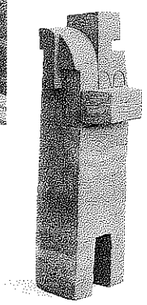
Bet Debora

Journal 2

The Jewish Family Myth and Reality

2. Conference of European Women Rabbis, Cantors, Jewish Scholars and Activists

Content



Editorial

Lara Dämmig and Elisa Klapheck

Debate among Jews about the renewal of European Jewry is overdue. The aim of Bet Debora is to provide an impetus for this. At our first conference in May 1999, we discussed the continued development of Jewish tradition. We addressed the question of how women rabbis, activists or scholars increasingly influence life in Jewish communities and synagogues. At this conference we will tackle an issue that plays a major role in contemporary discourse: "Does the family have a future?"
This question is decisive for the future of the Jewish community. As in the past, the classical nuclear family is still viewed as a foundation of Jewish tradition. There, the roles of women seem to be fairly clearly defined. But in reality, the Jewish dream family is no longer the rule. Jewish men and women live as singles, single parents, in "mixed" partnerships, and as lesbians and gays. Their lifestyles are, in short, diverse ... which reflects the general development of society. At our conference, "The Jewish Family, Myth and Reality," we would like to examine these trends from a Jewish women's perspective in order to formulate our own standpoints and introduce them to the current debate.
In this context, it seems important to us that both the Jewish and non-Jewish communities are aware of Bet Debora. We hope to encourage that with this journal, which documents the conference and invites further inquiry. We welcome a response and would like to greet readers at the next Bet Debora conference in 2003.

Leaving Protected Houses

Antje Vollmer

How can faith and the new forms society has developed for living in groups be reconciled? How can a modern woman introduce herself into a time-honoured system without destroying it? I'm extraordinarily pleased to give the welcoming address at this conference, because I've always wondered about these questions. I've had the good fortune and challenge of entering political life at a time when the position of women was infinitely different from the role they play today. I saw how emancipation was practised in the "revolutionary times" of the 1960s and 1970s. I fought for it and struggled to see it did not fail and developed, moving from pseudo-emancipation to genuine freedom. As women's roles changed, the entire society followed suit. The traditional conception of the family as a fundamental element of the community had to be altered. Working women and new types of work and leisure activity affected the interests of men and women, creating a demand for new concepts for coexistence.
Incorporating these worldly developments into the Jewish tradition requires a great deal of courage. The women taking part in this conference and in the first conference two years ago have demonstrated they have what it takes to tackle the task at hand. They left the protection of their homes and dared to go out into the world. They became rabbis and cantors, showing that women enrich, rather than disrupt the act of prayer. They have shown it is possible to profess faith together with men without being disrespectful.
That this is now possible is a sign that the major currents of the times can not be stopped, not even by religions and traditions. In turbulent times like these, religion and tradition should offer stability. But they can only do this if the people who turn to faith and time-honoured ritual trust that they can bring solace. It is only through tolerance and openness that this trust can be built.

(An excerpt from the opening address of the conference)

Acknowledgements

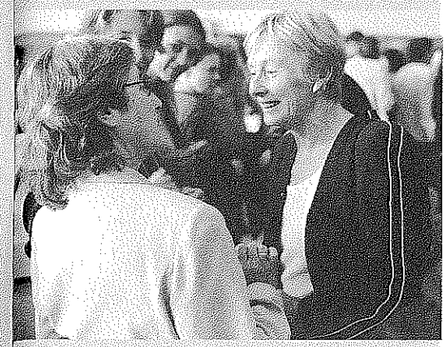
The publication of this journal would not have been possible without financial support from the Federal Ministry for Family, Seniors, Women, and Youth. In addition, we would like to thank all who helped with the conference and this journal. Among the other sponsors for Bet Debora are the Berlin Jewish Community, the Axel Springer Foundation, the Hanadiv Charitable Foundation and Schering AG. The success of the conference is also due to the efforts of many others. Carolyn Naumann, Grit Beel, Katrin Baumeister and Rainer Krokat and many other helpers. Simultaneous interpreters were Karin Fleischhacker and Catherine Johnson. Gaby Nonhoff did the catering, which was enthusiastically enjoyed by all. Eva Nickel and the Xenon company contributed to the smooth running of the conference on the part of the Jewish community. The commissarial dean of the Jewish High School, Raissa Kruk, gracefully provided space for our meetings. Darja Bartsch and Susanne Grunewald organised the children's programme. Last but not least we would like to extend our special thanks to all the speakers, moderators and artists. We were also pleased by the good and inspiring co-operation of the authors. The journal will again be published in German, English and Russian. The translators, Ludmila Duwidowitsch, Dr. Irene Runge, Taryn Toro, and Mila Nikitin have tackled an enormous job. Silke Helmerdig and Burkhard Peter photographed the conference. Graphic artist Sonja Hennersdorf composed the original layout.

Lara Dämmig and Elisa Klapheck
Initiators of Bet Debora

Dr. Antje Vollmer is vice president of the German parliament, the Bundestag, where she represents the party Alliance 90/the Greens.

Future-Oriented Family Policies

Christine Bergmann



Christine Bergmann (right) and **Jael Botsch-Fitterling**

Christine Bergmann with **Lara Dämmig** (centre) and **Elisa Klapheck** (right)

The study of history makes it clear to us that women always have had to struggle in every area of life for every centimetre of ground they have gained. Be it past or present, true perseverance is required for this fight. As you address the theme of this conference, "The Jewish Family – Myth or Reality," you are taking the bull by the horns. Stereotypes and clichés about women and the role of women and the family continue to prevail. This is true for the whole of our society.

But a welcome public debate on the role of the family in our society currently is taking place. "The disintegration of the family" is an expression that crops up again and again. Failing marriages, rising divorce rates and a decline in the birth rate are frequently cited as evidence of this trend. If we take a closer look, we see the institution of the family is actually far more stable than claimed. People have come to perceive the family more positively in recent years. That is not surprising in view of the social developments that I will, for the sake of brevity, call globalisation and a demand for increased flexibility. These developments are causing people to seek emotional stability primarily within the family.
In recent years, family structures have become increasingly diverse. There are single-parent families, "patchwork" families, foster families and families in that the heads of household or parents are not married. Nevertheless, nearly 80 percent of children are still raised by married couples, just as before. These forms of family also deserve recognition and support. The developments of recent years show that family life is not static, but is changing in many ways. Although the form of the family has remained stable, the roles of individual members and the patterns of relationships have changed fundamentally. The trend today has deviated from the norm of social groups required to secure existence to familial relationships based on choice. And that is an enrichment.
Yet there is still a long way to go before consensus about work within the family itself has been achieved. Who is responsible for work within the home and raising children? The changing roles of women are a central factor for the shift in forms and types of families and changes in family relationships. Today, women, like men, want both career and family. But the roles of men are beginning to change, too. After all, from 50 to 70 percent of young men say they would support more equality in partnerships, childcare and housework. But there is a great discrepancy between these desires and reality. It is still not easy to reconcile family and career. As in the past, childcare is a sticking point, but parents do not receive enough support in the working world either. One of the major questions society faces is how to achieve a more harmonious balance between the worlds of work and home. Together with numerous firms in Germany, we are currently campaigning for a new image of fatherhood in our society. We want to motivate fathers to take active responsibility for their families. We want them to spend more time with their children and view themselves as more than just the breadwinner.
The core of the traditional nuclear family is undergoing permanent change. Stereotypes are confronted by reality on a daily basis. At your conference, these issues will be addressed in the context of the Jewish family. Change within it is closely linked to Jewish women's changing perception of themselves. And it is only fitting that you include in the discussion your perspectives as Jewish women, which have been impacted by new conditions within the Jewish community as well as within society as a whole.

(Excerpt from the opening address of the conference)

Dr. Christine Bergmann is the German Minister for Family, Seniors Women and Youth

"Zelem Elohim" and Human Bonding

Boris Schapiro

The family bond is generally a human one and the ability to bond is a splendid gift that is a significant characteristic of humanity. The Jewish approach to family is to form a bond and fill it with love, something that is central to being human. For this reason, part of the Jewish perception of the family includes special attention to defining what a person actually is.

The answers to that question vary according to different Jewish perspectives. From the political point of view, human beings form and maintain states and communities that subordinate the decisions of the individual those of the community. Taken from a psychological perspective, humans use reason to form symbols of the individual and the entire community. The philosophical perspective views humans as those who possess dignity and respect the dignity of others. From the religious point of view, humans are men AND women created in God's image. In the words of the Torah, this principle and the understanding of humanity are called *Zelem Elohim* [God's likeness]. "Man" and "woman" in and of themselves cannot be God's likeness, but images of idols at best. That is why Jewish tradition understands humans and God to have qualities that are intangible, cannot be smelled or felt, but can nevertheless be experienced.

What is in *Zelem Elohim* that cannot be perceived by the senses but can still be experienced? It is the characteristic of being an idea and the capability to form bonds. That is what makes for the AND. It symbolises the family, which represents humans and the human world in microcosm. It aspires to love that signifies humanity in practice.

I welcome Bet Debora and congratulate the organisers of this conference. It is an event that draws to mind the central aspect of being and becoming human, the first source of life, upbringing, the shaping of communities and reason, the dignity and blessing of Jewish, feminine and human perspectives in the new, the modern and the traditional.

(An excerpt from the opening address of the conference)

Boris Schapiro and **Rabbi Eveline Goodman-Thau**

Dr. Boris Schapiro is a member of the executive committee of the Jewish Community in Berlin

Jael Botsch-Fitterling is a member of the presidium of the parliament of the Jewish Community in Berlin.

נשות בית דבורה
הנכן בדרך הטובה
לקדום הגשמת
חזון שויון זכויות הגבר והאשה
דרך צלחה לטובת בנות עמנו
חזקי ואמצי בת ישראל

Women of Bet Debora,
you're on the right road
to making the vision,
of equal rights and obligations
for men and women into reality,
not only in the secular world,
but also in the area of religious services.
I wish you much success
that will benefit the daughters
of our people.
Be strong and courageous, daughter
of Israel!

Dayenu—Enough is Enough

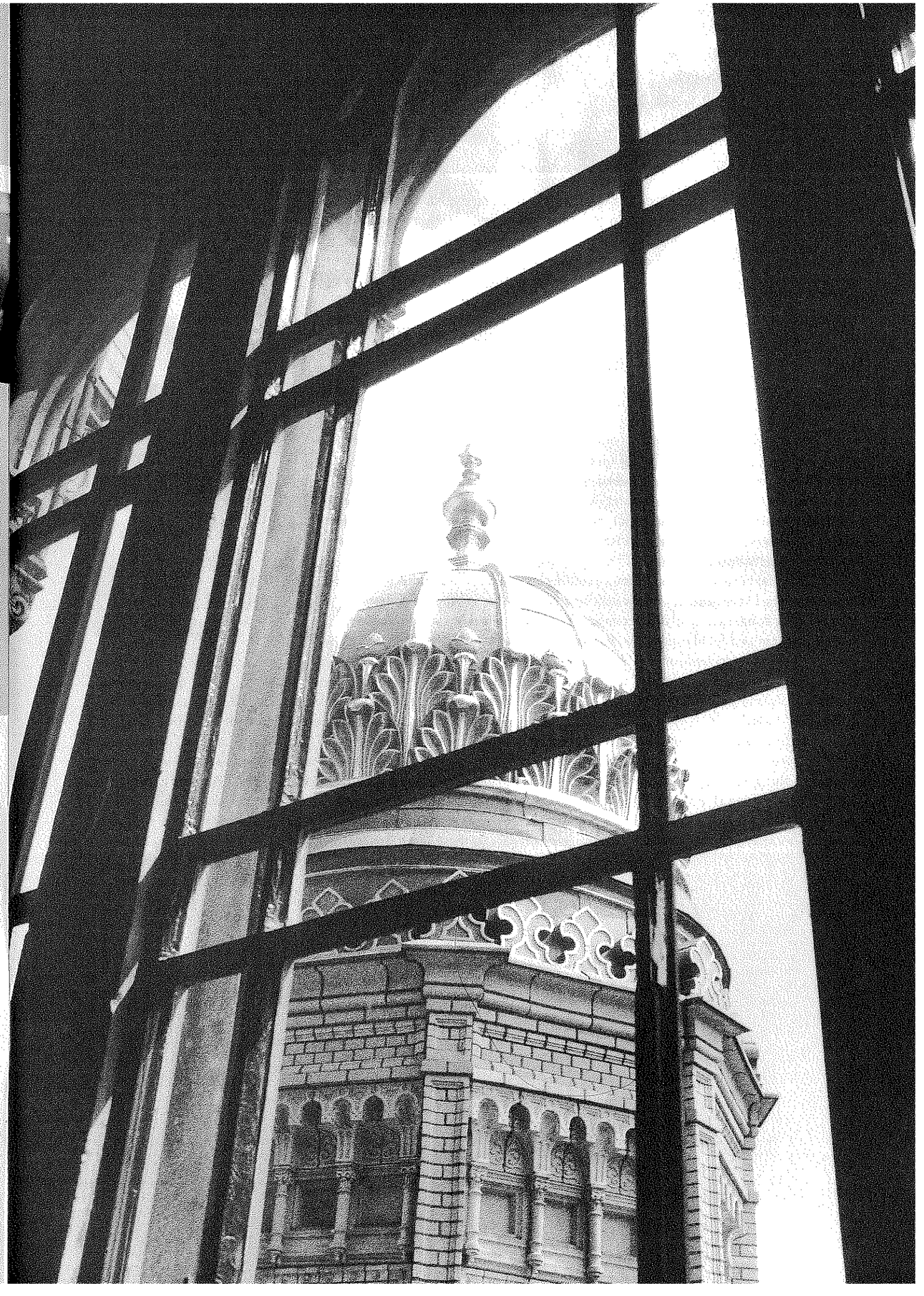
Jael Botsch-Fitterling

Step by step, we women are managing, three thousand years after King David, to bring women's rights up to par with real living conditions, to eke out the same rights, even if we repeatedly suffer setbacks. In this year's election for representatives to the parliament of Berlin's Jewish community, of a total of 62 candidates only four women were elected. And even when only one woman is in the executive and another is in the presidium of the parliament, the significance of women in these groups is increasing continually. So it's no wonder men are trying to put a damper on things.

As space for families has evolved from housing large enough to accommodate an extended family to a unit that will fit in a standardised three room flat, the myth of the woman as the one who tends of the home and hearth has faded. Reality demands self-confident, emancipated women, who are willing, able and do assume responsibility and competence in the shaping of all aspects of their lives.

Those who know Ivrit know grammatically masculine forms *include* and certainly do not *exclude* feminine agents. Dayenu!!!—It's enough that men interpret Mitzvot [Jewish comandments], etc. to suit their interests. The time is ripe for women to step in and pursue theirs. We women also know what our Torah says about the rights and duties of people in general: the laws, Mitzvot that are to be obeyed by men do not automatically engender bans for women. In this sense and in the tradition of the pre-war community in Berlin, I wish this conference a great deal of fighting spirit, with Rabbi Regina Jonas as a model.

(An excerpt from the opening address of the conference)



Long Live Jewish Families!

Elizabeth Tikvah Sarah

Family life in general has changed and transmuted into a heterogeneous phenomenon—but what about *Jewish* family life? Well, it seems that on the ultra-orthodox front—particularly within the Chasidic world—there has been very little change since shtetl days. But what about those Jews—the vast majority—who don't live apart from the mainstream society? The tale of my synagogue's first night communal Seder [ritual meal at Passover] provides an instructive response to this question. It was a lovely, lively occasion celebrated by a very diverse group of members and friends of the congregation of different ages: Jews by birth and Jews by choice; non-Jewish partners and family members; nuclear families; extended families; singles; couples—including at least one lesbian family and two lesbian couples. Into this mix came a group of regular guests at the synagogue's festival celebrations—some adults with learning disabilities who are part of a voluntary Jewish project in the area called 'Tikva.'

As we say in England, 'a good time was had by all.' But the sub-text of this happy gathering was a little more complex. And as I facilitated the proceedings I was conscious, on this great night for asking questions, of some insistent questions of my own: What were we all doing here on the first night of Pesach? Why weren't people at home conducting their own sederim? Why weren't people attending a family seder in someone else's' home? Of course, the answers to these questions were bound to be as diverse as the gathering itself and led me to ponder on further questions: Did some people lack the necessary knowledge and confidence to organise their own seder? Did others simply not have a family to invite, or to go to?

Since I didn't actually give voice to my questions, I could only guess at the possible responses. But one thing was clear: For a variety of reasons, 70 people—about 25 percent of the congregation—had chosen to come along to the shul [synagogue] and celebrate the seder together. In fact—as the waiting list indicated—the gathering could have been bigger. We just couldn't seat more than 70 in the synagogue hall.

My comments about the diversity of the gathering are, actually, just a little misleading: While there were children present, there were, in fact, just ten youngsters there altogether and though the age range spanned over 80 years, there was a yawning age-gap between 12 and 30-plus. As I surveyed the scene, my observations about the age pattern, of course, prompted further unspoken questions: Were those young nuclear families who weren't at the communal seder celebrating at home or with other nuclear families? Were those young adults who were absent from the communal seder celebrating with their families or perhaps doing their own Pesach thing somewhere else?

When I was young, communal sederim were rare—and rarer still was a *first night* communal seder. So what has changed during the last 30 years or so?

Let me tell you about the seder I conducted on the second night of Pesach organised by the Jewish Lesbian and Gay Group based in London—founded almost 30 years ago. This seder was specifically arranged to provide a space for lesbian and gay Jews—who are often excluded, ignored or marginalised within their families—to celebrate together, in the spirit of Pesach, as free people. But this seder was more than this. As a group spokesperson put it, in an article published in the (London) *Jewish Chronicle* the previous week: "We consider our group to be a family... Our seder reinforces the fact that we are an alternative family." (6 April 2001)

During the past three decades since lesbian and gay Jews have begun to emerge from the hidden nooks and crannies of their otherwise 'normal' Jewish families, the emerging communities of lesbian and gay Jews have become alternative families, offering love, support and a deep sense of kinship. The most interesting aspect of this development is that the sense of family has become greater as the diversity of the Jewish lesbian and gay community has become more evident. Contrary to what some might imagine, that second night seder was a very heterogeneous gathering, encompassing Jews of all denominations and none, women and men of different ages, singles and couples—and two children as well. In fact the similarities between the gatherings on the first and second night were as notable as the obvious contrasts. While on one hand there were many more adults than children at both sederim and there was an absence of teenagers and young people in their 20s and 30s, on the other hand, participants at both sederim had made an active choice to be there and there was a tangible sense of a diverse group of people celebrating as a family.

Individuals making an active choice; diverse groupings celebrating together as a family: I want us to hold these two concepts, these two realities, together in our minds so that we may consider the implications of what may seem, at first sight, to be an unlikely combination. The observance of Pesach throughout the generations, like the observance of all the practices that define Jewish life, is rooted in an obligation to serve God, who liberated our people from Egyptian bondage. that means, of course, that the obligation to keep Pesach is in some sense the obligation that defines our existence as the Jewish people. Quoting Torah, the Haggadah [tale of the departure from Egypt] sets out the obligation in no uncertain terms: "You shall tell your child on that day, this is because of what the Eternal One did for me when God brought me out of the land of Egypt." (Deuteronomy 6:23) Each parent is obligated to tell his or her child—that is the model. But now we have a new phenomenon: in-

Women's Seder in Berlin

Rabbi Elizabeth Tikvah Sarah is currently a part-time lecturer and rabbinic tutor at the Leo Baeck College, where she also chairs the Rabbinic In-Service Training Team and a part-time minister of the Brighton and Hove Progressive Synagogue. Published widely.

dividuals making choices, individuals choosing to celebrate together with others with whom they share a sense of kinship not rooted in a biological bond.

And, of course, those who choose to participate in communal sederim are not the only ones doing the choosing. There are also those who choose, still, to celebrate in their own homes or in the homes of relatives or friends. And, there are those who choose not to celebrate. Some of the choosers, no doubt, still feel obligated, but they are making choices none-the-less. And it's in the nature of choosing that a choice is not made once and for all; choosing is a dynamic process. We can all make choices either way as far as participating in Pesach is concerned. And the same is true of the biological ties we make and break and of the alternative families we join and leave. Despite an established tradition, codified by the early rabbis almost 2000 years ago, with the family, ledor vador, from generation to generation, at its heart, the continuation of Jewish life is in the hands of choosing individuals.

Elizabeth Tikvah Sarah

But that does not mean that Jewish communal structures are redundant. It is clear to me, on the basis of my experience, that the communal seder is not only a metaphor for Jewish life today and a setting in that the changes in Jewish family patterns are played out for all to see, but it provides a dramatic demonstration of ways in that congregations are transforming in response to changing Jewish families. Because the home is no longer the cornerstone of Jewish life for increasing numbers of Jewish people and because the biological family is no longer the locus of strong Jewish connections for many Jews, individuals, couples and families are turning to congregations, communities and chavurot [friends] to fulfil these nurturing, nourishing and connecting functions. And so synagogues, whose activities traditionally revolve around 'prayer,' 'study' and 'meeting,' are now being challenged to develop new roles as *extended families* and Jewish *homes* for their members and friends.

Which means that the family- and home-demands on congregations are extending way beyond providing an annual communal seder. One of the best examples from my experience is the development of Erev [evening] Shabbat services and shared meals—taking place not only in the synagogue itself but also in members' homes. I know of one particular weekly gathering within my congregation, which includes single people and couples in the 60-plus age group. Held in a different home every week, andeach person who comes contributes a dish. In addition to sharing an Erev Shabbat meal, those who meet together also support and care for one another. As one person put it to me: "We're there for one another, we are like a family—like a family should be."

Of course, not only congregations, communities and chavurot are beginning to provide new forms of Jewish family and home. Even a seemingly less rooted structure, like Bet Debora, is establishing a nexus in that new bonds, new connections are being forged between diverse individuals with differing backgrounds and personal circumstances. Because the contemporary Jewish family reality means that, far from the family being broken beyond repair, Jews are living in, creating and connecting with multiple families.

As my remarks have indicated, while there are many, many types of families—biological, non-biological and a mixture of the two—all of them, including a phenomenon like Bet Debora, share crucial elements. Each family—regardless of its profile—provides a context in that people may form bonds and make connections with one another; each one provides a locus for shared concerns, mutual support and *belonging*; each one engenders Jewish life. The Jewish family has not disappeared; it has transmuted into myriad forms. The only thing that is surely gone forever—I hope —is the myth that the family—Jewish or otherwise—is a singular, monolithic entity. And so, we can say—with confidence, I think—The Jewish family is dead: Long live Jewish families!

