



A Song for Women / Susan in Five Questions / Dworkin

The very first feminist consciousness raising meeting I attended was noteworthy for one thing: the non-Jews had the worst problems.

One young woman railed about the successive tyrannies of father, priest, brothers, priest, husband, priest and now her five children. One older lady, wringing pale gloves, had not dared even to tell her husband she was coming to the meeting. He expected her to be playing bridge. She had always been expected to play bridge. She was so miserable, I felt guilty sitting in the same circle with her.

My impression that feminism was not for me, nor for the other privileged, educated Jewish women in my green suburb, was deepened thereafter by writers in Jewish publications. They laughed at non-sexist sexual philosophies. They extolled the (supposedly) anti-feminist lady gossiping on her side of the *m'chitzah* and doing her eternal, life-giving work of volunteering for good causes. They labelled the intellectual feminist a narcissistic power grabber, setting up straw oppressors as an excuse for unwarranted aggression against a society which had been altogether too good to her.

I decided to support various feminist causes, like the right to a safe, legal abortion, but to repress my feminist feelings, convinced that these posed serious dangers to *sholem bayis* and to my own daily productivity and should not be al-

lowed to interfere with my personal — my Jewish — life.

Meanwhile, I had stopped going to shul.

I was refusing steadfastly to join any Jewish women's organization.

I had developed the vulgar habit of sticking out my hand for Chassidim to refuse to shake.

I was of the opinion that no woman who could help it should ever get married in the Jewish State.

I had grown to *hate* Jewish liturgical singing.

I was in open rebellion against Jewish life as it is lived — at the same time that I was developing a fondness for Jewish learning and tradition far beyond the wildest nightmares of my assimilated parents.

It did not occur to me until recently that mine was a feminist rebellion, a by-product of my "coldly rational" espousal of feminist causes and a very common thing among women like me who are Jewish and a little late-blooming. To my joy, I discovered that Jewishly-inclined women seemed to be absent from the larger feminist movement because they were meeting elsewhere — needing to talk to each other separately, about matters of communal interest.

Just like other Jews.

Thousands of Jewish women have investigated these matters in the last couple of years, a development sparked by several events.

There was a moderate speech by Jacqueline Levine of the American Jewish Congress at the General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds in 1972.

In it, she said that women should have more power in Jewish life.

There was some lobbying by a group called "Ezrat Nashim" — observant intellectual women who came to the Conservative Rabbinical Assembly in 1972 to demand that women be granted membership in synagogues, be counted in the *minyán*, be allowed full participation in religious services and be bound to execute all *mitzvot* equally with men, be recognized as witnesses under Jewish law, be allowed to initiate divorce, be admitted to rabbinical and cantorial schools, be welcomed into full leadership roles in the synagogue and in the general community. The encounter with "Ezrat Nashim" helped persuade the Rabbinical Assembly to give its congregations the option of counting women in the *minyán*. It also helped make the members of "Ezrat Nashim" into a kind of central rabbinate for Jewish feminism.

There was the first Network Jewish Women's Conference in New York, in early 1973, at which about 450 women of every variety discovered a feminist mutuality.

Finally, there was the publication of an anthology on "The Jewish Woman" by the magazine *Response* (Summer, 1973, No. 18) which became a basic text for seminars and consciousness raising (c.r.) groups across the country.

All this would have had no impact were it not for the cumulative effect of consciousness raising, for c.r. helped people identify with others who might have remained strangers. In our context, it catalyzed the only creative dialogue between Orthodox and non-Orthodox going on in the Jewish world today.

Jewish consciousness raising was

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1. THE QUESTION OF EQUAL ACCESS TO GOD
2. THE QUESTION OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR JOY
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4. THE QUESTION OF EQUAL ACCESS TO POWER
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made possible by the new national passion for ethnicity (which allowed Jewish women to think of themselves separately whereas once that might have violated their "humanist" ideals), and for spirituality, which had repopularized faith and made ritual obligation appealing to people who had never felt the need of it before.

