



JOFA Journal

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Jewish Orthodox
Feminist Alliance

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"And She Will Teach Me..." **Shabbat T'lamdeini:** Women, Learning, Leadership and Community

Shabbat T'lamdeini: a project of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, will take place Shabbat Parshat Emor, 15 Iyar 5759, April 30 through May 1, 1999. Orthodox synagogues around the world will participate in this international event in which each individual synagogue will design a program centering on women's learning and leadership to take place on that Shabbat. Synagogues will receive sample programs and may contact the Shabbat T'lamdeini Coordinating Committee for assistance in selecting topics and speakers, and/or in obtaining funding. The preliminary response has been very positive and, as we go to press, several synagogues have already signed on to participate.

For more information about Shabbat T'lamdeini, contact the JOFA Office at (212)752-7133. ■

From Our President

JOFA Moves Steadily Forward



By **Blu Greenberg**

In the minds of many, Presidents' weekend had become Orthodox feminist conference time. But, as your "dancing women" magnet reminds you, our next conference will take place February 20-21, 2000. The Board's decision, to skip over '99 and concentrate instead on building JOFA, was not an easy one -- especially with memories of organizing conferences 1 and 2 still fresh.

Those were heady times. I often wished I had had a recorder chronicling the planning meetings, for the discussions seemed to me a history in the making. At times I felt as if I were listening in on a conversation that Jews could have had in the 3rd or the 16th or the 19th century as they struggled with the challenge: how to live as rabbinic Jews when encountering new ideologies and societal norms.

No less stirring was the process of creating the program -- every week a new idea would crop up, a new voice would be discovered. And, finally, the conference itself with the

spirit and energy of 2,000 participants.

Yet, for all that planning a conference is exhilarating, it ends. Building an organization may be less glamorous, but its steady pace and permanent address enable the real work to get done. A conference can create a movement; an organization sustains it, implements its goals and vision, widens its arc and nourishes new leadership.

Though mine was a minority vote "yes" for '99, I now appreciate the wisdom of the majority, especially as I consider the many projects we have set for ourselves. Let me share some of them with you:

- Conference 2000, now calling for papers and framing an agenda.
- The newsletter, being published quarterly.
- *Shabbat T'lamdeini*, which will reach deeply into the Orthodox community. (See article on left).
- *Agunah* tasks, including convening forums for study of various *halakhic* solutions, organizing grass roots activism and meeting with different leaders working on this issue.
- Networking with other organizations on feminist issues such as domestic violence, trafficking of

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An Orthodox Feminist Speaks — In Response to Our Critics

By **Dr. Adena K. Berkowitz**

When I think of the Jewish Orthodox feminist movement these days, an old saying comes to mind: When everyone criticizes you, you must be doing something right. There is a certain irony in the fact that our movement has managed to get an extended range of crit-

icism within our community. But, while these disparate Orthodox Jewish groups agree that Orthodox feminists are doing something wrong, they disagree on just what that something is.

Orthodoxy's great strength is its focus on obligation, in contrast to the global emphasis on rights. Yet when Jewish Orthodox feminists seek to

take on more observance, they are accused of taking *mitzvot* that don't belong to them, of trying to change *halakha* or, at the very least, tradition in fundamental ways.

Modern Orthodoxy is increasingly critiqued by those on the right as being too passionless, its adherents lacking in fervor. But when Jewish Or-

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News From Down Under

JOFA Supports Australian Women in Fight for Torah

By Mark Baker

It began at Melbourne's Mizrahi Shul when a woman was handed a *sefer* Torah to dance with on Simkhat Torah. Within seconds, Rabbi Jack Simcha Cohen had wrested the Torah away from her arms. The following Shabbat he delivered a *p'sak* from the pulpit: Women were not permitted to handle a *sefer* Torah. His reasoning, published for communal consumption in the *Australian Jewish News*, was based on a stringency of the Remah which stated that the *minhag* for Ashkenazi women was to refrain from matters of Torah during their menstrual days. Rabbi Cohen's main concern, he stated, was the fear of a sudden emission of blood which would diminish the honor of the Torah.