Left Over—Living after the Shoah

Rebuilding Jewish Life in Europe

Excerpts from a Panel, complied by Sandra Lustig

Panel discussion participants (from left to right): Wanya Kruyer, Andrea Petö, Sandra Lustig, Lynn Feinberg, Jael Geis

Lynn Feinberg

When the war broke out on April 9, 1940, there were about 1,800 Jews awkward in Norway. Approximately 760 were deported to Auschwitz. The majority of the rest fled to Sweden. Of the 760 deported, only 25 returned. Of those, my father was one. Jewish life after the war—I was born in '55—consisted of trying to reconstruct what was there before, trying to make things work. It was like a shell; to me there was no inner spirituality. I was not fed as a Jew more than in a traditional way, and I think that is something probably many of us have experienced. The community is orthodox—that's what they call themselves—but I would say 90 percent of its members are not orthodox. They would call themselves liberal. It's common that everybody drives to shul [synagogue] on Shabbat, and very few keep kosher. Also, increasingly over the years, many of the new members are converted. Today we're about 950 Jews in Oslo, about 250 or even less in Trondheim. In Trondheim, it's been so hard to get a minyan of men [a prayer group of ten men] that women have been started to be counted, simply out of need. (*laughter*) But in Oslo, we still have the gallery. I still sit up on the gallery.

I shunned the synagogue for many years. I had to seek my spiritual home elsewhere. Somehow, I insisted on finding a bridge, and that is what I think my work in the future is going to be about. Through astrology I came to Kabbalah. I realised that Kabbalah could answer some of the questions, could give me a framework. Through Kabbalah I came deeply into Judaism and I think this was also what spurred me to want to do something different; which spurred me on also in these Rosh Chodesh groups [meeting of women at the beginning of the new Jewish month]. Being a single mother of two Jewish boys, I think my Jewish quest started when I had to choose their brit milah [circumcision], because I was not married to a Jew, and I was in a very difficult situation with my husband, and having them in the Jewish community kindergarten

Members of the panel

Lynn Feinberg lives in Oslo and has been instrumental in forming two Rosh Chodesh groups. She recently completed her studies in the History of Religions.

Dr. Jael Geis holds a PhD in Contemporary History. Her doctoral dissertation, titled "Übrig sein—Leben 'danach' (Left Over—Living after the Shoah. Jews of German descent in the British and American zones of occupation in Germany, 1945—1949)" inspired this panel. She lives in Berlin and was an active member of the "Jüdische Gruppe" from its beginnings.

Wanya Kruyer is a sociologist and historian. She works as a freelance journalist in Amsterdam and was co-founder of the progressive, egalitarian congregation "Beit ha'Chidush".

Dr. Eleonore Lappin holds a PhD in Comparative Literature and Jewish History of Ideas. She works at the Institute for the History of Jews in Austria and was co-founder of the liberal community "Or Chadash" in Vienna.

Dr. Andrea Petö studied history and sociology. She was an assistant professor at the Central European University, Budapest and has lectured and conducted research at other universities as well. She currently serves as President of the Feminist Section of the Hungarian Sociological Association.

Sandra Lustig was born in Washington, DC, of German-Jewish parents, and has lived in Germany most of her life. She has been an active member of "Gesher - Forum for Diaspora Culture" in Berlin, and was instrumental in organising Gesher's conference "Galut 2000—Towards a European Jewish Identity" in December 1998.

was the way I started to re-socialise, and so I became a "Jew of choice:" I was choosing my Jewishness back. I think this might be easier than in Israel because, being so few, everybody is needed. I'm not pushed out, I'm actually welcomed in.
So at the first Rosh Chodesh group I just came with the idea and, actually, one of the most established Jewish women took on this idea. It was an interesting group because they were very interested in learning things. For the first time, we made our own kiddushim [blessing of wine and bread], our own ceremonies: it was the first time we did things like that. There has been talk about reforming our Jewish community, but I think the talk is threatening, because they still feel reform is the first step towards assimilation and they don't know of any other alternatives. My idea is, I have to start with the women, with small groups of women, and first of all make these groups feel safe and thereby transform from within.
We have now a very orthodox British rabbi. We have quite a lot of communication and of course he supports us, and says, "Well, of course, you can have a women's minyan [prayer group], that's quite okay for me, but be aware, you're not supposed to split up the community."
My next idea is to begin with a women's prayer group, maybe once a month, where women can experience how it feels to participate actively in a service. This must not necessarily be a full service, but consist of singing and understanding the liturgy that already is a part of the traditional service; with songs and tunes many already know. My aim is not to change orthodox Judaism, but to ask questions and to begin by practicing and sharing a Judaism to which I can relate.

Wanya Kruyer

The story goes: The Jews in Holland were saved by the Dutch. When I grew up in Amsterdam, this myth was reality: The Dutch fought in the resistance against the Nazis. The Dutch hid Jews, distributed food tickets, and saved Jewish children. No one reminded me of the end of the Anne Frank story: She and her family were betrayed by their Dutch neighbours. This was the fate of 76 percent of the Jewish Dutch population, and over 90 percent of the Dutch Jews in Amsterdam. 90 percent vanished in the Holocaust. When I grew up in the city, what I call the Anne Frank myth was pervasive.

Eleonore Lappin

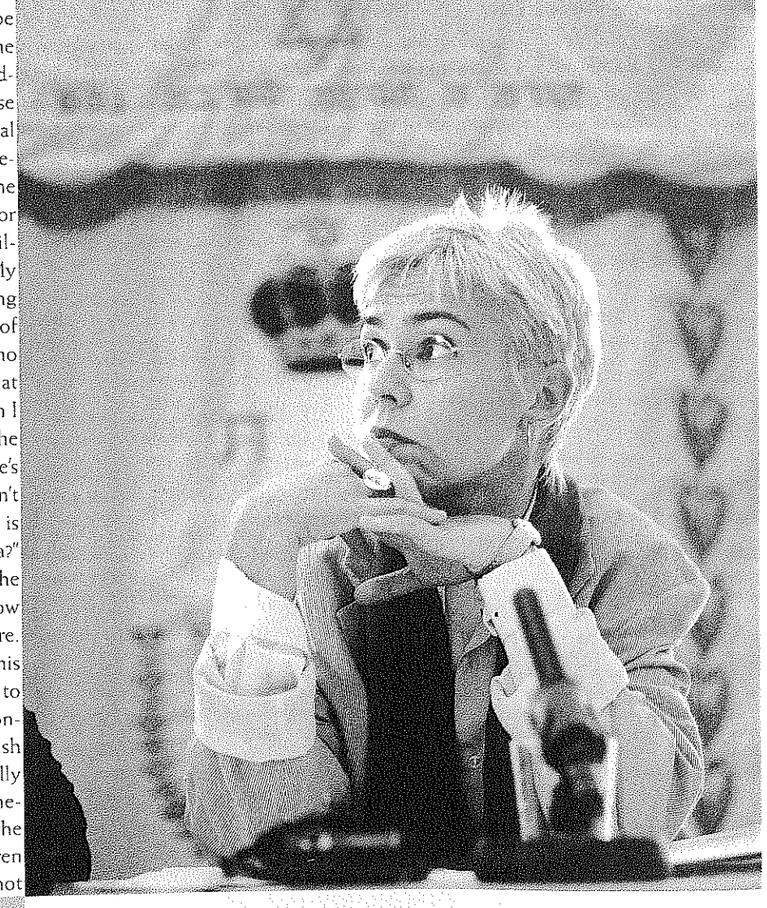
When my conscious Jewish life started in the 80's, I met a lot of people like myself: men and women travelling with their Jewish heritage, a heritage that was very complex, ambivalent, who grew up in families that wanted to be integrated, assimilated, at least integrated into Dutch society, who had their Holocaust traumas, and with this complex relationship with the Dutch environment. I made a lot of trips to the United States in the late 80's/early 90's and visited their small congregations associated with Reconstructionism and Renewal, some Reform in the big cities, and a Jewish life I had not seen in Holland, a Jewish life that was vibrant, easy-going, that was not overloaded with the shadows of trauma. In 1995, I was able to be involved in founding a new congregation: "Beit ha'Chidush," House of Renewal. I came to this sudden, and also for me unexpected step, because I missed the connection to our tradition and our history. Now, Beit ha'Chidush is a congregation like other congregations. It's more open, more informal, more participatory than the established congregations. But we are growing together again.
I have never been married, and I have never carried a child. I am not the only one in my Jewish peer group. The vast majority of my Jewish friends in their 30's, 40's, and 50's have no children themselves. 27 percent of the Jewish population is now organised in the two major congregations, the Reform and the traditional, or orthodox. The 73 percent of formally non-organised Jews still have this very low birth rate. But yet there's something else happening; we're getting a population influx from other parts of the world, mainly from Israel. My family consists of an American student who comes to study in Amsterdam for one semester, and I am her host family. It's a program called Gender and Sexuality of the School of International Training in Vermont in the US and the University of Amsterdam where I studied in the late '70's. And they always find a Jewish girl for me, so I have my little family, with two different *Pflegetöchter* (foster daughters) a year. Regularly, in the past two years, my Shabbat evenings are joined by a young man of 30 years who works and studies in Amsterdam and whose mother I met two years ago here at Bet Debora. So I made my own little family.

Eleonore Lappin

When we founded "Or Chadash" eleven years ago it was something quite new in Vienna and it could only succeed because there were simply people who were familiar with non-Orthodox Judaism. They were from Switzerland, Israel, and the USA. Since March we've got a woman Rabbi—for Vienna is a completely alien idea—Eveline Goodman-Thau, who is a native of Vienna herself.

Andrea Petö

The Vienna congregation was always a community of immigrants from Poland, Galicia, Hungary, Bohemia and Moravia. It also approximates the composition of the post-war community. After World War II, Austria was a transit country, a stop for people on their way to the USA, to Palestine/Israel, and many of a large number of DPs [displaced persons] did not get any further than Vienna. In 1938, there were perhaps about 180,000 Jews in Vienna. Today the "Israeli Cultural Community" has some 7,000 members. And nevertheless, by contrast with Germany, the community in Vienna is trying to find a certain link to the traditions of the pre-war community. If you're talking about patterns of identity, the pre-war community still has a certain power, and it was orthodox. There were no liberal houses of prayer in Vienna before World War II.
Today, we have no less than three Jewish schools. That's something that in itself is surprising and for us Jews in Vienna, a fact that fills us with pride. We have a school system. The future of our children has been provided for. The first Jewish school was founded in 1980. Today it has become the Zwi-Perez-Chajes-Gynasium, with an affiliated adult education centre. I sent my dauther there. During my childhood, I really suffered through religious instruction. It was horrible, the waste of one afternoon each week, and afterwards, you couldn't even read Hebrew. But still, you had a toehold in the Jewish Kehilla [community], that's why you went. I wanted something better for my daughter, and we really wanted to create Jewish life in Vienna. The school is a good one. That was also important, that the Jewish school be slightly elitist, at least as good as the Lycée Francaise, otherwise we wouldn't get any students ... that's because the Lycée Francaise was the inofficial Jewish school. We were better. We require four foreign languages for the "Matura" [school leaving certificate for university bound students]. Our children were simply Jewish geniuses. My daughter was in the first graduating class. Now I look at what became of that class. Two-thirds of them no longer live in Vienna. That means that exactly what I had to listen to when I decided to send my daughter to the Jewish school has happened, "She's going to become too Jewish. Don't send her back to the ghetto. How is she going to make it here in Austria?" And I said, "In order to live here, she needs a Jewish education." And now the children don't live here anymore. My daughter lives in Jerusalem. This really raises a question: If you want to raise children with a Jewish consciousness, and perhaps a bit of Jewish upbringing as well, then you've really got to send them to a ghetto somewhere. But then what happens to the Jewish renewal when these children leave? My daughter tells me, "I will not



marry some man who I already knew when I was ten years old." That's the way it is with most of them. It means that children who we keep in closed groups don't get much of an idea about perspectives for the future. So what's to be done? That's something I'd really like to know, because I believe it's a very important issue for family policy.

Andrea Petö

A national census was conducted in Hungary in the first part of 2001. In this census, there were three questions about religion that might serve as identification or coming out for the Jews. The first one was about nationality. For Hungarian Jews, that was Hungarian. The second was religion. Since 90 percent of the Hungarian Jews have no religious identification, most of them marked Atheist or No Answer. And the third was cultural identity, and that was an open-ended question, which means that most people did not understand what this was. The survey instructions suggested that this question referred to the mother tongue, and that is in most of the cases Hungarian. There was a certain debate about the result, but basically there are certain estimates, that 70, 50, 90 percent—it depends whom you ask—of the Hungarian Jewish population became invisible due to this way of asking in the census. In 1990, the Hungarian Jewish community made the decision that they wouldn't define themselves as a nationality or an ethnic group but as a religion, and in a community that is 90 percent non-religious, this is pretty problematic. The journal of the Hungarian Jewish Cultural Association, which tells you about its orientation, "Szombat," Shabbat, was actually the first one to introduce women's issues in its section Esther's Bag. Several of us women of their 30s decided to start a different type of publication, partly a journal, partly academic writing, and also literature which would reflect on gender issues. So far this is the only regularly published feminist intellectual product in the Hungarian press. But there is a problem: we have an imagined reading audience. We are putting an emphasis of the democratic character of our work. There are always two editors of each issue which secures that we could learn from each other. But we don't really know for whom we are writing these articles. We have fun, and we love spending our time together and reading the articles, and eating—we always make a feast—but the issue is that we are doing two things: we are constructing a community for ourselves, and we are constructing through our writing an audience. Yet the number of issues of the journal Szombat after January 2001 when we started the so called women's section in it did increased. That was the most surprising impact. Now the Szombat is published in 2,500 copies per month; you might consider that is nothing, but for an imagined Jewish community as it is the Hungarian one, it's a lot. If you count the readers not the copies sold the number of readers is around 10,000.

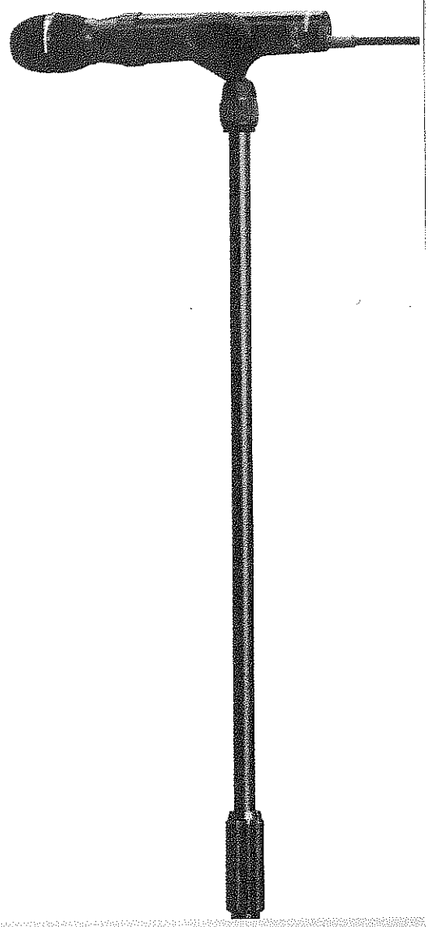
At the microphone: Elizabeth Tikvah Sarah (above) and **Alice Shalvi** (below)

Jael Geis

Even if it doesn't exist anymore, the Berlin "Jüdische Gruppe," in many respects paved the way for all of today's groups that are outside the mainstream. It was formed to protest the march of Israeli troops into Lebanon in 1982 and was opposed to the policy of the Jewish communities here, not in any case to criticise Israeli policy openly, following the slogan, "my country, right or wrong." Most of the members viewed themselves as more or less secular, leftist intellectuals, who adopted a critical position regarding social and cultural questions facing the Jewish and German societies. The aversion between the Jewish community and the Jüdische Gruppe was initially mutual. The rigid structures in the Jewish community are a product of Jewish post-war history in the Federal Republic of Germany. Jewish life was distinguished by the following characteristic facts: a) it was a political issue, b) it was quickly institutionalised but regenerated slowly, and was plagued by the central problems of spiritual, religious, and cultural impoverishment, c) it had an extremely ambivalent position to remaining in "the country of the murderers," and d) a large degree of heterogeneity despite the small number of Jews, until the beginning of the 1990s, there were some 30 thousand members of the Jewish community in Germany, as opposed to nearly half a million before Hitler came to power. The more or less latent feeling of threat and the resulting siege mentality first promoted the development of undemocratic structures within the communities, and second, had the consequence that Jews felt the need to appear in public standing homogenous and shoulder to shoulder. Otherwise they withdrew into anonymity. The invisibility of real Jews was linked to a high presence of dead Jews in public.

I'd like to remind you of the background, on which, in my opinion, the question of the family after the Shoah should be discussed. The extermination attempt by the national socialists was not directed at Jewish individuals, but at the Jews as a people. It included both the history and the future, meaning both children and the potential to reproduce. After the Shoah all potential parents were confronted with the physical and psychological renewal of parenthood, even if individuals did not pose the question to themselves. A child was a tangible bit of evidence of a person's own survival and in general played a role in the wishes of the parents for substitutes, continuity, rejection of national socialist doctrines, and the desire to negate what had happened. Every child that was born after Hitler was a triumph over the persecutors. We should, and by "we" I mean all Jews of all ages, not be surprised that we are still dealing with this partially failed attempt to exterminate us. The trauma of the extermination was collective and the consequences are as well.

Post-war Jewish communities in Germany were concerned with an above average number of social tasks: tending to the needs of survivors and their families, and those of orphans and refugees. The were challenged and certainly overwhelmed. The communities tried to compensate for what these mostly incomplete or shattered families, frequently 'second families,' were unable to do. It tried to meet the needs of the children to lead a Jewish life even after the traditions had been broken a number of times. This was particularly true if the communities adhered strictly to conventional forms of practising Judaism and retained hierarchical structures. So it shouldn't be surprising that the community clung and gave a great deal of significance to structures that were handed down after the Shoah. These communities were after all just as affected by the devastation and had to be reconstructed under conditions that were just as difficult as those faced by the families.



Open Discussion

Jael Geis

I'd like to ask you something that I do not immediately want to have taken as an appeal. Why is there, in Germany of all places, no organisation of children of survivors? I mean an organisation that is active in this generation and not an offer for it?

Esther Kontarsky

It's been mentioned that the Jewish community, particularly in Germany in 1945, was in something similar to a state of siege and that this was strongly connected to mistrust. Precisely the word spirituality has a great deal to do with trust. The slippery slope in reference to Jewish identity after 1945 was that it wasn't enough to have survived something like that. What would be the other side of the coin, then? Trust would be a precondition for it. How can that be developed?

Jael Geis

Do you mean trust in the surroundings? That the others have done their homework?

Esther Kontarsky

I mean trust in the self, a fundamental trust, confidence in life in general, and in what's around you. There's no question that the surroundings are a very active factor.

Why do I feel a bit odd with people that are converting or have converted? I know it's completely unfair and that I'm really sitting down in a bed of nettles when I address it. But I think this discomfort actually comes from the fact that they bring something I don't have, trust. That has noting to do with envy. It's just unease. It's something that I absolutely don't have. And I don't know how that will develop with time.

In reference to the question about organisations for the second generation. Rabbi Jonathan Magonet was recently in Berlin and made the observation that it was his impression this question is being addressed much more intensively in Holland. The question that follows that is: What is the difference between the work in Holland and the work in Germany? Both are communities of survivors. I'd like to pass on an impression I got while attending the same psychotherapy workshop one time in Holland and one time in Germany. In the case of Holland, it was clear, that needs and suffering and horrible feeling were much more clearly articulated in Holland than here in Germany, where things are much more strongly sublimated.

Lidia Drozdzynski

Since 1994 there's been a second generation group in Cologne, perhaps the first in Germany. We worked together for four years, together with a therapist, because we knew that we needed professional help. The issue of the second generation may also not have become publicised, because it's been made very taboo by members of the first generation within the community. That means that if the second generation wants to break the taboo, then it has to have support. It isn't a political task, it's a psychological one. The concept of trust has really touched me. I think it's very courageous because I am battling with a similar problem myself. We've been discussing collective trauma and its collec-

Rabbi Alexandra Wright

tive results. It's precisely this trauma that fundamental trust was robbed from my parents. That lack of trust has been carried over to me in the second generation and means I'm unable to find spirituality, because I don't have this trust. I need tangible things because I'm floating in a gap and have difficult finding space for myself.

Lara Dämmig & Elisa Klapheck
We also belong to the second generation ourselves, but as time has progressed, we've begun to reject the concept. By using it, you define yourself through the Shoah, that our parents and grandparents experienced, not us. With the concept, our Jewish identity remains trapped in trauma and unable to reach a positive foundation. That is why we've started saying —this may now sound provocative— that we see ourselves as the first generation, the 'first generation after.' We want to build something new that is based on the old traditions. That is why this conference is being held here, in the women's balcony of Berlin's largest synagogue, the place where Rabbi Regina Jonas did her work.

Elizabeth Tikvah Sarah
This whole notion of reconstructing Jewish life: I think we have to do it with the materials of who we are now and we start with ourselves. I'm addressing both the issue of spirituality, and also that comment about, "We send our children to Jewish schools, and then they get terribly Jewish and don't want to live with us any more." The Zionist dream is gone, and thank God we are not in a situation with that, because we don't want our children to all run off to Israel. And I'm not saying we don't want Israel, we don't want our children to run off to Israel, we want our children to find a way and a path whoever they are, wherever they are, as Germans, as Hungarians, whatever, it's a real task.

Sylvia Rothschild
I was boiling inside listening to some of the things I've heard! The question really is: What does it take—I don't know if it's just the women—for the Jews of Europe, post-Shoah, to actually claim their own authenticity? Because I'm hearing people talk about the 'real' community in which 'we' are all invisible. And the 'official' community, and "we can't split them." And so on, and so on. It seems to me ridiculous. Jewish communities have always been plural, it is traditional to have many different kinds of Jewish community. And yet, the whole time I've been here, I've heard about a 'lack of authenticity' in anything we're building, because the 'real' community is somehow out there, it's official, it's traditional,...

Andrea Petö
It's rich!

Sylvia Rothschild
...it's rich. So what?! You can set up a community in somebody's kitchen! You don't have to wait for the money to come in to you. You don't have to worry what the Germans think about the Jews in Germany. You don't have to worry about what the 'Einheitsgemeinde' thinks in Norway or whatever. If most of the community are outside of the official community, that tells you something. One of the things I learned some years ago, is that the word 'author'—somebody who writes something—is connected to the word 'authentic'. Actually, you write your own authenticity.