Thus, coming late into feminism, Jewish women were advantaged by the fact that many Jewish men had already achieved a raised consciousness, had returned to a Jewish ethnic base and had become interested in the spiritual side of life, even insofar as they might be willing to alter a form for the sake of a more perfect substance.

So the Jewish feminists have it easy.

They are ignored but not generally ridiculed.

Their opposition is as loyal as opposition can be. They tread delicately over, or more usually around, *Halachah* and the time-honored priorities of the Jewish family. Their influence grows in the warm sunshine of rabbinic disregard — like one of those songs that Goldfaden wrote in Yiddish so women could understand — one of those pleasant, hum-a-day songs that came up from the kitchen and filled the soul until it seemed to have been there always and was an accepted part of the Jewish tradition.

There are five questions to this song, said the writer, standing a little back.

THE QUESTION OF EQUAL ACCESS TO GOD

For some time, Frieda Birnbaum came to morning prayer at the Or-

thodox Lincoln Square Synagogue with a *tallit* in her briefcase.

She was scared to take it out and put it on.

She had been scared to buy it. ("For my nephew," she mumbled to the salesman.)

Davening alone at home, she wore the *tallit*. But she couldn't summon the courage to wear it in shul and would end up schlepping it on the subway to her job as a computer programmer.

One morning, Frieda Birnbaum said to herself: "Dammit! If I can *daven* in my *tallit* at home, I can sure as hell *daven* in my *tallit* in shul!" And she did. A friend of hers arrived, and she did too. These were the first women known to wear *tallesim* in shul in the New York area. Revolutionary heroines.

In fact, Frieda had broken only with tradition, not with *Halachah*. Her act was important because it broached the issue of discrimination against women in public prayer and Jewish assemblies — an issue about which feminists raise much bitter complaint.

Feminists say *Halachah* places two types of disadvantages upon women: disadvantages regarding personal status (the marriage and divorce laws of Israel and of Orthodox Jews everywhere) and disadvantages regarding religious status. A Jewish woman is not bound to perform the same *mitzvot* as men — she is exempted, like a child or a Canaanite slave, from all positive commandments that have an appropriated time. She doesn't have to hear the *shofar* blown on Rosh Hashanah. Or eat in a *sukkah*. Or pray with the *lulav*, or at three daily services, or wear a *tallit*, or put on *t'fillin*, or say the *Sh'ma*. Defenders of these ex-

emptions say they were given to women out of consideration for their responsibilities at home. A woman simply would not have time to perform them, what with the baby to be nursed and the floor to be washed and the meals to be prepared for the man of the house when he comes home from shul.

This meant that a Jewish girl didn't have to learn much Torah or any Talmud; her education succeeded when it helped her "enable" everyone else to reach God. To the chagrin of feminists, this continues to be the rule. The Bat Mitzvah preparatory program of one suburban Orthodox shul described itself this way: "The curriculum of the class includes the study of women in the Bible, Laws of Shabbat and holidays as they pertain to the home, Laws of Kashruth . . . cooking and baking of the traditional Jewish delicacies."

Over the years, of course, and especially in affluent America, women have acquired much more leisure and freedom than men have to perform the time-bound *mitzvot*. This means that the discriminatory subtext of the exemption system is bared for all to see. To feminists, it is now clear that what may originally have been a way to get women off the hook is now practiced as a way to keep them out of the swim.

This contradiction of intent produces strange results. For example: Rabbi Steven Riskin of Lincoln Square, who has never been known to permit any infraction of *Halachah*, gets himself a reputation as a raging liberal by allowing women to behave in shul in ways they are nowhere forbidden to behave. And Frieda Birnbaum, who started as an uninformed, uncommitted Jew and grew into an observant,



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educated Jew who walks from Washington Heights to 68th Street on Shabbat, gets herself a reputation as a revolutionary.

What happens if many women begin to refuse the non-roles set aside for them in public worship and to perform those time-bound *mitzvot* from which they are now exempted?

