

Special Article

"Who Hast Not Made Me a Man": The Movement for Equal Rights for Women in American Jewry

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IN GENERATIONS PAST, a Jewish girl's life was relatively free of options. She moved from girlhood to womanhood, apprenticed to her mother as part of an extended family in which she learned enough to enable her to replay her mother's role. Some Jewish women did, it is true, go into business; many worked outside the home; some received a secular education. But their lives, while not entirely monochromatic, did not offer the wide range of choices open to today's women. The Jewish woman aspired to be worthy of her husband's praises extolling her as an *eshet hayil*, "a woman of valor" (Proverbs 31: 10), before the Friday evening *qiddush*. If, in her dreams, she wished to play a redeeming role, it was much more likely to be that of Queen Esther, carrying out Mordecai's orders, than that of Deborah the Judge, leading her people in war as in peace.

Many of today's Jewish women are less likely to be satisfied with the role of "woman of valor," combining business acumen and home-making skills with practical wisdom and a concern for the poor. The modern Jewish woman is more likely to regard as inequitable that division of labor, according to which the wife attends to all the physical needs of the household, while the husband "sits among the elders of the land."¹ Queen Esther no longer reigns supreme in the hearts of young Jewish women. More and more of them are admiring Vashti's spunk instead.²

Note: I wish to express my gratitude to my husband, Rabbi Stephen C. Lerner, editor of *Conservative Judaism*, for giving so generously of his time and energy. I also had the advantage of using the excellent files at the Blaustein Library of the American Jewish Committee.

¹Proverbs 31:23.

²Mary Gendler, "The Vindication of Vashti," *Response*, Summer 1973, pp. 154-60.

Questioning the traditional picture of ideal Jewish womanhood is not entirely new. One might cite the power struggle between Abraham and Sarah over Hagar,³ or the complaint of the daughters of Zelophehad regarding discriminatory inheritance laws,⁴ as the first faint rumblings of Jewish feminism. But these and other isolated instances do not really constitute a major strand in Jewish tradition. In the past, protest has been either so isolated as to be ineffectual, or so rechanneled as to become part of the normative approach. Thus, in mishnaic times Beruriah's sarcastic use of the rabbinic injunction against excessive conversation with women did not become a force for change;⁵ and in this century Sarah Schnirer channeled her dissatisfaction with the situation of Jewish girls into the very Orthodox Beth Jacob movement.⁶ Organized dissent is a recent phenomenon.

Jewish feminism in its present form is essentially an outgrowth of the American women's movement. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and other works urging women's liberation, the bra-burnings and similar "violent" protests of the late 1960s and early 1970s—all these had their impact on Jewish women's views of their role in Jewish life. Such women, both here and abroad, had their satisfaction with their assumed roles as housewives and mothers shaken. Indeed, as a group, Jewish women were in the forefront of the new feminism, though Jewish women have traditionally been taught that they must be good nurturers, ever ready to sacrifice themselves for husband and children.⁷

Such questioning was not lightly undertaken, nor was its outcome predictable. One might have expected a weakening of commitment among Jewish women to a Judaism which, as Betty Friedan and other Jewish leaders of the feminist movement pointed out, had men daily bless God for not having created them women. One could scarcely have hoped for a sincere grappling with Judaism and, through this, a heightened sense of commitment.

For traditionalists, unsympathetic to feminist demands, it is hard to view challengers of established and sanctified Jewish mores as anything other than threats to the very fabric of Jewish existence. Yet concern with feminism did give rise to a specifically Jewish brand which, while questioning

³Genesis 21.

⁴Numbers 27.

⁵Avot 1:5; Eruvin 53b.

⁶Nisson Wolpin, "Jewish Women in a Torah Society: for frustration? or fulfillment?" *Jewish Observer*, November-December 1974, p. 15.

⁷Aviva Cantor Zuckoff, "The Oppression of the Jewish Woman," *Response*, Summer 1973, pp. 52-53.

many traditional Jewish assumptions, was frequently accompanied by growing respect for Judaism and Jewish values. The "growing assertiveness by women [on college campuses] to resist the ancient Jewish practice of male dominance in religious practices" reflects, in the words of Rabbi Norman Frimer, national Hillel director, "'a unique combination of radicalism and traditionalism.'"⁸ Rabbi Frimer's words are, in a sense, a good definition of a movement which includes both extremely Orthodox women who ask only that their parents allow them to go to college and women who want the right to have abortions. It is a complex movement, one that is not very cohesive, yet does move.

JEWISH FEMINISM

The movement, now loosely defined under the rubric of Jewish feminism, is relatively new. Its conscious beginning was as a series of isolated questionings in the shadow of the women's movement. Some Jewish women found each other in the anti-Vietnamese war movement, others in a consciousness-raising group or in the group involved in the *Brooklyn Bridge*, a self-styled "revolutionary Jewish newspaper." The first issue of *Brooklyn Bridge*, February 1971, contained the following statement:

Jewish daughters are thus caught in a double bind: we are expected to grow up assimilating the American image of "femininity"—soft, dependent, self-effacing, blonde, straight-haired, slim, long-legged—and at the same time be the "womanly" bulwark of our people against the destruction of our culture. Now we suffer the oppression of Women of both cultures and are torn by the contradictions between the two. These contradictions take some curious forms. Jewish men demand that their Women be intellectual sex-objects. So Jewish families push their daughters to get a good education. The real purpose is not to be forgotten however. While PhD's do make Jewish parents proud of their daughters, the universities are recognized as hunting-grounds for making a "good" marriage. Grandchildren assure the race.

We've been called "Jewish princess" and "castrating bitch," by the rest of the world and by our own men loud and clear. We've been defined as a "Jewess" and been the object of rape. As Jewish Women we are strong, but always the force *behind* our men. We were strong in order to survive, and kept things together for our families and our culture, and for this we are now attacked as being "Jewish mother," ridiculous and disgusting as that has come to be.⁹

At the same time that some women were protesting cultural and social oppression, others set about investigating the position of women in Jewish

⁸Irving Spiegel, "Equality Sought by Jewish Coeds," *New York Times*, April 20, 1975.

⁹"Jewish Women: Life Force of a Culture?," p. 14.

religious life. Ezrat Nashim, founded in September 1971, is "perhaps the first group publicly committed to equality for women within Judaism."¹⁰ It was, and has remained, a small group of women devoted both to the study of Jewish and secular materials relating to women and to active attempts to effect change in Jewish life. They have served as a major resource for speakers, educational materials, and advice of all sorts. Although they are of diverse backgrounds, many are Conservative and have been to Ramah camps, the educational and religious camps sponsored by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTSA). As a group, they are well-educated in Jewish and general culture, and committed to Judaism. As internal critics, or "loyal opposition,"¹¹ they are less vulnerable to accusations of self-hatred of the kind often leveled at such Jewish women as Betty Friedan and Shulamith Firestone, and others like them. Their appearance at the Rabbinical Assembly convention in March 1972, their first public act, brought the Jewish feminist movement to wide public attention.

The growing public awareness of Jewish feminism gave rise to the National Jewish Women's Conference in New York in February 1973. As Judith Plaskow Goldenberg, who was then finishing her doctorate in theology at Yale University, stated at that conference:

We are not here due to some unfolding of the Jewish tradition, to the fact that it is a Jewishly appropriate moment for us to have come together. We are here because a secular movement for the liberation of women, of which many of us are members, has made it imperative that we raise certain Jewish issues now. We are here because we will not let ourselves be defined as Jewish women in ways in which we cannot allow ourselves to be defined as women. This creates a conflict not just and not primarily because the women's movement is a secular movement whose principles we are attempting to apply to an ancient religious tradition, but because the women's movement is a different community around which we might center our lives. The conflict between communities is the first level on which I experience the conflict between being a woman and being a Jew.¹²

The more than 500 women who participated in that conference discussed various Jewish and feminist concerns. Most were elated that they were not alone in questioning the attitudes and values of traditional Judaism and Jewish social norms but that there were others like them as well. Yet it was also clear that elation was not enough. Much had to be done.

The second conference, in April 1974, was different in scope and result. Discussing "Changing Sex Roles: Implications for the Future of Jewish Life," the conference was open to men and women, although they frequently met in separate sessions. This paradoxical arrangement, in which

¹⁰Martha Ackelsberg, "Introduction," *Response*, Summer 1973, p. 7.

¹¹Susan Dworkin, "A Song for Women in Five Questions," *Moment*, May-June 1975, p. 44.

¹²"The Jewish Feminist: Conflict in Identities," *Response*, Summer 1973, pp. 11-12.

sexist role-typing was decried in groups which often were open only to one sex, gave rise to the establishment of the Jewish Feminist Organization (JFO). The preamble of its interim constitution reads, in part:

We, Jewish feminists, have joined together here in strength and joy to struggle for the liberation of the Jewish woman. Jewish women of all ages, political, cultural and religious outlooks and sexual preferences, are all sisters. We are committed to the development of our full human potential and to the survival and enhancement of Jewish life. We seek nothing else than the full, direct and equal participation of women at all levels of Jewish life—communal, religious, educational and political. We shall be a force for such creative change in the Jewish community.¹³

JFO is becoming the umbrella organization of Jewish feminism, functioning through committees designed to include every interest and ability: a committee to "examine Jewish law to determine views on issues of concern to Jewish women," another to "publicly answer offensive ads, publications, media stuff with letters, calls, demonstrations, etc." JFO is divided into Eastern, Midwestern, Western, and Canadian regions, with sub-regions becoming increasingly active in some areas, and has recently hired its first part-time functionary.

Ferment among young Jewish women, whether or not they are directly connected to JFO, has become fairly widespread. Some are planning to publish *Lilith*, a journal devoted to Jewish feminism. The so-called Jewish counter-culture, young people involved in *Response*, *The Jewish Catalog*, and the *havurot*—small Jewish fellowships devoted to prayer, study, and community—almost always stress egalitarian religious services allowing women a full measure of participation. Some of these men and women refuse on principle to participate in services which do not grant women's rights. Robert Lapidus, among the founders of one small Sabbath "davening group" in Boston, said that the wives, dissatisfied with their passive roles in Orthodox or right-wing Conservative congregations, were the driving force in the establishment of the group. The husbands had been largely satisfied with their active, participatory roles in established congregations.