Elizabeth Tikvah Sarah
What I think we've got to do is: be honest, bring all the different elements together, about where we live in our situation, whether it's in Vienna, or it's Budapest, or it's Berlin, or it's Norway, wherever we are, that we are honest about where we are, and living with that and owning it, together with exploring our Jewishness, which is to me not going about through the past, but recognising our own journey as a Jewish journey, and finding a way of connecting with the symbols and the ideas and the stories.

Elisa Klapheck & Lara Dämmig
What Rabbi Rothschild said is very important. We hold Bet Debora in the community, here in Berlin. We have been to America, to Israel, in order to orient ourselves. But at some point we thought we have to be authentic, in our place. We do not see Bet Debora as something that is outside of the community, quite the contrary. We want to spark a discourse within the community and outside of it as well, in non-Jewish society. We see ourselves in this society, not it some niche outside it. And we simply have to be able to handle it when not everyone in the community loves us.

Wanya Kruyer
I agree totally. Beit ha'Chidush, the new community I represent, is fully part of the community in Holland, and if others don't recognise us, they have a problem.

Alice Shalvi
One of the most interesting developments in Israel recently has been "reclaiming the Jewish bookcase." People who are not in any way religiously observant, who feel they have been denied their heritage because they went to the state school system and not the state religious school system, are now setting up numerous batey midrash [study houses] to study Judaism. I find this a wonderfully encouraging development.

Wanya Kruyer
When I was talking about discovering Jewish life in Amsterdam, I was exactly talking about this reclaiming of our bookshelves, from the mid-80's on, in Holland, reclaiming our culture, reclaiming our theatre, etc. etc. Much later this concept developed in Tel Aviv, and so I'm proud to be more in the vanguard of this reclaiming our bookshelves than walking behind! And now a small group is also reclaiming our rituals and reclaiming our spirituality, and not only reclaiming it but also renewing it and rediscovering it, how to fit it into contemporary life. So, by reclaiming our bookcases, we have a very open and inclusive Jewish cultural life.

The complete discussion appears in: Sandra H. Lustig, Ian Leveson (eds.), Turning the Kaleidoscope. Towards An European Jewish Identity, Oxford, New York 2002

The Essential is Wordless

For a Swiss, I am
only a Jew.
For the Jews, I am
only a Communist.
For the Communists, I am
only an artist.
For the artists, I am
only a woman.
For the women, I am
an single woman with a child.

Alis Guggenheim (1896–1958)

The sculptor Alis Guggenheim writes in an impressive way of the stratified complexity of her identity. At the same time, she expresses the danger of the splintering of that identity by her surroundings. It is a situation that is likely to be familiar to most people.
Questions of identity are first and foremost psychological questions. But even Freud, who founded psychology, had only vague comments to make about his Jewish identity. In the foreword of the Hebrew edition of "Totem and Taboo," he wrote in 1930 that "No one who reads this book will be able to empathise better with the feelings of the author than those who do not understand the sacred language of their fatherly religion, which, like all others, is completely alien, and who cannot adopt nationalistic ideals but do not deny belonging to his people, and who feel their character is Jewish and do not wish it to be otherwise..." Had he been asked, "What is still Jewish about you, if you have given up all these things you share with your cultural counterparts," it is likely he would have answered, "There is still a great deal, perhaps the essence." But he would have been unable to find clear words for this essential at the moment.
As far as it is known, Freud only used the term identity once and that was in a psychosocial context. It was during his attempt to formulate his connection to Judaism. The concept of identity in reference to Freud indicates a volume that connects individuals with the values of his people, who were uniquely shaped by history.
We all have our own personal history that sometimes limits our objectivity. Intergenerational influences are factors in all families. Art as a form of non-verbal communication can be a means to show consciousness and integration of experience that cannot otherwise be expressed. Art is the medium of exploration.

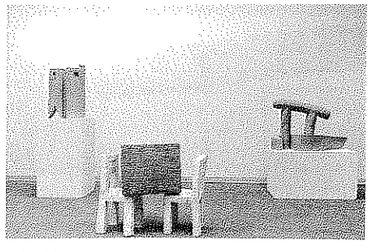
Ruth Herzka Bollinger

Ruth Herzka Bollinger founded the "Wyber-Shabbes" (Women's-Shabbes) in Zurich. She is at present working as a psychologist and psychotherapist in Basel, where she was a founding member of Ofek, Association for Pluralistic Judaism.

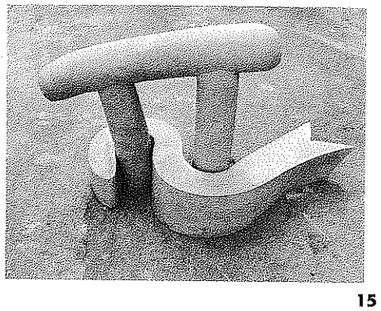
Histories of Clay

"Remembrance" is the name of a sculpture by Rachel Kohn. In it, a zigzag band escapes through a gate, like a snake. The movements of sliding away and disappearing take shape, as does the image of the past as a space to that one must gain re-entry. The sculptures of Rachel Kohn are less oriented to the external image of change. They are much more oriented toward physical experiences and emotional moments. They enable an effortless slide between the perspectives of below and above, large and small, of looking down and wanting to climb up.
A small, five-legged stool that leans shakily on a large shape, or a small, two-legged stool hanging on a large tripod makes it possible to visualise the instability of the relationship between mother and child. A smaller and a larger chair or a chair and a table become actors in the story of wanting to become bigger. A round shape cut from a segment and then returned to it tells the story of the moment of harmonic connection between two small, kissing sisters.
Expressing autobiographical experiences in abstract shapes is also something Rachel Kohn has done in earlier sculptures. Born in Prague and now living in Berlin, Kohn made the topic of the "Bearers" her own at the beginning of the1990s. It is a cycle of standing figures that melt together with their burdens in a symbiosis. The shapes were already reminiscent of archaic idols and a hint of the mythic continued there. Their burdens were motifs for not letting go or being able to surrender the tasks women are given through their upbringing and by tradition.

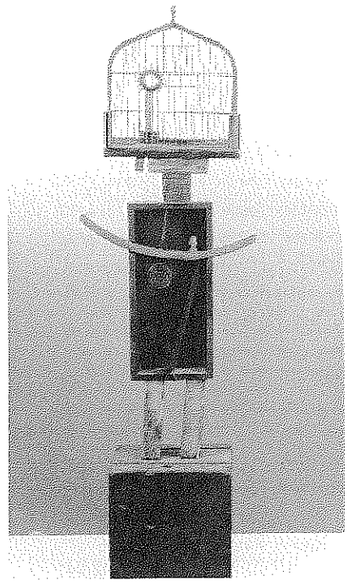
Katrin Bettina Müller



Exhibition of Rachel Kohn and **Marion Kahnemann**
during the Bet-Debora-Conference;
below: **Rachel Kohn, "Memories"**



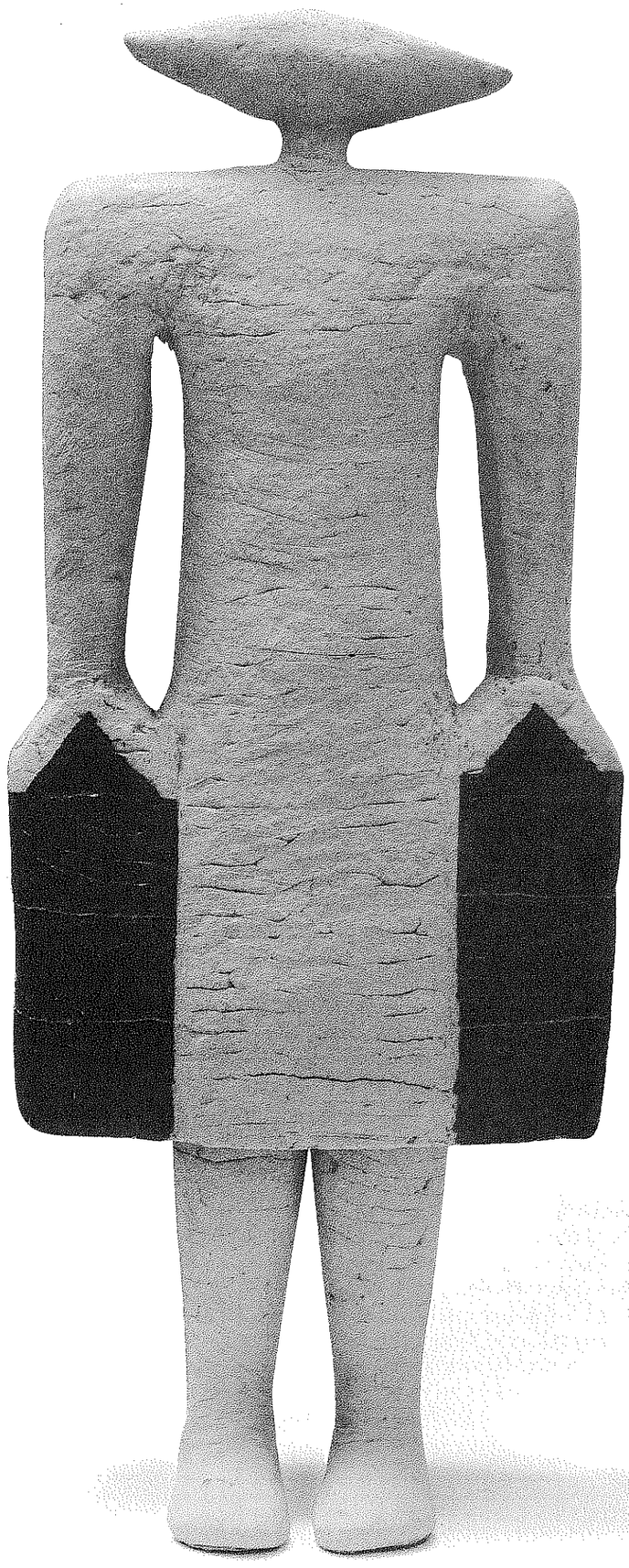
Marion Kahnemann, left: **"Your tender hands....."** **(King Solomon);** below: **"Messianic animal"** **(Messiastier);** right page: **Rachel Kohn,** from the series **"Bearer"**



An Artistic Journey of Discovery

I was born in East Germany, the GDR, and I come from a completely secularised family. The only "Jewish knowledge" I grew up with was that of the Shoah and the pain attached to it. The first time I was in a synagogue was directly after the death of my father. I was 17 years old. Even though I did not understand a single word of the service, I was surprised at how familiar the surroundings were.
The community began to replace my no longer existing, or at least for an East German citizen, unreachable, extended family. I began to study Jewish texts. They stimulated me and helped me to discover positive things about my Jewishness. This study soon became an important impetus for my artistic work and created the opportunity for me to pose relevant questions today.

Marion Kahnemann



Andrea Petö

Girls Educated as Boys

Historical Perspectives on the Hungarian Jewish Family

In the yearbook published in 1938 to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the National Alliance of Hungarian Jewish Women's Association, Dezsö Korein quoted S. R. Hirsch in German to describe the role of Hungarian Jewish women: "Die Frau sei die Priesterin des Hauses." If we analyse the other 86 contributions in this yearbook, half of them written by men, celebrating the most influential Jewish women's organisation in Hungary, we might as well come to the conclusions drawn in the pioneering works of Marion Kaplan (*The Making of the Jewish Middle Class*, Oxford 1991) and Paula Hyman (*Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History*, Washington 1995,) pointing out that the Jewish family was a discursive place that served as a site for articulation and enforcement of gender identities. Family was not only a discursive place to define women's needs, desires, pleasures in the society but also a key site to transmit class, ethnic and gender roles and to construct different identities. However, the family as an institution up to a certain limit accommodated to the changing social and cultural context and I would argue that family might serve as site of resistance, for example in Hungary at the turn of the century.

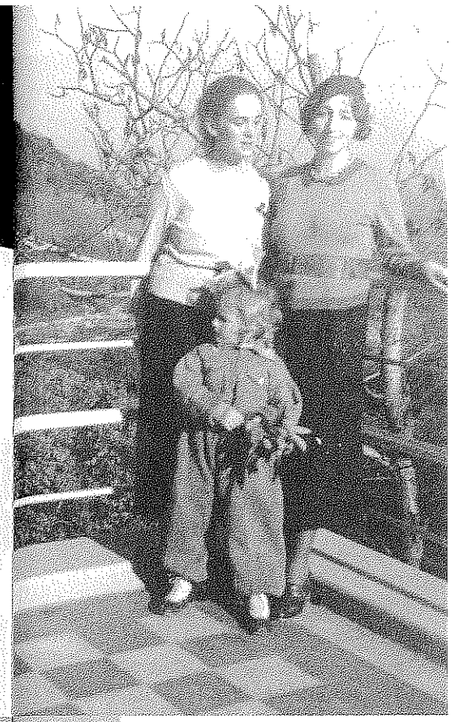
During the process of modernisation the rapidly assimilating Jewish Middle Class in Eastern Europe adopted the ideas of bourgeois domesticity and mixed it with the Jewish religious discourse on family. This process was happening at the same time as the public space for women was opening up because of women's increasing participation in the labour market and in educational institutions. To return to the quote at the beginning of this paper, the "Priest of the House" or rather "Priestess" also became the "Angel of the House". The double discourses on religious family and on domesticity strengthened each other, making this new ideology powerfully resistant to the challenges of modernity.

The first response to this challenge in the religious discourse was the redefinition of family, or broadening of its meaning. Women's participation in the public sphere could not be ignored any more. However, women's participation in the public sphere was considered acceptable if it served religious zeal or social welfare and women were called "heroes without a name" following the biblical tradition describing the role of women. We know from the social movement literature that mobilising women in the "maternal frame" solves the paradox of making women active in the public realm without challenging patriarchal power structures. So we can look at social work using the term women's agency and charity as a site where enterprising talents found space for their activity and developed a different female subjectivity.

The second route for emerging Jewish women as social actors was outside the religious framework. By the beginning of the 20th century educational institutions emerged as key forms to transmit social norms and values and to construct places of resistance.

At the turn of the century in Hungary the percentage of women's participation in the educational system was considerably smaller than that of men. But in analysing the figures of women's participation in higher education it becomes clear that women entered such institutes with greater educational capital, with fluency in more languages, more sporting skills and an educational performance during their years of study that was all together much better than that of their male—or of their Jewish male—fellow students. Within the Jewish population studying in the higher educational institutions, women were also very much present at the turn of the century. This route was supported by the demographic tendency that well-to-do Jewish middle class families who were aspiring for inter-generational social mobility, were restricting their reproduction rate by the turn of the century in Hungary and also in Germany. If only one or two children were born and both were female, the girl was educated as a boy. They received the same education, except for one important factor: there was no religious instruction. The social phenomenon "girls educated as boys" resulted in constructing a new female subjectivity where women with much better abilities, with deeper determination, entered a very male world of professionals. These women were trained with all the support of their family during the educational process as "boys". Through their experience they understood how patriarchy operates and for them the techniques of the patriarchal rule, such as forced amnesia, forgetting and discrimination became transparent. The social democratic, feminist movement and later the Communist opened up social and political space for assimilation and an escape route from religious norms and duties. Modernity together with the social program attracted a new generation of Jewish women taking part in leftist activities. During our quest for foremothers we are looking back to the very rich tradition of Jewish women's political activism.

Hence the Bible offers more models if we watch carefully. For the "girls educated as boys" there was no space in the religious world. For them the civic, state intervention was desirable to oppose the overwhelmingly oppressive and religious private sphere of domesticity. If we want to understand why the majority of Jewish women in Hungary today are non-religious, we should take into consideration (in addition to other factors) the exceptional individual achievements of our fore-mothers at the turn of the century and the family as a possible site for resistance.



above: **Schulteisz family: Babuka with her mother and Csuri, 1933;**
below: **Jewish high school for girls,** after 1945
Photos: Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives

Dr. Andrea Petö studied history and sociology and has a Ph.D. in Contemporary History. She has been lecturing on post World War II, Central European history, oral history and on women's history. Her monograph on Hungarian Women in Politics 1945–1951 was published 1998.

Britta Konz

Bertha Pappenheim:

A New Look at the Concept of the Family

Bertha Pappenheim (1859–1936) a Jewish women's rights activist known in the writings of Sigmund Freud as "Anna O," was one of the co-founders of psychoanalysis. She also made a lasting impression on the history of the women's movement and the lives of her Jewish women contemporaries. Her comprehensive social work was aimed at strengthening the Jewish community and promoting a return to more traditional ways of life. With the founding of the Jewish Women's Union (Jüdischer Frauenbund, the JFB) in 1904, Pappenheim set up an organisation specially tailored to representing the interests of Jewish women.

Bertha Pappenheim, 1882

Britta Konz (1972) studied Protestant theology in Frankfurt and Heidelberg. She currently is working on a dissertation about the piety and religious and political activities of Bertha Pappenheim and the Jewish Women's Union (JFB).

The JFB was to have been an explicitly religious organisation and was, according to Ottilie Schönewald, conceived as a "Mission for the Jewish Woman's World". (*Blätter des Jüdischen Frauenbundes* [BJFB], Nr. 7/8, 1936, p. 8) Bertha Pappenheim was particularly dedicated to the fight against selling young girls and women into prostitution. She travelled to Eastern Europe to gather background information and speak with women directly affected by the problem.

Pappenheim linked her feminist convictions to her orthodox faith. For her, religion was a source of strength, motivation and direction for her work. She viewed her religious heritage as an obligation and a source of enrichment. For her, social work was the way she professed her Jewish beliefs. It was a mitzva, an imperative and duty of the entire Jewish community.

As a childless, orthodox Jewish woman, Bertha Pappenheim was concerned about how she could conform to the requirements in the Torah to establish a home and devote her life to being a link in a chain of dignified generations of families. Like many feminists of her time, Pappenheim accepted the idea that motherhood was a female role and tried to enumerate and expand the tasks related to it. But her views were also more refined. "Motherhood," she wrote, "is ascribed to women, but this may make a woman unhappy. Motherhood is a primal instinct that a woman has, that even a virgin may experience." (Denkzettel, 27 April 1919). Pappenheim emphasised that there was no child who could be foreign to a woman, which was why a childless or unmarried woman could experience motherly feelings and as a result had earned the same rights as married women.

Bertha Pappenheim also expanded the role of Jewish women in a religious context. She addressed the tradition of the "Priestess of the House" and the "Guardian of the Family." She then enhanced the concepts by extending the definition of family to include both the Jewish community and the state, concluding that public life was a "natural sphere" of activity for Jewish women. As she wrote to Martin Buber in 1935, she viewed women as "creators" or "shapers of life." Through the pain of labour and childbirth, they produced those who would follow, or were "next." Women were to lead these followers and with untiring love, consciously admonish them to develop the seed of the divine within themselves.

Every child was sacred to Bertha Pappenheim. (BFJB, Nr. 7/8 1936, p. 12) For her, this made it imperative that a child remain whole in body and spirit and follow a godly path. She believed the hope for the Messiah would persist and be carried through the world in this way. The JFB home and orphanage was founded in 1907 in Neu-Isenburg and is said to be the heart of Bertha Pappenheim's work. Some of her most significant religious and social goals were achieved within its walls. It was where she formulated her basic ideas and tenets for raising children. Pappenheim also donated a great deal of her wealth to the establishment. People on the fringes

Address

My God, you are not a God of comforting words and incense, not a God of the bygone. You are a God of the present, placing demands on me. You bless me with your commanding "you ought," you expect me to distinguish between good and evil; you require evidence—of my having shown your power through the strength I gain from your presence, of my having struggled to rise to you, of my having inspired others, of my having contributed to the realisation of everythingwhich I desire.

Challenge me, challenge me, so that in every breath of my life I am consciously aware that there is a God.

Bertha Pappenheim, 14.11.1935
Translated from German by Ian Leveson

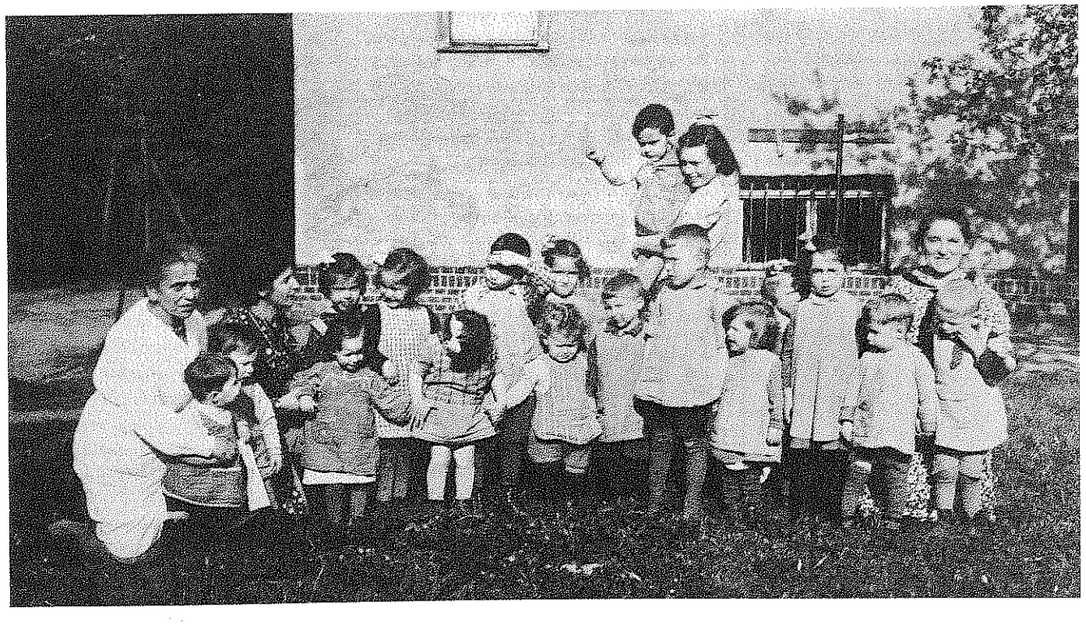
of Jewish society—former prostitutes, single mothers, young delinquent girls, difficult teenagers, children born out of wedlock and pogrom orphans found refuge in Neu-Isenburg. After the Nazis seized power, the home gained significance as a training centre for home economics and infant and childcare.

The home at Neu-Isenburg is viewed as the JFB's answer to the process of social change in the nineteenth century. Bertha Pappenheim believed it was the "divine task of the Jews of the world to secure the 'strength of the family.'" (BJFB, February 1929). She thought life in the home should have the character of a family and kindle longing for a traditional family. For that reason, the upbringing children received at the home was primarily oriented towards existing traditions. The teachers and childcare workers there tried to maintain the character of each Jewish holiday celebration. Life was conducted in strict observance of Jewish dietary rules and the religious calendar. As in a family, the residents of the home gathered around the table. But meals were conducted in a way designed to demonstrate their equality and promote life in a community. Even the girls received religious instruction and learned Hebrew and the traditional prayers.