Officially, nothing.

As long as a woman cannot be included in the *minyan*, she may *daven* until her soul grows hoarse and she still counts for zero in shul.

So why are the religious powers-that-be so firmly against participation by women in these extra *mitzvot*?

Because the social consequences would be staggering.

"I've heard people say," commented Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, "that once the women take over in shul, the men will have nothing to do" — an implicit recognition that the continuation of the faith does not even now depend on the faithfulness of men.

The last sanctuary of the Jewish male would soon be unfit for men to enter, what with all the sweet contralto *davening* and the lingering perfume and the titillating gossip. The men of Israel might be shamed by the sight of so many historic servants of man becoming, in Rachel Adler's words, "more perfect servants of God."

And it might be less and less clear to everyone why women are not counted in the *minyan*.

Once my husband ran an interracial summer camp. Some Orthodox young people wanted to join the

staff. However, their rabbi forbade them to participate in a *minyan* with black Jews who may or may not have been converted or reared in a "proper" manner. The kids did some research and came up with a situation, Talmudically cited, in which a slave was freed to complete a *minyan* (Gittin 38b). This, agreed another rabbi, was sufficient basis to allow black and white Jews to pray together. The first rabbi never gave in. The second rabbi, while allowing the kids to come to camp, paid an awful homage to bigotry. To me, this incident exemplified how corrupt the *Halachic* mode could become. But to many observant feminists, there is no other mode for correcting the disparaged position of women in Jewish life, and they believe it should be used for all it is worth.

On the issue of divorce and marriage laws, the difference in methodological approach among feminists is acute. A Jewish woman cannot initiate a divorce. If her marriage falls apart, she has to wait for her husband to give her a *get* — a bill of divorcement; if he is unwilling, or if the rabbis are unwilling to compel him, she's stuck. His claim on her, her children and her property, can last indefinitely. Judy Hauptman, a Talmudist and prominent scholar of *Halachah*, reports that when she speaks to Orthodox women's groups, she finds them disagreeing with every feminist critique *except* the critique of the divorce laws. On that, there is unanimity.

Hauptman said that at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, any woman could have her *k'tubah* drawn up to include the clause that her husband would grant a divorce, if and when she wanted it, so that if the marriage ever failed and he did not

grant the divorce, he would be violating his own *k'tubah*, thereby annulling the marriage.

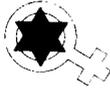
To Rabbi Sasso, a Reconstructionist, this was a circuitous route to nowhere. "It's not enough to say that if a man doesn't grant a woman a divorce, he's not fulfilling his part of the bargain and the marriage is annulled. We've got to say right there in the *k'tubah* that women have the right to initiate a divorce."

This variance in mode and methodology is a major impediment to Jewish feminist consensus; in fact, it is probably only the urgency of the issue that keeps the discussion creative, even though the participants are forever annoying each other.

Because observant women have discussed these matters with their "heterodox" sisters, Conservative and Reform synagogue practice has come under new scrutiny. The *m'chitzah* is down already, so why don't the girls receive *aliyot*? Why can't they march with the *lulavim*? The raised consciousness views these prohibitions as ghostly leftovers that continue only because of the groundless fear and plain laziness of men and women. Thus, a process which may be stymied for a long time yet in the Orthodox synagogue, which was inspired by the complaints of Orthodox women, begins to take hold in the rest of the community.

In shul on Rosh Hashanah, listening to a sermon about the *akedah*, I had a vision.

Abraham and Isaac are going up to Mount Moriah. Behind them, tearing off her apron, fixing her hair, or her wig, comes a breathless woman. She is 37 years old. She's had a few kids, paid a few debts and done some fair



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coping in her day. "Father!" she calls after Abraham. "Wait! Take me too! Bind me too! BIND ME TOO!"

And I really felt for that woman.
And I really wanted to help her.
Even though she wasn't me.