At the same time, Rabbi Ralph Genende, a former member of the

Johannesburg *Beit Din*, had given women a Torah to dance with in his Orthodox shul in Melbourne, and even permitted the Torah to be passed by women through their side of the *mechitzah* on a regular Shabbat. The Orthodox Rabbinical Council summoned Rabbi Genende to a meeting. While Rabbi Genende held his ground, the Council voted unanimously that women were *halakhichy* prohibited from handling a Torah.

The following week's issue of the *Jewish News* was filled with articles by women protesting the ruling. The articles answered the *halakhic* concerns of the rabbis, and showed these concerns to be politically motivated. Orthodox women and men of all shades responded to the ruling, lending strong vocal support to Rabbi Genende's lone stance.

When Blu Greenberg, president of JOFA, was contacted for advice, she and vice president Carol Newman im-

mediately mustered the support of JOFA, which placed a large advertisement in the *Jewish News*. (see below) Many women responded to the advertisement with tears, finding joy in the international chorus that added strength to their local protest.

The spurious arguments against women holding the Torah have still not been set aside, although the head of the Rabbinical Council wrote the following week that their stringent prohibition was out of concern for where things would lead. Many of us in Australia share with JOFA the vision of a new path for the future of women's relationship with Torah. Our concerns grow out of our commitment to Torah and *halakhah*. We thank JOFA for helping to illuminate where things can, and will, lead. ■

Mark Baker is editor of *Generation Journal* and lectures in modern Jewish history at the University of Melbourne.

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אין דברי תורה מקבלין טומאה (ברכות כב.)

Matters of Torah are not susceptible to impurity (Berachot 22a)

Many Orthodox communities have recognised that Halakha permits women to hold a **Sefer Torah**. In a generation in which women's **Talmud Torah** has proliferated, it is inappropriate to use non-Halakhic political or societal reasons to deny women the opportunity to show **Kavod HaTorah**.

We support all those in the Melbourne Jewish community who uphold Jewish women as full members in the sacred covenant of our people.

Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance

Sponsors of the First and Second International Conferences on Feminism & Orthodoxy and the Third International Conference on Feminism & Orthodoxy to be held in February 2000.

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If you would like more information or to become a member of the
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Our Scholars Speak

Can Women Touch the Torah? A Halakhic View

By Rahel Berkovits

Now that Orthodox Jewish women have the ability to access Torah on a high intellectual level, they have begun to inquire if they too could participate in certain synagogue rituals surrounding the *sefer* Torah. Would *halakha* permit them to dance with the *sefer* Torah on Simkhat Torah? Could they carry the *sefer* through the women's section to be honored and kissed?

The majority of traditional *halakhic* sources on the issue of women touching a *sefer* Torah address the topic as part of a larger discussion concerning whether a menstruating woman can enter the synagogue, utter God's name, or pray.

Upon initial examination, these sources seem to present a clear and simple answer: when discussing the special edict that a *ba'al qeri* [one who has had a seminal emission] must immerse himself in the *mikvah* before he is permitted to pray or study, the last *misbnah* in Berakhot 3 states as follows: "A *zav* [a person with a genital illness] who has a seminal emission and a *niddah* that discharges semen and a woman who becomes a *niddah* during intercourse require immersion [in a ritual bath]."

The *misbnah* implies that the only condition preventing a *niddah* from prayer is her quasi-status as a *ba'al qeri*, and not her own status as a menstruant. The corresponding Tosefta Berakhot (2:12) explicitly states that there exists no barrier to ritual for all other forms of *tumab*, other than *ba'al qeri*. "*Zavim* and *zavot* [males and females with genital illnesses], menstruants and women who have just given birth are permitted to read from the Torah, *Nevi'im*, and *Ketuvim*, to study the *misbnah*, the *midrash*, the *halakhot*, and *aggadot*. *Balei qerin* are forbidden from all of these activities."

The Gemara Berakhot 22a brings a tannaitic source that presents the defining factor of this discussion:

"It has been taught, R. Judah b.