But Neu-Isenburg also can be seen precisely as an alternative to traditional images of the family. There, women formed a community that did not fit the mores of the time. Jewish family traditions were experienced in a completely new context and, as a result, were being simultaneously reformed "from the inside out". In contrast to the bourgeois nuclear family, Isenburg was to be a point of departure for, goal and champion of solidarity in the Jewish community. (Bertha Pappenheim, Die jüdische Frau, 1934). It formed a miniature of Beyt Israel or "the house of Israel" set in a larger public context. Bertha Pappenheim viewed the home as a path and the educational objectives pursued along it were to be continually analysed and revised.

On 28 May 1936, this path was violently disrupted when Bertha Pappenheim died shortly after being interrogated by the Gestapo. More than two years later, on 9 November 1938, one of the complex's four buildings was burned to the ground as the children looked on. In 1942, the children remaining at the home and their educators were deported and murdered in the concentration camps. The remaining buildings were placed at the disposal of the Hitler Youth. Today, the complex is a seminar center and memorial site.

Young woman attending the JFB's girl's club in Breslau



Dagmar Schwermer

"No Trace of a Salon"

The Jewish Women's Union After 1945

When the Jewish Women's Union (JFB) was re-established at the beginning of the 1950s after being banned by the Nazis in 1938, the organisers' main aim was mitigating suffering in the wake of the Shoah. But the women also gained new political strength through their activities. Three of the group's co-founders, Ruth Galinski, Inge Markus and Lilli Marx, spoke with Dagmar Schwermer about the revival of the JFB.

Berlin Women's Group, 1957
3. from left: **Ruth Galinski**, standing right: **Inge Marcus** and **Jeanette Wolff**

Dagmar Schwermer: What was the role of the JFB after the war?
Ruth Galinski: We had to draw to us those who were coming out of the concentration camps, because all of them were in a state of despair. They were broken. That's why we set up a women's group, to give these people something to hold onto and a bit of warmth. That was the most important thing we did in the first years.

What was the contact like among the women themselves? Was there a specific culture of conversation?
Inge Marcus: Well, there wasn't a trace of the old bourgeois salons. People got to know each other. Each told of their particular fate. Traces of hope returned for some. We were really a long way from a salon. We didn't want to be like Rahel Varnhagen. No. That just doesn't exist anymore. At the time, the Jewish communities had only about five to six thousand members. A women's group with 500 people in it was considered enormous. Unfortunately, it didn't remain that way, namely due to the ageing process, of all things.
Ruth Galinski: Don't forget ... in those days mainly the women who were single were the ones who survived.
How did you exchange information among yourselves? Ms. Marx, at that time you were already editing a newspaper solely for the women in the different communities.
Lilli Marx: That was a newsletter for the JFB in Germany. It was called "The Woman in the Community". We believed that title encompassed everyone. Our goal was to promote social work, provide information about gaining citizenship and to awaken women's interest in politics. We also wanted to kindle interest in and promote working for Israel. We wanted to make it particularly clear to the women how important it was to remember not only social work, but also other things. We were really lucky we were able to occasionally publish the paper, which could be as long as 16 pages, using money from the budget of the General Jewish Weekly (Allgemeine Jüdische Wochenzeitung). Our paper was inserted in the Allgemeine and widely circulated as a result.
From the beginning, you've emphasised that the women in your community were primarily concerned with social work. The original JFB, before the war and the Shoah, represented completely modern thought. Did feminist ideas later play a role in your group again?

Ruth Galinski, 2001

Ruth Galinski: There was no talk of feminism then. We had to survive and regain our strength. Besides, as far as I recall, we were very confident women. We never had the feeling a struggle was necessary. Religion, of course, was another thing entirely, but everyone has their own opinion on that. One is orthodox, the other liberal.
What made you so strong?
Ruth Galinski: What made me strong to begin with, was that I survived at all and I could begin again. I got married to a strong man. That made me strong as well.
Ms. Galinski and Ms. Marx, your work is linked to the work of your well-known husbands. One, Heinz Galinski, was the long-time president of the Berlin community and the chairman of the central council. The other, Karl Marx, was a publicist and the publisher of the General Jewish Weekly. What were your roles when you stood alongside these men?
Ruth Galinski: Take my husband, for example. He had the feeling he was stronger when I was with him. He always demanded I come along. I'll give you a small example. When we came home in the evening, we always sat down and talked over a glass of wine. Mutual sharing played a major role.
Lilli Marx: I can only underscore that. It's true I was one of the few Jewish women who had a career. There were only two in Düsseldorf. Besides me, a friend of mine was a paediatrician who had returned from Israel. We had already worked together in exile in England. I learned a great deal from my husband and I was allowed to learn. There was never the need to fight ... quite the contrary. He had an extraordinary understanding for working women and found it was important enough that it was done.

Inge Marcus, 2001 and 1966

Meeting of the International council of Jewish Women in London, 1966
Photos: Private collection

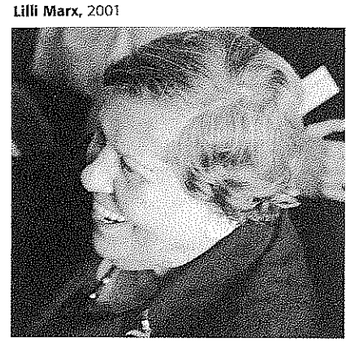
The work of the JFB was not limited to Germany. You soon began to take part again in meetings of the International Council of Jewish Women. What were your experiences there?
Inge Marcus: These international meetings were really interesting. Seen in a purely personal light, we were really good together, even when most were looking at us with the thought in the back of their minds: "... Oh, God, they come from Germany. How could they live there again? Or, How could they ever go back there?" Like me: I had lived in exile in England and I went back. They really had a hard time understanding that. But we tried to explain the dilemma to them with a funny little rhyme:

We are two boys from Germany
They call us Max and Moritz
Wherever we come on the scene
We're always having Zorres
But we don't think we need an excuse
to live in Germany
Because, remember, we are Jews
Wherever we may be.

Of course, we were wildly interested in the work at that time. It was so diverse. Our women contributed to it and they got to hear things from the large, free world beyond the war zone. And besides, the women's group was a springboard for me. At that time I was relatively young. I'd just had my third child and Heinz Galinski came to me and said, "Inge, I'd like it if you stood as a representative of the Jewish community. I said, "How am I supposed to do that? I've got a baby." He replied, "Oh, we'll manage all that." Well, why? Because we had a whole lot of women supporting us.
What are the tasks facing women's organisations today?
Lilli Marx: I believe the integration work done in our generation fell on fertile ground. We simply felt obliged to make ourselves available to the community. The main thing all organisations suffer from today is that contemporary young women who have superb career training don't make themselves available ... out of their own conviction. It takes a great deal of persuading to recruit young women.
Ruth Galinski: Well, in my opinion, the women's organisations have survived as such. Today there are women's organisations in the professions and in academe, or whatever you like, but the regular, old-fashioned women's unions are no longer "in."
Bet Debora is campaigning for equal treatment of women in Jewish ritual. What did you think of the religious services celebrated by the women at the conference?
Lilli Marx: I was really impressed both yesterday and today. It was the first time in about 54 years I'd been to a liberal or a reform service. It was a wonderful ceremony. The simultaneous readings of Hebrew, German and English scripture impressed me as well. I could read along, which is something I can't do in Düsseldorf.

Dagmar Schwermer is a journalist in Munich. Ruth Galinski and Inge Markus both live in Berlin, Lilli Marx lives in Düsseldorf

Lilli Marx, 2001

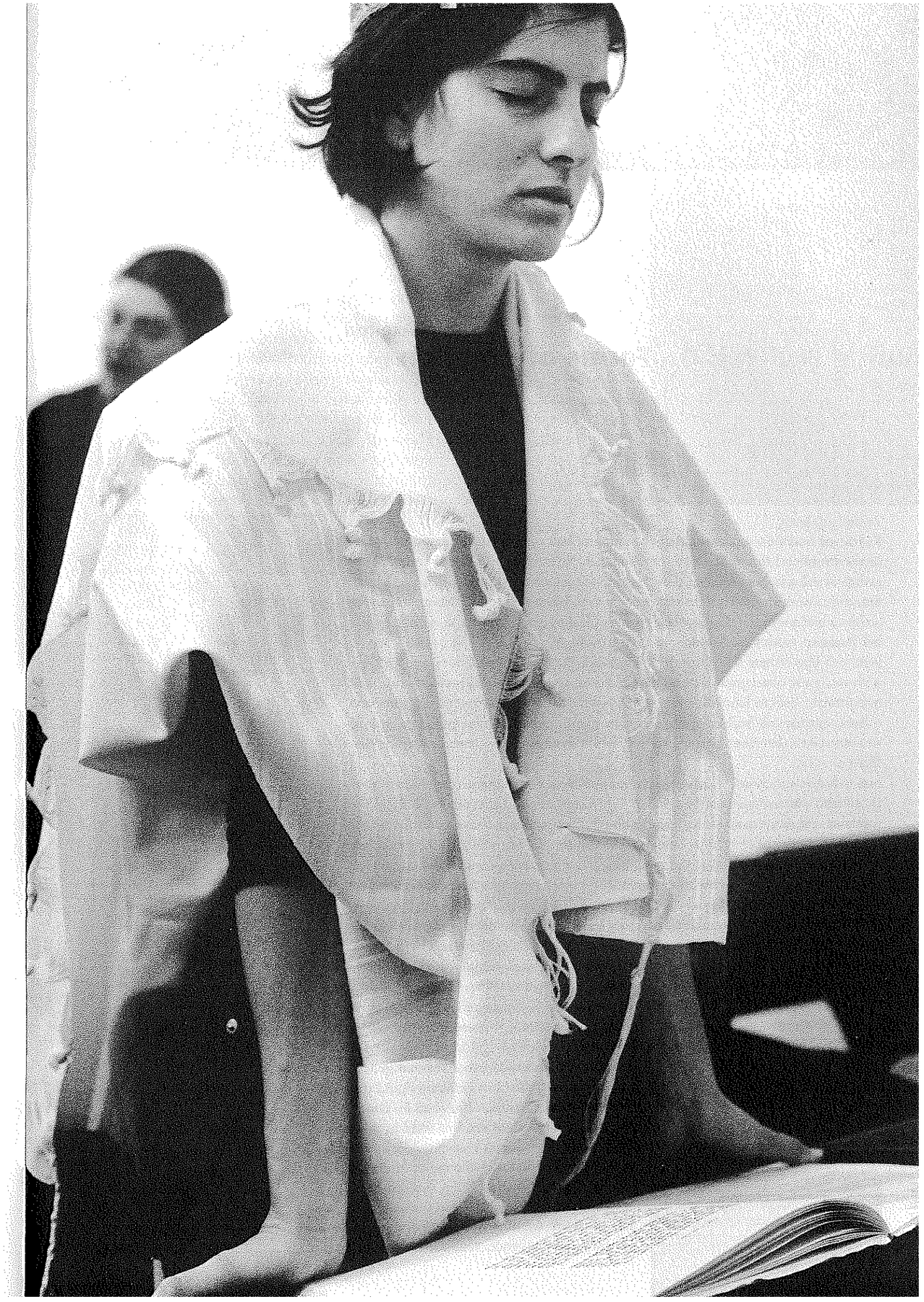


Andrea Petö

Friction Between Communism and Zionism

Before 1944, there were 152 Jewish women's organisations in Hungary; after 1945,16 were re-founded. I found the documents of eight of them. Four organisations have two dates of their dissolution. The first date—from 1945 to 1947—is actually very interesting because the Jewish women's organisations were dissolved, or banned, together with various conservative organisations, because there was a point in the Hungarian armistice requiring the banning of civil organisations that hadn't renewed their activity after the war, or that did not submit a request to renew their activity by a certain deadline. So in that sense, the Jewish women's organisations were packed together with the right wing organisations and were banned. Then, surprisingly, some Jews returned from deportation and wanted to continue their activity. The second date of dissolution is 1950. In 1950, the secret police came to the offices of the Jewish women's organisations; they put what they found into boxes and took them away to a secret archive in the Ministry of Home Affairs that was reopened for the first time in 1993. That was the moment when I got access to these boxes to do research.

If you look at the demographic data of women who took part in this active Jewish life, you see that they are non-professional women, with no careers. They were mostly active in charity and redistributing aid from the Joint and UNRA and other organisations. I would say that their aim and their perspective in participating in this renewal of Jewish life was related to somehow reintegrating themselves, to reconstructing something that had been lost, to networking, to making themselves acceptable again in Hungarian life. They were members of at least three organisations: one political party, Communist or social democratic, and besides the Jewish women's organisation the mass women's organisation or the Zionists. Why did this world disappear by 1950? The first answer relates to the Communist takeover. They destroyed the Jewish women's organisations for two reasons. The first is religion and they identified these organisations as religious organisations. They were banned together with the Catholic, Protestant and other organisations. The other reason is related to the anti-capitalist tendencies of the Communists, because this was the well-to-do upper middle class of Jewish women who took part in the Jewish women's organisations. Consequently they were labeled as "class enemies." So, right after they returned from the concentration camps, they were deported inside Hungary to other internment camps because of their social background. That destroyed the network basis that they had constructed very carefully and with a lot of effort after 1945. The second reason for the destructio of these organisations was Zionism. This was the very brief period in the history of Hungarian Jews when Zionism had certain deeper roots. We have police reports from 1950 saying that they did not find anybody who was previously active in these women's organisations, because they had all left for Israel. Between these two forces, Communism and Zionism, these Jewish feminist associations disappeared, although they had hoped to reconstruct the social networks that were so important for reintegration in the Hungarian society.



Toby Axelrod

Being Fruitful: On Forms of Creation

Ki Teze, or Isaiah 54, is a particularly meaningful haftarah [Shabbat reading portion of the Prophets] to me. It was my bat mitzvah haftarah in 1969. And I took ownership of it back then, sensing that this poetic text was destined to help me in the future. In the text, God speaks to a woman who has no children: "More numerous are the children of the desolate one than the children of when she was united with her husband, saith God."

I did not know then, when I was 13 years old, that I would reach my present age with no family of my own. To find the right man and to have children with him was my ultimate goal in life. For some, this is not a goal at all. I respect the choices of others. But for me, to be without my own family is a painful experience. It is a situation with that I am learning to live, while I still hope my dreams may be fulfilled one day.

No, it is not my choice to have no children. Not directly, at any rate. I am one of those who came of age in a time of conflicting messages. I believed (and still do) in romance and in independence. My ideal husband would be a friend and a lover and a partner in life. I believed in being sexual and sensual but not a sex object. I believed in being Jewish and at the same time having no boundaries (I no longer see the boundaries as necessarily discriminatory). I wanted to have four children—two older, two younger and two in the middle. And I did not think about the clock.

Who knew that the modern goals of being a career woman, developing one's God-given capabilities and insuring financial independence would take so much time from the pursuit of relationships? Who knew that so many young men would still be seeking traditional wives? Who knew that the mixed message of our liberal milieu—love thy neighbour but marry a Jew—would prove so challenging? And who knew that the ultimate warning, blasted from the synagogue pulpit—"Don't finish Hitler's job! You must have Jewish children!"—would prove so paralysing?

When I look back today, I see that our generation stood on a newly built bridge. We were the post-Holocaust generation and the message was clear. We had to rebuild the decimated Jewish nation, child by child.

But for those of us not encompassed in the shtetl-like cocoon of ultra-Orthodoxy, where 'matches made in Heaven' were arranged by parents here on earth, there remained the enormous challenge of finding our way to both family and career in a society where new possibilities and responsibilities abounded but where there were not enough role models to lead the way.

The freedoms we inherited are liberating and challenging. They require discipline against overindulgence. Our society indirectly encourages us to think of ourselves as immortal, through the distractions of material comfort, physical appearance and entertainment—all of which money can buy. And meanwhile, we grow older.

I say 'we' because I see you all around me, both in Germany and in the USA: heterosexual women in their late 30s to 50s who are still looking for a man with whom to share life and create a family. I do not know as many men in the same situation.

Let us not postpone our goals any longer. And, if we cannot physically bring children into the world ourselves, let us look for new ways to fulfill those dreams, to be fruitful if we wish to be and to help achieve 'Jewish continuity' but not in order to avoid being labelled an accomplice to Hitler.

The very poetic text of *Ki Teze* contains some possible answers for men and women who have not yet found the partner they seek, who are looking for ways to fulfil their creative role. *Ki Teze* implies that a forsaken bride will be "gathered up again" and that God's love "will not move from thee and the bond of My peace not vacillate." The text sounds loving and tender, despite the implication that the woman depends on her husband or on God for her fulfilment.

One common interpretation of the text is that the woman represents the people Israel and that God is promising to bring them back to full bloom. But it also can be seen as a representation of creative fulfilment for those without children. It still involves nurturing a new generation, the kind of renewal and inspiration that children bring. It involves the need that many of us feel, to help, protect and guide those in need. It also involves the desire to express our spirituality through music, art and writing, through the creation of medicines and machines that improve human life.

So the haftarah *Ki Teze* is about creation. But it is not about one kind of creation. To say we were created in God's image is to say we are creative beings. We do not look like God but have the capacity to act like God. Not by ruling over others, not by making something from nothing, but by making something of ourselves that goes beyond ourselves to affect others positively. An inherently Godlike quality of creation is that, once made, it takes on a life of its own. Each of our creations has the capacity to create.

I can still chant the first few lines of my *Ki Teze* without checking the text. My bat mitzvah was the first in our family, which at least on my father's side had very traditional roots. There was never any question that I would have a bat mitzvah and my paternal grandfather, an orthodox rabbi, came to the service and even got up on the bimah and spoke—about the traditional role of Jewish women.

You might think I had paid attention, but I was too focused on my feet, which were painfully jammed into tiny white high-heeled shoes. Instead, my mind wandered to my grandfather's little shul [synagogue], where men and women sat separately but children roamed free, free to open the secret door where the Shofar was hidden, free to feel the velvet of the Torah curtain. It must be written somewhere that children should be unfettered in the synagogue. They are a reminder of that most important word at the beginning of *Ki Teze*: Jubilate! And they are reminders of the joyous unruliness of creation.

When I look at the words of my old haftarah, I see many images of fruitfulness. The days of harvest come shortly after the days of atonement. If we are ready for them, there are many fruits of which we can partake and many ways in that the fruits of our labour can fulfil others. As it says in *Ki Teze*, God is "the God of love of all the hosts of His creations."

Anne-Lisa Nathan

Born in Paris and now living in Berlin, Anne-Lisa Nathan gave a concert of contemporary songs by Jewish composers specially for Bet Debora. Titled "Froyenshtimme" it included works by Helen Greenberg, Marie-Jeanne Serero and Mariana Krutojarskaja. One of the songs was the poem by Dora Teitelbaum that was recited by Helen Greenberg.

Ikh hob a Shvalb Gezen
(I Have Seen a Swallow)

I have seen a swallow in flight.
I thought it would fly there forever.
I saw a rose in full bloom
And thought it would always flower.

I was a tree in the meadow.
And I thought it would always flourish.
I once spun a dream
Which I thought would never vanish.

I am the swallow with the wounded breast.
The tree bent low by storms.
The flower plucked from the bush.
The dream my eyes long for.

Deep in my heart a wind cries.
With seven anguished howls.
But I am trusting like a child.
And am ready, still ready to love.

(Translated from Yiddish)

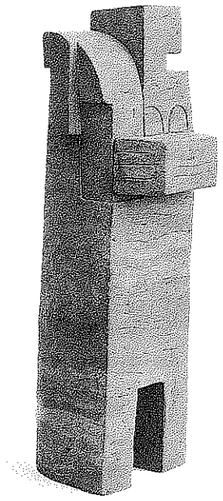
Toby Axelrod is the Germany correspondent for the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. She has been based in Berlin since October 1997.

Lynn Feinberg

Single Mother in an Orthodox Community

The traditional Jewish family with father, mother and children is a deeply ingrained image. The father has an important role to play. It is my experience that when this element is missing, family life seems very fractured. Being a single Jewish parent meant I took on many roles traditionally ascribed to fathers, such as saying Kiddush and cutting the bread on Friday evening. In a way, I have had to face a double set of taboos. First and foremost, I have chosen to live differently from the majority culture. Second, I have taken on roles that were not already preordained for me in our tradition. It has felt very lonely at times.

Going to the synagogue with my children proved to be most challenging. Because I am a woman, I had to sit in the gallery, where it is only possible to see the rituals going on from the front rows. My sons wanted to sit with the other children who were downstairs with their fathers. Until my boys were nine and ten, my father, their grandfather, was still alive. He was always in the synagogue during services. Of course, this was a good compensation for me. Celebrating Shabbat and holiday meals with my father and his second wife mitigated the immediate feeling of missing a proper family gathering. But in the synagogue my father was often busy with practical issues during the service and did not always have the time to be a substitute parent for my sons.



Having to sit apart from my sons frustrated me because it disqualified me from influencing my children's understanding of the service. It also made me aware of inherent gender issues related to Judaism and spurred my interest in doing something about it. I once joined the synagogue children's choir (I was one of two grown women. There were a few men and the rest were children) so that my children would be able to participate more actively in the services. ~~But~~ women and girls sing upstairs in the gallery. Boys stand downstairs by the bimah [podium].

