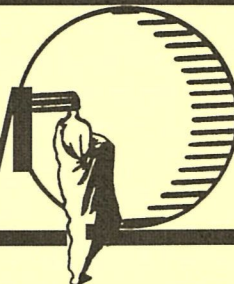


MARCH - APRIL 1995

Jewish Women's FORUM

BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH OPEN DISCOURSE



JEWISH FEMINISM A PROCESS OF CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION



"Eve"

Lucas Cranach, ca. 1530

INSIDE

- Women's Rituals
- Caring for the Environment
- Torah Study: A New Kind of Tikkun Olam
- Foremothers as Role Models
- Changing the Plight of the Agunot
- Change and the Mind-Body Connection

IN FOCUS

**FARBRENTE
SHVESTER**



POETRY

passover eve
by carol rose

blood on the door
posts a warning
there's change about
a splitting
separation is inevitable
death too
wherever oppression & slavery appear
bodies of water foam madly
moonlight tides flood new shores
on the edge of riverbanks
womanspirit drummers chant
bathed in silver
they dance

Miryam
by carol rose

i've watched
these women
for years
observing
their rites
i've seen them
sparkling
in moonlight
their limbs
coated in
sugarwater
hardening
into a second
skin that rips
hair from legs
mound thighs
as it's peeled
from their bodies
by a priestess
i've smelled
the henna potion
used to redden
skin against
the evileye
protection
from the curse
of barrenness
i've heard
their singing
soulful sweet
as the darkness
recedes and
the morningstar
comes to waken
Pharaoh's daughter

and her maids
to a monthly
ritual in the Nile
i've come to know
their mysteries
tied to moontime
and the swelling
of the sea
I wait
at the mouth
of the river
undulating
with the tides
i've grown wise
in the art
of midwifery
delivering
Moses
the child
to the womb
of their Motherwaters



Rochelle Rubinstein Kaplan, *Nursing Family*, 1992



Carol Rose is an educator, writer and spiritual counselor. Her poetry has been published in numerous journals in Canada and the United States. In 1994, she won the Stephen Leacock Award for Poetry. Ms. Rose is the mother of five children.

The above poems are part of a series, entitled *Fleshing Out the Rib: re-visioning women in biblical myth*. They have just won honourable mention in the "Long and the Short Of It Poetry Competition," and they will appear in the Winter 1994-95 issue of *Prairie Fire Magazine* (Volume 15, Number 4).

Jewish Women's FORUM

327 CONCORD AVENUE
SUITE 2,
TORONTO, ONT.
M6H 2P7
Tel. (416) 533 4264
Fax (416) 533 6041

PUBLISHER AND EDITOR
DOROTHY LICHTBLAU

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
BRIAN GREENSPAN

BOOK EDITOR
LILIAN NATTEL

DESIGN AND TYPESETTING
MOON IN JUNE PRODUCTIONS

PRINTER
INCREDIBLE PRINTING

JEWISH WOMEN'S FORUM
ADVISORY COUNCIL

Elaine Cooper Ph.D.

Suzanne Silk Klein

Shayna B. Kravetz

Agnes G. Meinhard
Professor of Organizational Behaviour,
Ryerson Polytechnic University

Leslie Robbins
Professional Storyteller

Reena Zeidman
Chair of Jewish Studies,
Queen's University

Jewish Women's FORUM

MISSION

This publication is for all Jewish women. JWF aims to provide an open forum for women across the spectrum of Jewish society. We believe that by acknowledging and respecting the diversity among us we can create a strong community. When we applaud all our parts we will be more unified.

The Jewish Women's Forum seeks to encourage women to realize their potency in both their private and public lives and to envision themselves as initiators of positive change.

We decry violence, hatred, and destruction. We promote respect for life. Our goal is to play a role in creating a shift from a patriarchal society to a partnership society.

EDITOR'S MESSAGE

The other day a friend visited the office of an international Jewish charitable organization. She was researching information on Jewish women's groups and hoped the bureau could suggest people to contact. Instead of obtaining help, she was told the agency didn't share information unless doing so directly served its interests.

When I heard this story I was surprised by this narrow understanding of benefit and cost. Unless intended for malevolent use, why is working together detrimental? Does sharing resources imply loss? To me, this anecdote describes the competitive (patriarchal) attitude still maintained by so many in our society. It doesn't take into consideration ways to work things out to everyone's satisfaction and benefit.

The patriarchal (old) view claims that since resources are limited we must vie for them. Everything becomes a commodity for which we must compete, even knowledge, friendship, sex and love. The patriarchal system revolves around ownership and power. Those who can muscle out others get the goods, get the status. The situation is adversarial; there are winners and losers.

However, a just society does not only reward the strong, but ensures that everyone can partake in what a community has to offer. The perspective is that we can all lead better lives if we work together to attain common goals. Cooperation, consensus and negotiation become the acknowledged means to a win-win situation.

Any person or group attempting to redress contemporary ills can not do it alone. We women, especially, who for so long have been commodified, objectified, and excluded, must join together if we want to create a civilization devoted to the well-being of all.

At this time, valuing possession and power is deeply ingrained in our minds, therefore we need to train ourselves to recognize the various instances in which we perpetuate this unhealthy habit. Unquestionably this kind of transition in awareness is a slow and difficult process, but each small, conscious act of generosity - like sharing information - has an effect.

B'shalom,
Dorothy

Mail Bag

Thank you, and keep up the good work. I do hope that the Forum continues to be as thought provoking and open-minded about all aspects of Judaism.

B'Shalom,
Judith Ross
North York, Ontario

☺ ☺ ☺ ☺

I don't know what caught my attention first; the magazine or the man reading it. I was on my way home from George Brown College, where I am enrolled in their course for Assaulted Women and Children Advocate Counselors, and wondering how I was going to access information to help me point out the dual biases that face Jewish women, as Jews and as women, and there it was . . . JWF was staring me in the face! I debated with myself and then did the unthinkable in our big city . . . I asked the gentleman if I could see the magazine he was holding. He very kindly agreed and I was hooked! I knew there were Jewish women with voices somewhere in the community and now they can be heard.

Frances Farago
Willowdale, Ontario

☺ ☺ ☺ ☺

It seems apparent that, just as Jewish women differ in their perception as to what makes them Jewish, so do they vary in their criteria and definition as to what constitutes a feminist! Perhaps, that is why, for the most part, I come away bewildered after reading the *Jewish Women's Forum*.

You state that you "goal is to play a role in creating a shift from a patriarchal society to a partnership society." Well, judging from the majority of your articles, it's obvious that your contributors seek only to imitate men in their rituals and attitudes, but do not make their own unique contributions. It would be far better to encourage your readers - as D.G. Rosenberg does in her article - to create new rites, and form new ideas manifesting from a woman's perspective. This would help develop a community directed towards repairing the earth, instead of one which continues to follow in the footsteps of a

patriarchal hierarchy, which, in 5000 years, has only brought us to the brink of destruction! Why perform as a new "female cast" - in the mold of a "male cast" - if only to depict the same old script? And although I recognize that this publication is to promote and provide a forum for Jewish women with diverse values and points of view, I can't help wondering whether it isn't a little lopsided?

As a secular Jew - albeit, brought up in an orthodox family - I find it rather difficult to subscribe to such legends as that which Rabbi Wechsler prescribes. Her use of the allegory describing two angels as a vehicle to teach readers "about habit" is as naive an act as the legend is banal. Just because some females only "bring in fresh flowers, buy Challah, set the table in a special way" and sing L'cha Dodi whenever the impulse grabs them, this doesn't make them any less Jewish than those who attend Synagogue and observe Shabbat and the dietary laws. As conscious and conscientious Jews, we should always work towards peace and understanding with others so that the world might become a safer place for Jews as well as for all of humankind.

