

# THE JOFA Journal

www.jofa.org

FROM OUR PRESIDENT

## Transitions and New Promise

By Pam Scheininger

Transitions are both a blessing and a challenge. They present new opportunities and fresh chances. They are exciting and energizing and offer the opportunity for great accomplishments and meaningful change. They also challenge us to celebrate what has come before—to honor the past, to build upon our achievements, to recognize all the good and all the growth and to continue in that vein. At JOFA, the past year has been a time of transition, as Bat Sheva Marcus's term as president came to an end and Sharon Weiss-Greenberg left her position as executive director. It is thanks to JOFA's strong past leadership that we remain poised to make true and lasting change in Orthodox women's leadership, learning, ritual engagement, and access. And it is with tremendous gratitude that I thank Allie Alperovich, who has led this organization with me in this time of change. Allie's thoughtful, steady, and passionate leadership has ensured that JOFA continues to advance in ways big and small and I thank her for all the ways in which



*continued on page 5*

## Message from the Executive Director

By Daphne Lazar Price

Dear friends,

I am excited to take on the role of executive director of JOFA and to work with a dedicated board of directors, an incredible professional team, and passionate lay leaders to advance the work of this vital organization.

One of the great blessings of my life is that I have always been surrounded by strong and smart women who have served as my role models and inspiration. Growing up in Toronto, I was raised—both at home and at school—to believe that I could be anything. Rarely did I consider my gender a barrier. Indeed, almost the entirety of my formal and experiential education was in the gender-segregated settings of Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox environments. I prayed out loud. I studied Torah daily. I had a hand in planning, organizing, and executing a number of private and public programs. And then I left my protective bubble and moved to New York, where I carved out a new space for myself in co-ed settings. I explored and worked hard to find a group of friends, synagogue, and community.



*continued on page 5*

## Adventures of an Orthodox Feminist in Academia

By Melissa R. Klapper

“Is it even possible to be an Orthodox woman historian?” The first time I was asked this, I laughed. It had never even occurred to me—then—that it was a serious question. I was a graduate of a Bais Yaakov high school and an elite liberal arts college, enrolled in the top women's history Ph.D. program in the United States, and very little in my life experience thus far had led me to believe that there was any conflict in this educational biography. Sure, a few of my more yeshivish friends' parents had raised an eyebrow upon hearing about my plans, and one even gently encouraged me to consider whether becoming a women's history professor might scare off potential *shiddukhim*. Didn't I worry that

I would be perceived as a radical (subtext: man-hating) feminist? But even though I rolled my eyes after this conversation, I knew she had what she considered to be my best interests at heart, and she certainly didn't think I couldn't pursue whatever career I chose. My highly educated parents, who had moved more than halfway across the country to secure their daughters an Orthodox Jewish secondary education, supported my professional aspirations with no concerns that I would be pulled out of my religious orbit.

Once I started graduate school, however, I more frequently confronted questions about a perceived conflict

*continued on page 3*

## IN THIS ISSUE:

From Our President: Transitions and New Promise by Pam Scheininger . . . . .	1
Message from the Executive Director by Daphne Lazar Price . . . . .	1
Adventures of an Orthodox Feminist in Academia by Melissa R. Klapper . . . . .	1
A Tribute to Marcel Lindenbaum, z"l by Blu Greenberg . . . . .	6
Medieval Jewish Businesswomen and Their Christian Clients: A Model for Religious Coexistence Today? by Pelia Werth . . . . .	7
The Kosher Meat Strike that Launched New York City's Labor Movement by Dina Gielchinsky . . . . .	10
Gender and Communication in the Workplace by Karen Hundert Novick . . . . .	11
The Values and Strengths that Orthodox Jewish Women Bring to the Workplace by Carolyn Hochstadter Dicker . . . . .	13
Architecture as a Profession for a Nice Jewish Girl by Atara Margolies . . . . .	14
Harediyot in Israel: Ultra-Orthodox Women in the Workplace by Sophie Bigot-Goldblum . . . . .	20
Hair Covering: An Issue in the Workplace and Within Oneself by Yafit Fishbach-Rosen . . . . .	22
Bigger Isn't Always Better by Sarah Birnbach . . . . .	23
#MeToo and Sexual Harrassment: A Familiar Mishnah through a New Lens by Meesh Hammer-Kossoy . . . . .	25
Book Corner by Roselyn Bell . . . . .	28
Movie Review by Barbara Trainin Blank . . . . .	30

## JOFA NEWS

JOFAton . . . . .	16
Woman Seder . . . . .	16
Webinars . . . . .	16
JOFA Journal Reading Groups . . . . .	16
Second International Women's Talmud Day . . . . .	17
Hilkhhot Nashim: Halakhic Source Guides, Volume I . . . . .	17
Inclusion of Singles in Our Faith Communities . . . . .	18
Professional Development Day . . . . .	18
Discussion on Women's March and Anti-Semitism . . . . .	18
JOFA 5K Run/Walk . . . . .	18
JOFA and Yeshivat Maharat Summer Tour . . . . .	19
Part of the Miracle: Women and Megillah . . . . .	19

# THE JOFA Journal

A Publication of the  
Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance  
Volume XVI, Issue 1  
Spring 2019 – Nisan 5779

### EDITOR:

Roselyn Bell

### PRESIDENT:

Pam Scheininger

### PAST PRESIDENTS:

Judy Hecklen  
Bat Sheva Marcus  
Carol Kaufman Newman

### FOUNDING PRESIDENT:

Blu Greenberg

### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:

Daphne Lazar Price

### EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Allie Alperovich  
Kayla Arons  
Carolyn Hochstadter Dicker  
Rachel Kohl Finegold  
Adrienne Goldfeder  
Karen Miller Jackson  
Pam Scheininger  
Zelda R. Stern

### PUBLICATIONS MANAGER:

Deborah Wenger

### GRAPHIC DESIGNER:

Graphic Concepts

The JOFA Journal is published by the  
Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, a 501(c)(3) organization.  
All correspondence should be mailed to:  
JOFA, 205 E 42nd Street, 20th floor, New York, NY 10017.  
We can be reached by phone at (212) 679-8500  
or email [jofa@jofa.org](mailto:jofa@jofa.org)

## Adventures of an Orthodox Feminist in Academia

continued from page 1

between my religious identity and my feminist identity. As far as I could tell, neither my graduate professors nor my doctoral classmates had ever encountered a religious Jew at close range before, and I disrupted their assumptions—if they even had any—about what observant Jews were like. My teachers cheerfully accommodated my *yom tov*-related absences and communication gaps, but it was clear that the very idea of religious observance was exotic at best. This was particularly true of my women's history mentors at my home institution and elsewhere, all of whom were wonderfully supportive, but seemed confounded by the idea that a clearly feminist scholar-in-training could be so bound by what they saw as antiquated, patriarchal religious traditions.

**My women's history mentors at my home institution and elsewhere ... were wonderfully supportive, but seemed confounded by the idea that a clearly feminist scholar-in-training could be so bound by what they saw as antiquated, patriarchal religious traditions.**

I was chary of sharing my own developing ideas about Orthodox Jewish feminism with people who, no matter how well-meaning and genuinely interested, did not have the context for the complex issues that arise when considering these questions. The only person with whom I discussed such matters was another doctoral student, a devout Catholic woman who evoked similar reactions among our professors. We generally shrugged our shoulders and took advantage of the social and religious networks that meant we could always find home hospitality wherever we needed to go for our research, much to the amazement and envy of our peers.

### The Question

At my very first academic conference, where I shared a hotel room with a junior faculty member from another institution who had graciously offered to help out any impecunious graduate students who needed housing, there was the question: "Is it even possible to be an Orthodox woman historian?" The only reason my religious identity came up at all was that I had to bring most of my own food, as no kosher food was available at the conference site. Otherwise, how would my generous roommate even have known? Once she did, however, she could not contain herself, although when I laughed in response, she flushed and laughed, too, and then apologized for asking such a personal question of someone she had just met.

In my naiveté, I assumed that only someone ignorant

about Judaism and Jews would even think to ask such a question. As it has turned out, however, that has not been the case. In fact, I have most often been asked about being an Orthodox feminist historian—and most aggressively interrogated about it—by other Jewish people, especially Jewish academics, and especially Jewish women scholars. This is true, even though in my work as a historian of American Jewish women I do not write primarily about traditionally observant women. The questions are therefore not about my historical subjects but about me, the subject myself, as an Orthodox Jewish feminist academic.

"Oh," I have been asked more than once at both women's history and Jewish studies conferences, "when did you stop being Orthodox?" I do think that the noticeably greater presence of observant scholars has softened this reaction in Jewish studies circles in recent years. Men wearing yarmulkes, and, more to the point, married women wearing hats and scarves and *sheitels* are much more visible than they used to be at the Association for Jewish Studies annual conference.

Still, I am continually surprised that there remain widespread assumptions that Orthodox people are socially cloistered and intellectually rigid. From within any standpoint of the Orthodox community, the vast array of nuances and divides in observance and philosophical approaches to the world are very obvious. But from the outside, even among people who pride themselves on their broadmindedness, liberalism, and tolerance, even among people who proudly self-identify as Jewish, the very idea that traditional observance and fealty to religious practice can live in concert with modernity is somehow irreconcilable. Even though I cannot claim never to feel any conflict myself—and thus the importance of an organization like JOFA—to me it should hardly be startling that people engaged in intellectual pursuits can just as easily be engaged in religious inquiry and feminist analysis, and vice versa.

**I have been asked more than once at both women's history and Jewish studies conferences, "When did you stop being Orthodox?"**

### Conflicts and Support

Not everyone would agree, apparently, which has led to some adventures in academia. During the two decades of my career, I have participated in numerous panels at all kinds of academic conferences. I have hardly ever had a problem requesting that my session not be scheduled

continued on page 4

## **Adventures of an Orthodox Feminist in Academia**

*continued from page 3*

on Shabbat. The only exceptions were both women's studies/women's history conferences, when the (nearly all Jewish) conference organizers refused to accommodate a request on religious grounds. When this happened to me in graduate school, my very famous doctoral advisor (also Jewish) intervened, and the change was made at her personal insistence. When this happened to me a few years ago, long after I had made a name for myself and been promoted to full professor, the only thing that changed the conference organizers' minds was being informed by all the other panelists that none of them would participate in the conference if the session were not moved to another time slot.

**From the outside, even among people who pride themselves on their broadmindedness, liberalism, and tolerance, even among people who proudly self-identify as Jewish, the very idea that traditional observance and fealty to religious practice can live in concert with modernity is somehow irreconcilable.**

I greatly appreciated my colleagues' support—but rued the need for it. Presumably, anyone who asked for a schedule accommodation based on a family need or conflicting professional engagement would receive it, so why should a religious accommodation be any different? And I couldn't help but wonder: If a scholar from a different faith had asked for a religious accommodation, would she have been met with such resistance? This might be paranoia, but given the tensions around Zionism and feminism, I do harbor suspicions about negative reactions to traditional Jewish practice, in particular.

Even within Jewish women's studies I have encountered some issues. While spending a sabbatical semester at a prestigious university more than ten years ago, I shared an apartment provided by the fellowship program with another one of the fellows, an Israeli woman old enough to be my mother. I was familiar with her work and admired her. However, before she ever got to know me, something about me as an Orthodox Jewish woman and feminist scholar simply struck her as impossible. The very first thing she said to me once she took in my skirts and my *siddur* was a Hebrew variation of "It is impossible to be an Orthodox Jewish feminist," phrased as a declarative sentence rather than as a question. She was so flummoxed by my observant self that she swiftly became downright hostile. As an avowedly secular Israeli, she was clearly contemptuous of any gestures toward traditional Jewish

life, let alone actual observance. The shared apartment was supposed to be kosher and dairy. At first I made my own assumptions that she was having trouble with this requirement because she had no idea how to keep kosher. I offered to go grocery shopping together and review some of the basic requirements for keeping kosher in this kind of setting. Not only did she reject these overtures, but I often came back to the apartment to find bacon sizzling in the frying pan. The few times I spent Shabbat in the apartment, I would come in to find the bathroom light turned off despite my polite requests and the masking tape I took to leaving over the switch. Perhaps wrongly, I never complained to the fellowship program about this situation, but in the years since then I have come to regret just replacing the pots and silverware before I left for the sake of the next fellows coming to stay in the apartment. Certainly the sponsors of the fellowship would have been upset to hear about the situation, and I imagine they would have intervened, but as a more junior scholar at the time, I was reluctant to tell tales.

These cases were by far the most extreme. I have comfortably shared residential fellowship quarters since then, and most conference organizers have gone out of their way to accommodate my schedule needs and, when relevant, requests for kosher food. I find that younger academics, perhaps more imbued with the sensibilities of fluid identity politics, are less likely to be confounded by the very existence of an Orthodox feminist historian, and I am not the only one who fits that description. Yet I am still asked about that identity on occasion by people who seem particularly confounded that a scholar of women's history—and of Jewish girls' education and Jewish women's activism, no less—can sustain a religious life given the gender issues within traditional forms of religion, including, undeniably, our own. The answer to the question "Is it even possible to be an Orthodox woman historian?" is an unqualified yes. But the question does reflect the broader complications faced by anyone seeking a balance between tradition and modernity, complications with both practical and ideological ramifications in the workplace.

---

*Melissa R. Klapper is a professor of history and director of women's and gender studies at Rowan University in Glassboro, NJ. Her most recent book, *Ballots, Babies, and Banners of Peace: American Jewish Women's Activism, 1890–1940* (NYU Press), won the 2013 National Jewish Book Award in Women's Studies.*

**This is a great space  
to advertise!**

Let our readers know about your business  
or organization.

For more information, visit  
[www.jofa.org/journal-ads](http://www.jofa.org/journal-ads)

## From Our President

*continued from page 1*

she has contributed during this transition.

The future brings tremendous promise for JOFA. We recently hired our new executive director, Daphne Lazar Price. Daphne comes to this position with twenty years of experience in the Jewish nonprofit world. She has an extensive background in strategic planning, programming, development, and working with boards and professionals alike. She is a thoughtful and committed Orthodox feminist who has blogged for JOFA in the past and participated in myriad JOFA programs. Daphne will be working primarily out of Washington, D.C., which will widen our reach as a national organization. We look forward to many productive, creative, and exciting years of moving JOFA forward with Daphne.

**The transition to the future  
brings the opportunity for  
self-reflection and dynamic change.  
I am excited to think about what  
JOFA is and what it  
can and should be doing**

The future also brings the opportunity for self-reflection and dynamic change. I am excited to think about what JOFA is and what it can and should be doing. I am eager to hear from you, our members, and to work with our thoughtful, talented, and passionate board of directors to think about and hone our vision and our mission, to identify and explore what we do well and what we can do better. I also look forward to partnering in a meaningful and productive way with other organizations and groups that share our goals and ideology.

When I joined the JOFA board nineteen years ago, I could not have anticipated what Orthodox feminism would look like today. I could not have contemplated the opportunities that now exist, nor could I have fully appreciated the opposition and the strength of those forces working against organizations and movements such as ours. I am a consensus builder and seek to partner with others, yet I recognize that there are also times when we have to take a stand of courage and conscience. Sometimes we will be able to find others to stand with us, but sometimes we will stand alone.