Bathyra used to say: 'Words of Torah are not susceptible to *tumab*.' Once a certain disciple was mumbling before R. Judah b. Bathyra. [He thought his status of *tumab* prevented him from speaking words of Torah.] He said to him: 'My son, open your mouth and let your words be clear, for words of Torah are not susceptible to *tumab*, as it says, "Is not My word like fire?" says the Lord.' Just as fire is not susceptible to *tumab*, so words of Torah are not susceptible to *tumab*."

The *sugya* concludes that the law is according to R. Judah b. Bathyra in this case. The Rambam extends this law even further. He states: "All *tameh* people, even *niddot*, even a gentile, are permitted to hold a Torah scroll and read from it, for the words of Torah are not susceptible to

In an Italian tradition women used to hold a sefer Torah during labor to give them strength.

tumab." (Hilkhos Sefer Torah 10:8)

Not only may people in the status of *tumab* recite the words of Torah, but they may also physically touch and hold the *sefer* Torah provided their hands are clean. Both the Tur (*Yoreh De'ah* 282) and the Shulchan Arukh (282:9) codify the Rambam's decision as *halakha*.

Yet, despite the clear-cut *halakhic* statements made by the Talmud and codes, the practice of women seems to have been otherwise. The Ravyah states as follows:

"And the women practiced stringency on themselves and piety at the time of menstruation by not entering the synagogue, and even when they [women who are not menstruating] pray they do not stand in front of their neighbor [who is menstruating]." (Tractate Berakhot 68)

The Or Zarua (Vol.1:36) also records such behavior. Rashi in Sefer Ha-Pardes (p.3) also mentions the additional *minbag* of refraining from

touching religious texts.

The Remah codifies this practice. "There are those who have written that a woman who is menstruating cannot enter a synagogue, or pray, or mention God's name, or touch a holy book. And there are those that say she is permitted all these things and that is the essential [law]. But the custom in these lands is according to the first opinion. And during the white days [the seven days after her flow stops before she is permitted to immerse herself in the *mikvah*] the practice is to permit. And even in the place where the practice is to be stringent, on the High Holy Days and [days] like that, when many gather together to go to synagogue, they [menstruating women] are permitted to go to synagogue like the rest of the women, since it is a great sadness for them that all gather and they would stand outside." (Shulchan Arukh *Orach Hayyim* 88:1)

If the essential law is to allow a menstruant to perform all of these actions, from where did the dissenting view originate and how did it become accepted custom? The Ravyah further explains that he had seen the practice recorded "in the works of the *gaonim* in the language of a *breita*" and that "it is not in our collection of the Tosefta." The original source to present the idea that a menstruant desecrates anything sacred or holy appears in Breita D'-Masekhet Niddah, a pre-Gaonic work written by a Jewish faction that did not follow rabbinic law. This group believed that the menstruant contaminated her surroundings, and that even the realm of the sacred and Torah were susceptible to her *tumab*. According to Breita D'-Masekhet Niddah, one may not say a blessing in front of a menstruating woman, for if she answers 'amen' she defiles God's name. (p.17) A menstruant may not enter a house of study or a synagogue since anything she comes into contact with becomes impure. (p.26)

The text derives this law from
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Can Women Touch the Torah? A Halakhic View

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Leviticus 12:4, the biblical passage concerning a woman who has just given birth, which states “she shall touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary.” These ideas were incorporated into the anonymous *gaonic* work, *Sefer Ha-Mikzo'ot*, as defining law and not as mere custom. Despite the fact that the *Sefer Ha-Mikzo'ot* is one of only two *gaonim* to hold this opinion, *basidei* Ashkenaz adopted these stringencies as law.