I also fail to be moved by Leslie Robbins' "Zaida meise," in which she describes the obnoxious behaviour of yet another male chauvinist "chazer". It's a pity that she's unable to be more inventive when illustrating the importance of communication between two people so that they can learn to live in peace and harmony. Is Ms. Robbins suggesting that spitting at or cowering to a despotic husband is the solution for a good marriage? If so, she ought to look beyond her rationalization and realize that both the Talmud and the Midrash are filled with misogynist material. Why Ms. Robbins would depend on that resource to advance her ideas boggles my mind!

As for the book Lilian Nattel reviewed: it's all well and good that Buddhists and Jews are carrying on a dialogue. Nevertheless, there are a great many interesting books out there, written by Jewish women, which address issues more critical to women. Besides, how many females are found within the Buddhist's hierarchy; or, for that matter, in the Rabbinate? Women have enough difficulty coping with the immediate, here on earth, without having to wonder "about the mystical concept of reality" and the "notion

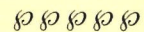
continued on page 4

Continued from page 3

of incarnation and the belief in a realm of angels."

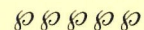
Why should women - who until now have been excluded and rendered invisible - settle for crumbs now that they've been "accepted"? There are those who believe in themselves, and will not accept anything less than total equality. I applaud the Jewish feminists who - despite hostile conditions - have paved the way for other Jewish women, and all women and Jews in general!

Florence Brown
Pierrefonds, Quebec



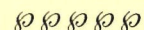
The JWF appreciates constructive criticism. Our editorial policy is to encourage dialogue between different, sometimes opposing, voices. We invite women across the spectrums of both Judaism and feminism to make themselves heard. Responses to the above letter are welcome.

Editor



Congratulations on a very interesting and stimulating magazine!

Sincerely,
Ellen Baker
Toronto, Ontario



Thank you for sending us copies of the

To The Reader:

The Jewish Women's Forum will not publish articles or advertisements which are sexist, racist or demeaning in any way. Articles disguised as advertising will not be published. JWF reserves the right to refuse to publish articles, at the sole discretion of the editor. Articles submitted for publication should not exceed 800 words in length. Contributors will be given a maximum by-line of three lines. Please check all your facts and proofread your article before you submit it. If you'd like your original material returned please enclose a stamped self-addressed envelope with your submission.

The Jewish Women's Forum currently does not pay contributors. Articles published will be edited without consultation with the writer. We will always endeavour to maintain the integrity of the work.

The views expressed in the articles published in the Jewish Women's Forum do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher.

All articles and literary and artistic contributions remain the property of their authors.

Jewish Women's FORUM. They were placed in a prominent place in our foyer and a good number of copies have been taken. Also, a copy was given to each member of our Women's Study Group.

We congratulate you and wish you success with this publication and its mission that "promotes respect for life and decries violence, hatred and destruction."

I, personally, was happy to see the tip-in for Found Treasures which I received as a Hanukkah gift. The stories are wonderful.

Sincerely,
Ruth D. Booth
Congregation Beth El
Windsor, Ontario

**SEND US YOUR CARDS AND LETTERS.
WE WANT TO HEAR YOUR VIEWS.
WRITE:**

"MAIL BAG"
JEWISH WOMEN'S FORUM
2-327 CONCORD AVE.
TORONTO, ONT. M6H 2P7

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to our contributors.

- Norma Baumel Joseph
- Rochelle Rubinstein Kaplan
- Elaine Kopman
- Lilian Nattel
- Rabbi Sheryl Nosan
- Carol Rose
- Rabbi Sharon Sobel
- Miriam Wyman
- Reena Zeidman

Thank you to Jennifer Cohen for her assistance.

ADVERTISING SALES PEOPLE!

The Jewish Women's FORUM

A new, Canadian magazine seeks articulate, personable individuals for its sales team. Must have excellent English language skills. Sales exp. and a vehicle are an asset.

FAX resume to (416) 533 6041 or call (416) 533 4264.

PERSPECTIVES

A Lemon on the Seder Plate: The Case for Women's Rituals in Judaism

by Rabbi Sharon L. Sobel

Last Pesach, I attended our youth group's third seder. On the seder plate, along with the usual ritual foods, was a lemon. During the part of the seder when we explain the other ritual foods - Pesach, Matzah and Maror - someone asked, "Why is there a lemon on the seder plate?" And the following answer was given:

"Susannah Heschel, Abraham Joshua Heschel's daughter, tells a story of a young woman who was cleaning her house vigorously for Pesach when it occurred to her that neither her husband, nor any of her friends' husbands were helping in the ritual preparation. This bothered her and she went to the rabbi with her concerns.

"'Rabbi,' she asked, 'what place does feminism have in Judaism?' The rabbi was flabbergasted. He could not believe that she was asking such a question. 'What place does FEMINISM have in Judaism?' he repeated. 'The same place a lemon has on a seder plate!'"

In Judaism women often feel like they are the lemon on the seder plate. We can put the lemon on the plate, but it seems out of place. We like the taste of lemons, and there are times when they enhance the taste of food, but they don't play a part in the ritual celebrations of Pesach. Just as I initially looked at the lemon on the seder plate with skepticism, Jewish women are often looked at skeptically when they wish to celebrate sacred moments in their lives from within a Jewish framework.

In Judaism there are very few rituals for women to help them celebrate sacred events in their lives, to help them add a sense of k'dushah to these times. Judaism is a patriarchal religion that has traditionally catered to and been dominated by males, while subordinating the place of women. As primary shapers of society and religion, males have been the ones to determine women's roles. For example, in a discussion on birth and delivery author and feminist Blu

Greenberg remarks, "Interestingly, there is no special ritual or blessing for women that marks the act of giving birth. Could it be that if men had been giving birth all these centuries, some fantastic ritual would have been developed by now?" As Simone de Beauvoir states in her book, *The Second Sex*, "... man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him...she is defined and differentiated with reference to man, and he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other."

Feminist Gayle Pomerantz states that within the Jewish community, "For the past twenty-five years or so, some enlightened women and men have been questioning the patriarchal nature of Judaism and women's status as 'Others'. They believe that since the traditional patriarchal society shaped Judaism, it is male-oriented and discriminatory toward women." As wider society shifts from patriarchy, Jewish feminists call for Judaism to become egalitarian. In a *Tikkun* article, Rabbi Laura Geller, expressed the belief that, "[women's spirituality] begins with the decision to stop being the 'Other', to understand that the perspective which views reality as a dichotomy between the 'Norm' and the 'Other' is a limited perspective. It seeks a larger perspective, the largest perspective of all, God's perspective, where concepts of 'Norm' and 'Other' disappear and we are left with different options, different models of spirituality."

Feminists seek to remedy the conflict in Judaism in a number of different ways. They are examining our liturgy, our theology, our texts and our rituals to see where patriarchal structures and ideas are perpetuated, where women's voices are missing, where women are excluded, or subjugated.

The reality that men have created within Judaism does not reflect the reality of Jewish women. As feminist and theologian Judith Plaskow states, "Women do not name reality, but rather are named as part of a reality that is male-constructed. Where women are Other, they can be present and silent simultaneously; for the language and thought-forms of culture do not express their [i.e. women's] meanings."

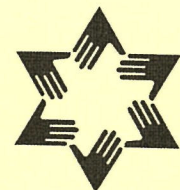
If among other things, the functions of ritual are to enable us to articulate the meaning of life by enabling people to define who they are; to transform significant

moments into sacred moments and to mark that transformation; to help connect us to our history and bond us to our community; to give our lives a sense of k'dushah; and to provide a framework for our lives, then Judaism misses the mark with half of the Jewish community - the female half. Says Pomerantz, "Judaism has ignored the significant events in a woman's life; i.e. naming/covenantal ceremonies, the onset of puberty, marriage (traditionally a wife is passively 'acquired' - M. Kid. 1:1), conception and pregnancy, miscarriage, birth and menopause." The message is that women are not equal partners in Judaism.

Feminists seek to remedy the conflict in Judaism in a number of different ways. They are examining our liturgy, our theology, our texts and our rituals to see where patriarchal structures and ideas are perpetuated, where women's voices are missing, where women are excluded, or subjugated.

