. ■

*Dr. Adena K. Berkowitz is a private consultant in New York and a JOFA board member.*

## Conflicting Messages

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values communal needs while feminism values individual rights. Orthodoxy promotes obedience while feminism promotes resistance. Orthodoxy adheres to social hierarchies, while feminism advances equality. Orthodoxy considers a woman's voice to be sinful while feminism experiences a woman's voice as glorious. Orthodoxy views a woman's position as centered in the home, while feminism emphasizes public roles.

These tensions are complex and profound. As difficult as it is for adult women to come to terms with the intricacy of it all, we can only imagine what it must be like for an adolescent – so concerned with “fitting in” – to try and develop her own identity and belief-system.

I question whether religious educators truly confront these issues. Moreover, I submit that the conflicting messages girls receive are a reflection of the conflicting opinions of educators. Conversations with teachers in religious schools reveal serious discord on feminist issues. Many teachers – both male and female – cling to antiquated notions of femininity, insisting that a woman's role is to see to her house and children. Furthermore, messages of passivity abound. Girls are taught that

their role in fighting societal injustice and pain is to “recite psalms,” and that they must serve as a support for their future husbands' work. Yet, at the same time, there are teachers concerned with empowering girls to succeed on the matriculation exams and tackle challenging careers. Ironically, sometimes these conflicting messages originate from the same teacher, who has not considered the disparity between her secular and religious expectations of girls. Glaringly absent from conversations among religious educators is an integrated message for the girls, one that has emerged from an intense process of wrestling with the issues.

I am not trying to minimize the wonderful work of hard-working religious feminist educators. Nor am I suggesting that teachers must “provide” students with all the answers. The struggle itself is educational, and our identities need not always be coherent and consistent. Nonetheless, I am advocating a better understanding of the experience of young religious women today. Because if we fail to appreciate their position, students will emerge confused, frustrated by the conflicting demands of the dual societies within which they live.

Already there are signs of the troubling impact that results from mixed educational messages: many twenty-something religious women

have internalized notions of equality in the workplace but not in the home. These women work the “second shift” of housework, as well as the “third shift” of religious life, with expectations that they be career women and mothers of large families who are more than willing to sit quietly behind the *mehitza*. The multiple pressures placed on young religious women are physically unhealthy, emotionally dangerous, and spiritually draining.

I would like to see more conversations around school conference tables centered upon the gender-identity development of young religious girls. I believe in the power of schooling to open up the mind, socialize, and challenge belief systems. I would like to think that educators can work with girls like Yael and Sara and help them sort out their individual issues surrounding gender and religion. I would like to see principals offering seminars and workshops to their staff on issues of gender identity in adolescence. Perhaps such programs will aid us in clarifying our own notions of what it means to be a religious woman – and that will help us to be more sensitive, understanding, and challenging role models for our students. ■

*Elana Maryles Sztokman is a doctoral student of education at Hebrew University, researching the socialization of adolescent religious girls in school. She is also one of the founders of Mavoi Satum: the Organization Opening up the Dead End for the Agunah, in Jerusalem.*

## Orthodox Feminist Education for Boys

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Jewish community is inherently conservative and can be nudged, but not shoved. Fidelity to tradition is the *sine qua non* of Orthodoxy and any agenda suggesting a departure from tradition is viewed with suspicion, as any Orthodox feminist well knows. Any attempt to introduce gender-sensitive education for boys must ensure that the integrity of the halakhic process is preserved. Further, the richness of halakha often supports a range of possibilities, including those not pursued heretofore as a result of communal

pressures. Opportunities for new communal and familiar roles for women must be achieved by balancing openness to new avenues of halakha and sensitivity to tradition. ■

*Zvi Grumet is a Jewish educator with many years of Jewish day school experience in the US. He currently resides in Jerusalem.*

1 To eavesdrop on an educators' discussion of this, see <http://www.lookstein.org/lookjed/read.php?f=1&i=2005&t=2005>

## Difficult Texts

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in this silence, it is my hope that my students will supply the voice, and create a moment of transformation for Batsheva in addition to David. And in the process of grappling with this difficult text, I hope that they will transform themselves as well, as they grow into mature, thinking individuals. ■

*Stephanie Newman Samuels teaches Tanakh to middle and high school students at the Maimonides School in Brookline, Massachusetts.*

*In Their Own Words:***An Interview with Three High School Administrators**

Interested in learning about current curricular trends for boys and girls, JOFA conducted interviews with three high school administrators. Below is an edited transcript of the interviews.