This tradition of prohibiting a menstruant contact with the sacred, and specifically the *sefer* Torah, appears to have existed only in Ashkenaz. In Sephardic tradition, Rav Saadya Gaon, the only other *gaon* to posit that a menstruant should not enter the synagogue, specifically states that “even though we call them holy writings, we do not warn about them, that a *tameh* person should not touch them.” The Karaites had adopted similar teachings to those stated in the Breita D’-Masekhet Niddah, and Rav Saadya reacted against them. It also seems, from the language of the Rambam, that he specifically singles out menstruants as a polemic against the Karaites, who lived in his midst. But in Ashkenaz, where no threat from another sect existed, the practice persisted.

The Sephardic practice of not holding by this is clearly demonstrated by an Italian tradition in which the women there used to hold a *sefer* Torah during labor to give them strength. Even in Ashkenaz, those outside of the *basidei* Ashkenaz tradition, such as the Remah, considered the practice pure custom and

not law as originally taught. Many *poskim*, such as Rashi, felt that the custom was a mere stringency which women did not need to follow. In more modern times the Mishneh Brura (88:1), basing himself on earlier sources, states three times in succession that the custom in his country is to permit menstruating women to enter the synagogue, utter God's name, and pray, and one should prevent anyone from trying to do otherwise. The only remnant from the earlier custom appears in the Mishneh Brura in the form of a prohibition against the menstruant looking directly at the *sefer* Torah when it is lifted up to show the congregation.

Today the question of women touching a *sefer* Torah remains in many Orthodox communities. There are those rabbis, such as in the recent dispute in Australia, who wish to claim that there exists a problem of *k'vod ha-Torah*. They base their claims on their understanding of the Remah, who distinguishes between the period when the woman sees blood and is prohibited from touching a *sefer*, and the period of her clean days when she is permitted. Based on their knowledge of the *halakha*, they posit that the reason she is prohibited could not possibly be due to issues of *tumah*, since the *halakha* clearly states that the words of Torah are not susceptible to *tumah*, but rather the problem must stem from the issue of *k'vod ha-Torah*: that one whose hands are dirty may not touch the *sefer*. Therefore they object to a woman touching a *sefer* Torah on the *halakhic* grounds that she might come to dirty it with blood.

This *p'sak* is difficult to understand for a number of reasons. Do these rabbis suggest that a menstruating woman should also refrain from entering a synagogue, praying, and mentioning God's name? Furthermore, the custom brought by the Remah stems from a tradition which contradicts the traditional teachings and believes that a menstruant and any *tameh* person can defile the sacred realm of Torah. There is no need to try to reconcile the practice with traditional teaching. The Remah brings this custom as it was prac-

ticed, in accordance with the original prohibition. He makes his comment in the laws of reading the *Sh'ma*, where the Shulchan Arukh discusses the relationship between people who are *tameh* and the realm of the sacred, and not in *Yoreh De'ah* 282 where the laws of *k'vod ha-Torah* are discussed.

Another group of rabbis prohibits women specifically from dancing with a *sefer* Torah. These rabbis admit that *halakhically* there exists no prohibition on a woman touching the *sefer*. But for thousands of years women did not dance with the *sefer* Torah and such traditions are sacred. Although their concern is understandable, permitting women to fully participate in Simkhat Torah might actually strengthen Jewish women's commitment to synagogue and traditional practice.

These rabbis should take their cue from the reasoning of the Terumat Hadeshen, upon whom the Remah bases himself, with regard to menstruants praying in synagogue on the High Holy Days. He states:

“In truth I permitted them on the High Holy Days and other such days to go to synagogue, since many gather in the synagogue to hear the prayer and the reading [of the Torah]. And I relied on Rashi who permits in the laws of Niddah, because of *nachat ruach l'nashim*, peace of spirit for women, because they had a saddening of spirit and a sickness of heart, that everyone gathered to be part of the community and they would stand outside.” (Vol.2:132)

Considering the *halakhic* permissibility of women touching a *sefer* Torah, hopefully the desire to bring peace of spirit to the sickness of heart felt by the women of our day will motivate the leaders of today's communities. ■

Rahel Berkovits teaches advanced Judaic studies at Evelina De Rothschild Middle School and at Pardes Institute in Jerusalem. She is also a fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute. For the complete text of this article, email Rahel@shi.org.il.