It is with deep pride that I contemplate how much JOFA has advanced women's learning, leadership, and access to ritual—and yet our work is far from done. I look forward to working with Daphne, the board of directors, and with each of you to ensure that we continue to go *me'hayil el hayil*, from strength to strength, in the coming weeks, months, and years.

## Message from the Executive Director

*continued from page 1*

It was during those years that a friend and I decided to spend Presidents' Day weekend at the first-ever Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance conference. It wasn't a term I would have used then, but looking back, it was one of the most disruptive events I have ever attended. From the plenary programs to the workshops to the buzzing in the hallways, I was surrounded by women who affiliated as Orthodox and were yearning to be with and learn from others like themselves. From exploring solutions to the *agumah* crisis, to discussing the growing roles of women in communal leadership positions, *tefillah* groups, and Torah study, the conference opened my mind to what really was possible. JOFA created the space that I was looking for, and I'm ever grateful to its founders and leadership who dreamed the organization into reality.

Not long after those heady days, I moved and planted roots in Silver Spring, Maryland. I got married and had two daughters. In the years since then I have dedicated much of my personal and professional life to Jewish communities, both Orthodox and beyond. I have worked extensively with clergy and professionals in public advocacy. I have taught Judaic studies in multiple settings. I have volunteered my time to serve on Jewish communal boards. My professional decisions have been driven by my commitment to halakhic values and my identity as an Orthodox feminist. Fast-forward more than twenty years, and I'm so happy to be returning "home."

JOFA is relevant. As women break through glass ceilings in their professional lives, there is still a hunger to expand the spiritual, ritual, intellectual, leadership, and political opportunities for women within the framework of *halakhab*. More specifically, JOFA has an important role to play in public conversations about #MeToo, the erasure of women's images from public

spaces, and ensuring that women are included as decision makers on Jewish institutional boards and committees. Operating within a halakhic framework, JOFA is open to men and women from all walks of life and of all ages—single, married, divorced, widowed, women of color, Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews, Jews who were born into Orthodox families and those who came to embrace tradition later in life. We will see our greatest successes when we widen the tent to create spaces for Orthodox women to have meaningful roles in Jewish life.

I invite you to take a moment to share with me how JOFA has made a difference in your life and how you hope the organization continues to improve and expand the role of women in Jewish life. If you wish to discuss the issues you feel are most relevant and how to bring JOFA to your community, please reach out to me at [Daphne@JOFA.org](mailto:Daphne@JOFA.org).

**We will see  
our greatest  
successes when we  
widen the tent  
to create spaces  
for Orthodox  
women to have  
meaningful roles  
in Jewish life.**

# A Tribute to Marcel Lindenbaum, z"l

By Blu Greenberg

**Y**etzi'at tzaddik min hamakom oseh roshem (the departure of a holy, righteous person leaves a real impact)—Rashi, Gen. 28:10.

Few people would have described Marcel Lindenbaum in his lifetime as a *tzaddik*. Marcel exuded *joie de vivre*, loved the finer things in life, possessed an adventurous spirit. He was a captain of his sailboat, horseback rider, opera lover, sharp dresser with bow tie and signature pocket handkerchief. He allowed himself one cigar a day until cancer warnings and his children's pressure made him stop. Bridge with Belda, Carol, and Mel was an occasional pastime.

Marcel had a mischievous twinkle in his sparkling blue eyes. He could be funnily irreverent, was not always PC, took delight in teasing and being teased back by his beloved grandchildren. His wry humor surfaced everywhere. When Abigail was away at college, he would send her the monthly credit card bill to approve with a note scribbled in the corner, "Loved you more before ... ML."

Yet the more I reflect on his life, the more apt is the description *tzaddik*. Marcel changed worlds with his beloved Belda. They were a team as Orthodox Judaism moved into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; they worked symbiotically all of their adult lives to move the community to a new place—a more vibrant, ethical, committed, learned, nurturing place.

Along with his *joie de vivre*, Marcel was a deep and serious person, a profound thinker who understood matters at their very essence, often before others did. Among his "standard *tzaddik* qualities" was honesty to the core. He was straight as an arrow in dealing with people and organizations.

Family was central to his life, as was Jewish tradition and celebration. Having his married children live close by was all-important to him—and worth some engineering. When daughter Victoria became engaged to a young man established in Los Angeles, Marcel traveled the next day to convince him of the importance of raising a family in a strong Jewish community pulsing with Jewish life. "So why wait? Find a new job, move now, and how can I help?"

Marcel appreciated Jewish learning and listened to lectures and *shiurim* with keen interest. Honoring rabbis was his go-to position. Even when he disagreed or felt that the leadership diminished Modern Orthodox ethical values, even when he gave *mussar*, he showed respect and often love. He went further, putting financial support behind his recommendations.

His generosity was legion. Marcel supported Belda in all that she did, and she reciprocated, doubling the objects of their largesse. They did not wait to be asked,

but sought out charitable enterprises they believed in, initiating support with no expectation of *kavod* in return.

Belda and Marcel took the same approach to helping individuals launch careers, receive education, or just find their way in a big world. They loved young people and gathered them around their gracious Shabbat table. Many a stray Jew in Manhattan and elsewhere turned into a communal servant under the arc of Belda and Marcel.

A leader who treated his followers as peers, Marcel called the shots as he saw them, but also understood the need for leaders to compromise, build allies, and nurture the future. And yet, just as a *tzaddik's* vision of the world cannot be sidetracked, so Marcel, when convinced of the right path, might back off a bit in the face of opposition but never abandon principles or tire of trying. He would regroup and press forward again.

All of his life, Marcel carried with him the sensibility of "there but for the grace of God ..." America was the prewar lifeline thrown to his family, and later, the *goldene medina* for an enterprising young man. Each year at Thanksgiving dinner, he presented what his family lovingly called his "refugee speech." He never forgot his gratitude, even as he grew in allegiance and dedication to his beloved Israel—building homes, institutions, and communities there, as in New York. He taught his children and grandchildren well the values of a genuine dual loyalty.

## Marcel Lindenbaum and JOFA

But why should remembrance of Marcel Lindenbaum be featured in the *JOFA Journal*? He was neither board member, nor sole benefactor on whom the organization depended, nor the only supportive husband or lone critic of the status quo.

He deserves a place in our public record, though, for he brought his exceptional human qualities to the work of JOFA. He also pioneered in the role of male feminist. In our early years, many of JOFA's supportive men stood at the sidelines, in important but quiet support. Marcel was not afraid to publicly claim the title "feminist"—a term so many others, men and women alike, eschewed. He never missed a public event or conference.

Once he became convinced of the propriety of gender equality, he wore his mission on his sleeve, constantly. He measured everything against a standard of equal rights for women in Orthodoxy—women's education, prayer, ritual, leadership, divorce law, and more.

He applied his wide range of talents to the work of JOFA—critical thinking, engaging the opposition, initiating ideas, cheering us on, and using power. "My father always used his power," said Nathan, "encouraged



Belda and Marcel Lindenbaum, z"l

# Medieval Anglo-Jewish Businesswomen and Their Christian Clients: A Model for Religious Coexistence Today?

By Pelia Werth

Despite a steady growth in scholarly interest in the subject over the past two decades, many details of the lives of Jewish women in medieval England remain elusive. Their ways of worship, their *minhagim* (customs), and their interpersonal relationships are subjects of conjecture. However, one aspect of their lives in particular sheds vital light on both their personal lives and their interactions with their Christian neighbors: the role of Jewish women as professionals and businesswomen.

Like the Anglo-Jewish community as a whole, Jewish

women had to navigate a political and legal system under which they were fundamentally unequal to their Christian peers. Their personal autonomy was limited by being a group “belonging” to the crown. However, active involvement in business transactions offered Jewish women not only a degree of personal freedom, but also opportunities to form working relationships with Christians, including Christian women. These interactions, often recorded in only a few lines, paint a

*continued on page 8*

## Marcel Lindenbaum

*continued from previous page*

my mother to use hers, and insisted that ‘women’s issues’ such as *agunah* would not be taken seriously until women generally used their powers.”

Perhaps most of all, in the words of his children, without Marcel Lindenbaum there would have been no Belda Lindenbaum extraordinaire. He pushed her to act on her dissatisfactions, to demand change, and in his support, she found strength.

Some examples: Marcel was as generous with praise as with critical insights. Many a time I would call to speak to Belda, and Marcel would answer the phone. “I hear you [JOFA] are thinking of ...” And then he would weigh in with pragmatics, approval, or a critique, reflecting on what may have been pillow talk the night before. I never knew whether he or Belda was the spark for a certain project because they walked in tandem.

We frequently used the Lindenbaum home for unofficial business, including conversations with foreign guests or others open to women’s issues. Instead of fleeing to a quiet spot in his home, Marcel relished participating in the conversations.

He held to his vision and had low tolerance for what he saw as backsliding. After a JOFA conference session, Marcel chastised me privately for reexamining an earlier view. “You should not have done that. You should not have walked back your original statement.” I was stunned—this from Marcel, my friend, my advocate. I hastily justified my remarks as being open-minded, respectful of those who opposed my views or felt I had gone too far. Marcel shot back: “How do you ever expect to achieve a change in others if you cave in to their ‘sensitivities?’ This [women’s equality within *halakhah*] is serious business. There’s no time to waste on niceties.” It was a sobering critique; when I rewrote the paper several years later, his words carried great weight.

Marcel and Belda were always looking out for JOFA—indeed, our first office, a posh address at Madison Avenue and 60th Street in Manhattan, was a generous gift from their sons Matthew and Bennett. They gave us a spacious

room, secretarial cubicle, and shared equipment, space worth more than our total annual budget. Until then, two years since JOFA’s founding, our execs had worked out of a small cubicle graciously provided by Drisha, itself cramped for space. Having a real office was a turning point for JOFA; it gave our fledgling organization a new sense of pride and dignity. The lavish gift came directly from the sons, but the whisper of the father, who also worked out of his sons’ offices, surely helped.

## Why a Tzaddik?

Still, why the term *tzaddik*? The answer is that Marcel understood all of his actions as a matter of justice, righting wrongs, and improving the world.

That also explains why he was so hands-on in his *tzedakah*, offering advice and criticism along with funding. When the International Beit Din was created several years ago, a Lindenbaum seat on the board was reserved in recognition of Marcel and Belda’s continuing efforts to end *igun*, a scourge that blights our community. Marcel believed that an initiative to resolve *igun* could also unite the entire community and enable it to move forward, unlike issues of women’s prayer or rabbinic leadership, which were red lines for Orthodoxy. We asked Marcel which of his children he wished to designate to fill that seat. All were active in Jewish community initiatives. Marcel, then 84, immediately responded, “I would like to fill the seat myself.”

Marcel saw every issue not as a small picture for equal rights but as a fundamental issue of justice and ethics. We have learned from the way he lived his life that *tzaddikim* in our times come in different forms and shapes. The true definition of a *tzaddik* is one who offers to other human beings a powerful and accessible model of righteousness, who leads us in perfecting the world with justice, and who teaches us that there are multiple ways in the course of a very human life to do God’s work on Earth. That, too, was Marcel’s “real impact.”

---

*Blu Greenberg is JOFA’s founder and first president and remains an active member of its Board. She has authored several books and numerous articles.*

## A Model for Religious Coexistence Today?

continued from page 7

picture of how Jewish women navigated their multiple identities—as businesspeople, as Jews, and as women—to survive and even thrive in a Christian-dominated society.

### Limited Work Opportunities

When it came to work, opportunities for English Jews in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were limited. Jews throughout medieval Western Europe had a narrow range of jobs available to them, due both to the physical conditions under which they lived (concentrated in cities, Jews generally owned less land than their Christian counterparts), and to the discrimination they suffered in being excluded from professional guilds.<sup>1</sup>

In England, the Jews' special legal status as “property of the king” afforded them a degree of protection, but also allowed for greater royal control over the community and business affairs. Such control was exercised through various royal orders governing the towns and cities in which Jews could live, including statutes that attempted to force Jews to live in towns with *archae*, or chests, containing Jews' financial records.<sup>2</sup> Further, moneylending with interest, a profession commonly held by Jews, attracted further suspicion of and hostility toward the community, with Edward I ultimately claiming usury as a justification for the expulsion of the entire Jewish population of England in 1290.<sup>3</sup> Thus, even professions that were open to Jews could emphasize their otherness and provide more ammunition for those seeking to harm the community.

However, moneylending could also lead to prosperity for both men and women, as they fulfilled the demand for a service traditionally forbidden to Christians. Indeed, Jewish women's involvement in business activities often allowed them to become successful in their own right.

**Jewish women had to navigate a political and legal system under which they were fundamentally unequal to their Christian peers.**

One individual who particularly stands out in this respect is Licoricia of Winchester. Twice married—the second time to the wealthy David of Oxford—and

twice widowed, Licoricia used her business acumen to increase both her wealth and her influence. She was well-connected at court, so much so that other members of Winchester's Jewish community at times looked to her to intercede with the king on their behalf.<sup>4</sup>

She further proved her independence and determination by undertaking long journeys as part of her professional activities—a risky endeavor during which she would likely have had to be escorted for her own protection and to rely on other Jews for food and shelter along the way.<sup>5</sup> Despite her success and connections, or perhaps in part because of them, Licoricia was not without enemies. She endured imprisonment in the Tower of London and

was ultimately murdered under mysterious circumstances. However, her story, along with those of several others, demonstrates how Jewish women's professional activities could allow for both enrichment and empowerment, even in a society in which the odds could seem stacked against them.

### Jewish Women Interacting with Christians

In addition to offering Jewish women opportunities for personal success, their working life also served to shape their interactions with their Christian neighbors. Authorities at times attempted to limit interfaith interactions to the realm of business to prevent “unnecessary” mixing of Jews and Christians. Edward I's 1275 Statute of the Jewry stated that “they [the Jews] may live by lawful trade and by their labour and ... have intercourse with Christians in order to carry on lawful trade by selling and buying. But ... no ... Christian ... shall dwell among them.”<sup>6</sup> Such

attempts were consistent with the concept of *servitus Judeorum* (“service of the Jews”), which stated that Jews should be tolerated in Christian society as “witnesses” to the life and death of Jesus on the condition that they “serve” Christians.<sup>7</sup>

However, such decrees failed to stop socializing between Christians and Jews. In one well-known case from 1286, Christians in Hereford even attended a Jewish wedding against their bishop's express instructions. The regulations also underestimated the potential of business dealings to foster close contact, even trust, between members of the two faiths, including women. This potential was partly due to the physical settings in which transactions took place. Moneylending often happened in lenders' homes, which might combine living quarters with the resident's



Glückel of Hameln (1646–1724; portrayed here by one of her descendants) was a successful Jewish businesswoman who traveled widely through central Europe. Picture courtesy of Leo Baeck Institute.

<sup>4</sup> Suzanne Bartlet, *Licoricia of Winchester: Marriage, Motherhood and Murder in the Medieval Anglo-Jewish Community*, ed. by Patricia Skinner (London; Portland, OR: Valentine Mitchell, 2009), p. 67.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>6</sup> “1275 Statute of the Jewry” in Joe and Caroline Hillaby, *The Palgrave Dictionary of Medieval Anglo-Jewish History* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 33.

<sup>7</sup> Abulafia, p. 66.

<sup>1</sup> Anna Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> Robin R. Mundill, *England's Jewish Solution: Experiment and Expulsion, 1262–1290* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Emilie Amt, ed., *Medieval England, 1000–1500: A Reader* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2008), p. 234.