Hillel Foundations are another place where changes are often made. Rabbi Allan Lettovsky reports that at the Orthodox service of his foundation at the University of Wisconsin, informed Orthodox graduate students ruled that women may have 'aliyot, being called to the Torah, but only when women read the Torah. Thus, each Sabbath morning, at a certain point in the Torah reading, the male *gabbai'im* and Torah readers are replaced by women, and women are called up for 'aliyot.

At some campuses women's *minyanim*, quorums necessary for public

¹³*Lilith's Rib*, June 1974, p. 1.

worship, have been established.¹⁴ At Brown University the women's *minyan* meets every Sabbath and addresses the Deity using feminine, rather than masculine, pronouns, although they do not consider God either male or female. Maggie Wenig, one of the participants, has explained other liturgical innovations: "There are blessings in Judaism for almost everything, including going to the bathroom, but there isn't one for menstruation or for a healthy pregnancy. These are the types of things we're developing."¹⁵ The women involved in this group do not want to join a Conservative or Reform congregation where they may be allowed an active role, both because they want to do these things first in a female setting and because this type of group encourages relationships among the women. On balance, though, the women's *minyan* does not seem to be the "wave of the future."

Another interesting innovation is found in a somewhat less likely place, the Armed Forces. The Jewish Welfare Board's *JWB Circle* (October 1975) reports that Capt. Ellen S. Philpott is the Jewish lay leader in Crete, and Capt. Karen McKay Philips in Athens. These women, stationed in locations which do not have a full-time chaplain, organize religious services as well as educational and religious programs.

JEWISH RITUAL

A discussion of Jewish women today must perforce include the question of the woman's role in Judaism and Jewish ritual. Obviously, this is an area of many sharp disagreements within Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative Judaism. Before attempting to discuss current trends, one must sketch some of the background.

The position of women in the traditional Jewish *Weltanschauung* is about as elusive a matter as defining that *Weltanschauung* itself. A recent volume by Reuben Alcalay, *A Basic Encyclopedia of Jewish Proverbs, Quotations and Folk Wisdom* (New York and Bridgeport, 1973), divides its statements on women into categories: praises, strictures, and miscellaneous, with 14, 55, and 41 entries, respectively. When one considers that among the praises are to be found such statements as "woman is for children; woman is for beauty" and "women are docile," one can easily get the impression that the pedestal which traditional Judaism has purportedly maintained for women rests on a narrow base. The equilibrium is somewhat restored by the mate-

¹⁴Irving Spiegel, "Equality Sought by Jewish Coeds," *New York Times*, April 20, 1975.

¹⁵K.S., "Judaism is not for men only," *Brown Alumni Monthly*, February 1975, p. 19.

rial under the heading "wife." There the three subdivisions are "good," "bad," and "general," with 18, 10, and 45 entries, respectively. On balance, then, the traditional Jewish view of women is less than wholly favorable. Yet, this or any other method based on nonlegal material that tries to ascertain the traditional Jewish view of women is bound to degenerate into a quotation-matching game of "Can You Top This?" and proves little.

Although *aggadah*, nonlegal material, may be said to be the soul of Judaism, it is *halakhah*, Jewish law, which provides us with an accurate guide to the actual position and treatment of women in Judaism. Careful examination of the woman's position in the halakhic system, which was developed almost entirely by men, may lead one either to marvel at the consideration given women, or to recoil from the lack of it.

It is possible to divide Jewish laws affecting women that apply today into four categories: family status, testimony, private ritual, and public ritual.

Laws of family status were always among the most stringent in Judaism because an error here could cause problems affecting generations of unborn children. The traditional marriage ceremony, the foundation on which the family rests, would customarily have the bride circle the groom as a symbol of her submissiveness, but, beyond that custom, would have the bride say nothing and do very little. The *ketubbah*, marriage contract, was instituted in talmudic times to obligate the husband to support his wife and, in the event the marriage terminated in divorce or in his death, to arrange for her to receive a stipulated sum. Divorce could be initiated only by the man, so that the woman in an unsatisfactory marriage had little recourse. A man who abandoned his wife but refused her a divorce made her an *'agunah*, "anchored" to him and unable to marry another. This was also the situation of a woman whose husband was believed to have died, but to whose death there were no witnesses, because he may have been lost at sea or missing in military action. Other laws which bore upon women and were particularly difficult for them were the laws of levirate marriage which, in biblical times, obligated a childless widow to marry her deceased husband's brother. If the brother-in-law refused, he and the widow had to go through a *ḥalīzah*, release ceremony, in which she was freed to marry someone else by removing a special shoe from his foot and spitting before him. If the surviving brother was a minor, the widow had to wait, unable to remarry, until he attained his majority. In all these categories the woman was clearly hurt by her inability to initiate a legal action.

Another issue in family relations was family purity, the term commonly used to refer to laws dealing with menstruation. In brief, a menstruating woman was forbidden all contact with her husband for the period of her

menstruation and for the following seven "clean" days. At the end of this time, if there had been no bleeding, she had to immerse herself in a *miqweh*, a ritual bath, before resuming normal relations with her husband.

A woman's testimony, like that of minors, the mentally impaired, and deaf-mutes, was generally not acceptable. This provision did not evince very high regard for women, a situation which was scarcely ameliorated by the fact that a woman's testimony regarding the *kashrut* of her home or her having been to the *miqweh* was acceptable.

In private ritual a woman had both more obligations and more options. There are three "women's *mizwot*": lighting Sabbath and holiday candles, separating the *hallah* portion from bread dough and throwing it into the fire after reciting the appropriate blessing, and the laws of family purity. Of these, only the last was to be observed exclusively by women; for a man could light candles and in fact was obligated to do so if there was no woman in the household, and whoever, male or female, made the bread dough had to remove the *hallah* portion. There also are *mizwot* which women shared with men.

In general a woman was exempt from performing most commandments enjoining one to do something at a particular time. Thus, although woman was exempt from the obligation to pray at the proper time, she was, according to many authorities, nevertheless obliged to pray. At any rate she was required to hear the *megillah* on Purim, might make *qiddush* on Sabbath and holidays, and might wear *tefillin*. For various reasons, women did not usually avail themselves of all the options open to them.

It was in the synagogue, the arena of public worship, that women were treated most differently from men. The seating arrangement, with a balcony, rear section, or separate room reserved for women, made it difficult for them to feel part of the service. Woman's exclusion from all prominent functions, such as *rabbi* or *hazzan*; her inability to be counted for a *minyan*, and her exclusion from an *'aliyah*, reinforced the differences in the roles of women and men.

To 20th-century sensibilities many of these laws may seem prejudicial to women. It is important, however, to consider them in the context of the periods in which they were promulgated. Thus, in the talmudic period, the *ketubbah* was devised to protect women from capricious divorce by tying divorce to a financial settlement. Also, in their attempt to ameliorate the condition of women, the rabbis sometimes circumvented biblical law, as they did in accepting the testimony of one witness, instead of the requisite two, to the death of a husband in order to free a woman from the crushing *'agunah* burden. In an assessment of the talmudic period as a whole, Judith

Hauptman, instructor in Talmud at the Jewish Theological Seminary, examined a number of issues, including divorce and inheritance, and came to the following conclusion:

With these examples in mind, we renounce the view held by many, both men and women, that the Jewish tradition, having been shaped by men, is totally biased in their favor. It was the Rabbis, members of the very class of people who were more equal than others, who voluntarily extended some of their privileges to those who were not so fortunate.¹⁶

Orthodoxy

Within Orthodox Judaism, little has changed. Many Orthodox Jews would probably concur with Rabbi Wolpin's dictum that "the women's role is not the object of discrimination—just one of definition."¹⁷ Although social attitudes now allow women to work outside the home, as they did, for example, in Eastern Europe, religious attitudes are not changing significantly.

The innovations have been outside the realm of religion. Some Orthodox Jewish women have organized a JFO chapter in Boro Park, Brooklyn's center of Orthodoxy. One of their aims is to strengthen the resolve of young Jewish women to pursue educational and career goals, often in opposition to family and community. One Manhattan Orthodox synagogue is struggling with the question of permitting women to be elected to its board. The rabbi is not opposed; some of the members are. The fact that discussions of the woman's place continue unabated in Orthodox journals and meetings is an indication of the strength of Jewish feminism and its impact upon elements within Orthodoxy.

Some change is inevitable. Rabbi Haskel Lookstein of Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun in New York, while maintaining that women should not be "public personalities," expects that they will become more active in the corporate aspect of Orthodox Jewish life in the next decade.¹⁸ Possibly in response to the Jewish Women's Conference, there was, in early 1974, a conference at the National Young Israel in New York to consider the status of Jewish women.

Most Orthodox spokesmen discuss the issues only to arrive at the traditional conclusions and to skirt such knotty and virtually insoluble problems

¹⁶Judith Hauptman, "Women's Liberation in the Talmudic Period: an Assessment," *Conservative Judaism*, Summer 1972, p. 28.

¹⁷Wolpin, *loc. cit.*, p. 13.

¹⁸Enid Nemy, "Young Women Challenging Their 'Second-Class Status' in Judaism," *New York Times*, June 12, 1972.

as that of the *'agunah*. Thus, in an article in *Ms.*,¹⁹ "Why I Choose Orthodoxy," Bracha Sacks raised some of the issues confronting Jewish women, but not that most painful one. And Rabbi Aaron Soloveichik, speaking to the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations in 1969 on the "Attitude of Judaism toward the Woman,"²⁰ emphasized the superior spirituality of women, but concluded with a strong plea for the sex-segregated prayer and family purity.