**Participants:**

**Mrs. Esther Krauss** is principal of the Ma'ayanot High School for girls in Teaneck, New Jersey. Currently in its sixth year, Ma'ayanot has 160 students.

**Rabbi Zev Litenatsky** is dean of admissions and financial aid for Shalhevet, a coed high school in Los Angeles. Shalhevet is seven years old, and has 285 students.

**Rabbi Leonard Matanky** is principal of Ida Crown, a coed high school in Chicago that separates boys and girls for Judaic studies. Founded sixty years ago, Ida Crown currently has 330 students.

**Interviewer:**

**Dr. Janet Dolgin** is the Maurice A. Deane Professor of Constitutional Law at Hofstra University School of Law and is a member of the JOFA board of directors.

**Q: How did your school make the decision to opt for a coeducational or separate environment? What are the advantages and disadvantages of such an environment?**

**Mrs. Krauss:** There is a coed school and a boys' school in the area. The founders felt that the community was entitled to a girls' school. Some opt to educate girls separately for religious reasons, and others for educational reasons, because the studies have shown that girls thrive in an all-girls environment. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage. It continues to be partially a man's world, and single sex education encourages the natural inclination of women to be less competitive and

more cooperative in the way in which they function in a man's world. Coed schools tend to be more competitive environments. I'm not one of those who says that men and women are the same. I don't think they are, and I think that it's important to nurture and value those distinctions that make us who we are.

**Rabbi Litenatsky:** When the school was founded no one was addressing the need of modern Orthodox families who wanted to educate their children in a coed environment. The school does not separate by gender for any subjects, as it was felt that boys and girls could study equally in all subject areas. In fact, we have found that in actual classroom teaching and management, that this is exactly what happens, be it in Talmud, mathematics, or biology.

**Rabbi Matanky:** The founders of the school created a coed school because that is all anyone would imagine sixty years ago. Were an Orthodox school being started today, it would be much more difficult to start it coed, but there would be concern about providing for both boys and girls. For the girls the coed environment is a mixed bag. Research suggests that girls do better when they are separated for math and science, which we don't do. On the other hand, there is an advantage for both genders to be in a coed environment, considering that students come from coed elementary schools and many are headed to coed universities. The decision to educate boys and girls separately for Judaic studies is also part of the history of the school. When the school was founded there was an option for the boys to study Judaic studies in conjunction with the Hebrew Theological College, a yeshiva program. The option did not exist for girls, so they learned in separate classes. I think there's a difference in the way the two genders learn in general. You're still in the adolescent years – there's a difference in maturity. You see that often in the way the girls take notes in

high school that are much more like transcripts. Boys will doodle often. There are differences in the type of work product, and in the work ethic.

**Q: Are girls taught Talmud in your school?**

**Mrs. Krauss:** At the inception of the school we made the decision that Talmud will be a core part of the curriculum without any apologetics, without any hesitation. The decision would be made based purely on educational grounds – what we choose to learn and how we choose to learn it is based, as in every other subject, upon what is best for the students educationally. We have never had any hesitation, and we certainly do not communicate to the students any kind of hesitation about learning Talmud.

**Rabbi Litenatsky:** We teach Talmud equally to both boys and girls in coed classes. When the kids start out in ninth grade, the girls have not had any experience with Talmud, whereas most of the boys have. But I find that within six months, the girls are right up there with the boys. I have often said that some of our girls have better Gemara heads than our boys.

**Rabbi Matanky:** Girls and boys are separated for Judaic studies. All boys study Talmud, whereas the girls have the option of a Talmud program or a Jewish philosophy program. A number of years ago, when we introduced the option of Talmud for the girls, we also introduced the option of Jewish philosophy for the boys. The reality was, that while the girls were pretty evenly split between the two programs, within a few years there were very few boys who remained in the Jewish philosophy program. I believe the reason for the imbalance relates to the expectation of parents that if boys do not study Talmud, the program is not considered serious. Parents are more open to different options for girls.