## A Model for Religious Coexistence Today?

*continued from previous page*

place of business. For example, the house of a Jewish woman, Floria, daughter of Josce, included “two shops and a beautiful entrance.”<sup>8</sup> This proximity suggests that, for a Christian, simply entering the house of a Jew might not have been a particularly intimate act because a private house could simultaneously function as a public place of business. However, this same closeness demonstrates the ways in which the blurring of domestic and public space could bring Jews and Christians closer together.

**Jewish women’s involvement in business activities often allowed them to become successful in their own right.**

It is also important to remember that, despite authorities’ propensity to see interactions between Jews and Christians as meetings of opposing worlds, religious identity was not necessarily the governing force behind such encounters. For Jewish women, moneylending afforded them the ability to interact with Christian women in ways that allowed for cordial relations. For example, a 1281 entry from the Plea Rolls of the Exchequer of the Jews (the body responsible for keeping records of business transactions involving Jews) relates the case of Belasez, a Jewish moneylender living in London, and her Christian client, Matilda la Megre. Matilda brought a case against two of Belasez’s colleagues (and fellow Jews), Moses of Dog Street and his wife, Bona, accusing them of unlawfully retaining a pledge after she had repaid her debt to them. Belasez, according to her own testimony, had asked Bona to join her in lending money to Matilda, as she could not provide Matilda with the full five shillings she had requested. Following Matilda’s repayment of the debt, Belasez instructed Moses and Bona to return the cloth they had taken as a pledge, but they refused to do so unless Matilda paid them a further 10 shillings.<sup>9</sup>

This case is striking because, despite Belasez’s shared religion and business interests with Moses and Bona, she chose to testify against them on Matilda’s behalf. Although the degree of closeness between Belasez and Matilda is unclear, this testimony, coupled with the fact that Belasez was willing to go out of her way to procure the extra money for Matilda’s loan, suggests that personal loyalties between women need not have existed only between women of the same religion. Rather than being a simple case of Christian versus Jew, the events surrounding Matilda’s complaint suggest that moneylending could function as a catalyst for exchanges between Jewish and Christian women, allowing them

<sup>8</sup> Hillaby and Hillaby, p. 174.

<sup>9</sup> J. M. Rigg, ed., *Select Pleas, Starrs, and Other Records from the Rolls of the Exchequer of the Jews, A.D. 1220–1284* (London: Selden Society, 1902), pp. 115–16.

to collaborate to find solutions to financial problems. Furthermore, through showing the interests of individual women, the case serves as a reminder that neither religion nor gender need necessarily have been the decisive factor when it came to Jewish women’s relationships with their clients. In addition to negotiating boundaries of religion and gender, their business activities may have helped them to surmount them.

### Opportunities for Wealth and Independence

Jewish women’s participation in business in medieval England offered opportunities for both cooperation and conflict with their Christian clients, as well as the chance of greater personal wealth and independence. This participation served to set them apart from Christian women, but it also offered the opportunity for closeness. Although the experiences of these Jewish businesswomen were by no means representative of those of most Jewish women living in England during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (those most heavily involved in business tended to be members of a small number of wealthy families), they provide an important glimpse into some women’s everyday lives. These women’s lives resonate with me on a personal level as a contemporary Anglo-Jewish woman.

**Jewish women’s participation in business in medieval England offered opportunities for both cooperation and conflict with their Christian clients, as well as the chance of greater personal wealth and independence.**

Is it possible, then, to go beyond such feelings of resonance and see parallels between medieval and modern Jewish women’s experiences in predominantly non-Jewish workplaces? To some extent, it would be anachronistic to do so; on a fundamental level, the freedoms we enjoy today go far beyond the regulations and prejudices endured by our medieval counterparts. However, for Jewish women, in countries such as the UK or the United States, who are currently negotiating boundaries of religion and gender in workplaces where Christianity is often seen as the default as opposed to other religions, it is perhaps comforting to consider the long history of such negotiations and their potential, even centuries ago, to build human connections.

*Pelia Werth has taught French at the University of Kansas and teaches Hebrew reading. She received a B.A. in English and French from Oxford University and an M.A. in medieval studies from Leeds University. She hopes to pursue a Ph.D. examining medieval women’s religious experiences. She writes a blog on contemporary Jewish identities and experience at [pelaiwblog.wordpress.com](http://pelaiwblog.wordpress.com).*

# The Kosher Meat Strike that Launched New York City's Labor Movement

By Dina Gielchinsky

“Brava, Brava Jewish Women,” exclaimed the *Jewish Daily Forward* headline on May 15, 1902, applauding the “[t]housands and thousands of *balaboostas* rebelling against the meat fraud” of 1902.<sup>1</sup> Kosher meat wholesalers, decried as “robber barons” by the indignant housewives of the Lower East Side, had hiked up the prices of kosher meat from 12 to 18 cents a pound. The kosher butchers of New York City tried to combat the monopolists by refusing to sell the wholesalers’ meat, but their inventory was severely depleted as a result. They threw up their hands and resumed selling the pricey meat. “The Kosher butchers of the east side, numbering about 1,600, ... abandoned their fight against the wholesale meat dealers and ... raised their prices even higher than the retailers of up-town New York,” reported the *New York Times*.<sup>2</sup>

The women of the Lower East Side knew a thing or two about the collective power of the purse and took matters into their own hands. During this time, nearly one-third of New York City’s workforce was employed by the garment industry, with immigrant women making up the majority of the employees. The Jewish immigrants had arrived in the United States in waves. The first wave came from Germany in the mid-nineteenth century, and worked their fingers to the bone in the Garment District for meager wages. A new crop of Jewish workers then arrived in the early 1900s from countries with a tradition of working-class militancy. Pogroms had swept Eastern Europe, causing a wave of Jewish immigration from places such as Poland, Russia, and Lithuania, where Jews had been members of the Labor Bund, a secular Jewish socialist party with heavy union representation. These Jewish women were no strangers to collective bargaining.

Fanny Levy, the wife of a unionized cloakmaker, and Sarah Edelson, who owned a small restaurant, called a meeting of their neighbors around Pike and Monroe Streets on May 14, 1902. Above the din of angry housewives, Mrs. Levy hollered: “This is a strike? Look

at the good it has brought! Now, if we *women* make a strike, then it will be a strike.”<sup>3</sup>

A strike, indeed! The women agreed not only to boycott the kosher butchers, but also to harass the scabs. The *Times* observed: “Not alone were the proprietors of the butcher shops attacked, but those who patronized them also met with the mob’s fury.”<sup>4</sup> Customers emerging from the butchers’ doors had their purchased meat forcibly grabbed from their arms and trampled. Butchers in bloodstained aprons watched helplessly as their former regulars stormed their stores and rendered their wares inedible and unsellable by pouring kerosene and carbolic acid on them. One policeman called to dismantle the fray had “an unpleasant moist piece of liver slapped in his face.”<sup>5</sup>

Another meeting took place the next day, May 15, this time in New Irving Hall, on Broome Street. More than 5,000 people showed up, inciting a mob scene. Police were summoned and ducked for cover as shoes and the occasional brick were hurled at them from windows and fire escapes. The *New York Times* praised these officers, who “kept their heads perfectly” by “belaboring the less sensitive parts of the rioters’ bodies with their clubs.”<sup>6</sup> Rioters with toddlers clinging to their skirt hems were arrested and bailed out by their husbands or the collection efforts of other rioters. “The patrol wagon

raced up and down, picking up its burdens at the corners, leaving them at the station, and returning for more.”<sup>7</sup>



Jewish women's activism during the meat strikes led to their involvement in labor union organization, such as this strike of the cloak makers in 1916.

## The Protesters Go to Shul

The insurgence continued, unaltered by the holy *Shabbos*, which fell on May 17. Butchers were closed, but *shuls* were open. The revolutionaries left their seats in the balcony and interrupted Torah reading to persuade men to back their cause and to gain communal support, which was almost uniformly forthcoming. In fact, these women were greeted warmly by the *shuls*, whose

<sup>1</sup> “Brava, Brava Jewish Women! Torn Bits of Meat Tossed in the Streets,” *Jewish Daily Forward*, May 15, 1902, reprinted and translated on May 19, 2017, <https://forward.com/food/371997/120-years-of-the-forverts-the-great-kosher-meat-strike-of-may-1902/>.

<sup>2</sup> “Fierce Meat Riot on Lower East Side,” *New York Times*, May 16, 1902.

<sup>3</sup> Paula E. Hyman, “Immigrant Women and Consumer Protest: The New York City Kosher Meat Boycott of 1902,” *American Jewish History*, 70: 1 (September 1980), p. 93.

<sup>4</sup> *New York Times*, op. cit.

<sup>5</sup> Hyman, op. cit., pp. 93–94.

<sup>6</sup> *New York Times*, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

## Kosher Meat Strike

*continued from previous page*

members aligned themselves with the cause. When police officers arrived at one particular *shul* to arrest a boycotter, other congregants successfully prevailed on her behalf, convincing the officers to release her.

The kosher butchers shuttered their doors. The boycott spread down to Brooklyn and up to Harlem. Mrs. Yetta Hirschberg attacked a man carrying a parcel of kosher meat on 105th Street while her eight-year-old son looked on. Upon being arrested for disorderly conduct, Yetta cried so hard that an officer at the precinct office secured a bondsman on her behalf.<sup>8</sup>

By June 5, 1902, the strike was concluded. The robber barons rolled back the wholesale price of kosher meat to 9 cents a pound, so that the retail price would be pegged at 14 cents a pound.<sup>9</sup> The women returned to their peaceful routines of working in their factories, minding their children, and caring for their homes. But the success of this resistance galvanized the Jewish women, and they organized more collective strikes to effectuate better working conditions for themselves.

## Labor Strikes Follow the Food Strikes

The most famous of New York's organized labor strikes was the shirtwaist makers' strike of 1909, organized primarily by Jewish women working in New York shirtwaist factories. Many of these Jewish women were the daughters of those who had mobilized during the meat strike of 1902 to keep neighborhood grocery prices affordable. Some of those daughters had even participated: As these young girls entered adolescence and the garment trade, the backbone of New York's labor movement, the resounding voices of their mothers echoed in their ears, so that when they found themselves working long days in unsanitary and unsafe sweatshops for miserable wages, they mobilized. Twenty thousand shirtwaist workers walked out of their factories and refused to return.

Weeks later, the "1910 protocol of peace" was finally reached. This historic compromise between the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and the major employers of the women's garment industry in New York City met the demands of the workers, which included better pay and shorter hours. The success of this strike marked a crucial milestone for the development and growth of unions nationwide. Armed with memories of their mothers' achievements, these working Jewish daughters had succeeded in creating a more just workplace for themselves and generations to come.

---

*Dina Gielchinsky is a civil counterterrorism lawyer who lives in Teaneck, New Jersey, with her husband and three children.*

---

<sup>8</sup> "Women Resume Riots Against Meat Shops," *New York Times*, May 18, 1902.

<sup>9</sup> Hyman, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

## Gender and Communication in the Workplace

*By Karen Hundert Novick*

For more than a year, we have seen frequent exposés of senior professionals who have harassed or assaulted subordinates. The current wave of actions addressing this workplace misbehavior is overdue and critical for supporting healthy work environments. But I believe that, for most people, the types of misbehaviors experienced at work are less severe than these extreme cases, yet they are more persistent and pervasive, affecting careers and daily lives.

I am involved in managing the work of hundreds of people in my role as chief operating officer of an organizational subdivision, and I serve on management teams for the parent organization that has more than 20,000 employees. The demographic diversity of this workforce is significant; there is a tremendous range of ages, races, religions, hair colors, sexual orientations, and every other characteristic. What is really significant, though, is not the demographic diversity, but the huge range of differences in how people speak, behave, think about the world, and react to one another.

### Differences in Communication Styles as Correlated to Gender

Some of the differences in communication style and behavior correlate with gender. For example, I have more often seen men than women attempt to be intimidating as a strategy for getting their way. I have more often seen men than women choose to belittle others as a way of punishing or marginalizing them and their ideas. I have certainly seen more men than women choose to make sexual comments or to be overtly sexual in a way they know will not be welcome, in order to puff up their own power in a situation.

On the other hand, I have more often seen women than men choose to stop speaking to a colleague whom they are mad at as a way of punishing the other, or simply not dealing with an interpersonal problem. I have more often seen women than men use gossip as a way of punishing or marginalizing others. And I have seen more women than men use flirting as a tactic to create relationships that will advance their place in the team.

Both women and men often treat people of one gender differently from the way they treat the other gender. The extent to which women in particular roles are expected by colleagues—both men and women—to be responsible for things that would never occur to them to expect of a man in that role is an ongoing problem. In a meeting in which someone needs to take notes, it is more likely that a woman will be asked to do it (or will volunteer). In a work group of equals, when everyone agrees that some clerical follow-up is needed, a woman is more likely to be asked or volunteer to coordinate this (although a man is more likely to volunteer if he has an assistant he can turn it over to).

*continued on page 12*

## Gender and Communication in the Workplace

*continued from page 11*

### Women Share Responsibility

Women are as responsible for the different treatments we get as men are. We volunteer for different things and accept being treated in certain ways. We are more likely to accept a more relationship-building and less decision-oriented role than men, even when we have a job title that a man would not fill in the same way. I have been involved with hiring at all levels, from clerical jobs to positions that require doctorates, and have observed that women are less likely to attempt to negotiate salary or other work conditions—yet a woman who does negotiate aggressively is more likely to be perceived in a negative way by both men and women.

It was an experience with negotiating a decade ago that highlighted for me the different ways we perceive the same behavior based on gender. A male colleague of mine made an offer of employment to a female candidate. The offer was in line with the median offers generally made for that job type; these offers include a number of work conditions in addition to salary. The candidate negotiated hard, to the point at which my colleague became concerned that it had been a mistake to have made her an offer at all, that she would be a very difficult employee if she came. He considered rescinding the offer altogether, but realized that once it had been made, it would be unethical to take it back. He held the line on his original terms, hoping she would turn the offer down, but ultimately she accepted. Initially I saw this situation through his eyes and, along with him, prepared to welcome and orient a new employee who was going to be very challenging.

About a year after this young woman had joined us, I reflected that she had actually been an extremely engaging, smart, team-playing person, but not someone who was content to be a quiet observer, as many new junior coworkers, both men and women, are. I realized that my colleague who made the offer had experienced aggressive negotiating from men but had never reacted negatively to it; it had only increased his respect for those candidates. I suddenly saw that his reaction was a pattern of subtle bias he had exhibited over time, and that he assigned very different meaning to the same behavior expressed by a man and a woman. I also realized that, too often, I fell into that same way of thinking. We have unconscious expectations of how people should behave given their gender, age, ethnicity, and other characteristics, and when they don't behave that way it feels uncomfortable. When we sense a problem, we tend to believe that the problem is with the other person.

### Becoming More Aware

There are, of course, very productive strategies that people employ that correlate with gender as well. I have more often seen women than men tend to the relational aspects of work groups, trying to make sure everyone feels that they have a voice and are happy with outcomes. I have more often seen men than women avoid taking

feedback personally and moving on when their ideas are not widely accepted.