We want to hear from you.

We will print your comments in a Letters to the Editor column starting next issue. JOFA Journal reserves the right to edit for length, clarity or style.

In the next issue we will take an in-depth look at the *Batei Din* for *agunot*.

In Response to Our Critics

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thodox feminists belie that argument by being more passionate about Judaism, by having more fervor about *halakha*, they become suspect. If they form women's prayer groups, if they seek the *kavod* of an *aliyah* in such a venue, if they read the *megillah*, they are accused of wanting to be like men and of diminishing the intent of tradition.

Then there is the opposite criticism — Jewish Orthodox feminism has not done enough. It has not obligated Orthodox Jewish feminists to say *kaddish* for a parent. It hasn't made women's *tefillah* groups a daily requirement. It hasn't insisted that the movement obligate its adherents to take on additional *mitzvot*, whether incumbent upon women or not.

Finally, there are the ultra Orthodox women, who insist that Jewish Orthodox feminism is not relevant to Jewish women. These women decry the movement as a foreign body, representing the broader, secular culture and strictly off limits to Torah Jews.

It would appear that Jewish Orthodox feminists cannot win.

But the reality from inside is quite different. Anyone who has attended a women's *tefillah* group and has witnessed the face of a woman finally seeing what the inside of a Torah scroll looks like or reading from the Torah for the first time knows that that is a moment of transcendence. Anyone who has heard a young girl singing *anim zmirot* understands that she is expressing a sincere love of *yiddishkeit*.

The fact that many of these moments proceed in the face of much hostility and severe opposition makes them all the more remarkable. There are countless stories of the obstacles that women have faced when they wanted to say *kaddish* or study Talmud or even carry a *sefer* Torah within the women's section of their synagogue. That these efforts continue to go forward only serves to further demonstrate not only the dedication and sincerity of these women, but also their need to perform these observances to connect with *Hashem*.

The seriousness with which many Orthodox feminists now take on additional *mitzvot* should also not be underestimated. In the last few years, my husband's company has hired interns



Photo by Joan Roth

Smiles of joy were evident as the Torah was paraded in the street outside of The Carlebach Shul in New York City.

and recent college graduates from a variety of schools including Barnard, Columbia and Stern Colleges. Increasingly, a request from the women is for a job "perk," time to daven *mincha* in addition to a lunch hour.

The reality is that Orthodox Jewish feminism has lit a spark of greater commitment across the board of Orthodox women's lives. Intensive Jewish learning is increasing for women, even in the most right-wing schools, turning out perhaps the most educated corps of Jewish women in Jewish history. Even our sisters in the ultra-Orthodox world cannot ignore the changes that feminism has wrought for them. Women are confronting their rabbis where they see abuse of process, such as one woman who is suing to prevent an issuance of a *beter meah rabbanim*. And ultra-Orthodox women are taking to the public arena, holding their own conferences and loudly stating their points of view.

Thus, despite the criticism, we move forward. For we know that knowledge of Torah and *halakha*, doing more *mitzvot*, studying more sacred texts, and taking on more obligations does not mean we are trying to be men nor does it make us mere dilettantes. It builds our spiritual lives, helping to make our love for tradition and daily commitment to Judaism ever greater. ■

Dr. Adena K. Berkowitz is a lawyer with a doctorate in Jewish ethics. She serves as a consultant to Hadassah and is a community liaison to NYC Public Advocate Mark Green.

JOFA Moves Forward

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women and women's health.

- A statement on pluralism. As we learned much from our sisters without compromising our Orthodox way of life, we wish to articulate a positive model for others.
- Education and gender sensitivity programs: how day schools and other Orthodox institutions can increase their inclusion of women in *halakhic* permissible ways.
- A speaker's bureau listing learned women and men who can speak on women's issues in Orthodoxy.
- A resource center -- linked to other such centers -- which will include a *teshuva* repository as well as models of *halakhic* ceremonies for women and girls.
- A web site with recently published articles, annotated bibliographies, and frequently asked questions.
- A hotline to answer questions ranging from how to organize community support to places for a woman to study Talmud in Israel.