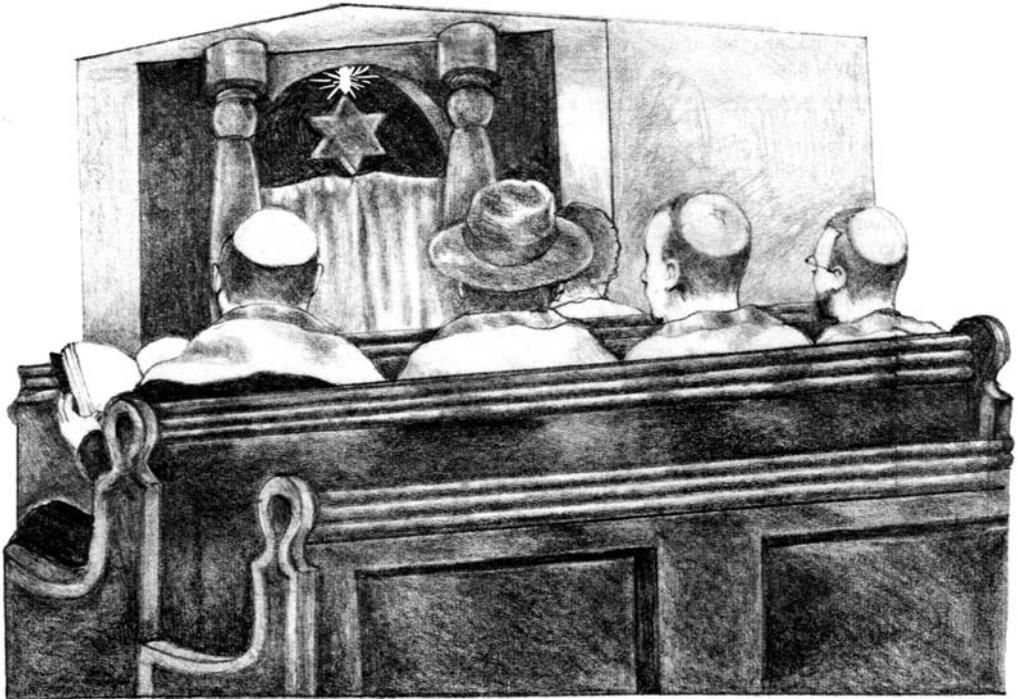
2 THE QUESTION OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR JOY

Sandy Eisenberg Sasso got married after her first year of rabbinical school at the Reconstructionist Seminary and everybody said, "Aha! *That's* why she went to rabbinical school!" and expected her to become a rebbetzin. Instead she went ahead and be-

came the first female Reconstructionist rabbi, and her congregation — the Manhattan Reconstructionist Havura — is living without a rebbetzin.

"At one job interview," she recalled, "they asked me questions like: 'Will you be afraid to drive to shul in heavy traffic?' 'What will happen if you get pregnant?' " (It's hard to convince people that pregnancies, like sabbatical years at the Hebrew University, can be planned and have an equally maturing effect on the Jew involved.)

Although she felt no compulsion to be a feminist ("I knew it was unusual to be a rabbi but I never expected any opposition"), Sandy Sasso automatically raised the con-





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siousness of the 1974 class at the Reconstructionist Seminary. Now, hers is one address where women may apply when seeking new *liturgical* ways to deepen their joy in Jewish ritual and to deepen the meaning of their Jewish acts. For the exclusion of women from Jewish joy is a major feminist complaint. Esther Ticktin, a member of the Fabrengen group in Washington, an observant Jew and a feminist, has created rules, with Talmudic underpinning, by which sensitive men can avoid inflicting pain on women who are excluded from joyous celebrations. She is more *Halachic* and kindly than a lady I heard last Simchat Torah.

"Let's go up to New City where the Chassidim are!" said her suburban husband excitedly.

"Hell no," said his lovely wife. "I'm not gonna stand around and watch while you guys dance."