The catalog of gender-related behavior patterns is extensive. Women may hold themselves back through lack of confidence that they can do the next job up or fear of taking some risk. Women express themselves with qualifiers—"I don't know if you'll agree with me, but ..."—or with tag lines that ask for reassurance—"I think xyz, don't you?" Both men and women are more careful to give a man than a woman "face" to ensure that he does not feel that he is being asked to be too subservient in a work role.

Many of these behavioral and communication tactics are used unconsciously. People don't necessarily think through how they are acting or reacting, but rather employ strategies that they have internalized over a lifetime by watching their parents, mentors, and colleagues—and, too often, people are employing behaviors that, if they would think about them, they would not choose to adopt.

This is the critical point. We must work hard to be "woke" about gender (and racial) issues in the workplace. We must work hard to be aware of our behavior and the behavior of others. We should strive to act and communicate as we feel is ideal and not allow ourselves to react instinctively.

Research shows that women are interrupted more often than men when speaking, but regardless of who is interrupted, we can each try to hear when it happens and be the person who politely says to the interrupter, "Excuse me, I would like to hear the rest of Susan's idea." When someone wants to share gossip about a colleague, we can be the person who understands the negative impact it has on the workplace and not participate in the conversation. When someone asks who would be willing to take notes in a meeting, we can suggest that turns be taken alphabetically at each meeting, rather than volunteering ourselves.<sup>1</sup>

### What Orthodox Women Bring to the Workplace

For Orthodox Jewish women, there is an additional layer to contend with as we make our way through the work environment. Whether we affiliate with a mainstream Orthodox synagogue or with a partnership community, in our Jewish communal and ritual lives we live with certain gender differences and separations. Whether we are comfortable with it or struggle with it, we are part of a community in which rabbis (therefore, almost exclusively men) have most major decision-making roles. Within our families, the fact that men have certain obligations and women do not leads to some gendered patterns of behavior even in families in which both the husband and wife feel passionately about equality. In addition, most of us have internalized a range of Jewish values, such as respecting those in authority and those who are older, and these affect

<sup>1</sup> For research and advice about advancing women in the workplace, see the website of the organization Catalyst at <http://www.catalyst.org/>.

# The Values and Strengths that Orthodox Jewish Women Bring to the Workplace

By Carolyn Hochstadter Dicker

As a lawyer and professor of business law, I have found that women bring their own brand of values to an employment setting. (*Of course* we do!) In fact, it was due to my prior experience in the workplace that I cultivated the value-added skill of navigating halakhic sources to support women's leadership roles within Orthodoxy. While at work, I came to personalize an innate set of positive values that are now integral to my religious life.

I grew up participating in services at the Young Israel of Montreal, an Orthodox *shul*. I vividly recall my joyful singing of *Anim Zemirot* along with my father in the men's section, within a welcoming community of Holocaust survivors. I attended Michlala Jerusalem College for Women and Barnard College, where my courses put words to the egalitarian treatment that had been modeled in my years at Camp Moshava and the

Jewish world of my youth.

As a young parent at Kehilath Jeshurun (KJ) on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, I was fortunate to be in the right place at the right time, and bonded with Belda Lindenbaum (*a"b*) and Carol Newman—first participating in their Upper West Side Women's Tefillah Group (WTG), and later co-founding with them the inaugural WTG at KJ. My identity as an Orthodox Jewish feminist was thereby solidified. I continued to learn and connect with other like-minded people through the educational programs of Edah and JOFA.

Having learned the value of family-wide ritual participation growing up, I was able to bring this perspective to bear as a first-year associate at a large New York law firm. I was fortunate to work closely with a particularly enlightened group of colleagues who adopted the values of "Family Pride." Though quite rare at the time, my mentors were women who took pride in providing other women with a full menu of opportunities and, remarkably, were deliberately open about their personal lives outside the office. We married and had children, announced attendance at school plays, parent-teacher conferences, and family outings—all with the firm's support. We even wore wedding-related jewelry, unabashedly, without the concern that we were considered kept women. We were proud of who we were and what we had accomplished.

It was this brazen approach to the role of our personal lives in the workplace that gave me the confidence to carve out a similarly progressive path in my religious life. Just as it was an assumption that I had a unique tool-set to offer from my perch as a young female lawyer in a male-dominated culture, so, too, I came to expect the same in the religious sphere. This perspective has buoyed me and enabled me to serve as president of Lechu Neranena, the only partnership minyan in the Philadelphia area, as CEO of my own law practice, and as lecturer at the Wharton School.

## Gender and Communication in the Workplace

*continued from previous page*

workplace behavior as well as personal relationships.

Naturally, Orthodox Jewish women bring our religious values and the experience of our personal and communal lives with us to the workplace. For some of us, these make it harder to address gender inequalities at work because we accept those differences in our personal communities. Especially when most of the senior colleagues are men, it can be hard for Orthodox women to be comfortable pushing against the behavioral norms, even if those norms are inappropriate in the workplace.

Our religious values, if expressed in our behavior, should make us wonderful work colleagues: being respectful of others, responsible for providing value to our employers, careful not to gossip, and regularly thanking others. However, our values should also mean that, no matter how uncomfortable it may be, we will try to effectively address practices in the workplace that are unfair or subtly undermine groups of people. Our values should mean that we feel the imperative to be aware of our behavior and how it may be harming ourselves and others, or holding us back. And our values should mean that we are willing to put in the effort to learn about and adopt more productive patterns of communication and behavior to ensure that every workplace is healthy and supportive of all of its members.

---

*Karen Hundert Novick is a senior university administrator who lives in central New Jersey.*

## Advocating for a Level Playing Field for Women

As part of this journey, I have consistently and confidently advocated for a level playing field for women and girls as a basic premise. Though change is never easy, nor is it accomplished overnight, I live by the respective mantras of Blu Greenberg and Theodor Herzl: "Where there is a rabbinic will, there is a halakhic way," and "If you will it, it is not a dream." These remain at the forefront of my mind in my never-ending efforts to equalize women's roles in the religious and secular contexts. Even though it has not always been an easy

*continued on page 31*

# Architecture as a Profession for a Nice Jewish Girl

By Atara Margolies

How does anyone choose a career path? Family precedents, inspiration from a teacher or mentor, a chosen course of study, or even an opportunity that opens new doors—any of these can be decisive.

At the age of sixteen, for no discernible reason, I decided I wanted to be an architect. I loved art, but ever the practical thinker, I knew I was no prodigy, and I wondered how I'd ever make a living pursuing the fine arts. I did not particularly want to be a teacher. I knew no architects and had only the faintest idea of what the profession was about. I thought it was a combination of art and geometry, and that mix was appealing. I applied to colleges with that potential course of study in mind, and have not looked back since.

Twenty years have passed, and after finishing college and earning a master's degree in architecture, I have now been working in the field for fourteen years. I have worked on master plans for entire college campuses, coordinated systems for world-renowned museums, and have recently focused on designing educational institutions. My early attraction toward a profession that combines creative expression with practical problem solving turned out to be a good fit.

As with any job in the secular world, there are challenges that arise as a halakhically observant Jew on a 24/6 schedule in a world that is increasingly expecting 24/7 availability. Most of the challenges I have encountered are likely similar to those experienced by lawyers, accountants, engineers, or anyone in a client-focused corporate environment. However, as a woman in a field that is currently grappling with the lack of women who stay in practice, and as an observant Jew in a field with few Jews compared with other popular fields, there are several challenges that may be unique to architecture.

## Challenges Unique to Architecture

The study of architecture, and the culture that accompanies both study and practice, are uniquely rigorous. As I moved through my years of training, I began to glimpse some of the challenges of being an observant Jew in that culture. The challenges of being a woman would largely reveal themselves once I entered the workplace, as my classes in school were largely balanced in terms of gender. The culture of architecture school, particularly at the graduate level, is similar to the culture of a yeshiva. Each school has its own philosophy of education (its own *hashkafah*, as it were), with its own set of well-known, often magnetic, brilliant leaders who are likely famous beyond the walls of the institution. The commitment to the pursuit of architecture is expected

to be 24/7. Whatever you are designing can always be better, the design is never finished, and it is never good enough. There is always another angle to probe, always a way to further the development of a concept.

Architecture students were expected to spend as many hours as they could endure in the studio, for years at a time. My friends who were training to be doctors or lawyers worked hard and studied hard, but when their exams were over, they took a break. When their on-call shift ended, they were expected to go home and rest, even if for just a few hours. For the architecture students, though, there was no beginning and no end. We ate, drank, and often slept in the studio building. Some schools enforced a time at night when the studio would close, thus forcing students to go home and sleep, but where I studied this was not the practice.

Thus, in such a culture, it is easy to imagine how difficult it was to develop an outside life! I took my 26- or 27-hour break for Shabbat every week, leaving the studio an hour or two before Shabbat began and then

often returning on Saturday night, shortly after *havdalah*. I had an entire life outside the studio, and this perplexed many of my fellow students. They could not easily understand how I felt the liberty to take such a long break, or how I had developed any friendships outside the building. This set me apart immediately, and although I did make several close friends in graduate school, the fact that I was immersed in a whole other

community that was not the architecture community identified me as an outsider far more than my kashruth restrictions or observance of the *hagim*.

This tension of balancing two communities continued into my professional life, but once I was out of school, I largely chose not to pursue extra opportunities to be involved in the architectural community, even though this would have helped me professionally. I view my Jewish community as my primary one, and in my limited free time, I look for opportunities to contribute to it. Participation in the architectural community is highly encouraged and considered a great way to network outside the office. It may be that I am missing out on key opportunities by not getting involved with this network at this midpoint in my career, but that is a choice that is right for me at this time.

## Finding the Right Work–Life Balance

Architecture is a profession that takes the long view. It is not a profession in which people often rise to prominence at a young age. For most, it starts with several years of study, followed by years of practice, during

**With any job in the secular world, there are challenges that arise as a halakhically observant Jew on a 24/6 schedule in a world that is increasingly expecting 24/7 availability.**

## Architecture as a Profession

*continued from previous page*

which one navigates a complex set of requirements, including a series of exams, to reach the status of “registered architect.” It is not uncommon at all for an architect to work well into his or her seventies. Design tools and building technology are constantly evolving and changing, which makes architecture a hard profession from which to take a break, if one intends to return to the workforce.

The profession is currently struggling with the lack of women in senior positions in the private sector, and many important conversations are happening at major conferences as well as online and in trade publications. I am fortunate to work in a firm with a large percentage of women colleagues, including at the senior management level. My company has many policies in place that support workplace flexibility, and numerous members of the staff have availed themselves of those benefits. For example, I have been working a 32-hour work week for seven years since the birth of my oldest child, and I have not felt that it has affected my ability to contribute at a high level or to support my clients. However, I have watched many talented women change course as a result of their inability to strike a work-life balance that they felt was sustainable, particularly once they became parents. This is not unique to architecture per se, as many industries struggle with the same imbalance, but despite individual forward-thinking companies, it will likely be another generation before we see significant progress across the field as a whole.

A final mundane aspect to the industry that has implications for observant Jewish women (and their families) is that of compensation. Despite popular opinion to the contrary, architecture is not a particularly high-paying profession when compared with other client-based professions that are built on project work and billable hours. An observant Jewish architect who intends to start a family and send her children to day school will need a spouse who earns at least a comparable living to make it work.

Many years ago, I participated in a panel on architecture and engineering for Stern and Yeshiva College students who were interested in the profession. There were four of us on the panel and we answered a wide range of questions from a packed room. We then asked everyone in the room to raise their hands if they were planning to have kids and to send them to day school. Nearly all hands were raised. We proceeded to make it clear that architecture is not a breadwinner profession in our community; it is realistic to think about it only in terms of a two-career household. Few college students want to even think about paying day school tuition, but as we know from conversations happening nationwide, the cost of day school is a key issue facing our community today, as well as the magnitude of student debt after college and graduate school. Understanding the earning potential of a given profession is a necessity in today’s world.

### Challenging, yet Fulfilling

Personally, I never experienced any familial or communal pressure to pursue a less demanding career. With the exception of one rabbi from my high school years who, upon learning I was an architect, exclaimed, “That’s not a job for a good Jewish girl,” no one in my life has been anything but supportive. I am fortunate to have lived as an adult in Orthodox communities full of women with varied and challenging professions.

A career in architecture can be challenging, yet fulfilling. To walk into a building or space you contributed to as a designer can be immensely rewarding. For some, it is that tangible sense of achievement that is most appealing. For others, it is the problem-solving aspect in a profession in which there is always something new to learn. I have spoken to several young women and men over the years who are interested in pursuing a career in architecture, and I have encouraged them to follow their dreams, with the caveat that it is a long and often uphill road and it demands a serious passion and commitment to the profession.

---

*Atara Margolies is an associate at Quinn Evans Architects in Washington, D.C.*

JOFA is the place where you share ideas with like-minded people. JOFA is where you find the tools for advancing social change in your community. JOFA helps you connect with feminists who are on the same journey that you are on. JOFA is YOU. It’s who you are. It’s your identity, your voice, and your community.

Become a member of JOFA to ensure that you are part of the community of JOFA members.



**For more information, go to [www.jofa.org](http://www.jofa.org)**

## JOFAton

**O**n March 9–11, 2018, JOFA hosted our first-ever national Shabbaton at the beautiful and snowy Isabella Freedman Retreat Center in Falls Village, Connecticut. The JOFAton featured exceptional speakers, discussions, multiple Orthodox davening options, beautiful singing, an improv workshop, a bonfire kumsitz, dancing, a pickle-making workshop, and more. Participants eagerly filled the sessions at every time slot, fostered new friendships, and held conversations about the session content throughout the weekend. The JOFAton allowed JOFA constituents to socialize, network, and build a community. The Shabbaton was fun, intellectually stimulating, spiritually invigorating, and community-centric. Overall, the JOFAton was a sold-out success (with more than 100 participants). We are looking forward to using it as a model for other communities to foster grassroots



community-building and discussion around Orthodox feminism!

### Here is a sampling of participant responses to the inaugural JOFAton:

“I had my first *aliyah* and it was my first time singing out loud in *shul*, which was an amazing experience from a Jewish and feminist perspective.”

“[I enjoyed] the opportunity to meet people dedicated to a feminist vision for Orthodoxy; the different ages that were represented; studying text and attending sessions; [and] the setting.”

“[I enjoyed] the amazing panels and lectures and the chance to talk with some of my Jewish feminist heroes.”

“The events were thought-provoking and provided a range of perspectives. There was constructive and open dialogue, which was refreshing.”

“It was one of the most interesting and meaningful Shabbats of my life.”

## Webinars

**J**OFA has hosted more than 30 webinars since the last edition of the *JOFA Journal*. Our live webinars, now hosted on Zoom and streamed through Facebook Live, are a great resource to give our constituents access to Torah scholars, authors, and feminist organizations, straight to your computer screen! Our webinars are live and interactive, but you can also access the recordings so that you can watch them in your own time. You can find webinars on topics such as “Gender Segregation and Religious Accommodation in Israel,” “Perinatal Loss and Bereavement,” “Sexual Harassment and Human Rights in NYC,” and “Feminism, Orthodoxy, and Cognitive Dissonance,” as well as our series for the *Yamim Nora'im* and International Women’s Talmud Day at [www.facebook.com/JOFAorg/videos](http://www.facebook.com/JOFAorg/videos) or on our YouTube channel @JOFAorg.