I could go on: an intergenerational women's *chevruta*, the Niddah Information Center, an Orthodox feminist calendar, a study of innovative Orthodox synagogue architecture. . . .

Yes, an organization is where the tasks multiply even as the work gets done. We welcome your participation and support in this worthy enterprise. ■

New and Noteworthy

Orthodox Feminism Around the World

NEW YORK

Eдах is holding its first international conference, “**Orthodoxy Encounters a Changing World**,” on February 14-15 in New York and will provide participants with the opportunity to explore the issues facing modern Orthodoxy. JOFA speakers will be Blu Greenberg, Bat Sheva Marcus, and Belda Lindenbaum. Contact Edah at (888)404-EDAH or email: conf@edah.org.

On Mondays from 7 to 10 p.m., the *beit midrash* at **Drisha**, the Manhattan-based institute for advanced Judaic studies for women, will be open to all women for an evening of learning. Students from Drisha's full-time programs will provide a *bavruta*-matching service and assistance to people with questions. On Sunday, May 16 from 4 to 10 p.m., **Drisha** and **Ma'yan**: The Jewish Women's Project will co-sponsor a pre-*Shavuot* learn-in. Contact Drisha at (212)595-0307.

On the weekend of March 20, the women's *tefillah* group of **Congregation Ohav Sholom** in Merrick, Long Island will be sponsoring their second annual Shabbaton. Shani Berrin will be the keynote speaker and will discuss Jewish diversity, women's prayer and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Housing is available. Contact Rebecca Moldwin at (516)867-3767.

NEW ENGLAND

Professor Sylvia Barack Fishman of Brandeis University, co-director of the International Research Institute on Jewish Women founded by Hadassah, received a grant from the **American Jewish Committee** (AJC) to study the impact of feminism on Orthodox Judaism. The results of this study will be published this spring by the AJC.

The **Jewish Women's Archive** in Boston is developing an on-line archive in collaboration with MIT which will make the information on Jewish women that is held in

archives and libraries around the country accessible on the internet. The JWA is an organization committed to making the lives and accomplishments of North American Jewish women known. Contact Leslie Mirchin at (617)232-2258 or email: jwa@aol.com.

THE MIDWEST

This past November in Chicago, 250 women attended the Second Annual Midwest Conference on **Women, Halakha and Modernity**. Among the day's speakers were Erica Brown, Devorah Steinmetz, Rabbi Yehiel Poupko and Rabbi Saul Berman.

TEXAS

This past August, the **Dallas Area Torah Association** hosted an Orthodox Jewish Women's conference. The conference, with over 250 attendees, covered topics ranging from family issues to Jewish women's spirituality.

LOS ANGELES

Members of **JOFA in LA** recently hosted Sharon Shenhav from Israel, an international women's civil rights lawyer, who spoke about her struggles for women's rights in rabbinical courts. Contact Dr. Doreen Seidler-Feller at (310)470-8647.

ISRAEL

Woman and Her Jewish Life, an international conference focusing on Orthodox women's issues, will be held July 14-15 in Jerusalem at the Renaissance Hotel. Contact Ariel Braun at 972-2-563-2753.

The Religious Women's Forum, founded by Hana Kehat, has recently been established as an advocacy group for religious women's issues in Israel. Contact Hana Kehat at Neve Daniel, Gush Etzion, 90909 or 972-2-993-4492.

This past October, the conference of **Religious Zionism and Modern Orthodoxy** was held at Kibbutz Lavi. Among the speakers were Rebbetzin Rivka Lubich, who spoke about feminism; Gili Zivan, who examined the daily blessing said by men on not being made a woman; and Hana Kehat, whose Religious Women's Forum led a session at the conference.

This past spring, the **Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center for the Study of Women in Judaism** was established at Bar Ilan University. The research center, founded by noted author and lecturer Fanya Heller, aims to bridge the gaps between the role of women in Orthodoxy and to conduct advanced feminist research on the role of women in society, religion, and culture. Contact Elana Oberlander atoberlae@mail.biu.ac.il.