What separates women from direct enjoyment of much Jewish ritual is the idea of *tumat niddah* — the menstruating woman as a temporarily impure person. This idea, that a natural bodily process makes a woman unfit to shake hands with a male Jew or touch a Torah scroll, is so horrifying to a liberated Jewish woman that the less Jewishly educated among them find it hard to believe. I once saw an Orthodox girl burst into tears because she could not defend *tumat niddah* to her incredulous non-observant sisters. "You must be kidding!" they shrieked.

Rachel Adler says that *tumat niddah* was distorted when "pathology entered *Halachah*." ("The Jew Who Wasn't There: *Halachah* and the Jewish Woman," *Response*, Summer 1973, No. 18)

Whereas *tumat niddah* had been a way for women to experience death and rebirth through the cycle of their own bodies, it became distorted into a method of controlling the fearsome power of sexual desire, of disciplining a mistrusted physical drive . . . The state of *niddah* became a monthly exile from the human race . . . women were taught disgust and shame for their own bodies . . . the *mikveh*, instead of being the primal sea in which all were made new, became the pool at which women were cleansed of their filth and thus became acceptable sexual partners once more.

Adler says the *niddah* taboo arose because of the influence of Christian, Essene and Islamic asceticism. My own instinct was always to find it a Puritanical concept, very un-Jewish really, and never to take it seriously for that reason.

I recall my mother-in-law's story that when she was a girl in Poland, she was always the one who waited for Eliyahu on Pesach. After she began menstruating, her mother — a faithful though uneducated woman — insisted that she could no longer have this job. It would be a disgrace if the Prophet came only to be greeted by an impure Jew!

Her father — a faithful but educated man — explained gently that my young mother-in-law would have to give up her job as lookout for Eliyahu. But not to worry, he said (whispering), the Prophet would not come anyway.

For the sake of a *meshugas*, the faith was lost.

3 THE QUESTION OF EQUAL TREATMENT BY HISTORY

Bruria, according to the Jewish Encyclopedia of 1904, was born in

the first quarter of the second century and lived in Tiberias. Her father and mother met violent deaths in the persecutions of Hadrian; her sister was carried off to Rome and sold into whoredom.

Bruria married Rabbi Meir (*Meir Ba'al Ha-Nes* — Meir the Miracle Worker), Rabbi Akiba's best student. Meir was a great legal and liturgical scholar, and popular among the masses. He saved his sister-in-law from dishonor in Rome by dressing up as a wealthy Roman and buying her back from the brothel owner. "When in Rome," he is said to have said, "do as the Romans do." After the Hadrianic oppressions, Rabbi Meir reestablished the Sanhedrin and, says the Encyclopedia, "introduced the rule of testing the validity of *Halachah* on *rational* grounds." (italics mine)

Meir figures in a discussion of Jewish feminism because he was married to Bruria who — like Lilith — has been resurrected by Jewish women looking for an historic ego ideal. Bruria, writes Judy Hauptman, "was singled out in the Talmud for her scholarship." ("Images of Women in the Talmud," in *Religion and Sexism*, Simon and Schuster, 1974)

It is reported that Bruria learned three hundred new laws every day and that legal decisions were reached that accepted her opinion over the opinion of a rabbi. In several incidents, her knowledge of the Bible appears to have been superior to that of her husband and his students.

But Bruria was not to be remembered primarily for her scholarship.



Bruria's story has become the case in point to prove that excessive learning never overcomes the basic lasciviousness of women and that men who teach their daughters Talmud are letting themselves in for disgrace.

Instead, she was ruined by one powerful *zetz* from rabbinic commentators, embodied in a legend. The Encyclopedia quotes:

Once Bruria scoffed at the rabbinical saying "Women are light-minded" and her husband warned her that her own end might yet testify to the truth of the words. To put her virtue to the test, he charged one of his disciples to endeavor to seduce her. After repeated efforts, she yielded and then shame drove her to commit suicide. Rabbi Meir, tortured by remorse, fled from his home.