Still, according to Rabbi Sholom Klass, in "Women's Rights Fully Protected by the Torah,"²¹ rabbis have attempted to help the *'agunah*. They have, he noted, consistently tried, where possible, to free *'agunot* whose husbands had disappeared and to aid women whose husbands refused them a divorce. Cases in which no solution is possible were not at issue here. Thus, Rabbi Klass cited a case in which Rabbi Moshe Feinstein annulled the marriage of a woman whose husband refused her a divorce "on the strength that the witnesses were not Sabbath observers and the wedding feast was held in a non-kosher hall and inasmuch as they didn't follow the tenets of our Torah at the wedding, therefore the latter requirement of a divorce according to our Torah also did not apply." But he did not discuss what would have happened had both the wedding feast and the witnesses been kosher. Contrary to its title, the article inadvertently supports the contention that women's rights are not "fully protected by Torah." Its opening sentence best shows the tenor of the argument: "The current Women's Liberation movement has generated many side issues which some people have used to malign our Torah." Surely, the *'agunah* issue cannot possibly be a "side issue" to the *'agunah* for whom there is no solution. If, as the Talmud states, the altar sheds tears when a man divorces his first wife,²² what must happen in the case of an *'agunah*?

There are Orthodox leaders who respect the arguments of Jewish feminists. Professor Ze'ev Falk of the Hebrew University Law School, indicating that much *halakhah* relating to women was based on a society and a sociology which have since changed, hinted that new times call for new solutions.²³

A most perceptive discussion of women's rights in Orthodox Judaism, by Rabbi Saul J. Berman of Stern College for Women, Yeshiva University,

¹⁹July 1974, pp. 82-83, 108-10.

²⁰*Major Addresses Delivered at Midcontinent Conclave and National Leadership Conference, November 27-30, 1969*, pp. 21-32.

²¹*Jewish Press*, New York, April 21, 1972.

²²Gittin 90b.

²³"On the Status of Women in Jewish Law" (Hebrew), *De'ot*, Fall 5732, pp. 29-35.

touches three sources of discontent among Jewish women: "the sense of being deprived of opportunities for positive religious identification"; "the disadvantaged position of women in Jewish Civil Law, particularly areas of marriage and divorce," and "the Rabbinic perception of the nature of women and the impact that it has had on the role to which women are assigned."²⁴ Assailing past discussions of this issue, Rabbi Berman states:

It is time to admit that we have attempted through our apologetics to make a virtue of social necessity. We have striven to elicit voluntary compliance by women to a status which men need never accept. . . . It is becoming increasingly difficult for Jewish women to accept the idea that their own religious potential is exhausted in enabling their husbands and children to fulfill *mitzvot* (p. 9).

The careful analysis to which Rabbi Berman subjected each of these areas is exemplary in that he never dismissed any of them as trivial.

When discussing possible solutions, however, Rabbi Berman was less than comforting. Recognizing "the reality of the religious quest of Jewish women," he suggested that his colleagues in the Orthodox rabbinate do likewise. He urged them, in particular, to design synagogues in such a way as to enable women to feel more a part of the service, and to expect of them the same decorum as of men. Emphasizing the importance of Jewish study, Rabbi Berman also suggested that Jewish women try to discover "customs expressive of their religious feelings in contemporary society." The traditional role of Jewish women must be examined, along with alternatives, to see what is more appropriate today.

Courageously unwilling to accept the *status quo* with regard to 'agunot, Berman felt that the Jewish religious leadership must rectify this situation. Remedies proposed within Jewish law have not, however, proved acceptable to the Orthodox rabbinate as a whole. Rabbi Berman, therefore, suggested that the Jewish community press for legislation which would enable civil courts to enforce civil antenuptial agreements mandating religious divorce for those who obtain a civil divorce or annulment. All rabbis could then require couples to sign such agreements.

The proposal does nothing to help those already married. (Even among the Orthodox the rate of divorce is rising. Rabbi Samuel J. Fox of Boston has said that the Jewish Divorce and Family Relations Court of the Massachusetts Board of Rabbis handled twice as many Jewish divorce cases in 1975 as in 1974.)²⁵ Furthermore, Rabbi Berman's plan constitutes a critique of the efficacy of *halakhah* and of the ability of Orthodox religious leader-

²⁴"The Status of Women in Halachic Judaism," *Tradition*, Fall 1973, pp. 5-28.

²⁵*Jewish Advocate*, Boston, January 8, 1976.

ship to repair this glaring inequity to women. Is there no other recourse than to request civil authority to rescue Jewish women from Jewish law?

Dr. Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, editor of the *Jewish Spectator* and one steeped in Orthodox traditions, has long discussed the issue of Jewish divorce. Although in 1950 she defended separate seating and differences in education, she did urge that there "be some reinterpretation of Jewish divorce law making it possible for a woman to divorce her husband, instead of being divorced by him."²⁶ She then went on to claim that the inequities "do not prove that a wronged wife has no recourse to justice." Her recent position has been unequivocal. She has recommended transferring the power of issuing divorces to the rabbinic courts. "So as to liberate Jewish women from being chained as *agunot*, the Rabbinic Courts must be appointed as *bona fide* agents, acting on behalf of the husband, so as to grant divorces to deserted wives."²⁷ Dr. Weiss-Rosmarin has also urged that women be allowed to enter the rabbinate.²⁸

A few noted examples of halakhically acceptable innovations have occurred. There have been Orthodox women's *minyanim*, groups consisting of ten or more women who could participate fully in a somewhat modified service. On Simḥat Torah, 1974, Rabbi Steven Riskin allowed a women's Torah service to take place in the building of the Lincoln Square Synagogue during the time of the Torah service in the main sanctuary. The 1975 women's service was held in mid-afternoon, when its impact was much less. Riskin has also allowed a woman to wear a *tallit* in his synagogue. According to Susan Dworkin, Rabbi Riskin, "who has never been known to permit any infraction of *Halachah*, gets himself a reputation as a raging liberal by allowing women to behave in ways they are nowhere forbidden to behave."²⁹

On the other hand, the position of some elements in Orthodoxy with regard to women has hardened. Where once separate seating without a *meḥizah*, a physical barrier, was deemed adequate, the current generation has established *meḥizot* in congregations, new and old, or raised the height of existing *meḥizot*. One interesting technological innovation in this area was the purchase by a hasidic congregation in Brookline, Mass., of a 550-pound thermopane mirror-coated one-way panel, intended for the new Hancock Tower in Boston, for use as a *meḥizah*. It will enable the women to see what is going on, but will not allow the men to see them.³⁰ Married women whose

²⁶"Jewish Woman in a Man's World," *Jewish Spectator*, May 1950, p. 12.

²⁷"The Rabbi as Politician," *Jewish Spectator*, January 1973, p. 4.

²⁸"Women's Liberation," *Jewish Spectator*, March 1973, p. 7.

²⁹Dworkin, *loc. cit.*, p. 45.

³⁰*Jewish Week*, New York, November 9-15, 1975.

Orthodox mothers walked around with uncovered heads are now expected, and often coerced by community pressure, to don a *tikhel*, kerchief, or *shaytl*, wig, on all occasions. An example of a new denigration of women is reflected in an editorial in Rabbi Bernard Levy's *Jewish Homemaker*:

We have found in many of our homemakers a sad lack of information regarding kashrus. And we ask the question: Does the fact that the master of the house is a Torah Jew automatically make his kitchen kosher? How many Torah Jews have taken an interest in the cupboard? They rely implicitly on their balboste [housewife]: she knows what she may buy and what she may serve him. His function is to see that the proper brocho [blessing] is made.³¹

Traditionally one accepted a woman's word that her home was kosher, but the *Jewish Homemaker* said that the housewife is not competent in this scientific age to know what ingredients among new chemicals and derivatives are kosher. It concluded with a plea that "Torah Jews" investigate their kitchens.

Another area traditionally the enclave of Orthodox Jewish women is the *miqweh* and the laws of family purity. *Miqweh* is a private matter, not for public discussion. Since a woman should not be questioned whether she goes to the *miqweh*, statistical data are hard to obtain. However, there is a fairly prevalent impression that the *miqweh* is more widely used today outside of strictest Orthodox circles. Many young modern Orthodox women whose mothers did not go to the *miqweh* go now. This is also true of some traditionalist Conservative women. A number of Jewish feminists, who have been urging the extension of women's public religious rights, were inspired by Rachel Adler's exposition at the first Women's Conference of the mystical value of the *miqweh* to begin to observe the rules of family purity. A look around the waiting room of the Jewish Women's Club, commonly known as the Mid-Manhattan *miqweh*, reveals styles from wigs and long sleeves to uncovered long hair and jeans. Some women seem to feel that if they ask to be included in rituals previously reserved for men, they should also accept those reserved for women.

Thus, while small but growing numbers of Orthodox women are reevaluating their traditional role in Judaism and asking for changes, others, perhaps a majority, are accepting more fully all the traditional demands made on them. Some even refuse to enter certain Orthodox synagogues where women's voices are heard in the congregational singing, because "the voice of a woman is impurity."³² These women pose little threat to Or-

³¹"In Our Home We Keep Kosher," *Jewish Homemaker*, September-October 1974, p. 3.

³²Berakhot 24a.

thodoxy. Orthodox Jewish feminists, however, are a disturbing element, for they will not indefinitely be satisfied to remain in a passive role in segregated sections of synagogues.

Reform

At the opposite end of the Jewish religious spectrum, Reform Judaism has long been concerned with enhancing the participation of women in public ritual. As Rabbi Sally Priesand, the first ordained woman rabbi, indicated, this was the gist of a statement by the *Rabbinerversammlung* (rabbinical conference) meeting in Frankfurt am Main in 1845.

One of the marked achievements of the Reform movement has been the change in the status of women. . . . This conference declares that woman has the same obligations as man to participate from youth up in the instruction of Judaism and in the public services and that the custom not to include women in the number of individuals necessary for the conducting of a public service (a *minyan*) is only a custom and has no religious basis.³³

A year later the Breslau Conference proposed that women observe all *miz-wot*, be responsible for their vows, and participate in public worship, and that the man's benediction to God, "Who hast not made me a woman," be eliminated. Despite the revolutionary nature of these proposals, one must note, according to Rabbi Priesand, that the conference neither mentioned the abolition of separate seating nor stressed encouraging women "to seek leadership roles within the synagogue structure."