We need to find the places in Judaism where our tradition is silent and we need to fill those gaps. As Plaskow states, "...In the ritual moment, women's history is made present... Ritual asserts women's presence in the present. Borrowing from history and midrash, it transform them into living

continued on page 13



BloorJCC

WORK OUT FOR AS LOW AS \$68/MONTH!

THE WOMEN'S HEALTH CLUB

at

THE BLOOR JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTRE

ENJOY:

- a private exercise space
- access to weight room, track, pool & courts
- a lounge and luxurious spa
- a choice of 35 fitness classes per week

**For info. call 416-924 6211 THE BLOOR JCC, 750 SPADINA AVE.,
(AT BLOOR AND SPADINA - ON 2 SUBWAY LINES)**

don't keep it a secret.
Spread The Word!

'Jewish Women's Forum is the Canadian magazine for Jewish women's voices.'
Tell your friends there's a new choice in town.

Jewish Women's FORUM

Only \$18.00 (+ GST) for 6 issues

2-327 Concord Ave.
Toronto, Ontario M6H 2P7

BOOK BAG

FOUND TREASURES: STORIES BY YIDDISH WOMEN WRITERS

Edited by Frieda Forman, Ethel Raicus, Sarah Silberstein Swartz and Margie Wolf.

Second Story Press, 1994

by Lilian Nattel

THIS is not "Fiddler on the Roof." There is no sentimentality or nostalgia here, but power and authenticity. In this collection of short Yiddish literature in translation, the eighteen authors reflect the diversity of our European foremothers' lives. Depicting the early years of the century to post-holocaust times, the stories are set in the shtetl, in Israel, and in North America. The characters are Zionist, Bundist, Orthodox and secular, poets, workers, mothers and children. They are loving, bitter, anguished, hopeful: women surviving.

I grew up with a strong sense of Yiddish heritage, a love of the richness and complexity of the life that gave birth to me, the life I never could touch first hand, but hungered to know. As a child, I discovered and loved my literary father, my Tateh, I.L. Poretz and his fellow writers, the brotherhood. But where was my Mammeniu? I searched and found only the odd story and poem in anthologies: Rachel Korn, Kadia Molodowsky (in my first attempt at a novel, I named a character after her). Like an orphan, I had to find female role models for myself among English writers.

This summer, working on a novel set in a Polish shtetl at the turn of the century, I became aware of how little I could find about the lives of the women. Everything I knew seemed to center in the synagogue or the kheder. The books I read referred to "children," meaning sons, and "Jews," meaning men. Again, I felt the old hunger. Where were the Yiddish women writers I had so rarely glimpsed? Where were my mothers' stories? Where were the feelings, experiences, knowledge of their worlds? Silenced, I assumed. Absent. Like so much

of women's history.

But I was wrong. As Irena Klepfisz says, "Since modern secular Yiddish literature is barely 150 years old, the existence of hundreds of women documented in Yiddish histories, anthologies and bibliographies is astonishing, their absence in the English/Yiddish canon even more so" (p. 23).

Into this void came Found Treasures. As the Preface makes clear, this is meant to be not the definitive collection of Yiddish women's literature, but rather a beginning. It is certainly that. A fine beginning. A fascinating beginning. An exciting beginning, though the stories are often sad and painful, and set against a background

Where were the Yiddish women writers I had so rarely glimpsed? Where were my mothers' stories? Where were the feelings, experiences, knowledge of their worlds? Silenced, I assumed. Absent. Like so much of women's history.

of poverty and anti-Semitism that is even more limiting for women. I am delighted by this book, and grateful for the complementary material which contextualizes and enriches it: Irena Klepfisz's incisive historical analysis, the headnotes, the biographies and bibliographies.

Some of the most moving stories were: "The Zogerin," about a female prayer leader

who is fed up with petitioning for the benefit of others; "Rayzele's Wedding," about a spirited girl forced into marriage; and "A Dancer," about a woman who sacrifices her passion for a conventional life and goes mad. There is a remarkable variety of voices in these stories: "Jazal the Purim Player," is about a Yemenite woman whose anger finds expression as Queen Esther.; while "Through the Eyes of Childhood" is the story of a young writer who finds her voice in the blending of the old world and the new. "Unspoken Hearts" tells of the reconciliation of a religious woman with her estranged, socialist daughter; in a different key is "The Road of No Return," the tale of a family who must choose one of their own in a Nazi selection.

Having tasted the richness of Yiddish women's literature, I am eager for a *Found Treasures II*. □

Lilian Nattel is a Toronto writer, whose short stories and poetry have appeared in Fireweed, Event, and Lilith. She is currently working on a novel.

FREE!

Listing of Community Events

Mail your typed info. to:

**JWF "Calendar"
2-327 Condord Ave.,
Toronto, ON M6H 2P7**

Or FAX (416) 533-6041

Deadline for the next issue is April 21/95.

DEADLINES FOR UP-COMING ISSUES

Issue	Theme	Article Deadline	Ad. Deadline
May-Jun., 1995	Our Stories JWF Literary Issue	Apr. 14/95	Apr.21/95
Jul.-Aug., 1995	Women, Judaism and Ecology	Jun. 15/95	Jun.19/95
Sep.-Oct., 1995	Our Bodies	Aug. 14/95	Aug. 18/95

PERSPECTIVES

Judaism, Feminism, and the Environment

by Miriam Wyman

ALL environmental problems are human problems. Since the things I have always loved about Judaism are our mandate for social justice and our belief in the ability of human beings to improve themselves and to create a better world, I have always felt that environmental problems, which are inherently human problems, are Jewish problems as well. This is the Jewish underpinning to my environmentalism and my feminism. I am a Jew, a feminist and an environmentalist. I am all three all the time, and each role informs the others all the time.

The women's movement taught us that the personal is political. The environmental movement taught us that everything is connected to everything else, and to think globally and act locally. And now, I think the need to work for sustainability means that we also have to think locally and act globally.

There are a number of themes that pervade my work as an environmental consultant. One is a concern for the environment that includes natural, built and social environments that are clean, healthy, safe, and life-sustaining for people and for other creatures. Another is making sure that women are equal partners in decision-making. I find the realities of women's lives stunning. Women continue to struggle for recognition and resources in the world community, the environmental community, and the Jewish community. We are plagued by lack of access to resources, land and capital; we suffer from poverty and violence; we have to fight for health, security, and control over our own bodies and lives. Women around the world are oppressed and dominated by the same social systems and institutions that oppress and dominate the earth.

Commitment to participatory democracy is another trend in my work. I believe that everyone has a right, perhaps even a responsibility, to participate in decision-making about her life. And I know that everyone has the capacity to understand the

issues and to think clearly about them.

I also investigate context: nothing happens in a vacuum. What we do every day has implications for people everywhere and for the entire planet.

My Jewish values are solidly rooted. In my family there was a continuous commitment to social justice and community involvement and a powerful sense of connection to what came before and what will come after. There was ongoing commitment to tzedakah in both its literal sense, and its moral sense of just and ethical behaviour. And there was a deep understanding of tikkun olam—the notion that as Jews we are obligated to find what is broken in our world and to repair it. There was also a powerful attachment to land—its care, custody, and productivity.

I think my initial concern for environment came straight out of the shopping habits I learned in my childhood. I was taught that it's better and cheaper to make everything from scratch, that you have to do it yourself, that you have to be concerned about cost, and that nothing should be wasted. If you didn't act this way, there was something very wrong! It turns out that "bayshanut," moderation and frugality are time-honoured Jewish virtues.

I arrived in graduate school as a mature student. I studied the history of ideas. I studied political science and learned about the impact of social structure on women's lives. My home-grown feminism emerged into the world. I met young women who were sure about what they wanted to learn and do and equally sure that their hopes, dreams and expectations were not going to be limited by what anyone else thought they should do. It was a heady, invigorating time. It inspired me to take a more serious and critical look at the Jewish-environment connections, as well as the role of women in Judaism.