## Woman Seder

**T**his past *Pesach Sheni*, JOFA hosted a Woman Seder in Washington Heights for more than 40 women. The event was in response to the many “Man Seders” we have seen across the country and the many women who expressed interest in an event that breaks down the gender stereotypes that Man Seders promote. With four *divrei Torah*, a four-course meal, and four types of beverages, we created a fun, empowering, and thought-provoking space for women to share words of Torah and discuss the meanings of *Pesach Sheni*, liberation from gender stereotypes, and the pros and cons of single-gender spaces. If you would like to create a Woman Seder in your own community on *Pesach Sheni* this year, which will also be International Women’s Talmud Day, please email JOFA Program Manager Rivka Cohen at [rivka@jofa.org](mailto:rivka@jofa.org).

## JOFA Journal Reading Groups



**W**ith our previous issue of the *JOFA Journal*, we developed a discussion guide and piloted a program of conversations in living rooms across America. Grassroots reading groups formed to discuss the issues presented in the journal, including demographic changes in the Orthodox community, the experience of singlehood in the Modern Orthodox world, the challenges of single parenting in our community institutions, LGBT experiences, and more. Reading groups met in more than a dozen communities, including Philadelphia, Dallas, Atlanta, and Oak Park, and in some cases, inspired follow-up discussions and actions. For more information about this initiative and how to implement a similar conversation around topics in this issue, contact JOFA Program Manager Rivka Cohen at [rivka@jofa.org](mailto:rivka@jofa.org).

## Second International Women's Talmud Day

Last year, JOFA partnered with Shayna Abramson, Yeshivat Maharat, and JOFA UK to launch the First International Women's Talmud Day to accomplish the following:

1. Encourage women's Talmud study.
2. Create a feeling of community among women who study and teach Talmud.
3. Highlight the women's Talmud study that is happening in our communities.

This year, we're proud to turn the day into an annual tradition. On *Pesach Sheni*, May 19, 2019, women from around the world will gather to learn and teach Talmud as part of the Second International Women's Talmud Day.

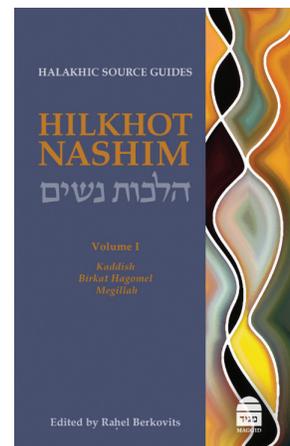
### How can you participate?

- 1. Teach:** A class at your local school or synagogue, or in your home. Want to teach, but never taught Talmud before? We can send source sheets. We'll have a Talmud teaching webinar (by advance registration) to give you teaching tools. For more information, email Shayna Abramson at shaynale68@gmail.com.
- 2. Learn:** Attend one of our events, or use our online source sheets and webinars at [www.internationalwomenstalmudday.com/resources](http://www.internationalwomenstalmudday.com/resources).
- 3. Host:** If you are a synagogue, school, or community center, organize an event for your community. Examples: a Woman Seder, complete with four courses of *divrei Torah* and food, a panel on women's Talmud study, an open women's *beit midrash*. Feel free to reach out to JOFA for ideas!
- 4. Create:** a Talmud source sheet for our website. All submissions should be sent to shaynale68@gmail.com by April 1, 2019.
- 5. Check in:** At 1:00 p.m. Eastern Daylight time/8:00 p.m. Israel time, we're asking women around the world to go live on Facebook learning or teaching Talmud.
- 6. Participate** in a *siyum* of *Masekhet Pesachim*: Please email shaynale68@gmail.com to sign up.
- 7. Blog:** JOFA will be running a special International Women's Talmud Day blog series. If you're interested in contributing, email Rivka Cohen at rivka@jofa.org.

This year's suggested theme is *Masekhet Pesachim*, in honor of *Pesach Sheni*. Want to study something else? Don't worry—*Pesachim* is just a suggested topic, not a requirement!

## Hilkhhot Nashim: Halakhic Source Guides, Volume I

JOFA is excited to announce that Volume 1 of the *Hilkhhot Nashim: Halakhic Source Guides* has been published! The *Hilkhhot Nashim* series, adapted from JOFA's *Ta Shma* series, presents an in-depth review of laws relating to women in Jewish ritual life. Tracing the development of responses on a given topic—from Talmudic to Geonic to medieval to modern—each chapter reproduces all relevant halakhic sources in both Hebrew and English. The sources are contextualized and clarified, their language closely parsed, their effects on subsequent *poskim* explained. This guided exploration of the halakhic process exposes readers to the rich tapestry of Jewish legal literature, its concerns and considerations, and the full complexity of the issues it braves. This first volume is devoted to questions of women in the synagogue: Kaddish, *Birkat Hagomel*, and Megillah.



The book, published by Maggid Books, is the first in a series of four volumes. Subsequent books will deal with such questions as *Kiddush*, *Hamotzi*, *Zimmun*, *She'lo asani ishah*, *minyan*, *kol ishah*, *tefillin*, *tallit*, and head covering. The book is now available for purchase at [www.maggidbooks.com](http://www.maggidbooks.com).

The book, published by Maggid Books, is the first in a series of four volumes. Subsequent books will deal with such questions as *Kiddush*, *Hamotzi*, *Zimmun*, *She'lo asani ishah*, *minyan*, *kol ishah*, *tefillin*, *tallit*, and head covering. The book is now available for purchase at [www.maggidbooks.com](http://www.maggidbooks.com).

"I strongly recommend this book, which represents the important place women have taken in the study and application of modern Jewish law, to anyone concerned with *halakhah* today."

—Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"This thoroughly researched and engaging work is a must read for all those concerned with the several currently contested questions regarding women's participation in public ritual."

—Professor Tamar Ross

## Inclusion of Singles in Our Faith Communities

The previous issue of the *JOFA Journal* shed light on the experiences of singles in our Orthodox communities, including how traditional marriage and dating pressures often lead to marginalization. This is not just a phenomenon unique to the Orthodox Jewish community, but is a critical issue across many faith communities. JOFA hosted a panel over the summer featuring strong female role models from the Jewish, Muslim, Mormon, and Baptist faiths to discuss the experiences of singles in our communities and to learn from one another the best practices and avenues toward change. You can watch a recording of the panel on our Facebook page and YouTube channel.



## Professional Development Day

As part of JOFA's Women's Leadership Initiative, we hosted a day-long professional development program, offering an opportunity for women working in Jewish institutions to learn and develop skills to advance themselves and their careers. The program featured workshops on networking, personal branding, and interview skills; in addition, JOFA hired a professional photographer to take new headshots for our participants. JOFA believes that by investing in the growth of our women leaders and professionals, we will strengthen the institutions at which they work and the Jewish community as a whole.



## Discussion on the Women's March and Anti-Semitism

To march or not to march: That was a burning question in the headlines and on social media threads in advance of the Women's March(es) on January 19, 2019. Jewish women looking for a diverse, nuanced, and productive conversation turned to JOFA. The result was a sold-out conversation on the Women's March and Anti-Semitism that had to be moved to Lincoln Square Synagogue in New York City to accommodate the 200-plus attendees on February 11. Participating in the



panel were women from diverse perspectives: Sara Liss, treasurer of the Zioness Movement; Abby Stein, a Jewish educator and member of the national Women's March steering committee; and

Tamara Fish, immediate past president of the Jewish Multiracial Network and a member of the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable. The moderator of the panel was Dr. Rivka Press Schwartz, associate principal of general studies at SAR High School and a research fellow of the Shalom Hartman Institute.

Issues discussed included anti-Semitism, roles and expectations of leadership, intersectionality, privilege, whiteness, and litmus tests. The goal was not to debate, but rather to engage in productive dialogue and educate ourselves as to the different views on these topics.

## JOFA 5K Run/Walk

In November, JOFA participated in our first-ever 5K walk/run! On a crisp autumn morning in Riverside Park, New York, fifteen JOFA supporters gathered to take up space, empower one another, and raise awareness for Orthodox feminism. Our runners ran alongside 20 other nonprofit organizations in a huge family-friendly event, where they were able to exercise, have fun, and support Jewish Orthodox feminism. Two of our runners even won awards! Naomi Barnett won #1 Overall Female Runner and Jordana Barnett won #1 Female Runner Age 12-19. We are so proud of you!

You can watch the highlights of the race and hear from our runners on our Facebook page and YouTube channel.



## JOFA and Yeshivat Maharat Summer Tour

This past summer, JOFA and Yeshivat Maharat, the first and only institution in North America to ordain Orthodox women, joined forces for a second Summer Tour, bringing women scholars to communities throughout the United States. The Summer Tour, which stopped in fifteen communities (including communities brand new to JOFA), featured *shiurim* and lectures given by women scholars associated with Yeshivat Maharat and JOFA. Some stops on the tour featured weeknight lectures; others were full scholar-in-residence Shabbatonim with multiple *shiurim*.

The purpose of the Summer Tour was to continue exposing communities to models of female scholarship and leadership and to the missions and values of JOFA and Yeshivat Maharat. The Summer Tour also aimed to create a meaningful sense of connection between the geographically, socially, and religiously diverse communities hosting these women scholars. Through participation on the tour, communities focused not on what makes them different—whether they are from the East Coast, West Coast, Midwest, or the South, the height of their *mehitzot*, or their stance on partnership minyanim. Instead, these fifteen communities came together to express their support for women leaders and scholars in the Orthodox community.



Yael Smooha (center, seated) leads a discussion in Atlanta as part of the Summer Tour.

## Part of the Miracle: Women and Megillah

In honor of the release of JOFA's new book, *Hilkhot Nashim*, and in preparation for the holiday of Purim, JOFA shared the teachings of a section of the book dealing with women's obligation in Megillah, "Part of the Miracle: Women and Megillah." The author of that section, Rabbanit Sara



Tillinger Wolkenfeld, gave a live *shiur* webinar, hosted by JOFA, on Rosh Hodesh Adar II.

Through an overview of tannaitic and amoraic views preserved in the Talmud, followed by geonic, medieval, modern, and contemporary decisors, Rabbanit Wolkenfeld addressed questions including the following: for whom may a woman read Megillah; what blessings does a woman recite on reading; and with whom may she count as part of a quorum for a public reading. She also answered questions with regard to practice, such as whether a woman reading Megillah to herself should say the words aloud.

Additionally, JOFA partnered with Yeshivat Maharat to send speakers throughout the country to teach the topic of women and Megillah. *Shiurim* were held in Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, and at the JOFA office in New York.



Become a JOFA member today  
with a \$100 donation.

<http://bit.ly/JOFAmember>

# Hareidiyot in Israel: Ultra-Orthodox Women in the Workplace

By Sophie Bigot-Goldblum

Since the early 2000s, employment of ultra-Orthodox women in Israel has continuously been on the rise and has now reached 80 percent—or 5 percent higher than the general rate of women’s employment. What caused such a radical female rush to the workforce?

The motive was dire necessity. Since 2003, *hareidi* families have been confronted with reductions in child allowances—a measure clearly geared toward not only cutting state expenditures, but also incentivizing the *hareidi* community to introduce some changes in its structure. Indeed, however insular the *hareidi* community may be, those numbers testify to the policies’ capacity to affect them.

However, when trying to interpret those numbers in light of their impact on gender dynamics in religious society, we are puzzled indeed. Have we not been taught that women’s emancipation can be expected to correspond to their level of literacy and employment? According to those principles, *hareidi* women would be among the most emancipated in Israeli society.

Such a reading, though, runs counter to the general portrayal of ultra-Orthodox society outside its strictly defined borders. Indeed, the ultra-Orthodox leadership is often called out for its misogynistic *hashkafah* (world-view)—from erasing women’s faces in newspapers to forbidding women access to leadership positions in *hareidi* political parties.

Do those numbers indicate *hareidi* women’s independence, or testify to their double penalty—having to bear all the responsibility for the household’s wealth, while having little or no power within the home and inside their communities? These figures challenge our general assumption of what constitutes women’s emancipation and the tools needed to evaluate it.

## Changes in Choice of Profession

Another change—more subtle and less easily quantifiable—has been in the type of professions *hareidiyot* (ultra-Orthodox women) choose. In the past, *hareidiyot* were often confined to caretaking positions such as nursing, midwifery, and pedagogy. Those areas of employment quickly became saturated as more women joined the workforce, pushing them to seek work outside areas of predefined gender expectations. Consequently, *hareidiyot* are now to be found in positions of power and high social prestige.

How is this change been accounted for and received in the *hareidi* community? Browsing through the press, one can hardly avoid both *hareidi* apologetics and *hareidi* bashing. What is certain, however, is that in most cases, the sources of information and judgment about women’s status within ultra-Orthodoxy are provided by outsiders: *Hareidi* women are proclaimed free or chained in the view of non-*hareidi* men or women.

However, if one turns to *hareidi* women to record their own understandings and self-perception, it is no simple task. One of the very distinctive traits of ultra-Orthodoxy is seclusion from broader secular society. If approaching these women as a non-*hareidi* wasn’t difficult enough, one can also challenge the genuineness of the answers provided to an outside pollster. Indeed, the *hareidi* community may very well be insular and careful not to expose internal struggles to the outside world. Moreover, gender mixing is highly frowned upon, so, in practice, only female journalists or sociologists can get a chance to approach those women and reach the level of trust required to have them share such intimate information.

Nevertheless, a few *hareidiyot* have started to make public appearances and become known figures outside their community. Their presence in the media is very much welcome in many respects. As mentioned earlier, seldom do we hear from *hareidiyot* themselves, but the benefit of their fame goes beyond providing the secular community with a spokesperson from an insular group. Young *hareidiyot* now have role models to look up to. Thankfully, we have now reached a point at which those figures no longer stand as isolated—and thus ostracized—characters in the *hareidi* sector, but constitute a real pool of women who, while remaining ultra-Orthodox in their practice, have excelled in a wide range of professional careers outside the *hareidi* world.

Let us examine a few examples of this trend in Israeli society, each with an analysis of the *hareidi* narrative of their achievements and their justification.

## Judge Havi Toker

In February 2018, Havi Toker was appointed as the first female ultra-Orthodox judge to serve in the Jerusalem Magistrate’s court—and, interestingly, the news received laudatory treatment from the *hareidi* press. Kikar Shabbat, an Israeli *hareidi* news website, referred to Judge Toker as a “pioneer.” Not only did the very usage of the term “pioneer” clearly testify to a will to encourage others to follow Judge Toker’s path, it was also a signal of a new understanding of the potential impact of female labor. The approval by a mainstream *hareidi* medium is very significant: A large part of the *hareidi* community sees in these women the opportunity to foster the broader community’s interest in the state’s institutions. Rather than needing to be sheltered from the outside world, women can be useful in bringing *hareidi* interests to the secular table.

## Political Participation

Women are still nowhere to be found in *hareidi* political parties such as Shas (the Sephardi *hareidi* party), Agudat Yisroel, and Degel haTorah, which are, respectively, the hasidic-oriented and non-hasidic Ashkenazic *hareidi*

parties. When combined, these three are known as United Torah Judaism. However, *hareidiot* are increasingly present in the political sphere. At present, although no *hareidiah* has entered the Knesset under a religious party banner, a handful of women have contested the status quo both from within the structure of those parties and by creating their own party as a protest.