American Reform Judaism further enhanced the position of women by introducing family pews, which did not obtain in Europe. Nevertheless, despite statements, including some by Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, urging the participation of women in the governance of Reform congregations, the gap between theory and practice, here as in Europe, has remained large.

While most congregations have granted women the privileges of membership and voting, only about 5 percent of all Reform congregations have women serving as presidents and vice-presidents. And only about 4 percent of the members of the Board of Trustees of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations are women.³⁴

The preamble to a resolution adopted in April 1973 by the New York Federation of Reform Synagogues underscores the problem:

Historically, the Reform Movement was the first in Judaism to assert the religious equality of women. We are proud, too, that there are no logical impediments barring women from any post or office in Reform Judaism, and that women have

³³Sally Priesand, *Judaism and the New Woman* (New York, 1975), pp. 30-31.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 35.

made effective contributions in various offices, including the office of president in some congregations and the rabbinate itself. Despite this, inequities persist. Very small numbers of women are elected to our governing bodies. Very few are enabled to contribute in full measure of their skills, energies and creativity to a movement in which, by right, they should be full partners.

Further resolutions in 1974 and 1975 indicate a continuing need for action to achieve equality in the synagogue, the liturgy, and religious education.

Social attitudes are hard to change. Dr. Trude Weiss-Rosmarin reported that Rabbi Gerald Raiskin (Reform) "let it be known that women will not be called to the Torah at Temple Sholom [Burlingame, Cal.]. The reason, he explained, is that the Torah service is the last frontier of male religious functions. If it were shared with the women, the men would stay away from services."³⁵ Sex-segregation is also prevalent in the nonreligious sphere. Women do not serve as ushers during services, nor do men pour tea or coffee at the Oneg Shabbat.³⁶

In a letter to the editor of *Ms.* (January 1975), Annette Daum, coordinator for religious action programs of the New York Federation of Reform Synagogues, praised Reform Judaism's achievements for women. She did point out, however, that Sally Priesand, the first woman rabbi, was not ordained until 1972, and that Barbara Herman, the first woman cantor, was yet to be graduated in June 1975. In closing, she remarked, "I speak as one who still bears the scars of her struggle (successful) to become president of her synagogue." Even in this, change has not been easily accepted.

Rabbi Priesand was not the first woman to study in a Reform rabbinical seminary, merely the first to do so and be ordained. In 1922 the Central Conference of American Rabbis issued the following statement: "In view of these Jewish teachings and in keeping with the spirit of our age and the traditions of our Conference, we declare that woman cannot justly be denied the privilege of ordination."³⁷ Nevertheless, when Martha Neumark was a student in the rabbinical department at Hebrew Union College in the 1920s, the board of governors voted six to two against the ordination of women. The only two rabbis present cast the two favorable votes. Martha Neumark left in the middle of her junior year, after almost eight years of study. Rabbi Earl S. Stone reported that in 1939 "the ordination class at the Jewish Institute of Religion was graduated with Helen Leventhal Lyons who

³⁵Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, "Female Consciousness-Raising," *Jewish Spectator*, September 1973, p. 6.

³⁶Myron Schoen, "Even Reform Is Slow On Women's Lib," *Jewish Post of New York*, January 10, 1975.

³⁷Priesand, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

completed all of the requirements for ordination but, at that time, was refused this honor. She participated in our ordination exercises and was graduated with the degree of Master of Hebrew Letters."³⁸ Even the fact that these two women were the daughters of distinguished Jewish scholars and rabbis was not enough to carry theory into practice and provide for their ordination.

American Reform Judaism's first *de facto* woman "rabbi" was Paula Ackerman, widow of Rabbi William Ackerman, who after her husband's death was asked to replace him as spiritual leader of Temple Beth Israel of Meridian, Miss. At that time Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath said that there was no reason not to ordain women rabbis. Mrs. Ackerman, who after her retirement was asked to take another pulpit, said she hoped that her work would advance the cause of the ordination of women.³⁹ Similarly, Temple Avodah, a Reform congregation in Massapequa, Long Island, not long thereafter appointed a lay woman cantor, Mrs. Sheldon Robbins.⁴⁰ Twenty years elapsed before a duly trained woman was ordained as a rabbi or invested as a cantor.

Now that women are being ordained, though in small numbers, within the Reform movement, the question of their acceptance by congregations must be faced. Unfortunately, the move to open the rabbinate to women comes at a time when the Reform seminaries are producing more rabbis than can be placed in Reform congregations. At a workshop conference sponsored by the Task Force on Equality of Women in Judaism of the New York Federation of Reform Synagogues on March 2, 1975, Rabbi Priesand expressed the hope that seminaries attempting to adjust supply to demand would not eliminate women students first. Jane Evans, executive director of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods and secretary of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, feels that women rabbis will eventually gain acceptance, although, like the women pioneers in medicine and other analogous professions, the first women rabbis may find placements somewhat limited. Progress in this area depends not on religious law alone, but on social change as well.⁴¹

Clearly, if the Reform movement, which in many cases has abrogated such basic areas of Jewish observance as kashrut or the use of *tallit* and *tefillin*, has changed dates of holidays, has held Sabbath services on Sunday,

³⁸Letter to the Editor, *Jewish Post of New York*, August 22, 1975.

³⁹*Time*, January 22, 1951.

⁴⁰*New York Times*, August 3, 1955.

⁴¹In a conversation with this author.

and has been equivocal about intermarriage, has taken so long to ordain a woman, the impediment was not religious in nature.

Conservatism

The situation of women in Conservative Judaism is decidedly more complex than in either Orthodoxy or Reform. Unlike Orthodoxy, Conservatism affirms change in Jewish law. Unlike Reform, it emphasizes fealty to tradition. Given its dual commitment, to tradition and to change, the movement comprehends a great diversity of opinion about the place of women in its religious life. Many congregations, as well as the national institutions of Conservative Judaism, are debating and arguing the issue.

It is fair to say that Conservative Judaism from its earliest years has granted new and substantial rights to women. The movement grew as it introduced mixed pews and the bat-mitzvah ceremony on Friday evenings, and as it emphasized equal education for girls in congregational schools. The Women's League for Conservative Judaism is probably the strongest lay arm of the movement, and the Teachers Institute of the movement's central institution, the Jewish Theological Seminary, has always had a sizable number of young women among its students.

With few exceptions, no further rights were effectively accorded women until the ferment of the past few years had set in, although the changes previously introduced led to an atmosphere responsive, in many cases, to calls for change. The initial impetus for the reconsideration of Conservative Judaism's position on women was probably the appearance of members of *Ezrat Nashim* at the convention of the Rabbinical Assembly, the organization of Conservative rabbis, in March 1972. These uninvited guests, "well mannered, earnest and honest, reared in our Conservative congregations,"⁴² were allowed to hold an open meeting for the rabbis' wives, while their husbands were voting on resolutions. They also distributed handbills asking, among other things, that women be counted in the *minyan*, be granted full participation in religious observances, be recognized as witnesses in Jewish law, and be allowed to initiate a Jewish divorce.

In the wake of this action, the Women's League for Conservative Judaism; the United Synagogue of America, the association of Conservative congregations; the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (CJLS) of the Rabbinical Assembly, and the Jewish Theological Seminary all moved in varying degrees toward a recognition of the merits of the feminist demand

⁴²Selma Rapaport, "Two Worlds?", *Outlook*, Summer 1972, p. 24.

for increased women's rights. In effect, Ezrat Nashim had served to bring forth opinions and feelings which had been germinating beneath the surface.

Most significant in this regard was the CJLS's September 1973 decision, by a 9-to-4 vote, that women may be counted equally with men in the *minyan*. The nine men who supported the decision reasoned that "the contemporary position of women in society, the fact that we educate women and that they play a greater role in synagogue life, and that we encourage them to attend services require of us to count them." The minority position was that "there is no halakhic support. The *minyan* should consist of heads of household who support the community. There is no need for a *takkanah* [the form of rabbinic decision used by the majority], only a small pressure group wants it and it is a passing fad."⁴³

The CJLS decision was deemed of sufficient weight to merit a front-page story in the *New York Times*, September 1, 1973. It raised a storm of comment, both positive and negative, and led to the rediscovery of favorable CJLS decisions in 1955 with regard to 'aliyot for women. Many congregations began to discuss the issues. Others, in which discussions had started earlier, decided in favor of the feminists. Most congregations granted women both *minyan* and 'aliyot, but some only one of the two—usually 'aliyot.

The 1955 decision on 'aliyot for women of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, like all its decisions, was not binding on rabbi or congregation, who may follow either the majority or a minority opinion. The majority decision then, supported by ten rabbis, allowed 'aliyot for women only on special occasions, after the mandatory seven Sabbath 'aliyot. The minority of five rabbis wished to allow women 'aliyot on an equal basis with men. What is remarkable about those decisions is that only one member of CJLS felt he could support neither. In other words, all but one member of the committee supported granting women 'aliyot on either a limited or a full basis. Nevertheless, during those relatively unruffled years the decision had had almost no impact.

In 1962 Rabbi Aaron Blumenthal, a former president of the Rabbinical Assembly and author of the responsum which had become the minority decision, conducted a survey on 'aliyot for women for the Rabbinical Assembly.⁴⁴ Of the congregations which responded, 196 did not grant women

⁴³Mayer Rabinowitz and Nessa Rappoport, "The Role of Women in Jewish Ritual: A Summary of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards" (Rabbinical Assembly, January 2, 1975), pp. 2-3 (mimeo.).

⁴⁴"A Questionnaire on Aliyot for Women and Bat Mitzvah: Results and Observations," 1962 mailing to RA members (mimeo.).