It was getting harder and harder to live in a feminist world at school and in what felt like a misogynist world at shul, so I started working to fix it. It was only after I left our large Conservative synagogue to participate in an egalitarian minyan that I realized how angry I had been and how wonderful it is to be in a setting where egalitarianism is a fact of life, not a battle. That's when I really started to examine the Jewish-environment connections, and to reenact what has been an honourable Jewish pattern for centuries—to look to the sources and to interpret them in the context of our lives today.

I think binding our tradition with contemporary social, ecological and economic realities is what sustainability is about. The World Commission on Environment and Development has named "sustainable development" as the way out of the downward spiral we're in. Sustainable development refers to living off the interest of the earth's resources rather than using up its capital. Moving—and moving quickly—toward sustainability here and around the world may be the only path to human survival on the planet, and everyone everywhere must be involved in this transition. It's not going to be easy, but I know we have to try. There is a Talmudic saying, "Lo alecha ha m'lacha ligmore, v'lo ata ben chorin lehibatel mimena." Loosely translated, it says that "we don't have to complete the task; but neither can we—who are free people—step away from getting started."

I don't know whether there has been a personal transformation over the years, or whether all these parts of me have been inside all along, waiting for my evolution to unfold. Does this also apply to Jewish feminism? Was it, too, waiting for the appropriate coincidence of time, people and circumstances? What I do know is that individuals, especially individuals working collectively toward common goals, make a difference in when and how these transformations take place.

The garden of my life is in a constant process of transformation. It has seasons, cycles, changing colours, many sizes, shapes and textures, and it grows deeper and stronger over time. As my Judaism, my feminism and my environmentalism continue to inform one another and to shape me, I remember that this happens "Inch by inch, row by row." □

Myriam Wyman is an independent environmental consultant. In 1990, she was coordinator of the first North American conference to examine women's involvement in environmental activity, and in 1992 she represented Canadian women at the UN Conference on Environment and Development. She is a member of Kehillat Ahavat Hesed, an egalitarian congregation in Toronto.



Women and Torah Study: A New Kind of Tikkun Olam

by Dr. Reena Zeidman

As a professor of Jewish Studies, I am frequently asked an elementary, yet complex question, "What is the effect of women entering the domain of the Jewish intellectual world?" The response I have forged suggests a revolutionary conclusion: women's involvement has transformed the entire Jewish enterprise. The story goes like this.

The past ten years have witnessed monumental changes in the study of Jewish texts by both genders. Men used to study primarily Talmud and law, and women, if they studied Jewish texts, would concentrate on certain parts of the Bible. Since the revolution of women studying Torah, men want in. They want what we have started, (writing about the Bible and reflecting on the interplay between Torah and literature) and they are getting it. This is a tremendous innovation in the arena of Jewish study which has wide repercussions in Jewish and, even, non-Jewish life and thought.

Women started studying Torah, in larger numbers, in the mid-nineteenth century

through the aegis of the Beth Jacob school system. The need arose out of women's over-education in secular fields of study (in part, based on the talmudic dictum that "secular studies act as an ornament to women") while neglecting standard Jewish texts. Beth Jacob tried to remedy the situation and, in many cases, achieved its goal. Men, however, still were rooted to their traditional curriculum (even in Hasidic schools) of Talmud, Poskim (legal decisors) and very little Torah—the latter was taken for granted and in the case of the prophets, considered dangerous enough to stir rebellious thoughts. We know this curriculum was rigorously upheld because when individuals rebelled, they often expressed their discontent through the prophets, Hebrew literature and secular studies.

Women, now, recognize that although Talmud and its ancillary subjects are very important, they still want to explore the more traditional route. Torah, the one non-secular subject that was permitted to women, its commentaries and super-commentaries, should be studied by women in multi-variant ways, so that we can bring fresh views to the scholars' table.

Recently, we have been blessed with the genius of biblical commentator Nechama Leibowitz and the perceptions of Aviva Zorenberg—women who made their mark by recognizing that Torah studies still require interpreters. Leibowitz's Torah commentaries are known for their ability to merge many sources and tease out of them

various approaches to biblical passages, while Zorenberg usually takes a problem in the midrashic literature and sheds light on it by referring to midrashim or bringing in literary or philosophic texts which grapple with similar problems. Only in Zorenberg can you find Torah, Kafka, depth psychology and Frost! Strange bedfellows, maybe, but such is the stuff of inter-textual genius.

Men, having tasted the fruits of women's labours, want more. Ironically, now they are the ones who have to stand in the lobbies of the lecture halls to drink from the richness of scholars, who in many centres still lecture only to women. They need what their scholars can not give them in the world of Talmud and law. This recent demand has forced male teachers to employ the once-female approach and introduce it to their students. Torah study has gained such popularity that it is taught in traditional and non-traditional places of Jewish learning.

Women have not only changed the face of men's relationship to Jewish learning, but also illustrate that rigorous and creative teaching and study can commence in one's adult life. I can certainly attest to this personally. I was raised without a solid background in the sources, but have acquainted myself with them, through university and other routes of study, in the past twelve years. We women are demonstrating that Torah study, in its widest sense, is a most fruitful endeavour. This, too, has revolutionized the wider world. Men, who have little or no background in the Jewish texts, recognize, only through our struggle, the viability of approaching a literature that at one time was considered only for those who began studies from a very young age.

We now are seeing a renaissance for both genders. A wider range of people in the study of Jewish texts spawns yet another generation that wants to study texts. Both Jew and non-Jew benefit from these studies (my university classes were enamoured by Leibowitz's critical work) in ways that we had never dreamed of. In short, women's output in these fields seems to tap some recessive and ingrained need in both genders --and for this, the whole cultural dimension of the world has to be grateful.

Dr. Reena Zeidman, Chair of Jewish Studies at Queen's University, received her Ph.D. in Talmud from the University of Toronto and resides in Toronto.

TELL THEM YOUR BUSINESS! Three lines FOR ONLY \$10 per issue.

LIST YOUR BUSINESS NAME AND PHONE NUMBER IN

Jewish Women's FORUM BUSINESS DIRECTORY

My Listing (Please print or type) _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postal Code: _____

Tel. Nos. (W) _____ (H) _____

Please enclose a cheque for \$10 + 0.70 GST = \$10.70

Mail to: **JWF Business Directory**

2-327 Concord Ave.,

Toronto, Ont. M6H 2P7

GST # R139043210

EVA GOLDFINGER

Secular Humanistic Jewish Leader & Counsellor

Licensed to Perform Marriages
Personal, Meaningful & Memorable Ceremonies

Weddings - Jewish & intercultural
Baby Namings, Bat/Bar Mitzvot, Funerals
Humanistic Counselling - Intermarriage Counselling
(905) 889-7450

ELAINE COOPER Ph.D.

FEMINIST PSYCHOTHERAPIST AND ADULT EDUCATOR

Practice Devoted to Individual Therapy,
Work-Related Stress & Career Management



88 Prince Arthur Ave.,
Toronto, Ontario M5R 1B6
Tel. (416) 964-9570 Fax (416) 964-7451

EVENING APPOINTMENTS AVAILABLE.



downtown jewish community school

Located in the Bloor J.C.C.
(Bloor & Spadina)

JR . KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE 7
JEWISH STUDIES PROGRAM
UNIQUE WED. EVE. HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM

Call Joan Schoenfeld, Principal (416) 924-6211

Affiliated with the Toronto Board of Jewish Education



come to the third annual
**Toronto
Jewish Film Festival**

May 4 to May 11, 1995
5755 years in the making

for more information

☎ call 324-8226

☎ fax 324-8668

Think Ink . . . Nyman Ink

for all your publishing and advertising needs

Nyman Ink is a full-service electronic publishing firm, specializing in newsletter production. We offer writing, editing, graphic design, layout and typesetting services of newsletters, annual reports, corporate brochures and other printed materials.