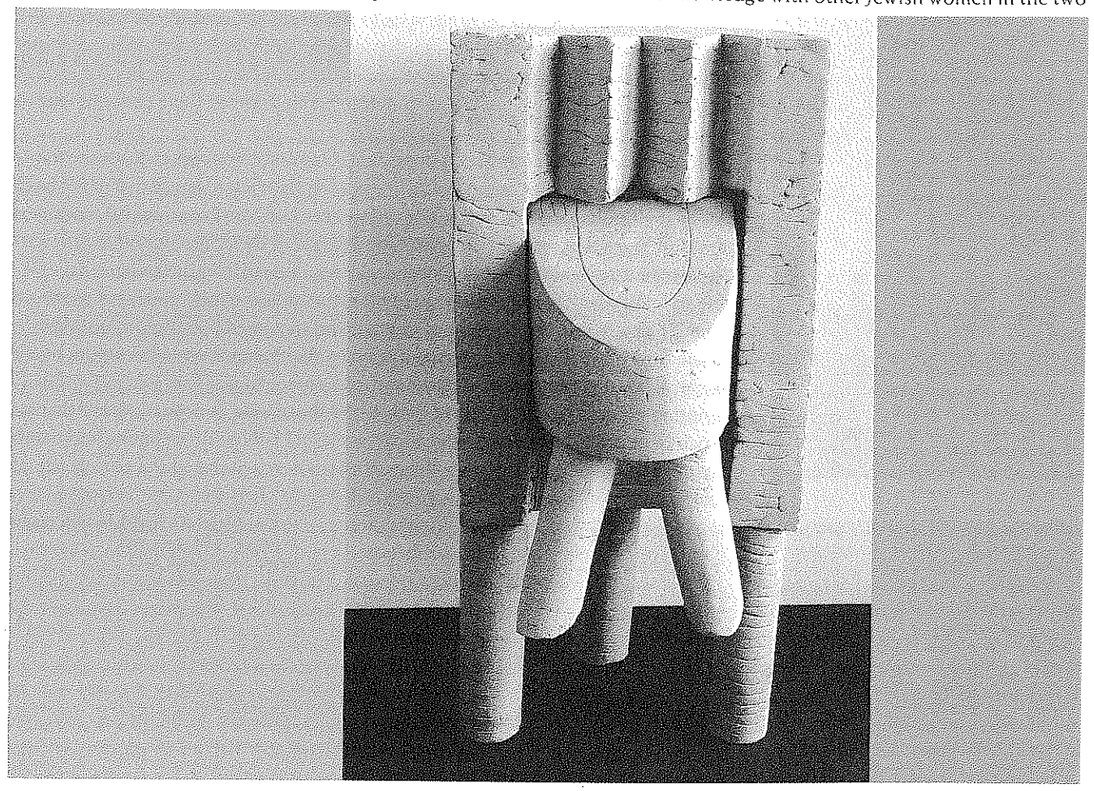
Although it is fairly common for children to have single parents in greater Norwegian society, this was not the case in our Jewish community 16 years ago. I was the first single mother at the time. Later, there were a few more. Still, the conventional family dominates the picture, although one partner may not necessarily be Jewish.

This situation made me feel very vulnerable as a parent in the community. Today, fathers play a big part in their children's lives and my role as a single parent was especially noticeable on certain occasions. When I drove my children to Jewish weekend camps, for example, or brought them to weekly cheder classes, which is often the father's job. Being the only parent meant being responsible for roles ascribed both to the mother and father and at times the burden felt very heavy.

My sons both have Jewish names but they do not have a Jewish father. This means my Jewish name is used when they are called up as sons to the Torah. This emphasises their and my status. When my boys prepared for bar mitzvah, I was their tutor at home, traditionally a typical fathers' activity. And, like most mothers, I was responsible for planning and holding the party, inviting guests and preparing food etc. Helping my boys with their bar mitzvah was actually something I enjoyed. It meant I was allowed to learn how to leyn [chant the Torah] through their learning. Yet during the actual bar-mitzvah service I had my place in the gallery and they were downstairs.

In our community it is a custom that the family holding the bar mitzvah say a Kiddush and provide coffee and cakes in the community centre after the Shabbat morning service. My Rosh Chodesh group volunteered to prepare this for me. Without their help I would have had additional chores on top of my already too full load. I think this situation illustrates how I do feel accepted as a part of the community despite the fact that I am a single parent.

My situation probably has made me more aware of gender issues within Judaism than a woman in a more traditional situation would be. In order to understand how I could find a way to feel comfortable within the tradition, it has been important to both learn about the "male" side as well as to understand more about the female roles within Judaism. I have tried to share this knowledge with other Jewish women in the two Rosh Chodesh groups I have been involved in founding. Paradoxically, this work is also what I am respected for in our community today.



Rachel Kohn, sculptures from the series **"Mother with Child"**

I struggle with questions related to how the tradition is interpreted and how it is taught to children and adults within an orthodox framework. I rebel deeply when Judaism presents its sages of old as if they had so much more to say and claims our current understanding to be of much less value. Since these so-called sages all were men that lived within a very different socio-economic framework it gives me reason to question their absolute validity. I interpret this way of honouring our past to be a way of renouncing our own power and ability to make a difference today. So not only has the experience of being a single Jewish mother made me view tradition differently, it has also challenged me to struggle with the tradition on deeper levels. In this quest I still feel I have more questions than answers.

Elizabeth Tikvah Sarah

Gay-Lesbian Kiddushin

It has only been in the last three decades of the twentieth century that lesbian and gay life has become more visible—in the western world at least. And as same-sex relationships have emerged from the shadows, so are increasing numbers of lesbian and gay couples today laying claim to public recognition of their commitment to one another.

The context for this development is important. One of the consequences of the transformation of gender roles in the last thirty years is that heterosexual marriages have been changing. In fact, in a sense, the differences between heterosexual marriages today and those that pre-date feminism are as great as the differences that differentiate heterosexual unions from homosexual ones. Indeed, the differences have become so immense that one could argue that many heterosexual 'marriages' today no longer 'fit' neatly into the concept of marriage promulgated by religious institutions and the State. What is more, marriage is not only changing, it is becoming much less prevalent. In a climate when fewer and fewer heterosexuals are getting 'married', the notion of 'marriage' as a choice defined by those who choose it, rather than as an inevitable state of existence for all heterosexual adults, is becoming more and more significant. And it is in this climate that we have witnessed the emergence of lesbian and gay marriage.

First marriage of a Jewish lesbian couple in Berlin: Lydia Stryke and Halina Bendkowski, 2001
Photo: Private collection

Of course, not all lesbian and gay people are choosing to get married. Indeed, for some it is important that lesbians and gay men live differently and do not become embroiled in a heterosexual institution. This view, of course, suits the heterosexual critics who see marriage as their exclusive prerogative, an eternal sign of the superior status of heterosexual relationships. The traditional rationale for Jewish marriage *(Kiddushin)* as the exclusive prerogative of heterosexual couples is rooted in the understanding that humanity was made in two forms, male and female, in order that these two forms might re-unite for the purposes of reproduction and companionship. This bi-polar reading, which focuses on the anatomical distinction between the sexes as delineated in the first Creation story, where the words male *(zachar)* and female *(nekeivah)* are used (Genesis 1: 27), ignores the implications of the fact that both male and female are created as two aspects of a singular human being *(Adam)* 'in the image of God' (1:27) and that in the second creation story the *similarity* between the two sexes is underlined with the use of the words woman, *ishah* and man, *ish*, both of which derive from the same root, Alef, Nun, Shin—meaning, *to be human* (2: 23) (Sarah, 1992).

While the Jewish concept of holiness, *Kedushah*, is bound up with the notion of making separations and this is reflected in the betrothal ritual *(Erusin—Kiddushin)* in that the bride is set apart for the groom, the marriage service as a whole is actually quite paradoxical. While the bride is consecrated to the groom in the first section of the ceremony, in that the *difference* between them is emphasised, they are joined together in the *singular* image of humanity *(Adam)* in Eden in the Seven Blessings *(Sheva Berachot)*, recited in the second section of the ceremony.

Humanity is both *one* and *differentiated*. While the Creation narratives posit differentiation simply in bi-polar terms, it is becoming increasingly evident that the differences within humanity are much more complex. Same-sex couples may share the same gender, but may express that gender differently and indeed, be different from one another in a host of ways. Heterosexual couples may be divided by the outward 'signs' of gender, but share a similar disposition and way of being in the world. A ceremony that acknowledges the ways in which the individuals concerned are different from one another, ritualises their consecration to one another and celebrates their union, is equally relevant for all couples. A Jewish marriage ceremony that includes these elements is *Kiddushin*.

Not only is it possible to re-define *Kiddushin* in such a way that includes the sanctification and celebration of same-sex unions—but that's what's actually happening. The reality is that many lesbian and gay Jews, along with other lesbian and gay couples, are choosing to formalise and celebrate their commitment to one another. The time has come for the religious institutions and the State to acknowledge this reality positively by expanding their understandings of 'marriage' to embrace same-sex relationships.

Guy Hall

Mixed-Faith Couples

One of the problems that all religions face nowadays is how to reconcile inherited tradition with the needs of their communities. Most faiths begin with a presumption that they must guard all the knowledge that has been received through divine revelation, cultural development and historical experience. People are expected to conform, or change their behaviour to fit in with these inherited practises, even though tradition itself has never been static, but has evolved.

The struggle in Judaism to reconcile tradition and modernity has resulted in two responses. There is the orthodox approach whose aim is to replicate the self-regulating, self-contained and self-perpetuating communities of the past. It celebrates those Jews who join them, but is largely silent about those who do not. As Fiddler on the Roof showed, even in the shtetl, tradition was of limited value when daughters insisted on choosing their own husbands. The second liberal approach is to reform traditions and of custom, by showing greater flexibility but this too has its limitations. A possible third approach is to try and turn a sociological reality into a religious opportunity. In its most creative periods, Judaism has sought to sanctify the important elements in people's lives. It has been at its best when it has been at its most realistic. It has achieved this by trying to bring holiness into the new and real situations in that people find themselves. It seeks to understand rather than to condemn.

Guy Hall (left) **at an interfaith baby naming**
Photo: Private collection

Now, some forms of behaviour are considered so unacceptable by convention and habit that it is difficult to even think afresh about them and reconsider whether they are still applicable. Often the attitude upholding a taboo, and the sanction that goes with it, becomes divorced from the reason that justified its creation and adoption in the first place. Ancient sages and authorities of the past are not always a helpful guide to the present. The insights of recent disciplines, external to Judaism, were unknown to them. Some of the new dilemmas being faced in contemporary society are beyond those envisaged in rabbinic writings. Not everything inherited from the past is applicable to today. It is permissible to use our intelligence and conscience to shape our morality and ethics. Ritual and tradition only have value when they are used in a context that enhances the spiritual and communal life of those involved.

Many of the statements put out today by religious leaders, However inspiring, or worthy, have little impact. They reflect the gap between religious ideals and the actuality of people's existence. This mismatch can lead both sides to react with disaffection and disappointment. Rabbis can not on the one hand complain about peo-

ple not attending their synagogues, if on the other hand they are not felt to be able to meet the religious needs of their communities. It is hardly surprising that people stop attending synagogues if they are left feeling (whether rightly, or wrongly) rejected, insulted, or that there is nothing available to help them religiously celebrate their choice of life partner.

Most rabbis are very sensitive to the distressing dilemmas faced by mixed-faith couples. They are moved, but find that at best, they only offer conversion, or rejection of such couples. For a significant part of the community, rabbinical interpretation of Jewish law alone is not the criteria by that people express their religious identity. Instead they rely on a combination of memory, symbolism and solidarity.

Now, the main objection to mixed marriages is that they are seen as a threat to the continuation of the Jewish people. Survival is a particularly important concern for a post-Holocaust generation. Yet, anxiety about whether parents will have Jewish grandchildren is an unhelpful question. It implies that having children is the definition of a successful marriage. This may have been true in the past, but now it is the quality of the relationship between the partners that matters. Grandparents are often more concerned that their grandchildren are healthy, happy and can grow up in a safe environment. Judaism certainly has a role to play in this, but it is does not have a monopoly.

It is rare in the Jewish media to see details, images, or announcements of mixed-faith marriages. It is happening, it is news, but it is not reported. Even within rabbinical organisations, or communal associations, it is a difficult subject for people to discuss honestly. Nor, in my experience, is it seriously considered as a part of the training of rabbis. With rates of intermarriage reaching 40% in the UK, one might wonder how many mixed-faith couples do there need to be, before such attitudes change? How long can theology resist demography?

Many couples want religious ceremonies at that there is a familiar Jewish presence. One at that a rabbi officiates, but that contains elements that both families recognise as part of their background. This can be for a wedding, a commitment ceremony, a baby blessing, a funeral or cremation. If interfaith dialogue is to be taken seriously, then the consequences must be greater then occasional encounters, educational courses and academic papers. It must affect our prayer book and communal life and a willingness to co-officiate with others. It means a willingness to appreciate the beliefs, values and concerns of other faiths, or those who have none and not just our own. It means recognising and taking seriously the diversity of sexual expression. There are many voices within contemporary Judaism. Among them there is a need and a place for a rabbi in Europe who is prepared to celebrate mixed-faith unions and other life-cycle ceremonies, openly and in public. Such events are at present outside of Jewish law, but that does not mean they do not have value, significance, or importance. The majority of Jews no longer live in a ghetto. If Jews choose to live in free, enlightened, pluralistic societies, then mixed-faith unions will be one of the natural and normal consequences. You can not have one without the other.

Rabbi Guy Hall works as an independent rabbi throughout Europe. He has officiated at many mixed-faith ceremonies over the last ten years.

Jessica Jacoby

Children of Jewish Fathers

When Jewish feminists appeal for equal rights and duties in the synagogue, they are often told Judaism places a very high value on women. After all, they are told, children are Jewish because their mothers are Jewish, not their fathers.

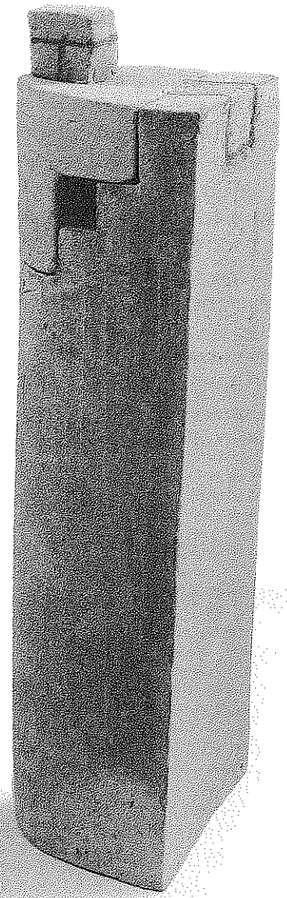
Many Jewish women use this argument to defend their faith against non-Jewish, Christian or matriarchal feminists, who happily hold forth that Judaism is the source of all patriarchal evils. It is true women feel an increase in their status through motherhood and their children, in particular sons. Jewish feminists began nevertheless to view the matrilineal nature of the faith as the remainder of a primal Israeli matriarchy. But viewed historically, this is out of the question.

The idea that being Jewish emanated from the mother was introduced relatively late, namely by the Pharisees, in talmudic times as part of a comprehensive package of reforms. The status of children from interfaith marriages is set out in the Mishnah and the Talmud. The passage, "Thy son by an Israelite woman is called thy son, but thy son by a heathen woman is not called thy son." (Kid. 68b), makes it clear faith is handed down by the mother. Rabina said, "It can be inferred from this that the son of your daughter by a non-Jew is your son."

Yet this was not to be construed as a license for spontaneous marriages with non-Jewish men. Such unions were usually followed by banishment from the community. At the same time, it was assumed non-Jewish women who married Jewish men were through their action adopting the faith of their husbands. Jewish husbands who allowed their non-Jewish wives to retain their religion, as did the wives of King Solomon, were blamed for the fall of Israel. That is also why the Kohanim [priests] may not marry a woman who has been previously married or served other gods.

A look at Roman law that was in force in Palestine in the time of the Pharisees provides insight. Roman law was based on patrilineal principles. Yet the status of the children of female slaves was matrilineal. Male slaveholders had no interest in conferring rights to offspring they had fathered with women who had no rights at all. Perhaps this particular bit of Jewish law came as a result of it being made consistent with the laws of the Roman occupiers, who drove the Jews from Palestine and collectively forced them into slavery.

Marriages between partners from different religions or the unaffiliated has at any rate only been possible since civil unions were introduced. In Germany, this began in 1876, with the opening of registry offices where couples, including Jewish-non-Jewish ones, could marry. Jewish efforts at reform made it possible for such couples to guarantee membership of their children in the Jewish community by declaring this intent in front of a Rabbi, for boys in connection with the Brit [circumcision] and for girls, at the naming ceremony.



Rachel Kohn, "Father with Child"

Jessica Jacoby founded the lesbian feminist Shabbes Circle in 1985 in Berlin and was one of the editors of "Nach der Schoah geboren. Jüdische Frauen in Deutschland" (Born After the Shoah. Jewish Women in Germany, Berlin 1994).

After the Shoah, the Jewish communities in Germany were composed mainly of survivors who were refugees from Eastern Europe or had survived in the Third Reich itself in mixed marriages ("Mischehen") or as mongrels ("Mischlinge"). Both German terms originated with the Nazis. Most members of the community were men who were living in DP [displaced persons] camps. Statistics compiled after the war imply that the majority of survivors were men and that two-thirds of marriages between Jews and non-Jews at that time were unions between Jewish men and non-Jewish women. The situation in other European countries was similar.

In the community, these men's wives (some of whom had converted to Judaism) and their children were silently tolerated at first, particularly when their husbands were active in the community or successful in business. Children resulting from these unions were accepted into the Jewish congregation in Berlin in the post-war period, for example. But later, children of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers had a more difficult time becoming members of the community. An expensive conversion hearing before a rabbinical court, Bet Din, was required for those who could not prove their mother had been Jewish. Children of Jewish men who had been raised within the faith were as a result handled in exactly the same way as non-Jews who had for different reasons decided to convert to Judaism. At the same time, there were incidents in which the orthodox questioned the Jewishness of children whose mothers had been converted by rabbis from liberal congregations.

Today we are confronted with new problems. During the last decade, tens of thousands of immigrants have come to Germany from the former Soviet Union. They were able to enter the Federal Republic as a result of their Jewish nationality, which was entered in their Soviet passport. The authorities whose role it was to determine nationality did not make the distinction according to Halakhah [Jewish law]. According to that law, anyone who cannot prove they had a Jewish mother is not accepted as a member of the congregation.

If we are to build, in spite of the Shoah, vital Jewish communities in Germany and elsewhere, then we must be aware that the question "Who is Jewish?" can no longer be answered solely on the basis of the Halakha. It is much more a matter of working constructively with conditions that have been shaped by history and including insights from ongoing discussions about identity.

Esther Egger-Rollig

Intergenerational Consequences

The intergenerational consequences of having a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother (for the sake of brevity children of such unions will be known as Vaterjuden in this piece) repeatedly falls by the wayside when Jewish identity is being discussed. Last year I spoke with three rabbis and conducted ten interviews about this issue.

Regardless of whether they had Communist parents, were raised in a secular home or in another faith, or speak of a "Jewish childhood," they all share one experience —the resistance of other Jews when Vaterjuden describe themselves as Jews without a "kosher seal." In this moment they are seen as aliens by virtue of the term they use to describe themselves. Experiences of exclusion are generated and passed on to following generations along with all their consequences. For those who are youngest, the threshold for approaching Judaism is raised to a higher level.

The subconscious guilt of the father about an inability to pass on Jewishness "correctly" due to marriage with a non-Jew plays a role that cannot be underestimated. At the same time, the official Jewish community denigrates the contribution of the mother to the raising of the child, because it deems her the reason for a lack of Jewishness. And that, despite the fact that because of her relationship with a Jew—no matter what the form or for what reason—she must at least be psychologically confronted with the Shoah.

As descendants, Vaterjuden are confronted with the consequences of the Shoah to the same degree as the children of Jewish mothers. Reports from relevant Jewish counselling centres and studies, particularly from Gabriele Rosenthal, indicate this clearly. Precisely in families that have experienced trauma is the freedom of choice of the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren limited. Their choices about how to structure their lives are more restricted than the current, more economically oriented "liberal Zeitgeist" would have it.

What is known as the "emotional self-service shop," through that an individual is able to cobble together an identity that appears fitting in the moment, is a fiction when it comes to all types of discussion about belonging. The special tragedy of the Vaterjuden results from the ignorance of official Judaism about the fact that they have to overcome the same intergenerational problems caused by the Shoah that children of Jewish mothers, Mutterjuden, do.

Rabbis in particular fail to be sufficiently sensitive to the special problems of Vaterjuden. They deal with Vaterjuden as they would candidates for "normal" conversion. The Vaterjuden often find this humiliating because their situation has been perceived inadequately (is perceived as inadequate). As a result, the community in certain cases loses potential members who are highly motivated.

Solutions can be found on both sides of the "defining line." The community should develop sufficient understanding for the problems of Vaterjuden, which should lead to a more inclusive stance in their case. It would be ideal if each community had a contact person who was responsible for such cases and special conversion courses designed to provide a greater economy of time due to the special situation of Vaterjuden.

Perhaps it is also about time for Vaterjuden to organise their own group to represent their interests and to share experiences with others affected by the problem. They could soften the psychological effects and also pursue their aims publicly in the form of demands. The Shoah may be part of the past, but it continues to affect the lives of the descendants of the victims. If it was possible in talmudic time to redefine Jewish descent as matrilineal, then in view of the enormous intergenerational burdens, it should be possible to redefine it again, and today.

Esther Egger-Rollig is a member of the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde and the progressive Jewish congregation "Or Chadasch" in Vienna. She studies sociology.

James R. Baaden

Motivations for Conversion

Historically, the development of Jewish attitudes towards conversion is notably varied and, I would suggest, discontinuous. There have been times when conversion was a more common feature in the Jewish landscape, and times when it was all but unheard of, mysterious and extraordinary. In the middle of the 20th century, for instance, conversion was still something relatively remarkable and associated with risk. Now it is part of the life of Jewish society almost everywhere. More and more Jews are either the descendants of converts—or are converts themselves. This now applies to many in my own profession, the rabbinate, itself a sign of the radical changes that have taken place.

So it is that when controversies erupt about conversion in our day, what is lost is a recognition of the fact that a major change has happened in Jewish society around the world in recent decades. Once Jews liked to take for granted that they were in some general way "all related," all descended from common forebears. True, this was something of an illusion: Indian, Polish and Ethiopian Jews, for instance, knew nothing of each other and thus were not obliged to acknowledge their obvious diversity. Yet within each of these communities there existed a certain fundamental assumption that all its members were linked by kinship and descent. These common assumptions are now being forced to give way in all Jewish communities to new understandings of the nature of Jewish affinity—and this is not an easy process.

Another dimension—geographical space—leaps at me when I compare the two countries I know best: Britain and Germany. In Britain, the vast majority of people

who convert are persons whose formative encounter with Judaism has been through a relationship with an individual Jew—usually a life-partner. Thus it is through personal relationships that people come from "outside" into the body of the Jewish people. The overall context remains the family, kinship.

Although my views are entirely impressionistic, I sense that the situation is somewhat different in Germany, last but not least because of the different historical and social setting. A fascinating aspect of conversion that I've noticed in Germany is what may be called pure "conviction" conversion: people who choose Judaism because it is the religion that appeals to them and not because of any connection with a Jewish person. Indeed, some people have told me that at the time they reached their decision in favour of Judaism they didn't know a single Jew. Additionally, quite a few seem to have made their choice not from a background of active involvement in and identification with Christianity: more than a few have even studied Christian theology. Accordingly, they not only have chosen something—they also have rejected something.