'*aliyot* under any circumstances, eight granted '*aliyot* with no restrictions, and 50 with restrictions. Some of the restrictions are particularly interesting. The late Rabbi Louis Levitsky thought it should be granted to "only those to whom it has deep religious significance and who can recite the *berakhot* by heart easily—never more than one on any Shabbat." These are restrictions which are never applied to men. According to Rabbi Blumenthal, "a number restrict it to girls at their Bat Mitzvah." This is a rather odd approach to religious training, but one which recurs. The bar-mitzvah ceremony marks a young man's entrance into adult Jewish responsibility and privilege—the first, it is hoped, of many such occasions. But a bat-mitzvah would mark a young woman's *exit* from participation. It would be the only time she was permitted to go up to read the *haftarah*.

A conflict over the Rabbinical Assembly's decisions regarding women was launched by Rabbi I. Usher Kirshblum of the Jewish Center of Kew Garden Hills, New York, in May 1975. In a letter sent to many members, he accused the CJLS of announcing its decision on the *minyan* "through the orchestration of a front-page article of the New York Times," thus undercutting the position of the congregational rabbi as *mara de'atra*, halakhic authority for his congregation. Excerpts from letters received by Rabbi Kirshblum in support of his position, which he circulated, reflected similar concerns, rabbis objecting to being challenged by their congregants and fearing that the Conservative movement was approaching Reform.

Rabbi Kirshblum also sharply criticized both Rabbi Wolfe Kelman, executive vice-president of the Rabbinical Assembly, and Rabbi Seymour Siegel, chairman of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, in the Yiddish press. The tone of the attack by Rabbi Kirshblum and his associates in the Committee for the Preservation of Tradition and Diversity Within the Rabbinical Assembly, of which Rabbi Kirshblum is chairman, is that of a group suddenly finding itself embattled. Rabbi Kelman carefully answered Rabbi Kirshblum's charges.

In the summer of 1975 a questionnaire was sent by this author and her husband, Rabbi Stephen C. Lerner, to all Rabbinical Assembly members regarding the status of women's rights in their synagogues. Of 229 respondents, 114 (almost 50 per cent) indicated that their synagogues granted women '*aliyot*, at least on some occasions, and 85 (37 per cent), including some congregations not granting women '*aliyot*, counted them in the *minyan*. An additional 40 congregations grant '*aliyot* only to girls, mainly at their junior services where the age level occasionally extends through high school.

The answers also revealed something about the pace of change. In 64 of

the 94 (68 per cent) congregations which indicated when *'aliyot* were first granted to women, this right had been instituted since 1973. Sixty-nine of the 85 (81 per cent) congregations counting women in the *minyan* had decided to do so since 1973. In other synagogues, discussion was either in progress or scheduled. Clearly, the "*minyan* decision" had triggered a movement, which seemed to be lagging only in Queens, N.Y., and in Canada.

One of the first issues concerning women discussed by the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards was their inability to initiate divorce proceedings, leaving them *'agunot*. As early as 1930 Rabbi Louis M. Epstein, chairman of the Rabbinical Assembly's Committee on Jewish Law and an expert on the status of women, proposed that the *bet din* be empowered by the husband at the time of the marriage to arrange for a Jewish divorce in the event he was granted a civil divorce or disappeared. Although there was considerable initial support, and CJLS approved the proposal in 1935, it was not implemented. Only in 1968 was the antenuptial agreement instituted, providing for the retroactive nullification of the marriage if the husband refuses to grant a divorce. Despite the psychological objections to discussing divorce just before marriage,⁴⁵ this agreement should go a long way toward alleviating problems in recent and future marriages. Unfortunately, it does little to help the women who married in the intervening 33 years. In cases where no agreement exists and the husband refuses to grant a *get*, a Conservative *bet din* will annul the marriage. Since such a procedure is not recognized by Orthodox Jews, it may not solve the problem of a woman who wishes to marry one.⁴⁶

Regarding the ordination of women, Rabbi Mordecai Waxman asserted in the presidential address opening the 1975 Rabbinical Assembly Convention that "the question of entry of women into the Conservative rabbinate is not a question of whether, but when." In an interview at that time he predicted that "properly ordained and educated" women would be admitted "to membership in the Rabbinical Assembly."⁴⁷ No action has been taken on this matter except for a little known CJLS decision, on June 10, 1974, in which a majority of nine held that women should serve neither as rabbis nor as cantors, and a minority of three,

⁴⁵Simon Greenberg, "And He Writes Her a Bill of Divorcement," *Conservative Judaism*, Spring 1970, pp. 92, 135; cf. Aaron Landes, "The Ante-Nuptial Agreement," *ibid.*, Spring 1972, pp. 61-63.

⁴⁶See the soul-searching article by Simon Greenberg, *loc. cit.*, pp. 75-141.

⁴⁷Irving Spiegel, "Conservative Rabbi Sees Woman in Pulpit Soon," *New York Times*, April 21, 1975.

that they should.⁴⁸ A growing number of women, some of whom would have preferred studying at the Jewish Theological Seminary, have been preparing for rabbinic ordination at Hebrew Union College and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, the latter sponsored by a movement which issued from Conservatism and has vigorously emphasized women's rights.

Waxman's prediction has yet to be fulfilled. No woman has been accepted for study in the rabbinical department of the Jewish Theological Seminary, the only institution specifically designed to ordain Conservative rabbis. Women studying in other schools at the Seminary, however, are allowed equal access to classes in the rabbinical department. They may study at the Seminary's College of Sacred Music, but not at the Cantors' Institute which confers the title of *hazzan*. There are some women on the faculty, although none on the prestigious Graduate Rabbinical School faculty. Women also hold high administrative posts, among them Sylvia C. Ettenberg, dean of educational development.

The issue of women at the Jewish Theological Seminary surfaced in 1903, when Henrietta Szold asked permission to attend classes at the institution, newly reorganized by Solomon Schechter. Permission was granted "only after she had assured its administration that she would not use the knowledge thus gained to seek ordination."⁴⁹ The question of the ordination of women was raised again in the 1970s. In 1972 Professor Gerson D. Cohen stated:

I, for one, would urge serious consideration if a woman applied [to the Rabbinical Department] who was qualified academically, characterologically and religiously, and I would urge the faculty and my colleagues in the Rabbinical Assembly to consider it.⁵⁰

Some time later, as chancellor, Professor Cohen further expressed himself on this subject in the publication of the National Women's League of the United Synagogue:

. . . anyone who has considered the matter dispassionately will concede that admitting her [an applicant] to candidacy for ordination *at this time* would hardly reflect the consensus of the Conservative Movement, whether of its laity or its professional leadership. . . . the quest for full equality with men on the levels we have been discussing [the rabbinate] has not been echoed by those young women who have been studying at the Seminary.⁵¹

⁴⁸Mayer Rabinowitz and Nessa Rappoport, *op. cit.*, pp. 2, 3.

⁴⁹Susan Dworkin, "Henrietta Szold," *Response*, Summer 1973, p. 43.

⁵⁰Nemy, *loc. cit.*

⁵¹Gerson D. Cohen, "Women in the Conservative Movement: 1973," *Women's League Outlook*, Winter 1973, pp. 5, 32.

Some women and rabbinic colleagues disagreed with Cohen's later statement. The members of Ezrat Nashim, two of whom were then teaching at the Seminary, declared:

For a woman to aspire vocally and actively to a role which is barred to her takes a great deal of courage, for she risks mockery, frustration and doubts, by her society, of her femininity. Despite this, several women have requested admission to the rabbinical program and have been turned away. Many more women might have applied were it possible to be admitted, several signatories to this letter included. How many gifted spiritual leaders has the Jewish people done without because one-half of the Jewish population is biologically ineligible?⁵²

Another respondent, Tziporah Heckelman of Waterbury, Conn., vice-chairman of adult education of the Women's League for Conservative Judaism, praised the chancellor's statement:

Your *Outlook* article on women in the Conservative Movement was an important statement on an inflamed issue. In all likelihood, it will be viewed as "reactionary" by men and women who are caught up in the groundswell of erasing all role distinctions in Synagogue life. I, for one, applaud its statesmanship and its reintroduction of perspective on an issue too much considered from the narrow vantage point of what's good for the modern American Jewish woman, to the exclusion of concern for what's good for the family, the fabric of Jewish law and the Jewish people as a whole.⁵³

Rabbi Aaron Blumenthal, while praising Cohen, concluded that "his faculty is opposed overwhelmingly and that there is nothing he can do about it. That is both sad and unfortunate."⁵⁴ Chancellor Cohen and the JTS faculty continue to grapple with the problem of a suitable role for women in rabbinic and other religious leadership.

In one area, the Seminary's network of Ramah summer camps, the status of women has changed. In 1974, without any fanfare, JTS, which is responsible for the educational and religious supervision of Ramah, issued a directive mandating *'aliyot* for women. By and large, this change has been successfully incorporated into services at the camps. However, camps do offer a choice of nonegalitarian services where needed.

Essentially, the Seminary synagogue has been the congregation of the senior faculty. As such, its bent is decidedly right-wing in religious orientation. It is one of the few United Synagogue congregations in which separation of the sexes is maintained, although without a *meḥizah*.⁵⁵ Of late an

⁵²*Ibid.*, Summer 1974, p. 29

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵⁴"Is Seminary Opposed to Women Rabbis?", *Jewish Post of New York*, January 3, 1975.

⁵⁵Shaare Zion of Montreal, one of the last Conservative synagogues to maintain separate seating, is considering change. In January 1976 its board of trustees voted to establish mixed seating, subject to a vote of the congregation in the spring. A poll indicated that 78 per cent of the membership approved the contemplated change.

occasional woman student has donned *tallit* and *tefillin* at week-day services, although no participatory rights are extended to women. But even here, small changes have occurred. On *Simhat Torah* 1975 women at the Seminary were allowed a separate Torah service, at which they recited blessings, albeit modified, when called to the Torah.

At the present time the Seminary is proceeding slowly. Requests for more religious rights at its synagogue and for admission to its rabbinical department are not likely to abate.