Nyman Ink

Judy Nyman

226 Lonsmount Drive, Toronto ON M5P 2Z1
Telephone (416) 653-4698 Fax (416) 653-9912

TORONTO WRITING WORKSHOP

Mar.-Apr. '95 416-260-6621

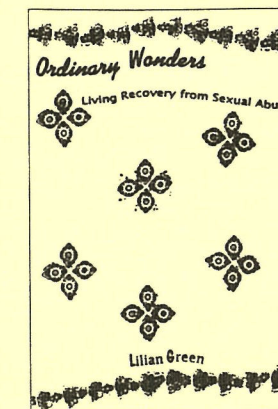
ONE-DAY WORKSHOPS: POETRY,
FICTION & LITERARY NONFICTION,
STORYTELLING & PERFORMANCE

May-June '95

NINE-WEEK WORKSHOPS
(one eve./week): WOMEN WRITERS,
INTRO. TO CREATIVE WRITING



with highly qualified faculty, including LIBBY SCHEIER,
MOLLY PEACOCK, HELEN PORTER, GEORGE GALT



Ordinary Wonders

Living Recovery
From Sexual Abuse

Lilian Green

Ordinary Wonders is one of the first books that deals with a Jewish survivor's experience of sexual abuse. Through intimate narratives Lilian Green traces her recovery from childhood and adult, physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Using journal entries in both

prose and poetry, Lilian Green provides the reader with an immediate sense of the pain and wonder involved in the healing journey. She emerges whole, perceiving herself as capable and independent, loved and loving, a mature Jewish woman beginning a new journey in life, and committed to sharing her story.

Ordinary Wonders ... another welcome addition to the growing body of personal memoirs about healing from sexual abuse. It is also one of the few books written by a Jewish survivor. -- THE HEALING WOMAN

Ask for it at your favourite bookstore

\$15.95 pb
0-88961-172-6



Women's Press
517 College St.
#233 Toronto,
Ont. M6G 4A2

Farbrente Shvester: Jewish Feminists Committed to Change

by Dorothy Lichtblau

It's a raw night in February, but Esther Geva, Cheryl Gaster and Ronnee Jaeger have braved the weather to gather together for a meeting of the Farbrente Shvester, a Toronto Jewish feminist group that has been going strong for thirteen years. Tonight, though attendance is reduced due to winter flu and other commitments, the proceedings are nevertheless stimulating and spirited.

It started with the invasion of Lebanon by Israel and International Women's Day of 1982," says Cheryl Gaster, a founder of the group.

That year, because of Israel's actions in Lebanon, the Women's Day events were fraught with anti-Semitism. Palestinians were deemed the oppressed and Zionists (anyone pro-Israel) the oppressor. According to Gaster, throughout the conference Jewish women were blatantly silenced. The larger group would not allow that Jews, specifically Zionists, were not a monolithic entity, nor was it interested in a Jewish feminist response to the political situation. Each time a Jewish woman attempted to speak, she was prevented from being heard.

Devastated by the ordeal, the Jewish feminists at the convocation sought each other out. Gaster says, "It was such a difficult experience we decided we needed to meet to debrief, go over what had happened."

Ironically, these long-time Zionists, long-time feminists, who because of their politics were cast aside by the women's community, were also attacked by mainstream Jews for questioning the actions of the Israeli government. Finding themselves thrust to the margins of the groups with which they strongly identified, the women searched for a way to grapple with what had occurred. They decided to form a study group. The questions had become: "What does it mean to be a feminist; what does it mean to be a Jew?" "Fundamentally, what is Judaism seen through the lens of feminism?"

The originators of the Farbrente Shvester were Reva Landau, Laura Weintraub, Frieda Forman, Tzipora Nemani and Cheryl Gaster. Esther Geva and Ronnee Jaeger connected with members a short while later through political activities to do with the invasion of Lebanon. Says Jaeger, "At the time I didn't know much about feminism, but I did know I was a great secretary." She was awakened to the lack of equity within the Zionist organizations she worked with. Men assumed leadership positions; women were asked to take the minutes.

Through the Farbrente Shvester Jaeger learned it wasn't just she who was being relegated to subordinate roles. She recalls nights when, after a meeting, she and Reva Landau would have long talks in the car before going home. Jaeger says Landau exposed her to data which changed her outlook on how society functions.

The group's pursuit of a significant understanding of feminism and Judaism caused it to rigorously explore available resources. Every second Monday, one of the women would present a paper or a book review. Topics ranged from an examination of Jewish women in Roman society, to women's religions and rituals, to the medicalization of birthing.

Jaeger remarks, "I remember I once did a paper on radical feminist groups. It took me three months. I thought I would die; I'm not an academic. I loved it!"

Some of the material the women discovered shook their basic assumptions. One instance was after exposure to writings that analyzed sexuality as a socio-political issue. Jaeger describes herself as being jolted into a new comprehension of her sexual self.

The notion of "family" was also dissected. "Family is about women doing unpaid work," says Gaster. She explains further that some feminists critique the concept of the family construct because as it stands it doesn't promote the economic security of individuals or a sense that individuals are holistic entities as opposed to half of a twosome or a fraction of a group.

Gaster's comments stimulate other observations and the three women volley more points: "What is the value of a nuclear family?" "Why is status given to those who form two's, rather than to those who opt for three's or five's or one's?" "What does it mean to fall in love? After all, aren't our emotions and behaviours shaped by our training and experience?" "As for Judaism,



is it currently a religion that reflects centuries of rabbinic (male) authority? Don't we need more female input? Is there another way to interpret and live a Jewish life?"

These are the types of issues the Farbrente Shvester have confronted over their thirteen year history. Diverse women have been associated with the group, which at times has expanded to twelve persons. (Now, besides the three women at the February meeting, members are Anne Hertz, Isabella Meltz, Lil Mendelsohn, Sheryl Nestel and Ruth Roth) There is no clear cut profile of a member, except that each has identified with feminism and Judaism, and has sought a safe place to explore her identity. Class, marital status, sexual orientation, or age were not common factors. Politically, Geva describes it like this: "If you had to divide the world into two we would all be on the same side, but if you were allowed to divide the world into ten, then we'd all be on different sides."

Such intensity has no doubt bred lively discussions. At times, friendships have apparently been broken over disparate views. Yet, at its core the Farbrente Shvester is an intimate circle of kindred women, which supports individual and common evolution.

Gaster, Geva and Jaeger all concur that there have been times when their partners and children have felt threatened by the group's powerful bonds.

When I first started coming to the group, every second Monday," recalls Geva, "it took a lot of courage to leave relatively young children, my spouse, not having the excuse of having to go to work." The

continued on page 11

Feminists

continued from page 10

women's' group was about doing something for oneself only, exclusive of family, not an easy step for most women to take.

The ties that formed, the obvious comfort of being with empathetic friends, the intimate conversation, and the diverse sexual orientations worried male partners. "Sam was sure that every lesbian in the group would proposition me and that I might run off with one of the women," divulges Jaeger, only half jokingly. Geva and Gaster reveal that their partners have had similar thoughts.

There were those who thought the women were being indulgent by creating a situation for females only. When Jaeger's children asked why all human beings couldn't just be together, she responded by saying, "Substitute the word 'Jew' for the word 'woman.' As Jews there are times we're part of the larger world and there are times when we need to limit ourselves to the Jewish world."

The three women agree with this line of reasoning. For ages, our sex was taught male perspectives, male languages and male values; we therefore need time to investigate who we are and what we need and want on our own terms. Geva adds, "At the same time, as I change this effects changes in my husband and daughters."

Feminism, for Jaeger, Geva and Gaster, is about profound transition that potentially can undo the underpinnings of our civilization. While realizing that transformation of this sort is a frightening proposition, especially in these unstable times, they think that working toward a more just system is worth the upheaval. However, there isn't a wide-eyed expectation of enormous or quick strides toward change. Outside the Farbrente Shvester, the women lead busy and full lives and contend with daily reality. They are not yet ready to bring down the system. Still, the group has flourished for so long because it is a means for obtaining what the wider world cannot now fully provide.

Geva says that for her, "The group is the main source for talk about feminism and understanding feminism and exploring things I'm not sure about. I can bring things in from the outside and ask, 'What do you think?' It's the only group with which I can do that and get intelligent, good answers..."