At the same time, I notice that other Jews in Germany view these individuals with some suspicion or unease and as a consequence, they then feel themselves to be the victims of disadvantage, prejudice and discrimination. Nonetheless, by taking a couple of steps back and considering the circumstances from a slightly longer-range perspective, it becomes clear that the whole situation is, quite frankly, extraordinary—and peculiar to Germany.

All the same, it's not all that bizarre... "Conviction" conversions take place at other places as well. Moreover, there are many historical examples to cite: whether involving slaves and Roman matrons in antiquity, or the villagers of San Nicandro in Italy, who abandoned Roman Catholicism and chose Judaism after one of them had a number of spiritual visions of Abraham in the 1920s! Unusual, yes and perhaps even odd, but the route of "pure individual conviction" has an honourable place in the history of conversion to Judaism. One could also point out that such converts have paid with their lives on many occasions: here in England, we have the example of the Dominican monk Robert of Reading, put to death in 1275 after he had converted. At the same time, as such an example indicates, we are dealing here with a phenomenon that is not only unusual in Jewish history, but that involves explicitly religious passions as well—and the worries of "born Jews" who feel uneasy should be accepted as understandable. Their suspicious responses aren't evidence of prejudice or discrimination, but simply of a struggle to make sense of a new and unfamiliar phenomenon in Jewish society. And with the backdrop of the German-Jewish experience of the 20th century behind them, they are entitled to experience this as a struggle.

James R. Baaden is the Rabbi of South London Liberal Synagogue

Converts – or Who is the Most Jewish in the Community?

I feel a burst of sheer joy when I think I was in the right place at the right time and was able to convert here in Berlin. Period. That may sound pathetic, but it cannot be changed by a few comments from Jewish friends and acquaintances: "You're now a great worry"; "What else do you want to become? Black?"; "If you had to convert, couldn't you have found a 'nicer' religion?"

No. I chose Judaism. I could write a novel about the reasons why. Maybe I will do that some day. For now, I will give you a few notes from the unwritten manuscript in advance. I feel often that I am an archaeologist at heart. I am interested in roots and I wanted to return to the original religion with its rich ritual life. I am moved because time gains another dimension. On one page of the Talmud are present the Hebrew words of participants in a discussion that has been going on for centuries.

Again and again, the "Hebrew language body" amazes me. I cannot describe it any other way. Hebrew, with its mystic dimensions, is far more than a language. But the language itself as a pure means of communication makes it possible for Jews, whether they are foreign or local, to feel at home in any synagogue in the world, because services everywhere are held in Hebrew.

A woman who has an active role in the Hebrew bible, Ruth, appeals to me. She also knew where she felt at home. Ruth asserts herself and refuses to be sent away. Tamar took what was ascribed to her according to Levirate law. She would not permit her father-in-law to destroy her life.

A bit of sadness comes up when I am asked about my parents. I often say I am a Jew by choice. Then sometimes I get a doubtful look, or a drawn out, "oh, so ...", and separating walls threaten to spring up. But most of the time, if I do not avoid this look and quickly check the reservations they have either towards me or for themselves then I receive a cautious smile. That smile freezes, however, when I witness the competition, "Who is the most Jewish person in the community?" The players are Jews by choice, Jews with Jewish mothers or fathers, and "racially pure" Jews. I was initially rendered speechless when a young man at a synagogue recently described himself in that way.

Salean Maiwald

Salean A. Maiwald works as a freelance author and painter in Berlin.

Rochelle Allebes

Violence in the Jewish Family

American studies indicate violence occurs just as often in Jewish families as it does in other families. The difference is that Jewish women seek outside help less often and take longer to do so. They are likely to remain in relationships in that they suffer violence for five to seven years longer than their non-Jewish counterparts. The powerful myths surrounding the Jewish family are a major reason for these differences.

One powerful, influential myth is that of Shalom Bayt, the myth of domestic tranquillity. Women and mothers feel very responsible for maintaining this peace. When it cannot be realised, they feel guilty, ashamed and perceive themselves to be bad women and poor mothers.

Jewish families are perceived by the outside world as warm, cohesive and peaceful. It is difficult to speak openly about the problem of violence, thereby destroying these internal and external images and expectations. In addition, by speaking out, a woman will bring scandal on her family.

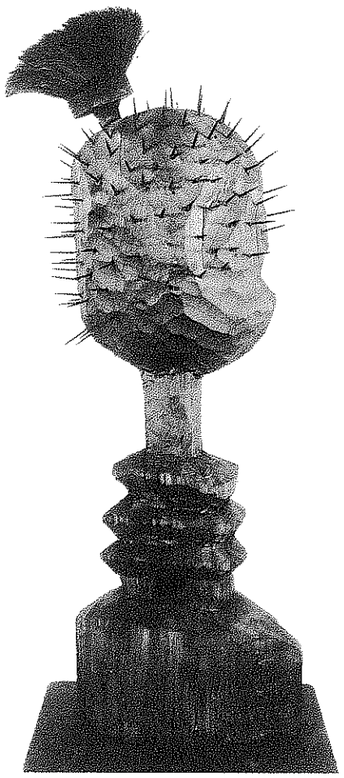
Another powerful myth is of the mild, docile and more or less passive Jewish man. When this image morphs into a horror show on a daily basis, it must be "countered" on different levels. It can take a long time for a woman to define her husband's behaviour as violent. Initially, she will propose and accept every possible explanation and excuse and is frequently prepared to see herself as the cause of the violence.

Abuse within a relationship usually does not begin with physical violence. Instead, it starts with control (over money, where the wife goes and with whom she has contact), isolation (cutting off contact with the outside world, prohibiting her from attending courses, for example) and limits on her freedom of movement (among other things through religiously based imperatives and prohibitions).

At the start, the husband's intent to control his wife may appear to be chivalrous. He accompanies her everywhere, driving her to places and picking her up... The real trouble starts only when she would like to do something on her own again. If, at that moment, a woman does not stand her ground regarding her desires and needs and instead tries to understand her husband and backs down, she may set the stage for a gradual spiral of violence within the marriage.

The last myth is of the wife's self-image. Frequently, the picture is one of a strong, well-educated woman who has the daily running of her home well in hand. She may be a woman who bears responsibility for the well being of all her relatives, whether she works outside the home or not. This self-image is also the result of a synergistically reinforcing interchange of attributions from both inside and outside the family. It is not easy for a woman to admit to herself and others that this is a mirage and to concede she was wrong about the man she chose as a husband and father for her children (or that someone else chose for her).

In relationships characterised by humiliation and violence, self-respect and self-confidence may sometimes be undermined for years. A high level of insecurity compounds the problem, making it difficult to go out and seek help. Given this, many women run the risk of becoming increasingly passive and tolerant of a situation that is escalating slowly to a crisis. In many cases, mothers only feel forced to act when they see their children are directly or indirectly threatened as well.



Marion Kahnemann, "Sabra"

Born in Leiden in the Netherlands, Rochelle Allebes lives today in Zürich, where she works as a social worker, supervisor and therapist.

Several distinctions are made between types of violence against children within the family. These are physical and psychological abuse, sexual exploitation and neglect. According to studies done in the United States, all these types of violence can be found in Jewish families as well. It is suspected that psychological violence occurs more often in Jewish families than physical abuse.

It is known that it was very difficult for many survivors of World War II to fulfil the responsibilities of being a parent "well enough." Frequently, their difficulties in raising children were expressed in forms of emotional and physical abuse. A few children of what is called "the second generation," or "the Children of the Holocaust," have described these families from their point of view. Although they, as children, have (must have!) a great deal of understanding for their parents, by reading between the lines one can see they often describe abusive situations.

The palette is a wide one. Some children were never allowed to bring others home or visit their friends. They had parents who were so fearful that they restricted any freedom of movement their children had. Other parents spoke endlessly about their experiences during the war, or, by contrast, were unable to tell their children why there were no longer any relatives left. Some parents punished their children using methods they experienced in the concentration camps (ranging from shouting at them to using extreme disciplinary methods like lashings). Children of the second generation who were damaged in this way may in turn have difficulty giving their own children what they never received themselves. (In order to avoid misunderstanding, I must add that I certainly do not believe that the entire second generation has been traumatised in this way.)

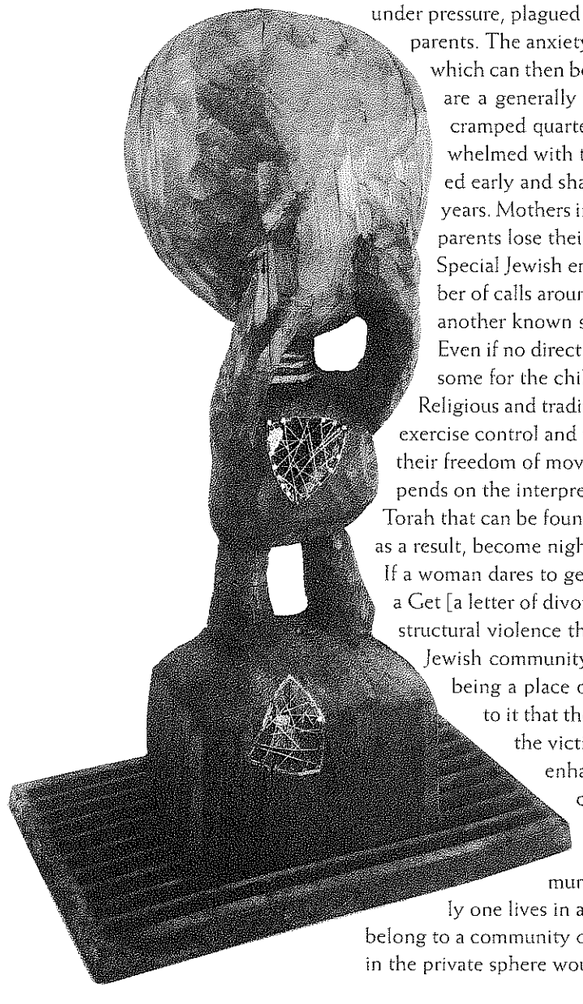
If Jews are living in an area where they are in the minority or may even be the sole Jewish family, there are additional risk factors. Children may, for example, be forced to always behave perfectly or conceal their Jewish identity. These children are under pressure, plagued as they are by fears they may endanger themselves or their parents. The anxiety of the parents repeatedly engenders tension in the family, which can then become fertile ground for conflicts. Stress factors in daily life are a generally recognised danger. Families with many children living in cramped quarters and plagued by financial worries quickly become overwhelmed with the running of their daily lives. Children must be disciplined early and sharply in order to take on responsibility that is beyond their years. Mothers in such families are often continually overextended and both parents lose their patience rapidly.

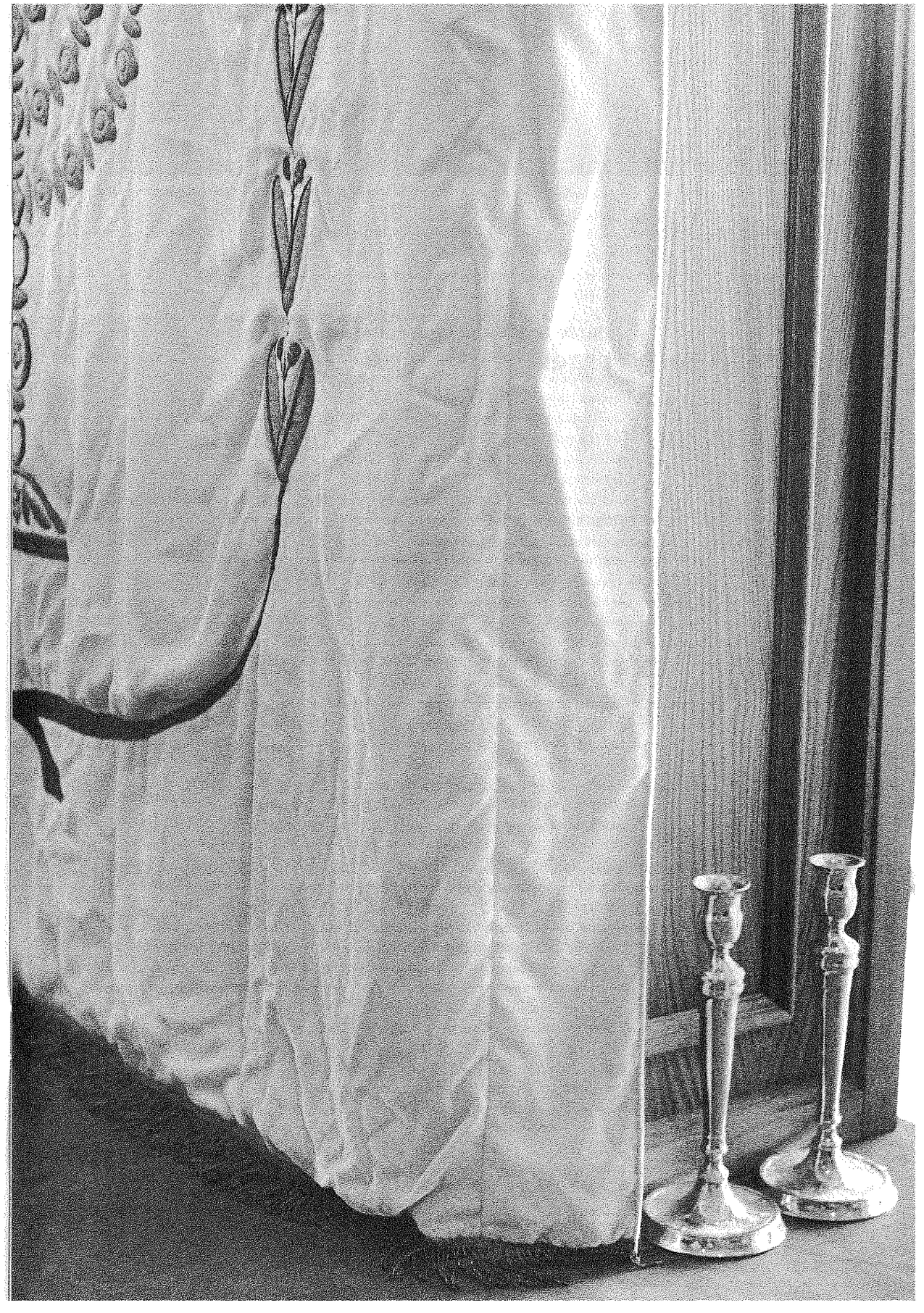
Special Jewish emergency hotlines in the USA report a clearly higher number of calls around the Jewish holidays. A chronically conflicted marriage is another known stressor that poses a risk to the well being of the children. Even if no direct violence is exercised on them, the situation is very burdensome for the children.

Religious and traditional rules and customs can be abused within the family to exercise control and threaten women and children to constrain unnecessarily in their freedom of movement and behaviour. As everyone knows, a great deal depends on the interpretation of these rules and there is always a paragraph in the Torah that can be found to support one's position. The Shabbat and holidays can, as a result, become nightmares for the family.

If a woman dares to get a divorce, her husband can threaten to refuse to give her a Get [a letter of divorce]. The whole problem with the Get is that it is a form of structural violence that only worsens the situation of the women affected. The Jewish community can be dangerous as a place of social control while also being a place of social support and openness. The community could see to it that the difficulties in the family do not escalate into violence and the victims of abuse receive help quickly. The contribution can be enhanced if every member of the community is allowed to choose freely the type of family they live in and that outsiders, be they single, divorced, together with a non-Jew, or living in a homosexual union are integrated in the community. If there were true freedom to choose the type of family one lives in and it were possible for everyone, man or woman, to really belong to a community or congregation, then withdrawing from a violent situation in the private sphere would no longer be so costly.

Marion Kahnemann, "Blue Figure"
(King David)





Bente Groth and Lynn Feinberg

Family Life in Early Israel

Archaeology has shown that from 1200 until about 1000 B.C. the number of settlements in the highland areas of Canaan increased almost a hundredfold. This time period seems to coincide with the time of the Judges. There are, however, no archaeological remains that could prove that these new inhabitants were foreign immigrants. Architecture and artefacts were distinctly Canaanite in style. An enormous amount of physical labour must have been required in order to clear the land, build terraces and dig cisterns to make living possible. Surveys show that there was famine, disease and warfare, and evidence of this can also be found in the early narratives of the Hebrew Bible.

A look at the possible family structure may make it easier to understand some of the basic concepts in the Hebrew Bible regarding domestic life. Life expectancy, especially for women, was short. There was an emphasis on large families, since child labour was a necessity. The continuous stress on the importance of replenishing the population through human fertility and the ideological sanctions to counteract barrenness in the Hebrew Bible, are therefore quite understandable. The Hebrew Bible's laws that are related to sexual customs could have been intended as a way of ensuring reproduction.

The locus of power was in the home. People lived in large household units, in compound families, which seem to have been autonomous. Such compound families emphasise the hard living conditions, since this way of living increased the chance of survival. As men regularly attended warfare, the women probably had to do much of the work on the land themselves, in addition to taking care of household work, water and food supply. The stress on honouring both your father and your mother in the Ten Commandments probably reflects this kind of society, where women's power was equally important to men's.

The stories of women leaders such as Miriam, Deborah and the women of Tekoa, who were military and religious leaders, show that women were valued and that leadership was indeed acceptable for some women. But what kind of religious beliefs did women have? The Bible does not give a clear picture of women's practices.

If, as suggested, the ancient Israelites were not a homogenous group who arrived in Canaan with their very own and very distinct desert religion, then the belief in one god, YHWH, may not have been as all prevailing as the Hebrew Bible wants us to believe. Introducing the one and only true god, YHWH, cannot have been an easy matter, as shown by the many narratives that condemn people who practice what is described as "foreign" cult. Scholars have begun to ask whether these narratives give a true picture. Egyptian and Canaanite conceptions, including goddess worship, may have been a part of most Israelites' life all along—and the progression towards the one and only transcendent God only brought about as a result of a long and arduous process.

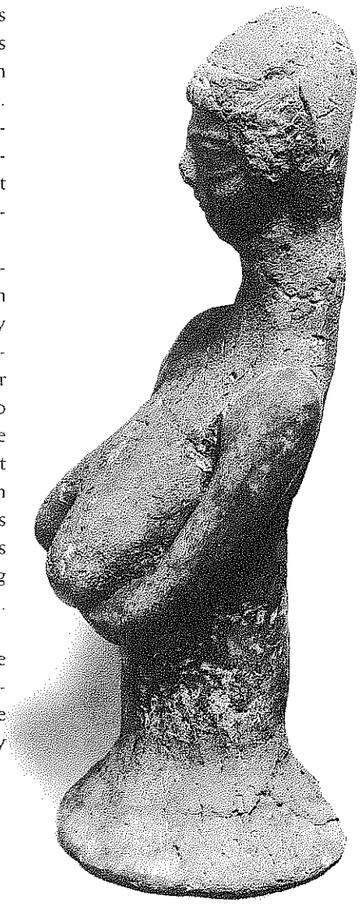
Archaeologists have found a large number of "foreign" symbols and artefacts in Israelite settlements. Sites from the time of the Kings reveal a large number of seals in the shape of Egyptian scarabs, depicting Hebrew names combined with egyptianised symbols, especially those connected with female powers. Some seals seem to have belonged to court officials in Jerusalem.

Before Joshia's cult reform in 622 B.C., there were shrines dedicated to the cult of YHWH all over the country. But excavations during the last 40 years have also brought to light cultic sites where varied practices have taken place. Of special interest is the so-called Locus E 207 in Samaria that revealed 27 female figurines, among them a figure of Isis with the Horus child. In a Jerusalem cave, just 300 meters from the Temple mount, dated approximately 800 B.C., 16 female figurines were found. Graves also show that the Judaites practised an extensive burial cult that had no ground in the official religion. The dead were buried with household utensils and working tools. The heads of the dead were often placed on a kind of "pillow" resembling Hathor's wig or the omega sign representing rebirth.

In Kuntillet Arjud in Northern Sinai, an Israelite site from around 800 B.C., archaeologist Zeev Meshel, in 1968, found two big terracotta jars (pithoy) with inscriptions that contain blessings made in the name of "YHWH and his Asherah," accompanied by typical West Semitic iconographic symbols. The same formula has later been found on the wall of a grave in Khirbet El Qom in Judah. Many scholars now believe that YHWH for a long period was connected with the goddess Asherah —in some way or other. Asherah is also mentioned 40 times in the Hebrew Bible. Some believe that the word Asherah is not referring to the Caananite mother goddess, but to a cultic symbol of YHWH, in form of a pillar or a holy place. Some believe that YHWH indeed was perceived as having a sort of female consort, but that this consort was a kind of translucent emanation of the god himself and not an independent goddess.

Small clay figurines formed in the shape of small female figures with a peaceful expression, almond-shaped eyes, big breasts and a pillar formed lower body have been found all over Judah. Excavations in the City of David have shown that a very large percentage of Judaite families had one such figure in its possession. Many scholars connect these pillar figurines with the goddess Asherah. Perhaps it is not too far fetched to suggest that women found little consolation in a god that, according to the Bible, promises a painful childbirth rather than giving assistance and help like the ancient birth goddesses? Would it be surprising if women continued to seek out fertility or mother goddesses during times of pregnancy, birth and sickness, in spite of the one and only male god in the temple having forbidden such practice? Is it by chance that it is mostly women who are accused of so called pagan religious practices, like weaving artefacts for Asherah at the temple (2. Kings 23:7), baking cakes for the Queen of Heaven (Jer. 9:16-17) or crying for Tammuz (Ezek. 8:14). The biblical writers defined all these as foreign cults.

New discoveries and new ways of looking at ancient texts and artefacts, have shown that the final breakthrough regarding the concept of one, wholly transcendent male creator may have been the result of the traumatic experience of the exile to Babylon in the 6th century B.C., although the idea was promoted long before by the prophets.



Ashera figurines of the 8th century BCA, excavated in Judea.
Photos: Israel Antiquities Authority

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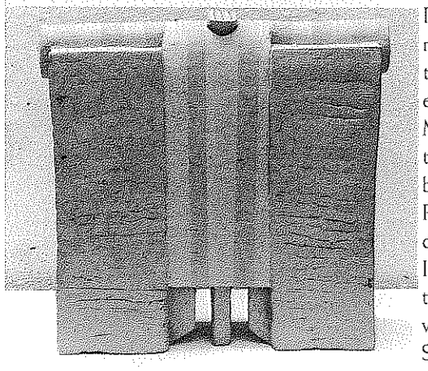
Pnina Navè Levinson

Deborah – A Political Mother Myth



Rachel Kohn, sculptures from the series "Bearer."