At the 1973 biennial convention of the United Synagogue of America, the congregational arm of Conservative Judaism, three resolutions concerning women were adopted. These were the strongest statement for the equal participation of women in public ritual ever to be issued by any body in the Conservative movement:

THE ROLE OF WOMEN

A. The Place of Jewish Women in Synagogue Life Today

Whereas, it is demonstrably evident that women have the same concerns and commitment to their synagogue as do men; and

Whereas, it is also demonstrably evident that women have not, generally, been accorded equal opportunity commensurate with their ability to serve as officers and trustees and members of congregational committees; and

Whereas, we recognize the justice of extending equality of opportunity to Jewish women in synagogue life; therefore

Be it resolved that the United Synagogue calls upon its member congregations to take such action as will insure equal opportunity for its women congregants to assume positions of leadership, authority and responsibility in all phases of congregational activity.

B. The Role of Women in Ritual

Whereas, the United Synagogue of America desires to encourage and foster the availability of creative Jewish identity and experience to all members of the Jewish community; and

Whereas, women are, and have been, an integral part of synagogue life, generously contributing their energies and resources to its growth and development; and

Whereas, the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly has determined it is halachically permissible for women to participate in synagogue ritual; and

Whereas, the United Synagogue of America believes that the concept of full and equal opportunity and participation by women in religious as well as secular roles is an idea whose time has come; therefore

Be it resolved that the United Synagogue of America looks with favor upon the inclusion of women in ritual participation, including but not limited to participation in the *minyan* and *'aliyot*, and looks with favor upon its member congregations adopting such programs as will meaningfully implement this resolution.

C. Admission of Women in the Rabbinical School of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America

Recognizing the growing role of women in the life of our congregations, the United Synagogue of America, in convention assembled, wishes to note that it looks with favor on the admission of qualified women to the Rabbinical School of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.⁵⁶

Despite the adoption by the United Synagogue of these proposals for greater women's religious participation, they were not implemented in the United Synagogue Youth (USY) movement, the most active arm of the organization. Neither at its national conclaves nor in its nationally sponsored programs, did USY accord women *'aliyot* or count them in the *minyán*, although some regional gatherings did so. A meeting of the National Youth Commission, the body charged with supervision of USY, voted in fall 1975 not to change its policy. A list of Youth Commission publications offers one article about Judaism's attitude toward women. Written by Nina Freedman, the wife of the USY director, the article is a paean to the traditional role of Jewish women.⁵⁷ This created the unlikely situation of the parent organization having endorsed more "radical" positions than those practiced by the children. As an ever-growing number of young women and men become accustomed to egalitarian services in their congregations, the official USY stand will experience further pressure for accommodation.

In the sisterhoods of the Conservative movement and among the leadership of their parent organization, the Women's League for Conservative Judaism, there has been a great deal of ambivalence about Jewish feminism. Sisterhood leaders have traditionally been dynamic volunteers who have been content to be the "power behind the throne," generally reflecting the acceptance of the traditional women's roles. Thus in the *Women's League Outlook*, national leaders, despite their important and coveted posts, are listed by their husbands' names, not their own.

In 1970 Evelyn Henkind, then League president, discussed the impact of women's organizations on Judaism, saying that there was

... no danger of feminizing religious life because women are not asking to take on traditional religious roles of the male—nor are they trying to become rabbis. Most of our work has to do with educating the Jewish woman to continue the Jewish traditions in the home—as a mother and wife, in addition to being responsive to issues in the community and in the world.⁵⁸

⁵⁶*Proceedings of the 1973 Biennial Convention of the United Synagogue of America, November 11–15, 1973*, pp. 108–109.

⁵⁷*The Jewish Woman: A Liberator, Already Liberated* (United Synagogue: Atid, College Age Organization), 4 p. (mimeo.).

⁵⁸Quoted by Doris B. Gold, "Jewish Women's Groups: Separate—But Equal?" *Congress Bi-Weekly*, February 6, 1970, p. 11.

Ezrat Nashim's appearance led to reconsideration of these historically sanctified attitudes. Selma N. Rapaport, Mrs. Henkind's successor, viewed the group of young women sympathetically. After first placing them in the context of the women's liberation movement, she characterized them as members of the family, "reared in our Conservative congregations, graduates of our religious schools, products of our Ramah Camps, our LTF [Leaders Training Fellowship], our USY, some of them enrolled for studies at our Jewish Theological Seminary." She then inserted much of their flyer, "Jewish Women Call for Change," into her column.⁵⁹

The result of an opinion poll conducted at the 1972 Women's League Convention, which preceded the Rabbinical Assembly "minyan decision," indicated 99 per cent of the participants in favor of allowing women to serve on congregational boards of directors; 98 per cent, of enabling them to initiate divorce proceedings; 70 per cent, of permitting them to read from the Torah; 66.5 per cent, of calling them for 'aliyot, and 61 per cent, of counting them in a minyan. Averages of response to all five questions, correlated by age group, showed, not unexpectedly, that the desire for change decreased from 92 per cent among those 21 to 30 years old to 71 per cent among those over 60.

The 1974 Women's League convention participants voted by secret ballot on the following resolution:

Women's League for Conservative Judaism endorses the recent decisions of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly which allow women to assume a more equal role in ritual and Synagogue life, and understanding that the Rabbi is the final religious authority in his Congregation, to explore and discuss the implications of these decisions, and to implement them as individual circumstances permit.⁶⁰

This resolution was obviously weaker than those passed by the United Synagogue the previous year, but it was clear. Though it passed by six to one, it made no headlines in *Outlook*.

Featured in a subsequent issue were the results of a questionnaire sent to the presidents of the 800 affiliated sisterhoods, eliciting information about current practice with regard to women in administration, ritual, and education. In this survey 26.4 per cent belonged to congregations giving women 'aliyot, in addition to the bat-mitzvah, and 23.8 per cent to congregations counting women in the minyan. The conclusion Zelda Dick drew from the survey was that

⁵⁹Rapaport, *loc. cit.*, pp. 4, 24-25.

⁶⁰Celia Goldstein, "Business Unusual," *Women's League Outlook*, Winter 1974, p. 24.

these figures strongly suggest an overwhelming "Silent Majority" which appears to be somewhat unmoved by the Resolution of the Committee on Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly . . . , or by the hue and cry which seems to be emanating from what is evidently a small percentage of our Conservative women. . . . To say that, as a result of this survey . . . , a mandate has been called for a more liberalized women's role would be to interpret these figures in a manner that could be in violation of the trust of a majority of our membership.⁶¹

There is plainly a large gap between the Women's League convention vote and replies to the *Outlook* questionnaire. Whether it justifies Zelda Dick's conclusion is another question. She failed to record that many synagogues have significantly enlarged the religious rights of women over the past few years. Also, a questionnaire on synagogue practice indicates nothing about a "silent majority." In congregations, men too vote on ritual matters. Besides, the rabbi, as *mara de'atra*, has a veto power over religious innovations, although he cannot alone compel any new, non-traditional practices. Finally, it has been estimated, about 20 per cent of the rabbis in Conservative congregations are Orthodox rabbis, having little sympathy for Rabbinical Assembly legal decisions; and a minority of Conservative rabbis are in accord with them, at least on women's rights. Thus in perhaps 30 to 40 per cent of the congregations, the rabbis are opposed to religious rights for women.

Zelda Dick's striking conclusions and recent *Outlook* articles by Rabbis Morton Leifman and Henry Sosland seem to represent an attempt to slow the extension of rights to women in Conservative Judaism. It may be that Sisterhood leaders are beginning to sense that the full integration of women into the administrative and religious life of the congregations poses a threat to the continued viability of women's organizations.

JEWISH EDUCATION

Intertwined with the question of the religious role of Jewish women is the issue of their religious education. The famous dictum, "He who teaches his daughter Torah, teaches her lechery,"⁶² generally excluded Jewish women from observing the highest commandment—Jewish learning. As Paula Hyman, now assistant professor of history at Columbia University, pointed out, "the *dominant* theme in Talmudic and rabbinic literature is not to educate women to the same level as men. Men and women, after all, were

⁶¹"Light from Our Poll on Women's Role," *ibid.*, Summer 1975, p. 15.

⁶²Soṭah III, 4.

educated for different purposes and different roles. So the *yeshiva* and *bet-midrash* were male monopolies.”⁶³ Rachel Adler added that “there is no continuous tradition of learned women in Jewish history.”⁶⁴ Traditional Jewish education for a girl, according to Susan Dworkin, “succeeded when it helped her ‘enable’ everyone else to reach God.”⁶⁵ Great changes have taken place in this century, however.

Conservative and Reform Judaism teach their boys and girls the same things, although women, as indicated above, are not accepted into the Conservative rabbinical school.⁶⁶ Among the Orthodox, even the liberals usually maintain real differences in education. The principal of a leading modern Orthodox day school in New York City recently told this writer that boys are given extensive training in Torah reading, whereas girls are taught only the “theory” and use the rest of the time for cooking and crafts. It would not be sensible, as he logically argued, to give girls the same training as boys, since the girls could not use it in their Orthodox synagogues.

“Right-wing” Orthodoxy often provides entirely separate schools for boys and girls. Rabbi David B. Hollander, vice-president of the Rabbinical Alliance of America, reported that boys in Orthodox day schools engaged in “deeper academic study,” while girls focused on such subjects as typing, stenography, and kashrut in the home.⁶⁷ Rabbi Nisson Wolpin, writing about the ultra-Orthodox Beth Jacob schools for girls, granted that they had “succeeded in salvaging” the post-World War I generation of Jewish girls, but questioned how realistically these schools educate women. “Schooling educates for education,” and women will have no time for that. Therefore, schools for Jewish girls should stress the intellectual less, and teach them how as women to help other Jews.⁶⁸ His article evoked both disagreement and praise. In a letter to the editor, Eve Roth of Lakewood, N.J., wrote that “once more, perhaps the finger should be pointed at the Torah society for failing its responsibility to its women, rather than at the women for seeking

⁶³Paula Hyman, “The Other Half: Women in the Jewish Tradition,” *Conservative Judaism*, Summer 1972, p. 16.