Already in 2014, animosity grew between Adina Bar Shalom, the daughter of Rav Ovadia Yosef, ז"ל, the founder of Shas and the party's then leader, as a result of which the Shas leadership promised to establish a women's council, but they did not mention allowing women to run for the Knesset. Ms. Bar Shalom was followed closely in her attempt by Raheli Ebenboim, a mother of three and a resident of Mea Shearim, who is married to an *avreikh* (a full-time Torah student). Even though Ms. Ebenboim withdrew before the election, she started a leadership program for *hareidiot* aiming for university careers. Beginning a few years ago, Michal Zernowitski, Esty Shoshan, and Estee Rieder-Indursky have been attempting to convince rabbis of the necessity of women's political representation and its halakhic legitimacy. Ms. Shoshan and Ms. Rieder-Indursky co-founded *Nivbarot*, a movement whose slogan can be translated as "No vote without representation," calling on women to stop voting for parties that refuse to give them a voice.

In the spring 2019 Knesset elections Michal Zernowitski made news by entering her name on the Labor list, saying that Labor's platform of social justice, equality, and peace would appeal to *hareidiot* like herself. She is far down enough on the Labor list, however, that it is highly unlikely that she would make it to the Knesset.

Similarly, in 2015, Ruth Colian, a 33-year-old mother of four, founded her own platform to foster ultra-Orthodox female representation in the Knesset. In an interview given to the *Jerusalem Post* in 2015, Ms. Colian justified her fight in these terms: "As *hareidi* woman, we are slaves, we are invisible, we are the weaker sector. ... There is a vast number of different population sectors who have representation in the Knesset—Arabs, Jews, Sephardim, Ashkenazim, *hareidim*, and so on. But *hareidi* women have no representation at all. There are male *hareidi* representatives, but they do not address the needs and concerns of *hareidi* women."<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, the findings on the health of *hareidiot* are alarming: These women have "one of the lowest levels of life expectancy in the country, when *hareidi* men rank second."<sup>2</sup> During a hearing in the Knesset on the matter, Ms. Colian pointed out, no male *hareidi* MK attended.

### Running a Marathon for God

In a different realm entirely, a *hareidi* mother of five was the winning woman in the 2018 Jerusalem marathon

while seven and a half months pregnant. This victory should not be deemed merely a miscellaneous news item, as the obstacles for *hareidiot* to pursue sports activities are numerous. Women's clothing is strictly regulated, according to the principles of *tzniut*. From collarbone to elbows and down to the knees, every inch of skin must be covered, as well as hair for married women. Pants are prohibited. These restrictions somewhat complicate access to certain sports.

The treatment that this marathon victory received in the Orthodox media is worth analyzing. In an article published on *Jewinthecity.com*,<sup>3</sup> the journalist took great care not to frame this sports endeavor as a feminist one, but rather as a religiously motivated activity: The winner, Beatie Deutsch, claimed she was "running for a higher purpose" and had "raised money for two initiatives." The journalist stressed the empowering impact this run has had on young women wanting to train while adhering to rules of modesty. "Deutsch has been approached by girls who thank her for normalizing working out in a skirt." Another interesting point of the narrative was the necessity to argue that the beneficiaries of her running activity were eventually her family and not herself: "My kids know they are my number one priority. ... Running is a very healthy outlet. ... I'm naturally a type-A, competitive person and I don't want that in my household. ... I'm able to be more relaxed and calm with my family and kids."

Whatever activity a *hareidi* woman may be engaged in, it can be sanctioned only within the accepted hierarchy of values in which family and strict observance takes precedence. Hence, the article concludes by portraying how Ms. Deutsch's life returned to normalcy through a clear reference to Shabbat and domestic tasks. The runner stated, "The marathon was on *erev* Shabbos. After it, we had to get back and get the house clean and all that."

### Hareidi Women and Army Service

If service in the Israeli army still seems to be beyond the pale for *hareidi* women, the religious population is nonetheless undergoing a major shift in attitude: "The number of observant women serving in the IDF has soared by nearly 190 percent this decade," claims *Ha'aretz*.<sup>4</sup>

Most observant young women are signed up by their religious high schools for (noncombat) national service, but Sharon Brick-Deshen is fighting to offer young women a choice. Hence, she founded *Meshartot Be'emunah* (Serving with Faith), a program that educates religious women interested in the army and offers them the tools to remain religious during their army service. The fear that military service will cause young women to leave the religious fold is the primary concern cited

*continued on page 22*

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-Elections/Haredi-women-in-position-of-slavery-says-chairwoman-of-new-party-for-female-hareidim-388479>.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> <https://jewinthecity.com/2018/03/haredi-mother-of-five-wins-fastest-israeli-female-at-jerusalem-marathon/>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium.MAGAZINE-israeli-rabbis-go-on-warpath-as-religious-women-increasingly-join-army-1.5907559?&ts=1522243744860>.

## Hareidiyot in Israel

continued from page 21

in Orthodox milieus for discouraging their enlistment. Rabbi Yigal Levinstein, who heads the Bnei David pre-military academy in Eli, has aroused media attention for his homophobic statements and his stance against women in the military. He claimed, “They [the IDF] recruit them [women] to the army, where they enter as Jews, but they’re not Jews by the time they leave.”<sup>5</sup>

R. Levinstein’s colleague, Rabbi Eli Sadan, founder of the Bnei David academy, has claimed that service can jeopardize women’s fertility, and that by accommodating women, the army is forced to compromise its standards of excellence.

One can understand why the pushback would be stronger against army service than for medical or legal careers. Use of force and mastery of warfare are deeply associated with masculinity. Moreover, among the recurring patterns of *hareidi* justification for allowing women to enter certain professions is the absence of negative impact on what remains their main priority: motherhood. However, such a defense is challenging for a pursuit that requires a long time spent on a military base far from home.

### Consequences of Empowerment

The very structure of *hareidi* gender roles in the household, with the husband remaining within the community to study Torah full-time while the wife works to sustain the family, has led some women to cross the physical boundaries of the *hareidi* world. To maintain the household’s finances, women have started gaining more training, seeking better positions, and realizing their self-worth. This empowerment cannot come without consequences to their understanding of their place in the world.

Fainy Sukenik, a *hareidi* woman who became an activist after being denied her *get* and being ostracized by her community, said, “Why must I deny my wants and opinions, my intelligence and knowledge, the minute I walk in the door? Women are beginning to ask questions that are influencing the entire *hareidi* structure.”<sup>6</sup> As demonstrated in this article, the *hareidi* institutional world does not necessarily reject all expressions of women’s empowerment, as long as these women are not perceived as a jeopardizing Orthodox religious practice and familial structures.

---

*Sophie Bigot-Goldblum holds a research M.A. (with distinction) from the EHESS, Paris, and an M.A. in Jewish Studies from the Hebrew University. She is an alumna of Paideia, the European Institute for Jewish Studies in Sweden, and of Pardes, an egalitarian yeshiva in Jerusalem.*

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.timesofisrael.com/rabbi-comes-under-fire-after-deriding-female-soldiers-as-crazy/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://forward.com/life/faith/395981/conversations-with-the-ultra-orthodox-women-fighting-for-their-rights/>

## Hair Covering: An Issue in the Workplace and Within Oneself

By Yafit Fishbach-Rosen

Orthodox girls are raised to be Orthodox women, and Orthodox women get married and, in some circles, cover their hair. Buying a long flowing wig is almost a rite of passage.

I decided to cover my hair because my husband asked me to. His mother, sisters, and sisters-in-law all cover their hair, and in his family covering hair is what you do when you marry. In my family, everyone does something different, and there really is no norm. I spent some time learning about the basis of the tradition. I learned about the story of the *ishah sotah*, the woman accused of adultery, as well as the talmudic sources in Sotah and the concept of *ervah* (indecent exposure) in the Zohar. I learned about the difference between *dat Yehudit* and *dat Moshe*, one rabbinic and subjective, and one biblical and objective, respectively. Then I decided to try it.

### The All-Consuming Wig

For sixteen months I spent most of my time thinking about the wig on my head. I had severe headaches daily. The second I walked through the door at the end of a long day, I tore the wig off my head and threw it onto the nearest piece of furniture. During these sixteen months I began graduate school at New York University and student-taught at a middle school in Manhattan, as well as at a high school in Park Slope. Consequently, I met many new people on a daily basis, none of whom were Jews, let alone Orthodox Jews. Most people I worked with assumed that the wig was my hair. I told a select few and answered their questions about the tradition. They were all respectful in their questioning and seemed to be genuinely interested.

It sounds strange to write now, but the wig was so all-consuming in my mind that the thought of putting it on made me turn down plans with friends. It made me want to never leave the house. It made me never want to have people over. I felt like a fake person hiding under fake hair. Keeping this tradition bothered me so much that it started turning me against keeping other traditions that I love.

I turned to other Jewish women for help, but all I could find were women saying how special they felt keeping their hair for their husbands’ eyes only, or how wearing a *tichel* felt like putting on a crown. When I tried switching to a *tichel*, I felt ugly. I felt there was no way to look appropriately dressed while wearing a *tichel*, and I stood out like a sore thumb on the streets and in the public schools of New York City. I thought there was something wrong with me that I couldn’t find a way to make it work. So I gave up.

# Bigger Isn't Always Better

By Sarah Birnbach

It was one of those challenging situations that we religious Jewish professionals often face. During my *aveilut*, a client invited me to make a presentation in Lansing, Michigan. I was excited for the opportunity, but, as always during that year, made my acceptance conditional on having a place to say Kaddish.

“Before I can agree to come, I need to be sure there’s a synagogue with a morning and evening *minyan* where I can recite Kaddish.” I explained to her the significance of our mourning traditions, my commitment to the redemption of my father’s soul, and my need to find a place where I could pray.

“May I get back to you in a day or two?” I asked.

“Absolutely,” she responded. “I’m in awe. I never heard of anyone doing this before.”

I then learned that neither of the two synagogues in Lansing had weekday *minyanim*, but Flint, more than an hour’s drive from Lansing, had a synagogue with both a morning and an evening *minyan*. It looked as if I would

have to fly into Flint and commute to Lansing.

My neck and back muscles tensed as I thought about driving between the two cities. The window of time between the end of services in Flint and the start time for my presentation in Lansing was precariously tight. In my twenty years as a consultant, I had never been late for work. Should I accept the assignment, knowing I’d feel the stress of the commute?

We can be surrounded by people who care, but ultimately each of us is alone with our sorrow.

## The Call that Changed Everything

Then I got the call that changed everything.

“Hello. I’m Allan Falk, the ritual committee chair of Kehillat Israel

Congregation in Lansing. I understand that you called looking for a *minyan*. I’d be happy to organize a morning and evening *minyan* for you while you’re here.”

I was caught so off guard, I couldn’t respond. “I ... I thought your synagogue didn’t have a morning and evening *minyan*.”

*continued on page 24*

## Hair Covering

*continued from previous page*

### Explaining My Change to Coworkers and Students

I broke down in tears one night while getting ready to go out with my husband and some friends. I couldn’t do it anymore. I couldn’t be uncomfortable. I couldn’t feel fake. I just wanted to be myself again, curly hair and all. I didn’t wear a wig that night, and I’ve worn one only a handful of times since then.

Explaining the situation to my family and Jewish friends was easy enough, but I had no way of explaining my hair to my coworkers, my ninth-grade students, and my peers in grad school. How could I explain to 100 thirteen-year-olds why my hair was suddenly light, short, and curly when they knew me only with darker, longer, wavy hair? How could I attempt to describe the tradition of covering hair to ninth graders who had never heard of this practice before? How could I explain to my coworkers that I am still an Orthodox married woman even without a hair covering?

There’s no guidebook for Orthodox women in the workplace, as we are already the odd ones out in the way we dress. We can’t share meals with our colleagues, and we observe different holidays from everyone else. Trying to explain why I took fake hair off my head after wearing fake hair on my head for more than a year was one of the strangest situations I’ve ever been in. I decided that because there was no protocol for this sort of thing, I was just going to be honest.

To my surprise, my ninth graders were very respectful and had so many questions for me about Judaism. My

new hair opened up a dialogue about respecting other cultures, learning about other religions, and finding commonalities between people, regardless of religious differences. My coworkers cautiously asked about the reasoning behind my decision to uncover my hair, and we had open discussions about religion, feminism, and Modern Orthodoxy.

### Removing a Barrier between Me and Everyone Else

Removing the wig removed the barrier between me and everyone else that I had felt for so long. I was finally able to exist just as myself. Although uncovering one’s hair is often seen as a step away from Orthodoxy, choosing to uncover my hair had the opposite effect on me. I have never felt this connected to Judaism as a married woman. All the resentment I had built up slowly disappeared, and without the constant pressure, I was finally able to enjoy other traditions, such as *hakhnasat orhim* (welcoming guests) and *hadlakat neirot* (lighting candles).

Learning about the traditions around a woman covering her hair, and making the conscious decision to no longer spend my energy trying to adhere to this custom—which is not a *mitzvah*—allowed me the clarity to switch my focus and learn to love the Jewish lifestyle again. Not only has the physical weight of the wig been lifted, but the emotional weight of the burden of hiding has finally been lifted as well.

*Yafit Fishbach-Rosen is a high school English teacher, world traveler, animal lover, and Torah learner who believes that education can change the world.*

## Bigger Isn't Always Better

continued from page 23

“We don’t, typically. But when someone in our community needs a *minyan* to say Kaddish, it’s our obligation to respond.”

Even knowing that *g’milut hasadim*, performing acts of loving-kindness, is a core Jewish value, I was stunned into silence. I felt a huge weight lift from my shoulders. I couldn’t keep the excitement from my voice.

“I hardly know what to say. I’m so grateful.” I wanted to say more. I wanted to thank him for embracing my right as a woman to recite the mourner’s Kaddish. I wanted him to know how my heart was stirred with so many emotions all at once—happiness, amazement, gratitude, relief. I wanted to show my appreciation, but at that moment I couldn’t find the words.

“We’re happy to do this for you. If you let me know where you’ll be staying, I’ll arrange to pick you up and return you to your hotel.”

### A Choice of Options

I called my client and told her the good news.

“A small congregation in Lansing, Kehillat Israel, is going to organize a morning and evening *minyan* for me around my work schedule,” I said, almost giggling with delight. “So I accept your invitation.”

“Well ... while you were learning about Kehillat Israel, I got a phone call from one of our Jewish members in Flint,” my client said. “She offered to attend services with you there and then bring you to Lansing. That way you wouldn’t have to drive in unfamiliar territory. So now you have two options.”

It was clear that being in Lansing and accepting Allan Falk’s offer was my better option, but before I could respond, she continued. “I’ve never seen anything like this, the commitment Jewish people make to one another. The ways you show your dedication to your faith and the way you respond to one another is something I’ve never experienced before. It’s amazing. You are so fortunate.”

I felt blessed that I could convey the deepest values of Judaism to people who knew little or nothing about them—the importance of kindness, of community, and of *l’dor vador*—keeping values alive from generation to generation, which was embodied in my saying Kaddish for my father.

True to his word, Allan Falk and the members of Kehillat Israel Congregation organized *minyanim* for me, on the evening before and the morning of my workshop.

I was waiting in the hotel lobby in the evening when Allan arrived to pick me up. “Jolly” was my first thought when I saw his hearty smile, topped with a graying mustache. His eyes sparkled through rimless eyeglasses.