"I feel like I was raised here," says

continued on page 15

PERSPECTIVES

Foremothers as Rolemodels: Biblical Ancients as Agents of Change

by Rabbi Sheryl Nosan

As contemporary women in a developed country, we may mistakenly believe that the world of our grandmothers, great-grandmothers, and ancient foremothers was simple. We may think that their lives were stable and that they lacked the opportunity to be agents of change. However, if we re-view our mothers' mothers stories with an open heart, we discover their bravery in coming to a new land, and their initiatives in shaping their lives and worlds. Similarly, if we read the stories of our biblical mothers with an open mind, we see them afresh, as role models for change. Yocheved, Tamar, and The Five Sisters (better known as Zelophehad's daughters) are biblical archetypes that remind us that Jewish women have acted as agents of change since ancient times. Their example teaches us how to continue to transform our world.

Yocheved gave birth to Moses (Exodus 2:1-9, Exodus 6:20) and played a pivotal role in changing the fate of the Jewish people. The pharaoh had decreed the drowning of every Hebrew male infant, saying, "all the sons born you shall cast into the Nile," but Yocheved defied the decree. She could not destroy her son. She hid the babe for three

months, then placed him in a basket which she cast into the Nile. The compassion of another woman, pharaoh's own daughter, saved the baby. The wisdom of a third woman, Miriam, arranged for Yocheved to nurse her son.

Moses survived because of Yocheved's commitment to saving her child, her bravery in defying Pharaoh, and her willingness to hide her infant. Yocheved, in partnership with God (and Moses), shaped the future of the enslaved Hebrews. Yocheved can be viewed as a complex woman living in desperate times, but committed to life. She teaches us that personal conviction and private acts are necessary in the process of change.

Tamar, Judah's daughter-in-law (Genesis 38:1-30), violates communal expectations in her pursuit of justice. According to the biblical institution of Levirate Marriage (Deuteronomy 25:5), after the untimely death of Tamar's first husband, Judah's family was required to provide a new partner for her. Time passes, but Judah does not fulfil his obligation. Ultimately, Judah's noncompliance inspires Tamar's action. The young widow Tamar disguises herself as a prostitute and becomes impregnated by Judah. Initially, her community judges her "harlotry" as punishable by death. However, when the facts of her story are revealed, Judah himself declares the justice of her acts.

Tamar's community expected her to wait passively for Judah to provide a partner. She shatters their expectations by becoming pregnant as a single woman through feigned harlotry. Tamar changes the way that the community judges her and creates a new standard of justice. During her pregnancy,

continued on page 13

The Jewish Women's FORUM & "BOOKS and BAGELS"

PRESENT

"OUR STORIES"

READINGS BY JEWISH WOMEN WRITERS

- ANN DECTOR
- LIBBY SCHEIER
- RHEA TREGEBOV
- HELEN WEINZWEIG

SUN. APRIL 30 - 11:30A.M.
WALLIN LOUNGE, BLOOR JCC
750 SPADINA AVE. (AT BLOOR)

TICKETS \$5. TO RESERVE: PHONE (416) 533 4264

Jewish Divorce: Canadian Law and Canadian Women Working Together

by Norma Baumel Joseph

On August 12, 1990, the Honourable Ray Hnatyshyn, then Governor General of Canada, signed a distinctive divorce amendment into law. That amendment (38-39 Elizabeth II chapter 18 section 21.1) requires that all barriers to the religious remarriage of a spouse that are within an individual's control be removed by that individual. The legal language and process is somewhat complicated but the result has been liberating for many in the Jewish community.

Canadian Jews, collectively and individually, worked towards that goal for five years. Some of us had worked on the problem for fifteen years.

Jewish divorce is the regrettable but acceptable solution to an unsuccessful marriage. The Talmud tells us that the altar sheds tears when a man divorces the wife of his youth. This image is an interesting symbolic representation that indicates two attitudes within Judaism to divorce. Obviously, the aphorism teaches that divorce is a terribly sad event. Disruptive and discontinuous, it challenges all our notions of the sanctity of marriage, family, stability, human relationship and love. In fact, the prophets used the model of marriage to explore God's loving and continuous relationship with Israel. In that context, divorce was almost inconceivable.

However, although "almost" inconceivable and certainly to be avoided if possible, Jewish law recognizes the reality and hence, responds to the need. For us, then, divorce is calamitous but it is allowed - it is a lamentable necessity. This brings us to the second point of the tearful altar: however sad it may be, the mechanism for divorce is in place. The sages were not loath to develop a legal system to implement the Deuteronomic (24:1) allusion to divorce.

If a marriage does not "work," does not fulfill the expectations of the couple nor the ideals of Judaism, then the system sets forth an escape clause. The divorce is morally neutral: no blame or sin is ascribed to the procedure. If the marriage is unsuccessful, the law encourages one to remarry. The ideal of marriage remains unsullied by divorce. It becomes then merely a procedure for

establishing one's freedom to try again.

A Jewish divorce requires a Gett. The Gett is a document that a man must freely give to his wife and she must voluntarily accept. By doing so, they both agree to terminate their previous Jewish marriage contract. Without this document, neither partner may remarry according to Jewish law as practiced by Orthodox, Conservative and Re-constructionist Jews.

Mutual consent constitutes sufficient grounds for a Jewish divorce. If both parties agree, they appear before three rabbis who constitute a Beth Din, a Jewish court. The court merely approves and then acts as agents of the couple to insure proper procedure. This procedure is essential and not subsumed under any civil process. Without the Gett there will be grave difficulties in the future, especially for the woman. The central part of the Gett is the husband's declaration: "I release you my wife, in order that you may have authority over yourself to marry any man you desire. Marriage is the ideal and goal, even of divorce."

The irony is, of course, that while the process was designed to set one free in order to encourage remarriage, in fact it has created a group of people who are not free. We call them agunot. The word signifies someone who is tied, chained or anchored to an absent spouse. In its Talmudic use, the word usually referred to a deserted wife.

Let us be clear on one point. Today, either a man or woman might find himself or herself in this situation. Due to the structure of Jewish law, however, the victim is most frequently a woman. Since the man must give the Gett, the woman is dependent upon his action. Even though Jewish law was amended nearly one thousand years ago to include her acceptance of the document, the reality is that the Beth Din can at times act to release him without her cooperation, but never the other way around. I do not have the words to convey to you the full extent of the agony of the agunah (chained woman). Imagine what it might be like to be unable to remarry according to the traditions of your people because of one person; to be publicly divorced but somehow still tied to someone; to look to a future of solitude; to feel that your community has deserted you; to be abandoned.

For the Jewish community today, divorce constitutes a major moral problem - not because of the increase in numbers, but due to the unresolved cases of agunot.

Getting the Gett has thus proven to be increasingly difficult. The frequency of cases in which one party of a couple granted civil divorce subsequently refuses to

cooperate in the execution of the Gett is alarming. This refusal is usually motivated by vengeance or a desire to use the Gett in a bid for financial or custodial benefits.

Recently, a coalition of Jewish women's organizations decided to ask for help from the Canadian government. In 1985, they formed the coalition of Jewish Women for the Gett. Combining the experience and resources of B'nai Brith Women, Emunah, Hadassah-Wizo, Na'amat, Status of Women CJC Quebec region, Women's Canadian ORT, Women's Federation AJCS, and led by Evelyn Brook, Norma Joseph and Marsha Levy, this impressive group began the process of looking for solutions within the Canadian context. In 1986, Ontario enacted a Family Law act, which dealt with the problem on a provincial level. This effort was spearheaded by John Syrtash. In the following year, B'nai Brith Canada issued a study on "The Uses of the 'Gett' as a Bargaining Tool". All these efforts were eventually successful in redressing the plight of agunot.

Why have we expended so much time and energy on this issue?

Let me introduce you to some women.

Sarah. Divorced civilly for thirty-five years. She raised her two sons alone without any help or support payments. Her husband never agreed to the Gett. At a late stage in her life she met someone "nice". He wanted to marry her; she wanted to end her years in companionship. They wanted to live near her children and grandchildren. No Gett, no marriage.