⁶⁴Rachel Adler, “The Jew Who Wasn’t There: Halacha and the Jewish Woman,” *Response*, Summer 1973, p. 79 (reprinted).

⁶⁵“A Song for Women . . .,” *loc. cit.*, p. 44.

⁶⁶The report by the Women’s League for Conservative Judaism of its “Survey of Women’s Activities in the Synagogue, 1974” (unpublished) indicated that 98.8 per cent of synagogue schools have the same curriculum for girls and boys.

⁶⁷Eleanor Blau, “Rabbis See Women’s Rights Measure as Threatening Orthodox Practices,” *New York Times*, April 4, 1972.

⁶⁸*Loc. cit.*, pp. 15, 16.

that elusive fulfillment wherever it might be found.”⁶⁹ Rabbi Benjamin Field of Phoenix, Ariz., elaborated on Rabbi Wolpin’s suggestions for a practical education: “Aside from giving practical suggestions regarding how to set up and maintain a kosher kitchen (leaving technical halachic questions to the rabbi), there is a need for direction on how and where to shop, what to look for, and so on.”⁷⁰

The view of women in Jewish textbooks casts them in markedly stereotyped and old-fashioned roles. Naturally, if all girls were being educated for a home role only, this would be reasonable. However, since many Jewish women now work outside the home, receive an extensive education, both Jewish and secular, and participate actively in public worship, the gap between children’s literature and reality is quite noticeable.

Melvin and Miriam Alexenberg’s *Alef-Bet Picture Dictionary* (New York, 1963), in which the level of Hebrew does not indicate that it is directed at a day-school readership, is a good example. “Man” is shown standing, dressed in a business suit, hat, and tie, holding an attaché case; “woman” is shown bent over, her dress covered by an apron, sweeping the floor. Rayzel Berman’s easy reader, *Hafta’ah likhvod shabbat* (“A Surprise for Shabbat”)⁷¹ shows Sabbath preparations being made by a woman, with the help of her son and daughter, while the father comes in at the last minute. *World Over*, a popular children’s magazine published by the New York Board of Jewish Education, heavily emphasizes the role of men. One story, “Last Shabbat,”⁷² views the new controversy in an interesting light. Its author, Barbara M. White, discusses a boy’s reaction to his parents’ exchanging roles for candle-lighting and *qiddush* on the Sabbath, i.e., that he is perfectly willing to have changes made in the synagogue, as long as they do not upset the home situation, in which he is comfortable. As the liberal-minded young man puts it: “So I said that I’d agree that it was okay for Mom to do anything if she didn’t actually go and do it.” Finally they agree to recite the appropriate blessings together, and alternate lighting the candles and holding the *qiddush* cup.⁷³

In “Sexism and Jewish Education,”⁷⁴ Susan Rosenblum Shevitz, then

⁶⁹*Jewish Observer*, January 1975, p. 4.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁷¹New York: Board of Jewish Education, 1968 (Hebrew).

⁷²December 6, 1974, p. 11.

⁷³Rabbi Wolpin (*loc. cit.*) used a picture from that story (p. 13) to illustrate his words about the dire effects of women’s liberation. This emphasizes the importance of sociological patterns, even among the ultra-Orthodox, for, according to *halakhah*, it is legal for a woman to make *qiddush* and for a man to light candles.

⁷⁴*Response*, Summer 1973, pp. 107–13.

educational director of New City Jewish Center, New City, N.Y., remarked that there were few role-models with which a young woman interested in developing a religious sensitivity could identify: "The textbooks unanimously choose to depict a rigidly defined family structure . . . and strenuous sex-role differentiation. Women are depicted almost exclusively in domestic scenes and men in spiritual and ritual ones." Girls who might want to be rabbis or cantors, she continued, are never shown a woman in that role:

Women are barred from Conservative rabbinical and cantorial schools. Furthermore those women who choose Jewish education as a profession are encouraged to be teachers, while the overwhelming majority of supervising personnel is male. This seems especially strange when one recalls that education is the only professional Jewish field which is truly open to women.

The girl's *rite de passage* is presented as marriage and motherhood—in stark contrast to the boy's bar mitzvah. Whereas bar mitzvah is ideally a measure of independent religious status, marriage marks the change of the female's status *vis a vis* her primary male relationship.

Deborah Grand Golomb, speaking about the Reform educational system, came to a similar conclusion.⁷⁵ While secular children's literature and textbooks show increasing awareness of these problems, Jewish publishers and writers do not. At the present time, Jewish textbooks and children's literature will not provide the Jewish school girl with a sense of the variety of life options increasingly available to her.

ORGANIZATIONS

Jewish communal and philanthropic work has not been free of sex-typing either. Professor Daniel Elazar recognizes the contributions and importance of Jewish women's organizations, particularly Hadassah. He notes, however, that "with some exceptions, women function in environments segregated from male decision-makers within the Jewish community." The exceptions are "very wealthy women who have a record of activity in their own right," who are occasionally "admitted to the governing councils of major Jewish institutions and organizations. So, too, are the top leaders of the women's groups in an *ex officio* capacity which is sometimes translated into meaningful participation but frequently remains *ex officio*."⁷⁶

⁷⁵Workshop Conference of the Task Force on Equality for Women in Judaism, New York Federation of Reform Synagogues, March 2, 1975.

⁷⁶"Women in American Jewish Life," *Congress Bi-Weekly*, November 23, 1973, p. 10.

Women, volunteer and professional, often do the actual job of running Jewish communal activities, leaving the higher, decision-making posts to men. With the exception of Naomi Levine, executive director of the American Jewish Congress, and Charlotte Jacobson, chairman of the World Zionist Organization—American Section, women do not head major “co-educational” organizations. There was a recent breakthrough, which, however, was reported in the old, prejudiced fashion: “The Conference on Jewish Social Studies is the first of the Jewish scholarly organizations to have a woman president, Jeanette M. Baron, wife of the eminent historian Dr. Salo Baron.”⁷⁷ Women usually are the secretaries, men the presidents.

The *General Assembly Papers*, summarizing the sessions of the National Committee on Women’s Communal Service of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds (CJFWF), are revealing. In a 1970 address, Mrs. Howard Levine, chairman of the committee, alluded to women’s liberation in her address, but in rather perfunctory fashion. The question of “integration” referred to integrating the “Young Matrons” into the Women’s Division. Young Matrons (aged 21 to 35) were “girls,” and the participants were called by their husbands’ names. In 1971, though names remained unchanged, the participants seemed to be much more aware of the importance of involvement in policy-making. Mrs. Leonard Bernheim, the session’s keynote speaker, declared:

Yet, while I am sure that a few women in this room have had top jobs, there are thousands of women around the country who are not invited to play a *major* role in Federations, Welfare Funds and other community organizations. I am not a member of Women’s Lib, but there are many things this movement is saying which we, as Jewish women leaders, must listen to and do something about.

There may be times when we ought to have a sit-in in the Federation president’s office or in the office of the Distribution Committee, or in any other functional office where we can make our views known and our opinions felt.

In 1972 Mrs. Levine, then national president of the Women’s Division of the American Jewish Congress, addressed a plenary session of CJFWF. Her talk, on “The Changing Role of Women in the Jewish Community,” raised many of the issues which had been of growing concern in the Jewish community. She reported on the results of a survey conducted that year of women’s participation in federation boards of directors and committees in 1965 and 1972. The percentages had risen, but the highest, 28.4, was for officers and members of Federation committees in small cities, with the corresponding figure for large cities only 16.2 per cent. Speaking as a “token woman,” Mrs. Levine urged expanding the decision-making role of women

⁷⁷*Jewish Week*, June 21, 1975.

in federations. In answer to the argument that men were more valuable on boards, she pointed out that if that was the only consideration, boards were not representative:

Yes, there must always be members who are large contributors. There must also be board members who are involved, who are activists, who are committed community leaders able to inspire others. Women may be any or all of these.

In closing, she urged that an affirmative-action program be undertaken to include women.

By 1974 the participants in the CJFWF Women's Communal Service sessions had all taken to using their given names, but the UJA and federations were nonetheless under attack from the Jewish Feminist Organization. JFO of Baltimore-Washington stated that its members "will submit their pledges this year, but that they will not be paid until women are equal to men, regardless of their choice of career, and 'the existing situation of separate women's and men's divisions has been changed.'"⁷⁸ In some places challenges were unnecessary. Frances Green and Mrs. Laurence Weinberg (as she prefers to be known) were chosen to head the federations in San Francisco and Los Angeles, respectively.⁷⁹

In 1973 the American Jewish Committee established a National Committee on the Role of Women. In a June 1974 memorandum to the members of that group about women's activities in the agency's various chapters, Ann G. Wolfe, adviser to the new committee, reported on a series of interreligious workshops called "Institute for Women Today," in which the Committee is participating, along with Church Women United and the National Coalition of American Nuns. She also reported that groups of chapter members across the country had conducted surveys of the role of women in Jewish community organizations. The finding of the Washington, D.C., survey, "that women are dramatically underrepresented in proportion to their numbers in leadership positions in Jewish communal organizations," was corroborated in other cities. A salutary effect of this activity, said Mrs. Wolfe, was that those who developed questionnaires in various cities have had their own consciousness raised, and that the mere act of answering these queries has helped respondents understand the problems. The surveys served, too, as starting points for affirmative-action programs.

Other Jewish organizations have begun to find it advisable to alter their basic structure to obviate opposition and encourage growth. B'nai B'rith, which had long maintained sex-segregated groups, has experimented with

⁷⁸*Jewish Post of New York*, August 1, 1975.

⁷⁹*Jewish Advocate*, Boston, May 15, 1975.