“Welcome to Lansing. I’m so happy we could meet, although I’m sorry it’s under these circumstances. I’m so sorry for your loss.” The warmth of his voice conveyed his sincerity. “The synagogue building would be cold, both in terms of temperature and spirit, since we turn on the heat only when we’re going to be using the building,

so we decided it would be more comfortable to conduct the service in someone’s home. I hope you don’t mind.”

“Of course I don’t mind. It will be lovely.” Sitting in the passenger seat in Allan’s car, I experienced the same soothing feeling I get when I nestle into my favorite sofa with a warm mug of tea.

We drove a short distance to the home of Bettie Menchik, who flung open the door and greeted me with an enormous grin and a warm hug. “Welcome. Come on in. I’m so happy you’re here.” I felt more like a long-lost roommate than a total stranger. Bettie escorted me into her cozy living room, where she and eight other men and women greeted me.

I quickly realized that, even though this was a non-Orthodox gathering, Bettie’s living room modeled *klal Yisrael*—Jews coming together in community. I was the tenth person required for the *minyan* and I was going to be able to recite the mourner’s Kaddish for my father. This community, though breaking from strict tradition, enabled me to fulfill an obligation I had promised to my father, a man with no sons but with a determined feminist daughter.

Folding chairs were arranged in a semicircle, supplementing the living room furniture, and a pile of prayer books sat on the coffee table. After a few moments, Allan looked at me and asked, “Shall we begin the service?”

### Saying Kaddish Alone

When we got to the mourner’s Kaddish, I recited the prayer alone, my voice a solitary one among a *minyan* of people gathered to support me. In my home congregation, when I recited the words of the Kaddish, other mourners’ voices joined mine. Sometimes we had a full *minyan* of people reciting Kaddish. The sound of my voice resonating through Bettie’s living room helped to mitigate the memories of other work-related travels where, as the only woman among nine men, I was precluded from reciting the Kaddish. Nine can be the loneliest number.

After the Kaddish, Bettie invited everyone into her kitchen. Spread out on her counters was an array of hot and cold foods, salads, and desserts that could have fed thirty people! She had prepared a meal that resembled a holiday feast. Staring at all the food, I wanted to give her a heartfelt hug, but she was flitting around the kitchen tending to everyone’s needs. Instead, I filled my plate and carried it back into the living room, where everyone lingered, talking for several hours.

As the evening drew to a close, I was physically and spiritually nourished. Allan drove me back to my hotel. “I’ll pick you up at 7 o’clock tomorrow morning,” he said. “That should give us enough time to get to the synagogue, have a leisurely service, and get you back here in time for your presentation.”

The next morning, he appeared precisely as planned and drove us to the synagogue. The building was plain, but children’s artwork from the religious school decorated the cinderblock walls. I later learned that the synagogue had been a public school before it was purchased by the congregation. We walked down a long corridor

## #MeToo and Sexual Harassment: A Familiar *Mishnah* through a New Lens

by Meesh Hammer-Kossoy

### Harassment: An Assault of Human Dignity

Following the headlines of the #MeToo movement, one might think that the horrors of sexual harassment had just been discovered. Remarkably, though, already in the second century CE, Rabbi Akiva taught some of the basic lessons of the movement. A close reading of a single *mishnah* can help us to sharpen our thinking about what is wrong with sexual harassment and even to understand secular law. Rabbi Akiva brings the right to human dignity into sharp focus.

Unwanted and inappropriate sexual conduct toward women is inherently demeaning, and shame looms large among the predator's weapons. Not only does the harassment embarrass the victim, but the fear of further hurt often shames a woman into silence. Not coincidentally, the rabbinic justice system considers deliberate shame a primary category of prosecutable personal damage, on par with physical damage, medical expenses, lost labor, and pain and suffering.

"One who damages another is obligated in five categories of remuneration: damage, pain, medical expenses, lost labor, and shame" (Mishnah *Bava Kamma* 8:1). After listing hefty fines for gender-neutral offenses, the Mishnah designates a massive fine for a gendered form of sexual harassment:

One who shouts at another gives that person a *sela* [twenty *zuz*]. Rabbi Yehudah, in the name of Rabbi Yose the Galilean, says: "a *maneh* [one hundred *zuz*]." One who slaps another gives that person two hundred *zuz*; with the back of the hand, that person gives [the victim] four hundred *zuz*. If that person split someone's ear, plucked their hair, spit [at them] and their spit touched the individual, stripped someone's cloak from them, or uncovered the head of a woman in the street, [the perpetrator] gives [the victim] four hundred *zuz* (Mishnah *Bava Kamma* 8:6).

The amount mandated for uncovering a woman's hair, 400 *zuz*, is equivalent to two standard divorce settlements (*ketubot*), enough for most women to live for two years (Mishnah *Peah* 8:8 and Bartenura, ad loc.). The size of this award alone indicates the gravity with which sexual harassment is viewed in the Jewish tradition.

The Mishnah goes on to debate whether compensation for violations of personal dignity and shaming should vary based on social status or be egalitarian and universal. Although there is debate as to which opinion should prevail (Talmud *Bava Kamma* 86a and codes), Rabbi Akiva declares strongly that all should be treated alike because they are children of Abraham:

### Bigger Isn't Always Better

*continued from previous page*

into the room where everyone was gathered. As we entered, my brain did its now-familiar exercise of counting the people. We had another *minyan* of ten. I recognized some faces from the night before, but others were new. As we had done the previous evening, we faced east toward Jerusalem. One man led the service, and I recited the Kaddish alone. After the service, some lingered to socialize, but I uttered quick thank-yous to everyone, and Allan returned me to my hotel to conduct my workshop.

"I hardly know how to thank you for all you've done for me," I said getting out of his car.

"I only did what any Jew would do. Your father must have been a wonderful man to have a daughter as dedicated as you. It's been a privilege to meet you."

### All-Volunteer Synagogue

I'd never seen an all-volunteer synagogue. The congregation had no rabbi or educational director. Services were run by lay leaders. And yet that small volunteer synagogue, with no religious leader, put together a morning and an evening *minyan*, whereas the

bigger congregation with more member families never responded to my phone call nor to Allan Falk's emails.

To this day, I feel a deep connection to the people of Kehillat Israel, both for providing *minyanim* (and a scrumptious dinner) and for teaching me that saying Kaddish is not only for the mourner and the deceased. It is also for the members of a community.

The Torah commands us, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). Compassion for others is at the heart of Judaism. By providing a *minyan* for me to pray, the members of Kehillat Israel fulfilled the *mitzvah* of *v'ahavta l're'akha kamokha*, loving your neighbor as yourself, and embodied the ultimate purpose of the *minyan*—to support the mourner through grief. This small community performed an act of holiness. Beyond the dark cloud of my loss was a rainbow of caring and a reminder that bigger was not always better.

---

*After three successful careers spanning four decades, Sarah Bimbach has embarked on an encore career as a writer. Her memoir A Daughter's Final Gift won a first place prize in Talking Writing magazine's Writing and Faith issue. In 2011, she became the first certified journal therapist in the United States.*

The general principle is that everything depends on the person's honor.

Rabbi Akiva said: "Even the poor of Israel are evaluated as free people who have lost their property, because they are children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (Mishnah *Bava Kamma* 8:6).

We don't like to admit it, but the universal right to honor is still contested in contemporary culture. Sexuality aside, society does not treat all human beings the same way. Rabbi Akiva is ahead of his time when he clarifies that whether one is a building maintenance professional or a top government official, one's human dignity is infinite and inalienable. Our present social status is not reflective of our inherent honor, and anyone who tries to diminish it should be punished harshly.

**By placing human dignity at the center, sexual harassment ceases to be limited to workplace violations.**

#### **No to Victim Blaming and Discounting**

After Rabbi Akiva unequivocally states that human dignity is infinite and that violating it is a grave offense, the Mishnah continues with an incident in which he translates theory into practice:

[And] there was an incident in which a man uncovered the head of a woman in the street. She came before Rabbi Akiva, and [Rabbi Akiva] required [the perpetrator] to give her four hundred *zuz*. He said to [Rabbi Akiva], "Rabbi, give me time." So he gave [the perpetrator] time.

[The man] watched her stand at the entrance of her courtyard, broke a pitcher in front of her, and in it was an *issar* [a small amount] of oil [which he was deliberately wasting]. She uncovered her head and scooped [the oil] and rubbed her hands on her head [so as not to waste the oil]. He placed witnesses against her, and he came before Rabbi Akiva. He said to him, "Rabbi, to her I give four hundred *zuz*?!" He replied, "You haven't said anything." Those who injure themselves are exempt, even though it is not permitted. Others who wound them are liable (Mishnah *Bava Kamma* 8:6).

The defendant in our ancient case employs the ubiquitous tools of modern perpetrators: victim blaming and discounting her disclosures. Standard practice in monetary law in the Mishnah allows defendants the opportunity to request a delay in payment—either to bring additional evidence or to arrange for payment of such a

significant fine (Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 3:8; *Shulhan Aruch Hoshen Mishpat* 16:1). Predictably, the perpetrator in this case leverages his time to engage in a defamation campaign of the victim.

By entrapping her and gathering evidence that she is willing to expose her hair just to claim a nominal amount of oil, the perpetrator attempts to prove that she is a woman without dignity. As such, the perpetrator claims, he has not really damaged her by forcibly exposing her hair. Perhaps he intimates that she has even invited his behavior through her promiscuous behavior. As Judith Herman writes:

After every atrocity, one can expect to hear the same predictable apologies: it never happened, the victim lies, the victim exaggerates; the victim brought it upon herself; and in any case it is time to forget the past and move on. The more powerful the perpetrator, the greater is his prerogative to name and define reality, and the more completely his arguments prevail.<sup>1</sup>

Given that she is a promiscuous woman, claims the perpetrator, she is not worthy of the redress of the court. "My actions are insignificant, in the context of her morality," he claims implicitly. Of course, intuitively we recognize the specious nature of his argument—exposed hair or skin, even in public spaces, has entirely different significance depending on circumstances.

#### **The Absolute Right to Consent and Agency**

Oscar Wilde stated famously, "Everything in the world is about sex except sex. Sex is about power." Here, in our *mishnah*, power and agency are essential in defining the experience. The fact that the woman is forcibly exposed and victimized creates humiliation and inflicts pain.

**There is no question that Jewish tradition looks upon sexual harassment as a severe and punishable offense.**

Rabbi Akiva rejects the defendant's claims unequivocally: There is no comparison between what someone does to himself or consents to and what is forced by others.

To cite analogies to modern situations, the fact that a woman wears provocative clothing, acts flirtatiously, or even works in an erotic dance bar does not reduce the gravity of sexual violence against her. Even if she is willing to sell sex today, if she does not agree tomorrow, forced sex is rape, no matter if he pays for it.

<sup>1</sup> Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York: Basic Books, 1992.

Heroically, Rabbi Akiva reasserts the victim's infinite dignity and stiffly punishes the offender. Even if most halakhic decisors do not rule in accordance with Rabbi Akiva, he teaches four eternal messages: the gravity of sexual assault, the infinite right of every human being to dignity, the rejection of victim blaming, and the absolute right of every individual to consent and agency.

### Comparing the Mishnah to Contemporary Law

In the United States, sexual harassment law is structured around the right to equality in the workplace. The United States' Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) defines workplace sexual harassment as: unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.<sup>2</sup>

A woman's vulnerability is particularly acute in the workplace, where men often exploit power imbalances and women's need for employment. Exploitation deprives women of their right to equal treatment in the workplace. Equality is a value addressed explicitly by Rabbi Akiva in his insistence that everyone be treated as "nobles who have fallen from wealth."

Interestingly, the Israeli law dealing with sexual harassment goes beyond American law to add another uniquely Jewish dimension. It states: "The purpose of this law is to prohibit sexual harassment in order to defend human dignity, freedom and privacy and in order to promote equality between the sexes."<sup>3</sup>

By placing human dignity at the center, sexual harassment ceases to be limited to workplace violations. As a corollary, sexual harassment is defined in terms of specific actions (touching, commenting, insulting, abuse of authority) rather than its impacts (interference with work) and is prohibited under any circumstances. Rabbi Akiva would be pleased.

### Due Process and the Unlikelihood of Proof

Rabbi Akiva did not fall for the perpetrator's victim-blaming campaign: "You went deep diving in mighty waters and emerged with nothing but shards," he declares in another version of the story (Talmud Bavli *Bava Kamma* 91a). However, although the perpetrator may not have gained, the victim has certainly lost. After having been victimized once, in her attempt to claim redress she is subjected to a smear campaign, victim

blaming, and further indignity. Her financial award is hard won.

Additional circumstances distinguish this case. In his attempt to discredit the victim, the perpetrator deliberately stages witnesses. He does so because Jewish law requires eyewitness testimony as proof in every court case. Rarely is a perpetrator so brazen as to accost his victim publicly and in the presence of witnesses. As the recent spate of scandals has revealed, offenders tend to prey on vulnerable victims precisely in moments when it is difficult for them to escape and easy for the perpetrator to deny. A case in which his word is pitted against hers does not meet the burden of proof to convict in a Jewish court of law. This makes her award an unusual success.

There is no question that Jewish tradition looks upon sexual harassment as a severe and punishable offense. However, our tradition also places a premium on the value of considering a person "innocent until proven guilty" and demands a high standard of proof for offenses of all kinds.

As Margret Atwood articulated clearly,<sup>4</sup> even though this requirement puts women at a disadvantage in cases of harassment, we too must support due process and criminal rights.

### Creating a Culture Where Harassment Is Not Tolerated

Much can be done to create a culture in which harassment is not tolerated. Our *mishnah* provides wisdom about the Jewish values: unequivocally rejecting harassment, demanding equal respect for every human being, and firmly rejecting attempts to blame or discredit the victim. It serves as a moral compass for us, enriching our understanding of contemporary law, but it does not provide us with the legal tools to punish violations when they inevitably occur. For this, our community and institutions have a lot more work ahead of us.

*Rabbi Dr. Meesh Hammer-Kossov teaches Talmud and directs the Social Justice Program at the Pardes Institute for Jewish Studies, a non-denominational beit midrash in Jerusalem. She was ordained in the first cohort of Beit Midrash Har El by Rabbis Daniel Sperber and Herzl Hefter and received her Ph.D. in Talmud from New York University.*

*This article was originally composed for ICJW Bea Zucker Online Social Justice Course. For additional units in the series, see <http://icju.org/online-learning/social-justice-course>.*

**Rabbi Akiva reasserts the victim's infinite dignity and stiffly punishes the offender.**

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.eeoc.gov/>

<sup>3</sup> [http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/AboutIsrael/State/Law/Pages/Prevention\\_of\\_Sexual\\_Harassment\\_Law\\_5758-1998.aspx](http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/AboutIsrael/State/Law/Pages/Prevention_of_Sexual_Harassment_Law_5758-1998.aspx)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/am-i-a-bad-feminist/article37591823/>

### *Memoirs of a Hopeful Pessimist: A Life of Activism through Dialogue*

By Debbie Weissman  
Ktav/Uriam, 2017, \$24.95

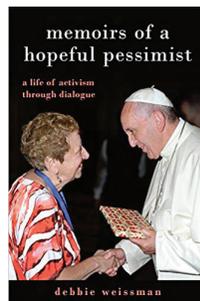
Debbie Weissman was one of the early activists in changing the status of women in Jewish life, yet few in JOFA today likely know her name—possibly because she made *aliyah* in 1972, before the internet or cheap long-distance phone calls. She made her mark in Israel in the field of Jewish education, as head of the English-speaking section of the Jewish Agency's Institute for Training Youth Leaders from Abroad and later director of the Kerem Institute for Teacher Training. She also contributed to the worldwide effort for interreligious dialogue, becoming the first woman president of the International Council of Christians and Jews.