The Encyclopedist doesn't believe the story. "It is," he says, "totally at variance with what is known of

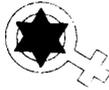
Bruria's character and that of Rabbi Meir."

But few people read the Jewish Encyclopedia of 1904, and so over the years, Bruria's story has become the case in point to prove that excessive learning never overcomes the basic lasciviousness of women and that men who teach their daughters Talmud are letting themselves in for disgrace.

Perhaps the fabulistic shame of Bruria was created not to ruin her in the eyes of history, but to ruin Rabbi Meir, a great man who might have been emulated; whose folly at parading around with a genius wife had to be exposed lest innocent descendants think this was a good thing. The

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What might be called a Lilith Complex is the first hallmark of Jewish prejudice against women—a deep-rooted fear of the aggressive female who has to be kept busy-busy-busy lest she ruin your good name by adultery and sap your strength with her insane sexual (financial, psychic) demands.

story is told that a certain woman came to hear Meir's lectures — and one of these lasted very late — so that when she came home, her furious husband threw her out of the house and told her not to come back until she had spat in the eye of Rabbi Meir. Hearing of her plight, the good Rabbi pretended to have some ocular malady that could only be cured if this particular woman spat in his eye.

Without a man like Meir to encourage women like Bruria or the simple lecture-goer, there can be no feminist reform of Jewish life. He doesn't have to be a rabbi, this man. All he has to do is stand firm when they spit in his eye.

A forthcoming feminist magazine in New York is called *Lilith*. A current Chicago feminist newsletter is called *Lilith's Rib*.

This historic symbol of the intractable original female, who would not accept, physically or figuratively, the supine position under Adam and was cast out of Eden in favor of the more docile Eve, has become the new mythical ego ideal of Jewish feminists.

The Lilith craze may be part of the excessive feminist concern with the rehabilitation of witches; however, this trend quickly goes from the dead serious to the ironic. At the second anniversary party of *Ms. Magazine*, entertainment was provided by a country rock group called "Deadly Night Shade." One can imagine a *Nachal* troupe called "Lilith and Her Hosts" causing a riot at the next Chassidic Song Festival.

However much fun feminists have with the new Lilith, the old one was a real enough horror for Jewish men.

What might be called a Lilith Complex is the first hallmark of Jewish prejudice against women — a deep-rooted fear of the aggressive female who has to be kept busy-busy-busy lest she ruin your good name by adultery and sap your strength with her insane sexual (financial, psychic) demands. The killer bitch woman of some contemporary Jewish writing is an expression of the Lilith Complex in our time. And *she* is strangely like the killer bitch characterizations of women in some homosexual theatre of the last few decades, indicating that you don't have to be Jewish to be a scapegoat for feelings of emasculation. Maggie in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* also serve.

Now, the ranks of Jewish feminism are swelled with women recriminating because the Lilith Complex has blighted their lives. This is not a pretty process. It turns up a lot of hatred and self-hatred. Sam the Husband is blamed for what Irving the Father did, and Irving the Father is blamed for what Maimonides thought. Shrinks are consulted; intermarriage begins to look good; no marriage at all begins to look good. The exorcism of Lilith is sloppy and emotional and absolutely necessary if we are ever to see the day when "Lilith and Her Hosts" cease to haunt Jews and become a rock group.

4 THE QUESTION OF EQUAL ACCESS TO POWER

Up to now, most Jewish women have been inspired by the fabulous apologetics girding the "woman of valor" role. They have taken the suggested road to greatness by trying

to be wonderful housekeepers, brilliant arbiters of familial unity, skilled businesswomen and energetic charity givers. The achieving but powerless woman was produced to perfection by our culture.

The trouble with the "woman of valor" role type is that it has been so brilliantly maligned in popular literature that fewer and fewer Jewish women want to play it, let alone be it. In one book and a couple of stories, Philip Roth helped undo the best laid plans of rabbinic generations by destroying the exalted image of the Jewish mother. Indeed, he should be given credit for this by Jewish feminists, who are rather apt to revile him.