Ruth. Her husband beat her. She and her children left their home. She ran away to escape being battered, to protect her children from possible abuse. He won't give her a Gett. He wants her to sign over the house and bank account to him. He wants custody of the children. He is trying to force her to relocate, to leave Montreal where she has a job, friends and family, and where her children have found a home.

Susan. Her husband said, "Yes, I'll give you a Gett, but not now, not today. I can't be bothered." He moves from his mother's home to live with friends. He sets up meetings with her or the rabbis, but never shows. Unstable? Certainly. Yet Susan is unfree and she is still waiting.

Stephanie. Her husband won't give her a Gett. No reason. She wants to remarry. She lives in an Orthodox community. No one will date her. A nice Jewish man stopped dating her when she told him that she did not have her Jewish divorce. If there was no chance of marriage, he did not want to develop the relationship. Women in her community feel sorry for her, but won't

continued on page 13

Gett

continued from page 12

introduce her to single men. She has no chance of marriage, no chance of more children, no social life. What kind of future is that? Her life is on hold.

Marcelle married young, straight out of school, to a Yeshiva boy who was from a good family, religious, studious, and pious. The boy was seriously disturbed, but no one said anything. There had been incidents in school, rumours in the community, but no one warned her family. Once young and innocent, she is now bitter and enraged. His family is demanding \$200,000 for the Gett. **Shaindl.** Her husband asked for all the rights to the business that she started in return for a Gett.

All these women can be helped by the new Divorce act. The Canadian government acted with courage and leadership in this area. It demonstrated a commitment to multiculturalism through action, not just speeches. The Jewish community sought help with a particular problem and we were not turned away. By consulting other religious traditions, the Justice department found a way to use the civil procedure to give equal footing to both parties in the divorce without contravening the Charter.

This law applies specifically to any barriers to remarriage that lie within an individual's powers. Significantly, the Gett is not a religious document per se; it involves no affirmation of belief in God. It is merely the voiding of a contract. Civil rights legislation guarantees both parties the freedom to remarry according to the traditions of their people, without fear of extortion.

Our coalition has grown since the passing of this law. We have founded an organization called ICAR (International Coalition for Agunah Rights) to share our knowledge and success. Through ICAR, we work together both in Canada and elsewhere to find ways to free agunot and to find a universal solution to their plight. □

Norma Baumel Joseph is a professor in the Department of Religious Studies at Concordia University. A long-time feminist, she has devoted a great deal of time and energy to changing the plight of the Agunot.

A version of this article appeared in *Ecumenism* no. 115, September, 1994.

Seder Plate

continued from page 5

memory. Creating new forms, it offers them to be remembered."

From my perspective as a Reform Jew, Jewish men and women have permission to use their autonomy to weigh what tradition teaches with what our modern values teach, and then to build a Jewish life for ourselves which reflects both an understanding of our tradition and an understanding of ourselves as modern 20th-century Jews. As Rabbi Laura Geller states, "We remember and we invent because rituals teach people that God is present in their experiences and that encountering the Divine Presence is the beginning of empowerment, of wholeness, of personal tikkun."

We, however, need to ask ourselves many questions when discussing the idea of celebrating sacred moments in Jewish women's lives. Should women's rituals and ceremonies imitate men's - i.e., do we appropriate male rituals that are unique to women? Do we look for examples from the past and update these rituals so that they can be used today? How far can we go before we totally depart from what Judaism stands for?

There are many different approaches to creating rituals, yet whichever approach is taken, I feel that three elements must be present for that ritual to be effective: there must be a clearly stated purpose which fits the definition of the function of rituals as described briefly above; the ritual must be performed with a sense of k'dushah - holiness - and the ritual must be grounded in some way to Jewish tradition, whether in form structure, content, or some link to the past. If the ritual, ceremony or blessing does not have some link to Judaism it has gone past the point of being considered a valid Jewish ritual.

Jews must acknowledge and validate women's existence and importance. If we don't incorporate the celebration of sacred moments in women's lives into our tradition, then Jewish women will continue to be 'Other' and will feel that Judaism has no room for them. □

Rabbi Sharon L. Sobel is the assistant rabbi of Holy Blossom Temple and, among other things, the chair of the liturgy committee of The Legacy of Miriam: A Feminist Seder.

Rolemodels

continued from page 11

her body itself publicly attested to her strength of character, teaching us not to be confined by public expectations. We learn that another step in change can be public testimony of what is true, right, and necessary.

The Five Sisters (better known as the daughters of Zelophehad) publicly demanded their birthright; thereby initiating the articulation of women's inheritance laws (Numbers 27:1-11). As Moses prepared to apportion the land of Israel, he reviewed only the names of the male leaders of tribes, clans, and kinship groups. The sisters Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah had no brothers and their father had died. Appearing together before Moses and all Israel, the women argued their case and insisted upon receiving their share of the land. Moses turned to God for guidance, and The Holy One said, "the plea of Zelophehad's daughter is just" (Numbers 27:7). Thus it is that the Source of Justice establishes the laws of women's inheritance.

Rabbinic literature applauds Zelophehad's daughters, describing them as wise, virtuous, and astute (Baba Batra 119b). The Sisters worked together publicly to facilitate systematic change for women. They remind us that we also can and must combine our efforts to shape widespread change in our world.

Taken together, Yocheved, Tamar, and the Five Sisters teach us about three steps in the process of creating change. First, like Yocheved, we must each hold strong convictions and be willing to act upon them. Second, like Tamar, we must risk challenging communal expectations, and publicly establish new approaches through our words and deeds. Finally, like the Five Sisters, we must publicly collaborate so that our collective wisdom, goodness, and insight can benefit all women and all people. May God make us like Yocheved, Tamar, and the Five Sisters as we work to improve ourselves, and our world. □

Rabbi Sheryl Nosan serves Temple Har Zion in Thronhill, Ontario, as assistant Rabbi and Director of Education. She is particularly interested in Jewish Women's Studies and Midrash. This article is dedicated to her mothers Lori, Ethel, and Minnie.



PERSPECTIVES

Change and the Mind-Body Connection: Learning A New Consciousness Through The Alexander Technique

by Elaine Kopman

My first contact with the Alexander Technique took place in Israel in 1975. I was living in Jerusalem and looking for a new profession. I had for some time been cultivating an interest in mind-body disciplines when I heard of a school in the city that offered a teachers' training program in the Alexander Technique. I decided to explore it.

I began with private lessons. During my first lesson, my teacher asked me a number of questions about myself, and as we worked he observed me carefully. Afterward, he pointed out that as I spoke, I continuously threw my head back and down. This exerted a downward pressure on my spine, bringing about a contraction in the thoracic region as well as a shortening and narrowing of my entire stature. I also appeared to be using an excessive amount of tension in my arms and legs. This harmful influence on my body was present not only as I spoke, but in all my actions.

My teacher went on to explain that Alexander (F. Matthias Alexander, 1869-1955) discovered that there is a certain relationship between the head, neck and back which determines the quality of any activity we engage in. The purpose of the work is to learn how we interfere with this relationship, and to bring about new conditions in ourselves that will allow us to perform any given task with greater ease and efficiency.

The first step is to recognize what we are doing on a sensory level. It is the job of the teacher to educate the student to become fully sensitive to her own actions. The next step is to learn to pause between the stimulus and the response. When we react automatically to a familiar stimulus, we naturally respond in a habitual manner, unless we can learn to do otherwise. Once we have the momentary pause, we can create new conditions in ourselves. Instead of the old reaction, we can choose to send new directions to the head, neck and back,

thereby creating a new set of conditions from which to respond.

All of this was a little difficult for me to comprehend at first, but slowly through a series of lessons, I began to gain an understanding of the principles of Alexander's work. This came about not through my intellect, but through a new understanding of the relationship between mind and body. I gradually learned that I needed to take responsibility for my actions. The teacher was there to guide me and to give me new experiences; but outside of lessons, there was no one to help me but myself. The technique provided me with the tools for my well-being.