Along the way she has “lived in interesting times” and traveled to many history-laden places, including Soviet Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Germany, India, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Bosnia, Hiroshima, and the Vatican. Her memoirs read like both a travelogue to far-flung Jewish (and non-Jewish) communities and a firsthand account of recent milestones of feminist and interreligious history.

Ms. Weissman had her “aha” feminist moment early on, in high school, when she wanted to run for national president of Young Judaea after serving as vice president, and the Israeli *shaliach* tried to dissuade her, saying that a boy would better represent the organization. She ignored his advice, ran for president, and won.

Her feminist proclivities and achievements are strands that have run throughout her life. In the early 1970s she was a member of the religious feminist study group *qua* consciousness-raising group, Ezrat Nashim. When doing graduate-level research, she chose to examine the Bais Yaakov movement in prewar Poland. In 1985 she taught a course on Jewish women at the Hebrew University School for Overseas Students, which was likely the first university-level course on Jewish women in Israel. After attending a JOFA Conference in 1997, she became involved in the founding of our Israeli sister organization, Kolech. She records that Torah giant Rav Aharon Lichtenstein was present and supportive at the initial meeting of Kolech. She continues to fight for greater representation for women at Jewish conferences and in communal forums. She observes, “Being the only woman in a roomful of Jewish men is often more difficult than being the only Jew in a roomful of Christians.”

Weissman was also deeply involved in the founding (and ongoing life) of Kehillat Yedidya, a spiritual and *davening* community in Jerusalem that has pioneered many innovations in women's participation in services and in decision making. She describes with pride and in detail the authority structure and decision-making



process within Yedidya, which is non-hierarchical and democratic. Although there are many rabbis and scholars, male and female, in the community, they are consulted about halakhic issues but do not have more clout than anyone else. She describes in depth the changes the community has experienced, and how its evolution has influenced other communities, including the partnership *minyanim*.

Similarly, Weissman's involvements in interreligious dialogue and in seeking Israeli–Palestinian understanding have been lifelong, ongoing commitments. She began her interreligious journey in 1988 with an invitation from Blu Greenberg to attend a conference in Toronto that brought together women of nine different religions from around the world to discuss religion, politics, and feminism. She ended up choosing to go into “retirement” so she could serve for six years as the president of the ICCJ, traveling the world for that organization and coming happily back to her home in Jerusalem.

She describes herself oxymoronically as a “hopeful pessimist”—pessimistic about her chances to live to see peace in the Middle East, but still optimistic that “the pursuit of peace is a religious imperative.” She rejoices in the positive changes she has seen in her lifetime, particularly in the “major changes in the role of women within Judaism.” Perhaps this is why she has shown such a natural ability to dialogue—she can see the glass both half empty and half full at the same time.

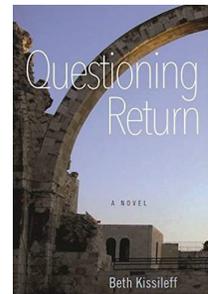
### *Questioning Return*

By Beth Kissileff  
Mandel Vilar Press, 2016, \$21.95

The two words of the title of this book, “Questioning,” and “Return,” are the two poles between which the protagonist, Wendy Goldberg, moves in this sensitive, brainy, and surprisingly learned novel. Wendy, a Ph.D. student from Princeton, is on a one-year fellowship to study American *ba'alei teshuvah* in Jerusalem. Her academic pursuits, as well as her experience of a year in Israel, seem as much about questioning as about return.

The novel opens with a quotation from seventeenth-century poet George Herbert, who wrote, “When one is asked a question he must discover what he is.” The questions Wendy asks the newly religious as to why they have turned their lives upside down lead her to a deeper discovery of who she is. And she finds a few wise teachers who help her along the way.

Wendy's journey is both interior and exterior. Jerusalem of the 1990s is realistically portrayed—the bus bombings but also the new *minyanim*, *shiurim*, and communities sprouting all over. The Shabbat mealtime conversations, with their lively discussions of concepts of God and individual life choices, ring true to a certain time and place. This is the life-altering year in Jerusalem that so many have experienced.



The year, of course, makes its impact because of matters of the heart as well as explorations of the mind. Wendy goes through the ups and downs of romantic relationships and learns that “who is asking” is as important as what is asked. She finally comes to a “fuller sense of myself” as an intellectual but also “someone who wants to enjoy the sensual delights given to us as humans.”

Likewise, this sensitively written novel will delight the reader by appealing both to the intellect and to one’s appreciation of the senses.

### **The Queen and the Spymaster: A Novel Based on the Story of Esther**

By Sandra E. Rapoport  
Ktav, 2018, \$39.95

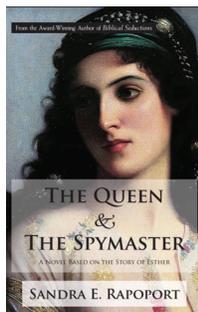
**M**egillat Esther, the book of Esther, is composed of ten *perakim* (chapters) and takes a little under an hour to read. Sandra Rapoport has spun this story into an (almost) 500-page novel.

She has added layer upon layer of visual and sensual details, historical background, midrashic traditions, and even political theory (with a hat tip to Yoram Hazony). Some of the additions are familiar from *midrash*, such as the notion that Mordechai and Esther are in love and almost succeed in getting married. Others are surprising novelistic innovations, such as the reason given for Vashti’s refusal to come before the king at his banquet: She is three months pregnant due to an affair with the stable boy, and would surely be found out if she came scantily clad, as directed.

Some of the additions complicate and attenuate the story. Mordechai is described as a spymaster who runs a ring of Jewish spies who communicate through secret notes written in disappearing ink. He, in turn, is directed by Daniel (of the biblical book of the same name), who, after escaping the lions’ den, lives on as an old, wise, hooded and unseen advisor in the king’s court. Daniel interacts with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (also of the Book of Daniel) who are transformed by the fiery furnace into men with supernatural powers, for good and evil. They slip in and out of the story, sometimes invisible, sometimes with black magical abilities. Shadrach ends up allying himself with Haman, who, as we are told numerous times, is his generation’s incarnation of Amalek, the perpetual enemy of the Jews.

The story is told on many levels—natural, supernatural, psychological, and historical—and sometimes feels choppy as it goes back and forth from one genre to another, from one character’s perspective to another. The author says that her goal in writing this work was “to retell the Bible’s exciting stories through the lens of *midrash* ... and my own unique viewpoint, in the process giving voice to the Bible’s women and men.”

That she has done, but I prefer “the real *megillah*,” which allows one to fill in the spaces oneself.



### **My Real Name Is Hanna**

By Tara Lynn Masih  
Mandel Vilar Press, 2018, \$16.95



**T**his novel is a boundary-crosser. Although it is categorized as young adult fiction, it has depth and depiction of harsh life circumstances that make it entirely suitable for adults. Although it is a work of fiction, it is well researched and could pass as a memoir or a work of Holocaust history.

As Holocaust stories go, this novel provides a ray of hope for the human condition, both in the way the family works together to improve their chances of survival and in the covert help they receive from some of their non-Jewish neighbors. Unlike many Holocaust novels, this one puts the emphasis on “righteous gentiles” who are motivated to their good deeds by their caring relationships with their Jewish neighbors. They are not the high-profile saviors such as Raoul Wallenberg or Oskar Schindler, but unsung heroes who provided food or shelter for a while for Jews hiding in the forests.

Hanna is a thirteen-year-old Jewish girl living in a *shtetl* in the border lands that alternated between Russia, Poland, and Ukraine, when Hitler invades from the west. At first, her family can stay in their home, which is not in the path of the occupiers, but her life changes in that she can no longer go to school. She continues to visit her closest neighbor, Mrs. Perovich, the family’s *Shabbes goy*, with whom she paints decorative eggs called *pysanky*. The warmth of their relationship is shown when Mrs. Perovich tells Hanna to call her Alla.

As the Germans determine to make the village *Judenfrei*, the family must leave and go into the forest, where they stay in a rundown backwoods cabin offered by Yuri, a friendly forester. Yuri also designates a “witness tree” where he leaves marks communicating better or worsening conditions. When he marks an O, that means there are Germans in the forest and the family must get out. They move on to the most hidden space imaginable, a series of underground caves with a lake and a stream running through them. Here they live, several families together, in pitch blackness with occasional nighttime excursions to forage for food. Finally, they learn from a sign on the witness tree that the Soviets have arrived and it is safe to come to the surface.

I found it hard to believe that such a large family could have survived underground for so long, but their story is based on fact. In October 1942 the 38-person extended family of Esther Stermer sought refuge in underground caves in western Ukraine for almost a year and a half. Their story was told in a documentary film, *No Place on Earth*, and in a memoir, *We Fight to Survive*, told by Esther Stermer’s grandchildren.

The author adds a postscript noting the relevance of the story at “a time in which the KKK and White Nationalists would march again and bring forth from the depths of an ugly, deadly history their rallying racist and anti-Semitic chants.”

## 93Queen: Documenting Change within a Hasidic Community

What's *93Queen*? It's the internal ambulance code that the Fire Department of the City of New York assigned to Ezras Nashim, the Big Apple's first all-volunteer female ambulance service. It's also the name of a documentary describing how that service came to be.

*93Queen* is the first feature film by director/cinematographer Paula Eiselt, who obtained a degree in film from New York University's prestigious Tisch School of the Arts. The fact that she is Orthodox—living in Teaneck, New Jersey—eased Eiselt's way into the large enclave of hasidic Jews in Boro Park, Brooklyn, where the documentary is set.

The surprise is that Ezras Nashim was launched by hasidic women deeply committed to their way of life, yet challenging one stricture: that Hatzalah, the world-renowned volunteer ambulance service, refuses to accept women as volunteers.

"When I saw an article about Hatzalah banning women, I was struck by two things," said Eiselt. "That I grew up in the Five Towns, where we had a vibrant Hatzalah unit, and there were no women volunteers, and by my own blindness, that I hadn't seen that."

These hasidic women not only noticed, but acted. The exclusion of female volunteers, they point out, meant

that in an emergency, women who, because of *tzniut* (modesty) had never held the hand of a man other than their husband's, might be treated, while not fully dressed, by several men.

Hatzalah's rationale for refusing female volunteers was not only the belief that women should stay home to raise their children, but that they're "not strong enough or smart enough," community leader Rachel (Ruchie) Freier asserts in the documentary.

When attempts to convince Hatzalah to change its policy failed, the women struck out on their own. Under Freier's leadership, despite community opposition, they formed Ezras Nashim.

The women took their responsibilities seriously—training extensively and earning certification from New York State, while gaining respect from their own community little by little.

*93Queen* focuses primarily on Freier, a charming but indomitable mother of six, who graduated from law school at 40. In 2017, she became a civil court judge, making her almost certainly the first female hasidic elected official in the United States.

"It was women going up against a patriarchal system," Eiselt said of Ezras Nashim. "Feminism isn't one size fits all; women come to it from different places."

The *sheitl*-wearing Freier might question the label "feminist," but would agree the organization she helped found is stereotype-bashing—as is *93Queen*, the film. Not everyone, including Modern Orthodox Jews, is likely to think of hasidic women as savvy game-changers, but these emergency medic volunteers certainly are.

One would be remiss not to mention Freier's husband. He appears in only a few scenes of the film, but his beaming face at her induction as judge and his calling out, "My wife is a smart woman," before one of Ezras Nashim's meetings speak volumes. A real estate agent, David Freier is known as the "Marty Ginsburg of Boro Park"—a reference to the late extraordinarily supportive husband of Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

About this inspiring and well-crafted film, one may nitpick just a little. The chronology is unclear, unless one refers to other (newspaper) sources. As in old Hollywood movies, the



OFFICIAL SELECTION  
hotdocs  
2018 OUTSTANDING  
*93Queen*  
A FILM BY PAULA EISELT



admittedly elegant Freier wears a different outfit in every scene.

It might have been interesting for some viewers to learn of the double entendre of *Ezras Nashim*—which means literally “helping women,” but also refers to the women’s section of a *shul*.

This eye-opening and inspiring film has been finding multiple screenings in film festivals, synagogues, and other venues. *93Queen* won the inaugural firstlook Pitch Prize at the 2017 Hot Docs Forum.

Five years in the making, the documentary doesn’t claim to be objective. It does not gloss over Freier’s flaws and even recounts an internal struggle that took place within the organization, but it is a labor of love about a superwoman and her trailblazing compatriots. See <https://www.93queen.com> for information about screenings.

## The Values and Strengths That Orthodox Women Bring to the Workplace

*continued from page 13*

identity to own, and I have received much pushback, through my Jewish board leaderships, I have worked to ensure that women’s voices are considered and heard with regard to school curricula, programs, and policies, as well as in the business/law professional and academic contexts.

Within Lechu Neranena, we seek to empower girls and women to be ritual leaders and thereby create a normalized inclusive community of full participants of all genders. As a board member of Women Owned Law, I work to facilitate the integration of women entrepreneurial owners of law and legal services firms to grow their businesses and raise their profiles within the legal community.

That is precisely what Orthodox Jewish women bring to the workplace: the experience of having forged a new path, the gratitude to those who tirelessly looked out for others, and the enduring motivation to open doors for all.

---

*Carolyn Hochstadter Dicker, Esq., serves on the JOFA Board, chairs JOFA’s Philadelphia chapter, and is a member of the JOFA Journal’s Editorial Board. She is principal of E. Carolyn Hochstadter Dicker, LLC, and is also a faculty member of the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania. She serves on the boards of Kobelet Yeshiva, the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia, Lechu Neranena, and Women Owned Law.*

 The advertisement features a background image of a modern, multi-level interior space with a curved staircase and large windows. Overlaid on this image is the title "Finding the 'I' in Identity" in a large, elegant, black cursive font. Below the title, the event details are listed: "Shabbaton • Women ages 21-35 • May 10-12 • Morristown, NJ". Further down, it says "To learn more and apply, please visit [www.jofa.org/shabbaton](http://www.jofa.org/shabbaton)" and "Rolling applications through April 19, 2019". In the bottom right corner, there is a logo for JOFA MOISHE HOUSE, which consists of a blue stylized house icon above the text "JOFA MOISHE HOUSE".



205 E. 42nd Street, 20th Floor,  
New York, NY 10017

NONPROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ  
PERMIT #1551

**Understand Halakha  
& Its Development**  
*with original rabbinic sources  
in Hebrew and English*

*Essays by: Rahel Berkovits, Jennie Rosenfeld,  
Sara Tillinger Wolkenfeld*

**30% OFF**  
with promo code  
**NASHIM30**

HALAKHIC SOURCE GUIDES  
**HILKHOT NASHIM**  
הלכות נשים  
Volume 1  
Kaddish  
Birkat Hagomel  
Megillah  
Edited by Rahel Berkovits

**מגיד**  
MAGGID  
[www.maggidbooks.com](http://www.maggidbooks.com)

Offer valid until May 1, 2019