In the wide open search for a viable new role model, the missing ingredient most desired is the power to lead (not just influence) the community (not just the family). That is: political power.

The Jewish woman operates under several cosmic political disadvantages.

She is made to feel that she must shelter the frail machismo of the men in her life — a machismo retarded in the first place by the aggressiveness of an anti-Semitic, anti-intellectual world. And if she fails in this well-nigh impossible task, she is blamed for the original emasculation. (Any feminist will tell you that the changes demanded in Jewish life and in Jews by the early Zionist theorists were all geared to rebuilding historically shattered Jewish machismo. Very ironically, the lack of this quality in Jewish men was what gave Jewish women like me the idea, originally, that we were not quite as oppressed as, say, Spanish women, or Syrian women. ("Whatever problems we



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have,” feminist leader Cheryl Moch said, “we’re not afflicted with a race of jocks.”)

If a Jewish girl turns out to be a fine student, she must be careful not to excel in relation to Jewish men — lest she be left unmarried or wreck the marriage she’s got.

No one inherits the Holocaust as pointedly as the Jewish wife (especially in Israel) who — knowing that she can never outbreed the Arabs — is still getting pregnant long after it is safe, in a mighty effort to right the historic Jewish population deficit. The Jewish feminist is the only feminist who is told, by mentors who are feminists too, that the abortion option is not for her.

Thus, if a Jewish woman figures history into her life-mix (which she is likely to do, being Jewish), she often feels herself to be a blocked force, a powerful wheel spinning in place. “There comes a time in your life,” said Chaverat Ha-Knesset Marsha Friedman, head of Israel’s nascent feminist movement, “that you’re doing everything perfectly, and everyone is saying, look at that marvelous woman, a fine career, a lovely family, good looking, a good cook, and it’s all true, and you’re going out of your mind.”

Knowing how little power she gets for her success, the Jewish woman may scorn her success; she may derive no real self-esteem from it; and all the apologetics in the Bible will not comfort her.

In this way, the achieving but powerless woman, whom our culture has produced to perfection, no longer blesses us but begins to burden our community with anger and frustration.

The woman of valor, having once again broken all records for sheer productivity, should be dead tired. But she can’t sleep. In fact, she is crying. And her sobs fill the tent of her husband, and her husband cannot sleep either.

Cheryl Moch grew up in the radical Left. She experimented with terrifying drugs. She slept on the beach in Spain. She learned how to raise money, distribute posters, organize demonstrations. She lived on a kibbutz. She developed the vague feeling that she wasn’t really a supporter of Al Fatah. She joined a radical left Jewish group called The Brooklyn Bridge, so named to symbolize the return of its members to their Jewish roots. (!) She studied landscape architecture and the history and thought of the Jews. She became a counselor at Jewish summer camps; she became a feminist; she became Director of the Youth Commission of the American Jewish Congress. She is part of the Jewish Establishment today, in her own small way, and a member of the New York Board of the Jewish Feminist Organization.

Like Aviva Cantor Zuckoff of *Hadassah Magazine* and Joanne Jahr of the American Zionist Federation, Cheryl is among that large number of feminists who now work in the Jewish Establishment who were trained in the Jewish student movements and whose skills are more political than religious. They are the secular theorists of Jewish feminism; their talents complement those of women like Adler, Hauptman, Sasso and Ticktin, and give to the movement a scope, an impact, a political

viability it would never have otherwise.

The preamble to the interim constitution of the new Jewish Feminist Organization goes like this:

We, Jewish feminists, have joined together here in strength and joy to struggle for the liberation of the Jewish woman. Jewish women of all ages, political, cultural and religious outlooks and sexual preferences, are all sisters. We are committed to the development of our full human potential and to the survival and enhancement of Jewish life — communal, religious, educational and political. We shall be a force for such creative change in the Jewish community.

Drawing inspiration from the strength of our sisters throughout history, we call on Jewish women everywhere to join in this struggle. To work toward these goals, we have founded, on this 28th day of the month of April in the year 1974 (6 Iyyar 5734), the Jewish Feminist Organization.