All I wanted was a new profession - I didn't realize I was becoming involved in a process with far-reaching implications. I cannot imagine what my life would be like without this work. When I began to study the technique, I was twenty-nine and had to that point always felt as though my feet contained lead. I carried myself with stooped shoulders and had intermittent pain in one hip and leg due to scoliosis in my lower back. I was also in a continuous state of anxiety. However, as I became more aware of the actions which caused me to exert a constant downward pressure on my spine, the pain in my hips and leg began to subside, the heaviness left my body and my posture miraculously seemed to change without my conscious interference. These changes lowered my overall level of anxiety. This evolution was due to my new attentiveness to the relationship between my head, neck and back. Alexander said that we can only hope to know what we are doing wrong. The rest will take care of itself.

These changes did not come quickly, but rather over many years. In this work we attune to means rather than ends. It is about freeing ourselves from the slavery of old and newly acquired habits which insidiously creep into our lives. I owe a great deal to Mr. Alexander and the work he developed. Unfortunately, I was never lucky enough to meet him. He died in 1955 at the age of 86. He taught until four days before his death. As the years go by the quality of my life continues to improve. The changes are slow but never-ending. □

Elaine Kopman graduated from the Jerusalem School of the Alexander Technique in 1979. She is the Director of the Toronto School of the Alexander Technique and maintains a private practice.

GET THE WORD OUT

With Jewish Women's Forum

DISPLAY ADVERTISING

- COMPETITIVE RATES
- SOPHISTICATED READERSHIP
- NATIONAL DISTRIBUTION

CALL TODAY FOR INFORMATION
(416) 533 4264

The JWF Network

We want to learn about you. Send JWF information about Jewish women's groups and publications in your community.

Tell us who you are and what you do.

AND

We want Jewish women to learn about JWF. Take a copy to your women's organization, and put information about us in your bulletins. Discuss issues raised in the Jewish Women's Forum.

Together, let us ensure that women's voices are heard.

Sunday March 30th

The 50th Anniversary of Liberation and Holocaust Remembrance. Sponsored by:

Canadian Jewish Congress, Ontario Region, and the Holocaust Remembrance Committee of the Jewish Federation of Greater Toronto.

For registration information call: Prina Zilberman (416) 635-2883 ext. 144

Feminists

continued from page 11

Jaeger. "I grew up here, in a feminist manner...I can't get this stimulating sustenance elsewhere."

Ultimately, the group continues because the women are friends who help each other progress toward greater fulfillment. Gaster expresses this bond simply and with feeling: "It's hard for me to say, actually, but I love Esther and Ronnee, that for me is one of the biggest pulls to the group...it is an opportunity for me to shift my focus from my work and my family and to broaden it a bit and that's important to me."

Jochebed

by carol rose

dearest child
 I wonder if I'm dreaming
 this night
 this last night with you
 sleeping
 my breast in your mouth
 close
 as if we were one body
 still
 in a few hours you'll be gone
 taken from me in a chariot
 of reeds
 mud & pitch the only arms
 to hold you
 safe against the sea
 of death
 it's all been planned
 every detail
 if the tides are right
 you'll find
 a circle of women
 waiting
 to take you in
 their gift
 from the Mothergod
 one
 they've been dreaming of
 all night

Business Directory

Sharon Clavir Insurance
Life, Disability, RRSP Group Travel
(416) 445 3501

Shelley Duke
Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner; Registered Massage Therapist
(416) 485 5975

Tom Farago
Carpentry & Small Repairs
(416) 512 9915 *No Shabbat Calls

Adrienne Jones, P.R.
Media relations, image building, publications and promotional materials
(416) 538 1352

Susan Stern
Fundraising Consultant
(416) 489 4541

Janice P. Warren, Barrister and Solicitor
Employment and Administrative (tribunal) law
(416) 601 0445

CLASSIFIEDS

ROSA BERGMAN, PSYCHOTHERAPIST. General Practice specializing in Second Generation and Holocaust Survivors; Dedicated Professional; Yiddish and French speaking; Confidentiality assured. Fees on a sliding scale. By appointment: (416) 923 6810.

ARTISTS! The Jewish Women's Forum is looking for contributors to feature in future issues. Send suitable material to 2-327 Concord Ave., Toronto, M6H 2P7.

The Jewish Women's Forum Needs You. We're looking for book reviewers, other contributors and people to help with distribution. Call (416) 533 4264.

CLASSIFIED ORDER FORM

FIRST 21 WORDS ONLY \$21 + GST

EACH ADDITIONAL WORD \$1 + GST

YOUR CLASSIFIED

GST# R139043210

\$ 21 FIRST 21 WORDS
 \$ _____ ADDITIONAL WORDS
 \$ _____ SUBTOTAL
 \$ _____ GST (7%)
 \$ _____ TOTAL ENCLOSED

PLEASE MAIL COMPLETED FORM AND CHEQUE TO:
JEWISH WOMEN'S FORUM
CLASSIFIEDS
2-327 CONCORD AVE.,
TORONTO, ONT. M6H 2P7

NAME: _____
ADDRESS: _____
POSTAL CODE: _____ PHONE NO.: _____

EVENTS CALENDAR

Date	Event & Organization	Time & Place
March		
Tues. 14th	A Vigil of Agunot (Women denied a Jewish divorce) Sponsored by the International Coalition for Agunah Rights (ICAR)	8 p.m., Bathurst Jewish Centre. Joyce Eklove (416) 782-9039
Sat 18th	Sabbath Service. Downtown Reform Minyan. Egalitarian Service	10 a.m., Bloor JCC (905) 844-4185
Tues. 21st	Women of Achievement Series presented by the Toronto ORT and The McGill Club. Dr. Ruth Getter, Senior VP and Chief Economist of TD Bank	7.30 p.m. For info and to register (416) 787-0297
Tues. 21st	Menopause - Taking Charge. Panel Discussion. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada	7.30 p.m., 4700 Bathurst (416) 445-3501
Mon. 27th	Resistance and Rescue: Denmark's Response to the Holocaust. A photographic exhibition. Until May 8th. Co-sponsored by the Jewish Festival of the Arts Society	Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, (604) 266-0245
Tues. 28th	Letty Cottin-Pogrebin "Why Feminism is Good for Judaism". Canadian Friends of The Hebrew University	7.45 p.m., Beth Tzedec (416) 485-8000
Fri. 31st	Intertalk, a support group for intercultural couples, facilitated by intermmarriage , counsellor Eva Goldfinger, Secular Jewish Association	8-10.00 p.m. 82 Willowbrook Road RSVP (905) 889-7450
April		
Sun. 2nd	A Swap Of Ideas For Your Feminist Seder. A Passover Event.	2 - 4.00 p.m. Annex area Marsha 604-3175
	"Gordin in America," a staged reading The Jewish Theatre Committee and The Medina Theatre Ensemble of the Bloor JCC.	8 p.m., Bloor JCC (416) 924-6211
Sat. 8th	Sabbath Service. Downtown Reform. Minyan. Egalitarian Service.	10 a.m., Bloor JCC (905) 844-4185
Wed. 12th	Lunchtime Learning Series Rabbi Michael Skobac. Passover event	12 noon, Bloor JCC (416) 924-6211
Sat. 15th	The Rosalynd Cohen Memorial Passover Seder. Downtown Jewish Community Council.	(416) 924-6211 Bloor JCC
Wed. 26th	Breast Self Examination. Demonstration. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada	6-9 p.m., 4700 Bathurst (416) 445-3501
Sun. 30th	"Our Stories" Readings by Jewish Women Writers Jewish Women's Forum & "Books & Bagels"	11.30 a.m., Bloor JCC Wallin Lounge (416) 924-6211
May		
Wed. 10th	Women and Substance Abuse: Confronting the Truth. A Forum on Awareness and Prevention	7.30 p.m., Adath Israel Glenda Gomperts (416) 635-2883 ext. 135
Thurs. 25th	Taking Charge by Taking Care. If You Don't, The Government Will. National Council of Jewish Women of Canada.	7:30 p.m., 4700 Bathurst For info (416) 633-5100