**Q: Do you employ female Talmud teachers?**

**Mrs. Krauss:** It happens to be that the head of the Talmud Department in the school is a woman. At first, the girls felt it was weird, and then the next year they told me it was weird to have a man – they had had such a wonderful experience. They have really established a *rebbe-talmid* (student-teacher) relationship with their Talmud teacher. The thing that is most missing for girls in a coed environment is female role models in Judaic studies, especially in Talmud. And because of that, the atmosphere, especially in Talmud, and the perspective and the approach of learning Talmud is a male approach because men have been learning Talmud for centuries and women have not. When a woman is in the classroom teaching Talmud, she's got to approach it as a woman. That's going to translate itself to the students. We haven't created a particularly female way of learning Talmud, but the very fact that it's being taught in a school which takes women seriously, in which they have role models of leadership in all areas, but particularly in Judaic studies— all of that changes their perspective.

**Rabbi Litenatsky:** At the moment, we do not have any women teaching Talmud but we entertained the thought of having a seminar for girls by women.

**Rabbi Matanky:** We do not currently have any women teaching Talmud, but we tried to get one a few years back. There aren't that many women who are capable and trained in this, and Chicago has an even smaller percentage of capable women than New York, for example. We would not be averse to having a woman Talmud teacher, and there was once a woman teacher of Talmud here. I don't believe that we would have a woman teaching boys. We would prefer to have woman teachers teaching girls, and male teachers teaching boys. We have a mixed gender of teachers teaching both genders as it is now. I think the question of role modeling is very important

for us. But we have to deal with the reality of what we have.

**Q: What is the extent of girls' participation in tefillah?**

**Mrs. Krauss:** We take *tefillah* very seriously. The girls daven together every day for both *shabarit* and *minha*, and all girls are required to participate. A student leads the *tefillah* and on Friday gives a *dvar Torah*, but we do not read from the Torah. Taking responsibility for leading *tefillah* has been a new experience for our students. Although they were hesitant at first, they have become invested in the daily *tefillah* and our Rosh Hodesh davening is really nice. We also have a *tefillah* committee of students to discuss protocol and policy.

**Rabbi Litenatsky:** We have a number of *tefillah* options. We have a regular minyan of boys. Then we have what is called a "happy minyan," which is a *mehitzab* minyan, including both boys and girls, that spends more time on singing and discussion. And then there are six or seven individual girls' minyanim by grade level, that are led by the rebbeztins who teach. And they conduct a full minyan in the true sense of the word – but it's with girls. The girls do not read from the Torah in their minyan, but they join the boys each month on Rosh Hodesh. Of course, the reading of Torah on Rosh Hodesh is done by the boys. We do have a separate girls' reading of the megillah on Purim.

**Rabbi Matanky:** The girls daven at a minyan with the boys, so they don't participate except as individuals. We want to train students for participation in the community. If girls aren't familiar with davening with a traditional minyan, they are not going to be familiar with davening in a shul. And we want to create that familiarity. When I started running the school six years ago, I made a switch from the girls davening on their own to davening as part of a minyan. It is my feeling that we need to encourage the concept of participation in traditional Jewish structure.

**Q: How do you envision the ideal graduate of your school?**

**Mrs. Krauss:** My dream is that she will take herself seriously as a Jewish woman, as a woman and a Jewish woman particularly, that she will see herself as able to make a significant contribution to the Jewish community, that she will have integrated Torah into her very being – and that that will inform anything that she chooses to do. A very tall order!

**Rabbi Litenatsky:** One who is involved in his community, the land of Israel, and who gives back to the school and its community that which he received. Or she received.

**Rabbi Matanky:** Our ideal graduate is a person who is involved in the Jewish community, is committed to Jewish life, and is contributing to Jewish and secular society. ■



# High School: A Student Perspective

By Sara Breger

Class is about to start and students are talking among themselves. A rabbi walks into the room to confer with the teacher and everyone stands up; conversation momentarily stops in acknowledgement of the respected figure who has just entered. Another teacher then enters, someone who has been teaching Judaic studies for twelve years and is considered a role model at the school. However, this time no one stands up and the buzz of conversation continues. All because the teacher is a female without the title "rabbi" affixed to her name.

This is a typical occurrence at the Melvin J. Berman Hebrew Academy in Maryland that I have attended since nursery and where I am now a senior in high school. It is a co-ed school with Judaic classes in which boys and girls are separated from fifth grade on, and are mixed for secular classes. While I am grateful for the many opportunities afforded by my school, there are also areas of frustration.