These are fighting words mostly because they are so democratic, and Jewish organizational life today is basically elitist. In fact, *it is the power of the elite that is really at stake in the feminist confrontation* — the power of those Jewish traditions and of those Jews who until now have had the ability to exclude, to belittle and subdue large masses of the Jewish public — not only women.

The rabbinic establishment — all male.

The intellectual establishment — incredibly, virtually still all male. (Norman Podhoretz, in *Making It*, records that there was a women’s slot



The growth of this new chevrah does not depend on the growth of the Jewish feminist organization... it is the feeling, the product of consciousness raising, the experience of being together for once without bigotry, that poses the greatest threat to the Jewish establishment.

in the elite which belonged to Mary McCarthy and was inherited by Susan Sontag. Who the next "she" will be is therefore of very little importance, since everyone knows that being one is no fun.)

The Zionist organizational establishment is mostly male, punctuated by the power of a few women and operated almost entirely by a female rank and file. Feminists do not trust the Jewish women's organizations not because they are insufficiently feminist, but because they are insufficiently democratic and tend to divide and type Jews.

The Israeli Establishment, with two, maybe three exceptions, is mostly male, and what's worse, mostly macho.

However, the power of the spiritual establishment is up for grabs — the emotional forces, the aesthetic senses, the moral fibre, the soul of our community has been so neglected for so long by the various elites that anyone who will pay honest attention to it can raise a cloud of chassidim. This helps to explain the "power" in our time of people like Irving Greenberg (who was Cheryl's Rebbe at CCNY), Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis, Shlomo Carlebach, Elie Wiesel.

The same simple qualities that characterize these new "spiritual" leaders characterize the Jewish feminists. (And it's all clearly laid out in the preamble to their constitution.) They are egalitarian, they ac-

cept Jews uncritically, off the street. They pay suitable homage to history, our communal guru, and wonderful attention to joy, which most of us only dimly remember, reviving positive emotional connections with Jewish living. Just to write such a preamble required forbearance and tolerance unheard of in other establishments — secularized women broke bread with the Orthodox, and amazingly, vice versa. ("Once an Orthodox woman becomes a feminist," said Cheryl, "to any degree, on any issue, she has reached the psychological position where she can accept other Jews.") Incredibly, for the first time in any Jewish program, the homosexual was welcomed outright as a desirable member of the Jewish community. And perhaps most important, the professor sat down with the housewife, and the housewife was not made to feel inferior.

The growth of this new *chevrah* does not depend on the growth of the Jewish Feminist Organization; the organization could fold tomorrow and the feeling would remain; it is the *feeling*, the product of consciousness raising, the experience of being together for once without bigotry, that poses the greatest threat to the Jewish establishment and constitutes the great power of Jewish feminism.

An organization might stir the waters; a raised consciousness can change the tide.

5

THE QUESTION OF RESPECT

Judy Hauptman is the only woman in history ever to teach Talmud at the Jewish Theological Seminary. Her work is seen in magazines of note and in books which anthologize the best contemporary thought of women on problems of religion. She is a veteran member of "Ezrat Nashim," and a founding member of the Jewish Feminist Organization. She lectures widely. She has brought *nachas* to her parents; *yichus* to her lineage.

In the fall of 1974, she was married to a scientist.

And in announcing her engagement from the pulpit, a rabbi who is often thought of as a liberal said, "*Baruch HaShem*, Judy Hauptman is finally getting married."

All of which is rather like that old joke about the rabbi who goes to rabbinical school, gets two doctorates, scales the heights of scholarship and brings glory and pride to all Jews everywhere. Upon passing the great synagogue where this learned man has his pulpit, the casual observer remarks: "See that? That's Buddy Hackett's shul."

If only the rabbi who announced Judy Hauptman's engagement had been Myron Cohen telling that joke, we could all have a good laugh and go home and forget it. ★

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