"co-ed" units, as a way of reversing a decline in membership among young adults (25-35). Fifty-three such units, enrolling 4,000 members, have included single men and women, young married couples, members of a specific industry or profession, single parents, and persons isolated in small towns. These members manifest an unusually high degree of involvement. B'nai B'rith president David M. Blumberg, stating that "nine out of ten . . . have no interest in joining voluntary groups that are segregated by sex," maintained that this new arrangement offers potential for growth.⁸⁰ Similarly, a newly chartered Machar group of Hadassah in Cleveland is for married couples.⁸¹

Among a number of outstanding American Jewish women's organizations, Hadassah has been the most influential and probably the most potent force in the lives of its members. Its more than 300,000 members are heavily involved in raising money for Israel and in study. Many would agree with the contention of Rose Feinberg, past president of the New England region and a member of the national board, that Hadassah has helped women feel themselves to be "worthwhile, active individuals."⁸² Although she had no objection to Hadassah members serving coffee and cake to male delegates at the first Brussels World Conference on Soviet Jewry (February 1971), she felt that Hadassah members had long been liberated. Among Hadassah's achievements are its lowest per capita operating cost among Jewish organizations and its members' high individual contributions to Israel, second only to UJA.

If the women's movement, with its rejection of sex-segregation and volunteerism, begins seriously to challenge "women only" organizations, the American Jewish community will have a major task in providing for their creative reconstruction. Coed chapters may be the way.

ROLE IN SOCIETY

All Jews, except those living in almost self-contained, isolated communities like the hasidic village of New Square near Spring Valley, N. Y., realize that women are aware of the women's liberation movement. Although the synagogue or Jewish school may be shielded from its impact, the family and other societal structures are generally affected. Jewish women are increas-

⁸⁰Irving Spiegel, "B'nai B'rith Gains with 'Coed Units,'" *New York Times*, August 3, 1975.

⁸¹Bernard Postal, "Postal Card," *Jewish Week-American Examiner*, May 24, 1975, p. 17.

⁸²Elaine S. Cohen, "Hadassah Ladies and Liberation," *genesis* 2, March 25, 1971, p. 4.

ingly choosing roles other than that of wife, mother, and home-maker. Recent figures for Greater New York indicated that only "four to five out of every ten Jewish women (16 years of age and older) are housewives."⁸³ Conversely, just over half of those women are either employed or students. A young woman today is likely to view her work as more important than did her mother or grandmother who may also have worked outside the home. Bracha Sacks, who is Orthodox, speaks of wanting "a fulfilling career,"⁸⁴ a concept which was probably foreign to her grandmothers, whether or not they were gainfully employed. If one can derive fulfillment from both career and family, one must value both.

Dr. Trude Weiss-Rosmarin has long claimed that a significant part of the problem of Jewish women derives "from the fact that the importance and dignity of the home-maker and mother are not sufficiently stressed in our civilization . . ."⁸⁵ While proclaiming that sex-roles as defined by Judaism make sense, Dr. Weiss-Rosmarin would like women to be given an equal opportunity in the rabbinate, education, and communal and professional work, if they desire it.⁸⁶ Although the importance of home-making and mothering is not to be underestimated, one doubts that any profound shift in public attitudes will take place in the near future.

One is constantly besieged by alarms which purport to signal the breakdown of the Jewish family, and the subsequent breakdown of the Jewish community as a whole. This is not a new situation. According to Professor Gerson Cohen, "even before [Jewish] emancipation, when the stability of the Jewish family could be more effectively enforced by social controls, families seemed to totter from time to time."⁸⁷ The idyllic picture of the Jewish family of the past is a myth which, as Paula Hyman indicated, will not convince women to leave their jobs, but "may provide a group of angry and guilty Jewish working mothers who feel that their community is not supportive of them."⁸⁸ Rabbi Wolpin, on the other hand, felt that the home should occupy all of a woman's time:

⁸³Fred Massarik, "Basic Characteristics of the Greater New York Jewish Population," *AMERICAN JEWISH YEAR BOOK*, Vol. 76 (1976), p. 248.

⁸⁴*Loc. cit.*, p. 108.

⁸⁵"Jewish Woman in a Man's World," *Jewish Spectator*, May 1950, p. 9.

⁸⁶"Women's Liberation," *Jewish Spectator*, March 1973, pp. 4-7, 31.

⁸⁷"Dr. [Gerson D.] Cohen Talks of the Jewish Family," *The Jewish Theological Seminary of America Bulletin*, November 1975, p. 1a.

⁸⁸Paula Hyman, "The Jewish Family: Looking for a Usable Past" (unpublished paper for Conference on Changing Life Styles in America, sponsored by American Jewish Congress); see also Charlotte Baum, "What Made Yetta Work?," *Response*, Summer 1973, pp. 32-38, and I. Epstein, "The Jewish Woman in the Responsa," *ibid.*, p. 24 and *passim*.

When a woman does focus her interests, activities and designs for fulfillment outside her home, this can become a factor in the destruction of the family as a viable unit in society. Statistics need not be cited.⁸⁹

But all Jewish women will not be restricted to their homes; therefore, it is reasonable to expect the Jewish community to move toward meeting the new needs of women. In the New York area some YM-YWHAs are beginning to offer expanded programs for the pre-school children of working parents, which may be extended to infants and school-age children. It would be appropriate for the National Council of Jewish Women, which has done much in the field of day care for disadvantaged minorities, to initiate some Jewish programs as well.⁹⁰

There are also increasing numbers of Jewish women who are not married—never married or formerly married, single-parent or childless, young or old. Their situation results from extended schooling, challenging careers, a growing divorce rate, and prolonged widowhood. Their far less numerous predecessors of earlier generations had usually found a niche under the protecting shelter of the extended family. Today, as Rosa Felsenberg Kaplan pointed out, family seating and family-centered activities make single persons feel out of place. She suggested as “a possible option the development of co-educational or non-gender-specific and non-marital-status-specific educational and community action groups which meet at times convenient for most working people.”⁹¹ The need for such programs is underscored by the near-universality of Dr. Naomi Bluestone’s personal experience that “there is virtually no place in my Judaism for an unmarried woman over twenty-five.”⁹²

Though they accept many feminist strictures with regard to the need to restructure communities, Jewish feminists can differ from the others on problems of direct Jewish concern—e.g., zero population growth for Jews:

No one inherits the Holocaust as pointedly as the Jewish wife who is still getting pregnant long after it is safe, in a mighty effort to right the Jewish population deficit. The Jewish feminist is the only feminist who is told by mentors who are feminists too, that the abortion option is not for her.⁹³

Married Jewish women also have their own special problems of adjustment, especially after their children no longer need baby-sitters. Pauline Bart, who has carefully examined the problems of middle-aged depression

⁸⁹*Loc. cit.*, p. 13.

⁹⁰*Impact*, National Council of Jewish Women, Biennial Report, 1973–1975.

⁹¹“The Noah Syndrome,” *Davka*, Winter 1975, p. 32.

⁹²Naomi Bluestone, “Exodus from Eden: One Woman’s Experience,” *Judaism*, Winter 1974, p. 96.

⁹³Susan Dworkin, “A Song for Women,” *loc. cit.*, p. 53.

in Jewish women, found that it is because of the demands made on the Jewish mother that she is more likely to be depressed once the "mothering" role becomes attenuated:

The literature on the Jewish mother is practically unanimous in painting her as "supermother" especially vulnerable to being severely affected if her children fail to meet her needs, either by not making what she considers "good" marriages, not achieving the career aspirations she has for them or even by not phoning her every day.⁹⁴

Many of these women have been so conditioned to define themselves in terms of their husbands and children that they cannot see any value in their own independent existence.

Divisions among Jews regarding feminism have spilled over into the political world. In the fall of 1975 many Orthodox spokesmen argued against the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the state constitutions of New York and New Jersey, contending that the amendment would destroy the fabric of family life. One outstanding Orthodox rabbi, Rabbi Emanuel Rackman, implied that it was related to a Marxist view of the family; that despite First Amendment guarantees, its adoption might force religious schools to compromise their principles regarding separation of sexes for the sake of government grants, and that "the amendment might be used against rabbinical courts," which "exist by virtue of corporate charters given by government and enjoy tax exemption." To try to bring about the equalization of Jewish women in divorce by resort to the amendment, however, would be counterproductive in that it would only make the rabbinical courts more intransigent. Mrs. O. Asher Reichel, a well-known Orthodox *rebbitzin*, claimed that "all laws which segregate the sexes in places such as private schools, prisons, dormitories and rest-rooms will be stricken from the books," and intimated that it would be difficult to obtain single-sex accommodations in hospitals.⁹⁵ While many Jewish organizations relied on the First Amendment to protect Jewish religious law and supported the amendment, there also was significant non-Orthodox opposition to it.

Many people perceived the women's movement and its Jewish feminist subdivision as threatening, overly strident, and destructive. While many men and women have come to accept the movement's assumptions, a significant proportion of Jews have reservations about one or another part of its program, and a small minority remains in total opposition.

It seems clear, however, that the feminist movement is not likely to

⁹⁴"Portnoy's Mother's Complaint," *Response*, Summer 1973, p. 133.

⁹⁵*West Side Institutional Review* (publication of West Side Synagogue), October 1975.

disappear. Since the founding of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1965, the movement has grown in both organized and unorganized support. It has changed the perceptions of many women and men. In Jewish life, courses on the Jewish woman have been given in universities, free universities, Hillel Foundations, and adult-education programs. The best-selling *Jewish Catalog* contains a chapter on Jewish women. There are now Jewish women who are rabbis and Jewish women who are terrorists.⁹⁶ One might hope there would be more of the former than of the latter, though movements are not easily controlled. The image of Queen Esther is becoming less persuasive. Professor Leo Pfeffer sees in "the feminist revolution not an enemy of the Jewish people [but] a challenge that can be met and lived with."⁹⁷ Judaism has always survived by evolution, never painless. The "new" Jewish feminism must be confronted and accommodated to ensure the survival of American Jewry.

⁹⁶Elenore Lester, "What Drives a 'Nice Jewish Girl' into Life of Guerilla Violence?" *Jewish Week*, July 26, 1975.

⁹⁷"Feminism and Judaism," *Congress Monthly*, June 1975, p. 14.