It's well known that people who know Hebrew place a great deal of emphasis on the meaning of names. Devora is "the bee" that makes honey and defends itself when threatened. Men have a saying, "Give me neither stinger, nor honey!" That image expresses the fears men develop so readily.

Male fears led to the statement that Deborah's gift of prophecy was taken from her temporarily because she praised herself in song: (all this evil prevailed) "until I, Deborah, arose, arose, a mother in Israel!" The reprimand appears in the Talmud tract Pessakhim (66b), which proves that the common interpretation of "until you arose" does not correspond to conventional Jewish understanding.

Is this a bourgeois effort intended to save the honour of the Jewish prophet from the accusation of a self-confidence found so undesirable in women? There is a whole series of such disarming phrases, among others in the translation of the of the Song of Solomon and in the "wife of noble character" at the end of the book of Proverbs where a strong woman peer is made into a "virtuous wife."

In the song, Deborah is called "a *mother* in Israel." We also hear incidental reference to her husband, Lapidot, but no children are named. What does the Jewish interpretation of the Bible have to say about this unusual circumstance? One interpretative method used by rabbis is philological comparison. The question here is whether we use the term "mother in Israel" in a non-biological sense. There is such a text in 2 Samuel 20, which tells of bloody deeds during an uprising against King David. A general orders the destruction of a town. During the siege a wise woman negotiates with him, reminding him of the significance of the town's role. She calls to him (19), "You want to kill the town and the mother in Israel."

"Mother in Israel" has an integrative meaning here. It is also a sign of Deborah's political office. The paraphrase from the Aramaic Bible is corresponds as follows: "The unfortified towns of the land of Israel were empty, the residents captured and carted away, until I was sent, I, Deborah *was sent to prophesise about the House of Israel.*"

But some men in the late ancient period wondered why God sent a woman and not a man who was close to God. They were not at a loss for names. A feminist colleague responded to them, "I will call witnesses from heaven and earth that the *ruach hakodesh* (the Holy Spirit) rests on the deeds of people, be they non-Jew or Jew, man or woman, knave or maid." (Midrash Eliyah Rabba, Chapter 9)

In Deborah's case it is a matter of a particularly strong social position. In the Israel of 1200–1000 B.C. there were twelve consecutive tribal leaders called "Judges." The eleven men led armies during times of strife. None of them was a prophet. Debora held all three positions—judge, prophet and general—and these not only for her tribe but also as a judge for all of Israel. (Judges 4,5). The period was one of oppression by technically advanced neighbours from Canaan, who had a threatening potential for destruction. In contrast to the Israelis, who only had conventional hand-held weapons, the Canaanites had 900 iron chariots (Judges 4,7). In addition, they lived in the mountains.

Deborah is portrayed as a second Moses or a new Miriam, without whom Moses would have been ineffective. Just as Pharaoh's army did when the Jews escaped bondage in Egypt, the advancing Canaanites sank in mud due to the weight of their equipment and Israel, still threatened with demise, experienced a vision of God (Judges 5, 4–5, 20–22). The country then had peace for forty years (31) and the perennial word of comfort, "Those who love God are like the sun that rises mightily." (5, 31). In biblical terms, 40 years means a "long time." It is not to be taken literally. Thus the childless woman became a rescuer, just as once did the unmarried, childless Miriam, who according to our tradition was kept alive with Israel for 40 years in the desert at a life-giving spring.

The text describes Deborah's residence as follows: "She sat under the Deborah palm between Rama and Bet-El in the mountains of Ephraim." (Judges 4,5). The keeping of a woman's tradition is marked by that description because the palm grew on the grave of another Deborah who had lived 600 years earlier, in the time of the mothers and fathers of the tribe. This was Deborah, the nurse and confidante of mother Rebeccah. When Rebeccah's son Jacob returned home after many years, he built an altar on the site in Bet-El where he had once dreamed of the angel's ladder. In the next verse it says, "There Deborah died, Rebeccah's nurse and she was buried below Bet-El, beneath an oak that was then called the oak of tears." (Gen. 35,8) The women who carried the legend on said a palm grew there that was the symbol of both Deborahs.

Here a brief women's historical note: "Rebeccah's nurse" was a familiar presence for Jews in the 17th century, because that was the name of a widely circulated book of ethics in the Jewish-German language. The author, Rebecca Tiktiner, the daughter of a rabbi, worked during the period around 1520 and died in 1550. Her manuscript was printed in Prague in 1609 (24th edition, Krakow, 1618). The publisher hoped that each woman who looked into it would buy the book because it was an unusual event: "A woman had conceived of a book with Bible verses and sermons," and that it would be "... a memorial to her and an honour to all women that a woman can be an author and write about ethics and explain things well, just like a man."

Back to the judge "under the palm." Some Jewish commentators say her house was also on the site. Others say it was her court, located in the open air to avoid ambiguous situations that could result from being alone in the house with strange men.

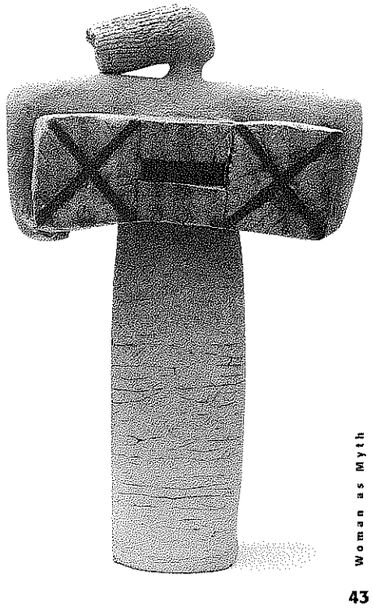
What were the questions surrounding pay during the biblical period? Accepting money could lead to corruption, just as pity for the poor could cause one-sidedness. The commandments of the Torah warn of both dangers.

In the rules for legal decisions it says (Lev. 19,15): "Do not be unfair in trials! Do not favour the small nor elevate the mighty! Judge your neighbour in fairness!" The rabbis say Deborah worked for free. This is completely consistent with the Jewish tradition according to that, at least until the new time, the learned of the Torah accepted compensation at the most for lack of time to earn their bread any other way. The great masters were always craftsmen, doctors, salesmen, vintners, landowners and fathers! The did not live in monastic ivory towers.

This helped fill in the blanks about Deborah, about whom it was said that she lived between Rama and Bet-El in the Ephraim Mountains. She was counted among the major landholders who have been portrayed since biblical times. That is how she is described in a paraphrase of an Aramaic Bible verse that served as an aid to preachers and it is the way Rashi described her in his popular commentary. He lived in the 11th century in Troyes, Champagne, where he had a vineyard and founded a college before the Sorbonne was founded in 1253. His students came from all over central Europe. They worked in the vineyard, receiving in return food, lodging and schooling. They were also Rashi's assistants and worked in many Jewish communities in the German and Slavic language areas.

When Rashi and his students spoke of farming, it was not merely theoretical. In Rashi's commentary about the verse mentioned from Judges 4.5, we read, "She lived in the town of Atarot and fed herself from her own property. She had palms in Jericho, citrus groves in Rama, olive trees with good oil in the Bekaa valley, irrigated vegetable fields in Bet-El, fine clay in Tur-Malka." Finally, Rashi mentions, "...fields of white vegetables." Could this be asparagus as he knew and loved it? Deborah was independently wealthy and had no husband. She is the classic Judaic model for the well-rounded, circumspect, independent career woman.

According to exegetic opinion, Deborah's husband—"Deborah, wife of Lapidot" (Judges 4.4)—is identical with her comrade in arms, Barak, because this name means lighting and Lapidot, torch. Perhaps Barak was his nickname. Other com-



Prof. Dr. Pnina Navè Levinson (Berlin 1921–Jerusalem 1998) became the first woman to receive a doctoral degree from the Jerusalem Faculty for Jewish Studies in 1952. During the 1960s she returned to Germany to teach, most often at the University and College for Jewish Studies in Heidelberg. She was for a long time the only well-known Jewish feminist theologian in Germany.

Zazie de Paris (Solange Dymensztein), an actress and singer, lives today in Berlin.
This photograph was taken of her at the Jewish Cultural Festival in Berlin 1994.

mentators interpret Lapidot out of existence completely. The Hebrew *Eshet Lapidot* is not taken to be "the wife of the torch", but as "torch woman". In a common commentary from an annotated Hebrew Bible of the18th century it was written, "...a capable and skilful woman is described as 'fiery as a torch'." Alongside appears a less harmless interpretation from the philosopher Gersonides (Provence, 14th century), "She reached such a high level of prophecy that the light of fire surrounded her when she prophesised, just as the Torah reports of our master, Moses." That is in a similar vein to the tradition of honour shown by a saying of the Mystics, "Come and see. In the world there were two women who spoke in praise of God in a way no man on earth could! Who were they? Deborah and Hannah. And all this was so because the men were in a state of sin and were not worthy that the spirit of sanctification resided in them, truly." (Sohar 3, 19b).

"The wisest of her princesses answers here, "First they must divide the spoils of war, each man will receive one or two girls, many beautiful coloured garments, many necklaces!" (Judges 5, 25–30). This is a reflection of the bitter experiences of Jewish women who were often carried away, enslaved and raped. That is why in the Torah there is a law about the protection of the fairer prisoners of war, whose female dignity must be protected (Deu. 21,10–14). This is one of the many imperatives of charity towards women. Because it happened so often in the course of history, a large proportion of the Jews of today are the descendants of purchased and freed female slaves who were accepted into the Jewish faith—black, yellow and white women.

This brings us to the non-Jew, Yael. Together with Deborah she saved the northern tribes of Israel. Whether she is a traitor or a hero is in the eye of the beholder. Her situation is no different than that of the whore, Rahab of Jericho, who chose Israel. Yael was tribally related with the non-Jewish wife of Moses (Num. 10, 29). She took it upon herself to kill the general who was fleeing, dealing a final blow to break the power of Hazor and avert danger. Her husband was an ally of that city, but *her* loyalty was to Deborah.

The Jewish masters came to the conclusion that Yael acted in self-defence when she killed Sisera. They interpret that from the text of Judges 5,7, where seven verbs are used for kneel, lie and fall, between her legs. That is the source of the opinion, "The scoundrel raped her seven times," cited in the Babylonian Talmud (Jevamot 103a). Others say God testifies that she fended him off in time (Midrash Leviticus Rabba 23,10). She is consecrated "with" or "through" or "more than the women in the tent." (Ri. 5,21) Those are the matriarchs of Israel. Yael is deemed worthy to be set among them. In the place of the lost honour of Jael, the daughter of Cain, are ages of gratitude from those who were once. She is embedded in Midrash tradition as one who has found the way to Israel through "uncritical solidarity."

Excerpts from a lecture at the conference, "Women in the Bible," held in Hohenheim in December 1994. Reprinted with the kind permission of Rabbi Prof. Dr. Nathan Peter Levinson

Queen of Saba

There have always been opportunities to be a woman. Fortunately, I come from an artistic family, first in France and then in Israel, and I had many chances to express myself as a girl. I took, for example, ballet lessons with my godmother. If I had been born 300 years earlier, I would have looked for a job in which I would have been accepted as a woman and would not have become conspicuous at all. Maybe I would have become a businesswoman at a market for fabrics, silks and jewellery somewhere along the Silk Route.

My favourite biblical heroine is the Queen of Saba. She was extraordinarily clever and beautiful and came from another culture, Yemen. She went to Jerusalem to test the wisdom of King Solomon. Of course, they fell in love. I believe in the great myths about love. Jewish clichés? What are clichés? But a Yiddishe Mamme is no cliché. And of course, all Jewish boys must be little Einsteins. What's cliché about that?

God made me a woman. I have trouble with the word "transgender". Just because this is a trendy thing to say right now does not mean I have to go along with it! Quite simply, I am a woman. Period. The word "transsexual" does not thrill me either, because it reduces you to your gender. But you are much more than your gender.

For me, undergoing a sex change means choosing to embark on a process in which you develop and bloom as a woman. I describe this path as a "metamorphosis." At the beginning you are like a caterpillar, but you develop into a beautiful, colourful butterfly. The way between these two poles is nevertheless very painful. It is associated with a great deal of self-hatred for everything that is still masculine about you. Many do not survive. Transsexuals who are receiving hormone treatments have one of the highest suicide rates.

My family has finally accepted me. But at the beginning it was a disaster. It had nothing to do with religion. My parents were both atheistic communists, but still ...

Today my mishpachah includes people I have chosen. I am not saying that as a transsexual, I am saying it as an artist. I find the oath of friendship from those who chose me as a friend much more important than marriage. My family exists through passing on talents as an artist and a person.

Zazie de Paris (Solange Dymensztein)

Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert

The Trickster – A Feminist Reading of Midrash

Among rabbinic writings, the genre of narrative or aggadic Midrash [additional stories to the biblical account] has been favored by Jewish feminists since the very beginning of second wave Jewish feminism. This popularity that began in liberal Jewish groups has spread even into the more orthodox and traditionalist communities and currently there is a growing market for women's midrashic writings.

Two aspects of Midrash that contribute to this newly found appreciation. Firstly, Midrash as a hermeneutic methodology is perceived as the quintessential rabbinic and therefore, Jewish way of reading the biblical text. Jews do Midrash, whereas others do historical critical exegesis or allegory. By choosing Midrash as a methodology, therefore, feminists can locate themselves more easily within the Jewish camp and circumvent the criticism that certain types of feminism are brought into Jewish culture from the "outside." Secondly, aggadic Midrash is considered to have great creative potential. Thus, Judith Plaskow emphasizes the fluidity of midrash in her now classic book on feminist Jewish theology, "Standing Again At Sinai" (San Francisco 1990): "The open-ended process of writing midrash—simultaneously serious and playful, imaginative, metaphoric—has easily lent itself to feminist use. ...Listening to the traditional sources, we wait for the words of women 'to rise out of the white spaces between the letters in the Torah' as we remember and transmit the past through 'the experience of our own lives'." (53–54)

Let us turn to a prominent and recurring midrashic motif, the connection of women with redemption—both redemption in the past, that is, the Exodus and redemption in the future, that is, the messianic future. The particular shape that this motif takes and that I want to trace here is the repeated tale of the trickster woman or women who, due to their cunning, deserve to bring about the fulfillment of redemption and the messianic promise.

The Handmaid's Tale

In the "Yalqut (ha-) Makhiri", a medieval anthology of aggadic Midrashim (12–14th century, southern France or Spain), we find the following tale in connection to a famous verse in Psalms: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the main cornerstone" (Ps 118:22).

Midrash: "Behold, I was shaped in iniquity [*be-avvon*]" (Ps 51:7)—[in iniquity] is spelled with two *vavin*. Two Amora'im in Palestine had a disagreement on [how to interpret] the verse. One said David was the son of the beloved wife, the other said David was the son of the hated wife. How so?

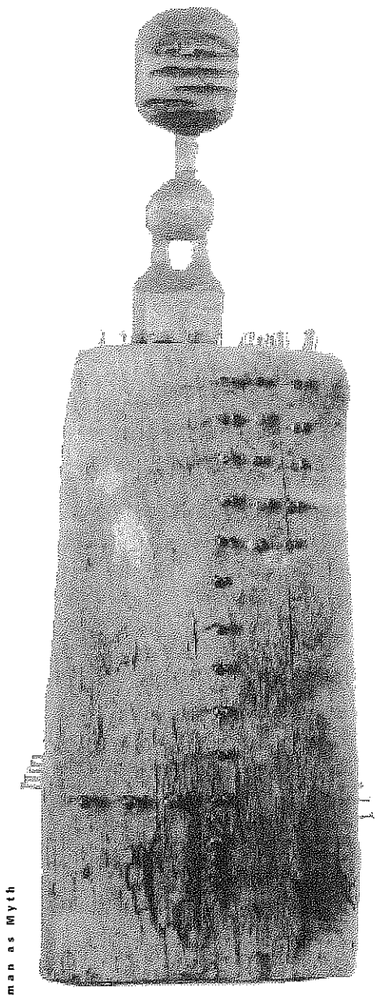
Ishai was the head of the Sanhedrin. He went out and returned with an army of 600,000 and he had 60 grown sons. He abstained from sexual relations with his wife for three years and after three years he acquired a beautiful handmaid and lusted after her. He said to her: My daughter, acquire yourself (your freedom) tonight, so that you can come to me with a certificate of emancipation. The handmaid went and told her mistress [Ishai's wife]: Deliver yourself and my soul and my master from gehinnom [hell]! She said to her: What is the reason? So she told her everything. Said the mistress: My daughter, what can I do, seeing that today it is three years that he has not touched me. Answered the handmaid: I will give you advice. Go and prepare yourself, as will I and at night when he will say "close the door," you will enter and I will exit. So she did. At night the handmaid got up and blew out the light, she went to close the door and her mistress entered while she left. She made (love) with him all night and got pregnant with David."

Subversive Potential

The handmaid's tale is an example of how classic midrashic imagination acts to transform the biblical narrative. In particular, it is a powerful example of inventing and adding female characters or mothers where there are none in the biblical account. It is an example of what Norma Rosen wants Midrash to do: "... to give a voice to women in the Bible who have had nearly none. To be an advocate for biblical figures over whom the ages have kicked considerable dust and to imagine their lives." ("Midrash, Bible and Women's Voices," Judaism 45:4, Fall 1996, 423) Even more, this particular midrashic tale represents women as acting, as protecting their interests against male domination. This aspect of the midrashic narrative can not be underestimated, especially because in this case the contrast with the biblical narrative could not be any more pronounced. The biblical story of the genealogy and selection of David for king is, after all, an all-male scene.

Beyond the mere introduction of women into the biblical narrative of David's anointment, however, the story further adds what can be read as a particularly radical moment. The narrator seems to project the following perspective: Two women conspire to fool Ishai, thus enabling the birth of the future historic as well as messianic king of Israel.

A later commentator, Hayim Joseph David Azulai (1724–1806), points out that Ishai, who is a descendant of Ruth, the Moabite woman, "came to the conclusion that a Moabite is prohibited from marrying and producing offspring with an Israelite." According to rabbinic halakhah [Jewish laws], a Moabite man cannot marry an "Israelite" woman, but he can marry and have children with an emancipated (Israelite) handmaid, since the children would attain the halakhic status of emancipated slaves. Because of Ishai's (legitimate?) halakhic scruples—if we follow Azulai's comment—and subsequent sexual abandonment of his wife, he almost prevents the birth of his youngest son David. In addition, Ishai's project of legitimizing his morally questionable desire for the handmaid, for all its halakhic correctness ("get yourself a certificate of emancipation"), does not appear in a positive light in the context of this story. After all, he abandoned his wife.



Marion Kahnemann, "King David"

To summarize, the women are the righteous ones, the real heroes of the story. Thanks to the women's solidarity the messianic king of Israel is born. The father, on the other hand, is lecherous and a fool, in spite of, or perhaps even because of, his halakhic zealousness. This last point adds one more interesting subversive aspect to our story. It marks (Ishai's) halakhic behavior, the desire to follow and observe halakhic regulations as male. This is juxtaposed with the (women's) subversion of halakhic attachment, marked as female. And it is exactly the subversive, female, moment or the trickster moment of the narrative that produces the messianic king.

About the trickster motif James C. Scott has written that "nothing illustrates the veiled cultural resistance of subordinate groups better than what have been termed trickster tales" ("Domination and the Arts of Resistance"). Discussing a number of examples from various contexts of subordination he points out that "typically the trickster makes his [sic!] successful way through a treacherous environment of enemies out to defeat him ... not by his strength but by his wit and cunning. The trickster is unable, in principle, to win any direct confrontation, as he is smaller and weaker than are his antagonists. Only by knowing the habits of his enemies, by deceiving them, by taking advantage of their greed, size, gullibility or haste does he manage to escape their clutches and win victories." (162) This moment in our handmaid's tale needs to be emphasized and is part of its power. The halakhic system that via Ishai silences the women's desire and in fact, puts it at Ishai's mercy, is criticized. In this sense, the narrative does create some "imaginative breathing space in that the normal categories of order and hierarchy are less than completely inevitable" (168) and other possibilities than those officially endorsed become thinkable.

The male-female plot-structure of the medieval midrashic story of David's birth, in that women are portrayed as the guarantors for bringing the divine plan to fruition and men as its liability at best, is after all not an exception in rabbinic narrative tradition. Rather, it copies and rewrites biblical models that are variously reinforced, restaged and focused in midrashic literature. In each of the following cases of midrashic readings of biblical stories we shall see that over and over again the Midrash rewards the women for behavior that in the biblical narratives does not always have an unambiguously positive overtone. Yet, the more widespread this plot-structure is in rabbinic literature, the more characteristic it becomes of rabbinic imagination, the more questionable the subversive nature appears to be.

Ialda Rebling's concert at Bet Debora was dedicated to Jewish women in the Middle Ages. She sang, among other things, the poem "Eshet Chayl," by the Jewish minnesinger Süsskint von Trimberg in Middle High German.

The classic biblical precedent is, of course, the Book of Ruth, with its genealogy of David as the great-grandson of Ruth, in the last four verses of the book. In the Book of Ruth, too, two women collaborate to seduce a man, Boaz, into sexual relations and ultimately marital commitment (Ruth 3:1–4), thus ultimately paving the way for the birth of David.

If we trace the Moabite lineage back to its beginning we again find the plot of the trickster women. After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the two daughters of Lot are under the impression that "there is no man [left] on earth to have sex with us [lit., to come upon us], as is the way of all the world" (Gen 19:31). Thus they conspire to get their father drunk, lie with him and to "give life to seed from our father [Heb., nechayeh me-avinu zara']" (Gen 19:32). In two consecutive nights both daughters get pregnant from their father, thus turning into the matriarchs of the Moabites and Ammonites respectively (Gen 19:37–38).