ENGLAND

The **Midrasha**, the women's branch of Yeshivat Ohr Torah in Efrat, recently opened in London. The program includes a *kollel* for ten women and Jewish study classes for women in the community. Child care is provided. Contact Sara Robinson at 44(181)201-6164.

This past November, **Yakar**, a London-based synagogue, sponsored a two-day seminar featuring Aviva Gottlieb Zornberg among several female Jewish educators who discussed public leadership roles for women, historic role models, and philosophy.

In Manchester, the **Women in Judaism Group** at Yeshurun Synagogue organized the first ever Simkhat Torah women's celebration which included a program of stories, songs, readings, and *divrei Torah*. The women's *tefillah* group there is currently working on an information sheet dealing with *bat mitzvah* options and women coping with bereavement. Contact Irene Naftalin at irene.n@orangenet.co.uk.

Pirkei Imahot

The Jewish Women's Reclamation Project

By Sylvia Herskowitz

In the Torah, women are major players whose actions often chart the paths of Jewish destiny. Beginning with Eve and then Lot's daughters, followed by Sarah, Hagar, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, Tamar, Yocheved, Miriam, Zipporah, and many others, each can be said to have affected the course of our history. But when we leave the biblical period and go to post-biblical history, the search for women's impact on Jewish survival becomes harder to track. The names of women and their achievements often are submerged in obscure texts, waiting to be discovered and reclaimed in our post-feminist era. With this thought, I present three significant sages who sought to memorialize the names of women who played key roles in their lives:

1. R. Yair Hayim Bacharach (1638-1702) was the grandson of R. Abraham Samuel ben Isaac Bacharach and his wife Hava, who had a broad knowledge of Hebrew and Rab-



binic literature, unusual for her time. R. Yair Hayim Bacharach's book of Responsa is called *Havas Yair*. In his introduction he writes:

...and in addition I also chose this name to be a good memorial for my grandmother, the pious Hava, the mother of my father the Gaon Moses Samson... She was one of a kind in her generation -- learned in Torah. She had a Midrash Rabbah without a Peirush (commentaries) and she studied in it continually. Her intelligence and her wisdom in many places overtook the given explanation of the Rabbi, and she explained it in such a way that everyone who listened understood that she was right and I quoted some of her explanations in her name. And she did the same with Machzorim and Selichot and with the explanations of Rashi in the Humash and the Tanakh and the Targum and the Apocrypha. Many times, she added to the interpretations of the great Sages of our generation... She was fluent in the written and spoken word, and also deeply pious... I wanted this to be a memorial to my grandmother because of her great scholarship in Torah and her noble and glorious deeds.

2. Rabbi Ezekiel ben Judah Landau (1713-1793), born in Poland,



was the foremost *halakhic* authority of the eighteenth century, one of the most famous rabbis at the close of the classical Ashkenazic era. He is known as the *Nodeh B'Yehudab*, the name of his important work published in Prague in 1776. In 1783, he published *Tsiyun L'Nefesh Haya*, a commentary on the tractate *Berakhot*. In his introduction to this work he explains:

...And for good shall be remembered the woman who was my Aishet Hayil, my modest and pious partner the Rabbanit Leba. In the introduction to Nodeh B'Yehudab I wrote about her in my young years and now, how good and pious she is in my aged years when my strength fails me. She watches over me ceaselessly, spending sleepless nights maintaining my health. May God repay her kindness and goodness by prolonging her days and years in pleasantness and with honor.

3. R. Simha Hayas wrote Novellae on the tractate *Baba Metzia*. He was the son-in-law of R. Aryeh Leib Horowitz and was Rabbi in Kushunz where he died in 1865. In his introduction he writes:

...I have been called by the name of my mother (Haya) since my early youth because of her piety. But my mother with all her physical strength and material might brought me up to the heights of Torah and Avodah, and loaded my shoulders with Avodat HaKodesh -- holy work.



JOFA would like to thank our generous contributors of recent months:

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