## Curriculum

The morning is divided into four periods – Bible, Hebrew Language, Prophets, and Talmud. Whereas at some schools girls are relegated to the weaker teachers, in our school, girls get very accomplished teachers. Most are scholars who listen and appreciate what girls have to say and challenge us to think critically. However, there is a clear differentiation between boys and girls when it comes to Talmud. Talmud is required for boys, but optional for girls. While boys begin learning Talmud in the sixth grade, those girls that choose to learn Talmud do not start until seventh grade. In high school, classes are only forty-five minutes each, and there is not enough time to delve deeply or to develop facility with the Talmud text, particularly as one Talmud period a week is devoted to a separate halakhah curriculum. Boys, on the other hand, do not study Prophets and instead have a second period of Talmud each day. They also have the option of learning Talmud during Hebrew Language. This gives boys the opportunity to learn Talmud in-depth with more sources. It often seems as if Talmud for girls is only a survey course encouraging us to learn in the future, as we are not given the tools to learn on our own. I am much more limited in my approach to a page of Talmud than a boy in my grade. If Talmud is not for all girls, then maybe it is not for all boys either.

I think it is important that both boys and girls are exposed to the voices and stories of women in our past. Schools should focus on issues such as women's leadership roles in the Bible and the personalities of the foremothers. I can still remember our third grade teacher introducing us (boys and girls) to Rashi with a recreation of Rashi's family. We dressed up as Rashi's scholarly daughters and practiced writing with quills and speaking French.

## Prayer

The school does recognize that gender is an important issue in the modern world and that everyone should be educated in

halakhot regarding women. This year, the halakha curriculum for the entire high school is women and prayer. However, when it comes to practice, girls are not actively involved in prayer. We pray together with the boys but we cannot see over the *mehitzab*. There are no female *gabbai'ot*. No female teachers give *divrei Torah* after davening, whereas rabbis give them three times a week. I think it is very important that prayer in a school such as ours be in an environment of equal sight lines to increase girls' participation and feelings of belonging. Many girls miss being *bazzanit* (prayer leader) as we were in earlier grades. The highlight of the year for many girls is the women's *megillah* reading held annually on Purim morning at which the *megillah* is read by high school girls.

## Modesty

The way modesty is addressed by the school is often frustrating for girls. Even though there is a dress code for boys as well as girls, *tzniut* is often viewed as a girls' issue with discussions focusing on sleeve lengths. It seems sometimes as if teachers and boys forget that *tzniut* encompasses more than externals and should apply to every Jew, male and female – how we speak to each other, refraining from boasting about grades, not parading newly acquired clothes, and generally acting modestly.

## Leadership Roles

Leadership roles in the school are equal for girls and boys. There are many female role models of leadership – a female president of the school, a female head of the board of education, three out of four female principals, many female department chairs and so on. In the high school, girls actually run more activities than boys - student council, drama society, newspaper and yearbook. Girls' sports teams receive the same funding as boys' and the school encourages attendance for all teams equally.

## Student-Teacher Relationships

One of the things I am upset about is the lack of an equivalent for girls of the *talmid-rebbe* relationship. The boys go over to their rabbi's house on Shabbat, talk over problems with him, and seem to have a special relationship. I have never had this opportunity. I have had teachers that I respected and learned from, but never someone I had a special bond with. More young female teachers need to be hired who can relate to female students and guide us in making religious decisions.

## Beit Midrash

Another issue is that the *beit midrash* (study-room) is very unwelcoming to girls. It is very unusual to find females there and certainly not female teachers. Although the school has tried to remedy this by establishing a monthly women's evening learning program, the generally male-dominated *beit midrash* still intimidates many girls who might want to study there.

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**Inspirational!** That was the verdict of the 50 participants after the JOFA Solidarity Mission to Israel May 19-26, 2002. The group visited women's yeshivot, spoke with women who work with rabbinic courts, and met with female Knesset members. **Shown here:** Visit to Beit Nachshon – Shalva, a center for developmentally challenged children; packing boxes of provisions for soldiers; visiting victims of terrorist attacks at Hadassah Hospital; and bringing flowers to cheer patrols at a Jerusalem-Bethlehem army checkpoint.



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