The biblical story by itself does not shed any positive light on the manipulative behavior of Lot's daughters. It could, in fact, be read as an etiological tale demeaning the enemies of Israel by attributing their origins to incest. The midrashic commentary in Bereshit Rabbah, however, justifies, if it does not actually valorize, the behavior of the daughters: "[On Gen 19:31:] 'And the firstborn said unto the younger: Our father is old and there is no man [left] on earth...' They [the daughters of Lot] thought that the whole world was destroyed, as in the generation of the Flood. [On Gen 19:32] 'Come, let us make our father drink wine... that we may give life to seed from our father.' R. Tanhuma said in the name of Shmu'el: It is not written 'that we may give life to a son from our father,' but 'that we may give life to a seed from our father.' That is, that seed that comes from a different place. that one is this [seed]? This is the King Messiah. (Bereshit Rabbah 51:8)"

In fact, the midrashic tradition remains unambiguous as to the moral integrity of Lot's daughters and their intention: "R. Eleazar said: Usually a woman does not become pregnant in her first coition. Nevertheless, the two daughters of Lot, mastering the pain that attends the first coition, became pregnant. For their purpose was other than lewdness with their father. They said that God assigned to humans no task other than that of increasing and multiplying. But behold, the world is now being destroyed as in the generation of the flood. How is it to be kept going? The answer must be that the Holy One, blessed be He, saved us only in order to keep it going through us. They did not know that only Sodom was to be destroyed. All they knew was that the angels had declared, 'We will destroy this place' (Gen 19:13). The Holy One, blessed be He, said: I do not withhold the reward of any creature. Even though Lot's daughters did not think the matter through properly, nevertheless, I know what is in men's hearts: 'I, the Lord, search the heart, I try the reins' (Jer 17:10)." (Pesiqta Rabbit 42)

These two tales of trickster women provide the background for the maternal Moabite line of Ishai. They are connected with the handmaid's tale through the recurrent motif of the women fooling or intoxicating and seducing their husbands, or in this case, their father. If the men were left to their own design, redemption could not happen. This is latent in the biblical narratives, but amplified in the Midrash.

We can connect one more biblical tale with its midrashic amplification to our trail of trickster women that produces David: the story of Tamar and Judah. Tamar is an ancestress of David, as the Book of Ruth lists the ten generations that lead from Tamar's son Perez to David. Ruth explicitly mentions the story of Tamar as an intertext. The elders give Boaz their blessing: "...may your house be like *the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore for Judah,* from the seed that God will give you from this young woman." (Ruth 4:11–12)

Commentators of all kinds of religious and ideological perspectives, as well as the rabbinic midrash point out that the allusion in the blessing here is not just a genealogical allusion, but an allusion to the entire story and relationship that transpires between Judah and Tamar.

After his first two sons died in marriage to Tamar, Judah refuses to give up his youngest son to her. Tamar resorts to trickery. She dresses up as a prostitute and, in what reads like a carefully designed plan, seduces Judah. The midrashic commentary

"Eshet Chayl"
A chaste woman is her husband's crown,
She honours him with what she has,
Purity in soul and body,
How lucky the man beside her,
Together with her in joy pass the years.
She is blessed with steadiness,
Her light remains bright in the night,
I have written this song to praise her.

(Süsskint von Trimberg, 13th century)

amplifies Judah's blindness and near failure to carry out the divine plan: "And Judah saw her..." (Gen 38:15). He did not pay attention when he saw that she covered her face. He said: If she were a prostitute she would cover her face? That sounds strange! Said Rabbi Yohanan: He [Judah] wanted to pass by, but the Holy One Blessed be He made the angel who is in charge of desire appear before him. He said: Where are you going, Judah? From where will kings arise and from where will redeemers arise? [Thus] 'he turned to her,' against himself and against his wish." (Bereshit Rabbah 85:18)

Midrashic Women and Redemption

Our handmaid's tale appears as the culmination of the narrative fabric of biblical and midrashic texts. It highlights the trickster motif, the cunning labor that women have to invest in order to enable the future of the messianic seed. Women rather than men, it appears, are the ones who have the ability to see the big picture. Lot's daughters worry about the perpetuation of humanity in the world. Tamar has the insight into God's plans and acts accordingly. Naomi and Ruth collaborate to secure the future genealogy of David. And finally, Ishai's wife and handmaid collaborate to preserve the integrity of wife and husband and thus to enable the birth of David himself.

As feminists, how are we to read this midrashic plot? Oriented to the future, our midrashic women might be more in tune with God's plans with Israel from the narrators' perspective, than their sexual partners who remain stuck in the present. The husbands are not merely reluctant to have sex at all: Ishai withdraws after having produced sixty sons, Lot already had his daughters and Amram and his wife had already given birth to Miriam. Rather, the husbands are reluctant to produce the son (or the next generation) who will replace them and in most cases, as with Ishai and David and Amram and Moses, will end up to be greater than they. The narrative focus of these Midrashim really lies on the men's commitment or enslavement to the status quo of the present, versus the women's commitment to the promise of the future and the change or redemption it may bring.

In the end, I suggest that the cultural tension that rabbinic culture struggles with and that gives birth to the line of midrashic narratives drawn in this essay is two-fold. First, the rabbinic movement produced a culture of learning from that it strove to almost completely exclude women. At the same time, in contrast to early Christianity, for example, it also insists on collective physical reproduction as a primary imperative. The tension that lies in this juxtaposition is that the ideal world of the rabbis—the world of the Beit Midrash—is one without women, while the "real" world of the household, which perpetuates the Beit Midrash via physical reproduction, is one in that women play a vital role as mothers. The reproductive powers of women in this sphere ultimately interfere with the fantasy of the ideal world without women. This tension gives birth to the narrative motif of the women who can lay claim to their reproductive power only through tricksterism, camouflage and seduction.

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Alice Shalvi

The Maternal Imperative

Alice Shalvi in front of the Berlin synagogue Fraenkelufer

The topos of the barren woman is one that constantly recurs in our literature, especially in Genesis, the book of our forefathers and foremothers, patriarchs and matriarchs. Ironically, perhaps the most outstanding characteristics of the matriarchs is their initial barrenness. Divine intervention is needed before Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel can bear the longed-for sons *that God has promised their husbands*. The only really fertile one who has no trouble conceiving is Leah, the "unloved" wife falsely imposed on Jacob, who assumes that the bearing of sons will win her husband's love. This is the other noteworthy point: it is sons that are desired, because of the tradition of inheritance by male children—not, as one might have expected, the firstborn, but the "chosen" one, usually the younger (i.e. Isaac, not Ishmael; Joseph, not his older brothers; Ephraim, not Menasshe).

In Genesis we first encounter the practice of surrogate motherhood. Sarah suggests to her husband Abraham that, since she is childless, he take her handmaid Hagar. And she uses an interesting word: *ulay ebane mimenah*. Literally this means: "Perhaps I will be built by her." But the root of the word *ebane*—I will be built—is *ben*, which means "son." It is interesting that etymologically the root of the word "to build" is "son" [bet, nun]. And then later we have Rachel and Leah also giving their handmaidens Bilha and Zilpha to Jacob in order that through the surrogate they—that is, the wives—may bear children. By the way, I have always found it sad that, when we already put the matriarchs in our prayer and say *avot ve'imahot* (fathers and mothers), we only refer to Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah; I personally would like to start adding Bilha and Zilpha, who after all did give birth to several of Jacob's sons. In later books, we have the story of Hannah, from whom Judaism derives the concept of prayer; and of Naomi and Ruth, where the "happy end" is provided by the birth of a son. But it is interesting that the son of Ruth is perceived by the neighbours as actually the son of Naomi—*yolad ben le'Naomi*. It's Naomi's "doing" that Ruth has a child—an event that reverses the loss of her sons recorded in the opening chapter.

So there we have the tradition in the biblical sources. In rabbinical law a woman's barrenness is grounds for divorce. The fact that very often the infertility stems from the man was not sufficiently addressed by the rabbis. In part, the imperative of childbirth stemmed from the need to provide an heir to continue the family's line of land ownership. And the very interesting example of the first feminists in our literature, the five daughters of Zelofchad, who stood up and said: "Shall our father's name be lost, because he has no sons? Give us the land, which would otherwise have gone to our father's sons." This is one of the very few cases, where Moses, who usually knows the answer to everything, doesn't know the answer. But God says: "Justly the daughters of Zelofchad speak!" So they get the land, but later on we are told that they had to marry people of the same tribe, because otherwise the land would be lost. In other words, they got certain rights, but they were still restricted.

Partly, the maternal imperative is a fulfilment of the division of functions dictated by God after the Fall: Eve's doom "to bear children in pain" balances Adam's task of physical bread-winning "by the sweat of his brow." (It is perhaps appropriate that the English word for both activities is "labour!")

Yet today, when the landownership issue is no longer valid and the strict division of social and economic functions is equally irrelevant, there is *still* a stress on a woman's childbearing "duty." A woman who has not borne children is frequently considered (both by herself and by others) as not having fulfilled herself, not having justified her raison d'être as a woman.

Hence we are today witnessing an enormous increase in the number of single mothers by choice and lesbian couples' adoption of children or use of in vitro fertilisation, as well as adoption by heterosexual couples. This is particularly the case in Israel today. In 1998, there were 5,900 births to single mothers; in 1999, the number increased by 15 percent to 7,000.

There are other contemporary, historical factors that combine to influence Jewish women to bear children. One such factor is the Holocaust, which spurred an urge to replace those who had perished. Thus we have the remarkable phenomenon of large numbers of marriages and births even in the DP camps, where one might have thought the circumstances far from conducive to either activity. Am Jisrael Chay—"The Jewish People Lives!" and "Each Birth a Victory!" were—and still are—slogans that encourage childbearing as a national duty.

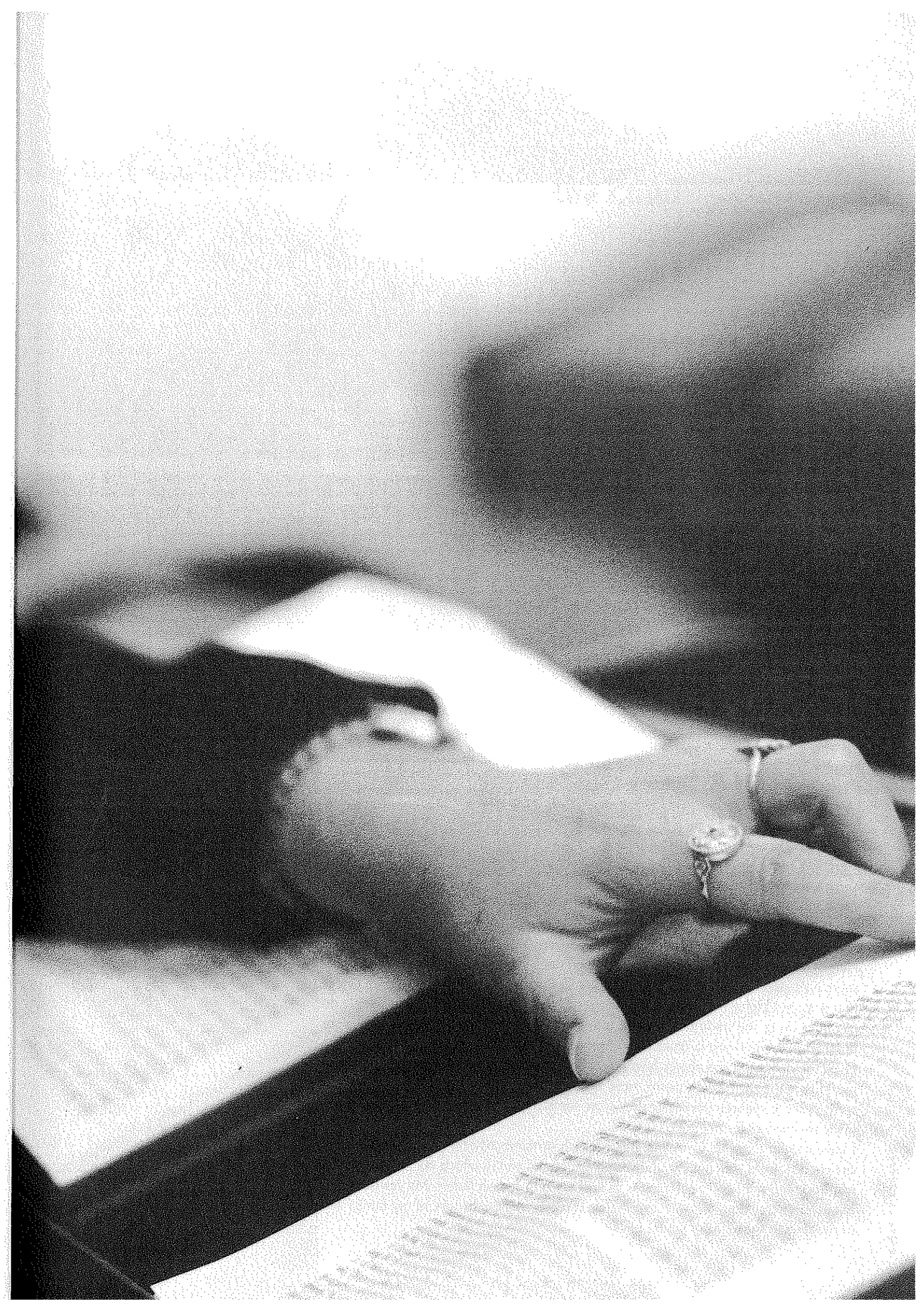
In Israel we also have the understandable paranoia induced by fear of extinction, annihilation, through war—a fear further strengthened by the Palestinian vaunting of their women's wombs as the "weapon" that will ultimately overcome Israel. The average birth rate among Jewish women is 2.8, higher than that in most developed countries, but still only half of the Israeli Arab average and far less than the Palestinians'. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the highest birth rate occurs among the Haredi [ultra-orthodox] community and in the settlements on the West Bank and in Gaza. Israeli government policy encourages large families with generous family allowances, paid maternity leave and comparatively low-cost or subsidised childcare facilities. The Israel Defence Forces discharge women soldiers if they marry while doing their 20-month compulsory service and do not (yet) call married women to reserve duty. Most strikingly—and shamefully—health insurance covers expensive fertility treatment up to two successful births, but does not cover contraception or family planning services. Artificial insemination is state-subsidised and infertile women may receive ova from state-paid donors.

Religious authorities likewise encourage women to have at least ten children. Rabbi Shach once declared "There is a blessing on all good things in nature that help to bring another soul into Israel." Some rabbis were even found to have been handing over fertility pills to women who were experiencing difficulties in becoming pregnant after already having given birth several times. Abortion is legally available, but not to physically and mentally healthy married women aged 17 to 40.

Nevertheless, countering all these incentives and inducements, current research indicates the existence of other phenomena, primarily the result of Israel's present precarious security situation. Women are afraid of bearing sons. Somatic symptoms are prevalent among mothers of sons serving in the military and there is apparent conflict between concern for one's child's safety and traditional (Jewish) attitudes that favour sons.

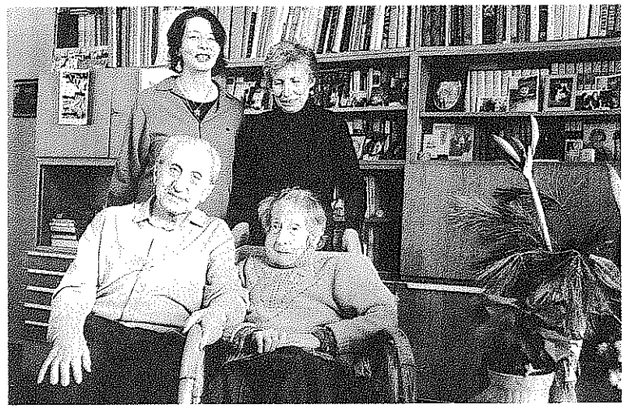
Indeed, motherhood has become a political tool, not only among the settlers and the Palestinians both inside and outside Israel, but also in the peace movement. The "Four Mothers" were instrumental in bringing about the withdrawal from Lebanon. The "Mother for Peace" later became "Parents for Peace." Orthodox women have established "Women for the Sanctity of Life." In other words, womanhood, maternity and maternal discourse legitimise the challenge to military and government policy, thus enabling Jewish women to reconcile their "natural" maternal feelings with opposition to a government policy of aggression and occupation (that is, unfortunately, supported by a large percentage of the population) without seeming unpatriotic. Feminists can thus get away with being subversive by playing the ancient "maternal imperative" card! All honour to them!

Prof. Dr. Alice Shalvi, born in Essen/Germany in 1926, founded the Israel Women's Network and was until recently rector of the Solomon Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem.



Lara Dämmig

Jewish Names



Lara Dämmig with her family in the 1970s and 1990s
Photos: Private collection

Parents-to-be often spend months debating, before they decide on the name for their child. The name is most often an indicator of the culture to which the parents feel linked. It also shows the hopes and wishes cherished by the parents when their child is born, the tradition in which they perceive themselves, and a sign of the family to which they belong.

The meaning of a name is illustrated for us by the Paraschah section of the Torah, known as "Lech Lechah." It says, "When Abram was 99-years-old, the Eternal appeared to him and said, 'See, I affirm my covenant with you, and you will become the father of many nations. Therefore you will no longer be called Abram. Abraham will be your name, for I have made you the father of many nations'." (Gen. 17:4–5) And later it is written: "As for Sarai, your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai. Her name will be Sarah. Princess will be her name." (Gen 17:15)

Here we experience naming as a constitutive act reflecting the new status of Abraham and Sarah. When parents give their children Jewish names they want to make clear the status of the child in the society and their belonging to the Jewish people. But what is a Jewish name? Which names did Jewish men and women have in the past and present? One of the founders of Semitics, Leopold Zunz (1797–1886), wrote in "The Names of Jews, an Historical Study" ("Namen der Juden. Eine geschichtliche Untersuchung"), that by the 6th and 5th century B.C. Jews were already being given names that were not Hebrew. Zunz wrote, "As a result, each period shows ... that people do not hold on to the traditional names; individuals followed their needs as to how to proceed with the living language, and perceptions had free rein over vocabulary."

Over the centuries, the names Jews gave their children were influenced by the surrounding cultures. Foreign names were adopted and transformed. Phonetic changes were made to Hebrew names or they were translated. History and local procedures made themselves felt.

I have neither a Jewish first name nor a Jewish surname. My first name originates in the country from which my grandparents emigrated and in which my Jewish mother was born and raised. My surname is that of my non-Jewish father. My Jewishness is not apparent from my name. Nevertheless it represents the history of my family and of the Jews in the country where I live.

Leah Blumah

When I was born, my parents gave me three names: an American name, Lori and a two-part Jewish name composed of Hebrew and Yiddish, Leah Blumah. My family was secular when I was young, so I had little occasion to use my Jewish name; I just knew it was there, a symbol of my dual identity in the United States as a not quite assimilated American Jew.

I have had difficulty accepting my Jewish name. When I was a child, I asked my mother what it meant and she said, "weary flower." I did not see myself as weary or as a flower. I was an active, smart, dirty-behind-the-ears tomboy. Later I learned who Leah was in the Torah and I liked my name even less. Leah was the un-desired, perhaps unattractive wife, the one who could only prove her worth by birthing so many sons. My first knowledge of Leah served only to reinforce my self-image as a teenager and young woman who was undesirable and unattractive.

As an adult, I joined a group of women who created and celebrated rituals together. Each us chose a sacred name to be used in the group. Most of the other women chose goddess names. I could not. The only name I thought I could use with integrity was Leah Blumah. What could I do to redeem this name?

I went to the women's bookstore to look for feminist Bible commentary. One interpretation called to me. The names of Leah's first three sons, Reuben, Simeon and Levi, were expressions of her unfulfilled desire to be loved by Jacob. When Leah had her fourth son, however, she named him Judah, meaning, "I will praise G'd."Leah had recognized her right to a positive self-identity and re-oriented herself towards G'd. With this deeper knowledge of Leah, I could at last claim her name as my own, as I learned self-love and turned my face to G'd.

Lori Klein

Rachel Monika Herweg and Rea Gorgon

The Proof is in the Child*

A participant in our workshop, "My Partner is Not Jewish," came up with an expanded concept of family that leaps beyond the classical, heterosexual definition: "A family, whether hetero-or homosexual, exists when parents, independent of gender, have children or live with children." This view expressed both integration of and appreciation for the traditional biological family as well as a break from that tradition. Participants generally agreed that family, whatever its form, is defined by trust, security, communication and above all by a search for compromise. They agreed that the struggle for compromise is most necessary when it comes to the practice of rituals and the religious training of children.

In fact, for many parents the arrival of children raises or intensifies questions about their own Jewish identity, about their practice of Jewish rituals and their joint or separate relations to faith. So it is entirely possible that, even if prospective parents agree to raise a future child as a Jew, after the birth of the child the non-Jewish partner might rethink his or her position on faith.

It appears to be especially difficult to reach compromise regarding education. Children are raised either in one faith or in no faith at all. One participant summed up this generational challenge as follows: "The child itself is the evidence." In other words, the child proves the loyalty of his or her parents to family, to community, to a people and to God. The importance of this loyalty is not calculated before the birth. Compromises formed through struggle between interfaith partners are many-faceted and usually focused on rituals. They range from rejection of a partner's unfamiliar rituals to acceptance of these rituals, and even to an improved mutual understanding.

Through mutual Bible study, joint visits to the synagogue and perhaps to church, as well as through shared family rituals, feelings of warmth and safety are created, together with an appreciation for differences and shared beliefs. But pressure to conform is sometimes threatening, and excessive demand creates problems between partners. The creation of new rituals appears essential to the building of mutual acceptance. And it is important that, during common prayer, texts be chosen that not offend either partner's religious sensibilities. This task can also lead to reflection about anti-Semitic or racist content in liturgy. The practice of a joint Jewish-Christian ritual was described by one workshop participant as follows: "We did it in such a way that it felt right for both of us. We never asked for a rabbi's approval." Such a position requires each partner having the courage to take liberties within tradition, in order to allow a partnership to grow.

** Excerpt from aus "The Comingout of the Inter," complete text in www.bet-debora.de/juedische-familie.*
See also page 56.

Rea Gorgon is an educator, philosopher and health management professional. She works as an educational docent and is researching themes of gender and trust.

Dr. Rachel Herweg, a co-founder of Bet Debora, is a Judaic scholar, educator and family therapist. She is working on a EU research project. "Work Changes Gender."

Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert

A Mikvah for Feminists

In recent years the mikvah—the bath for ritual immersion—has moved to the foreground of Jewish feminist discussions, especially since conservative and reform synagogues have begun to build their own mikvaot. (See *"Mikveh Mania,"* Jerusalem Report, 10.9.2001, or *"Coming of Age: The Growth of the Conservative Mikveh Movement,"* United Synagogue Review 54:1, Fall 2001) To a certain degree it makes sense that the mikvah has been ignored in the earlier feminist debates, since it is neither a public nor collective institution in the same sense as the synagogue and the yeshivah. Nonetheless, the mikvah does function as a communal institution and has historically been at least as central to the life of traditional communities, if not more so. In fact, according to Jewish law the construction of a mikvah takes precedence over building a synagogue.

The mikvah's primary function lies within the context of traditional Jewish marital life, at least since the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the abolishment of is requirement of ritual purity. According to Jewish law, in this case derived from biblical law (Lev 15 and 18:19; 20:19), a Jewish married couple is prohibited from having sexual or even erotic relations during the wife's menstrual period. In rabbinic and halakhic literature the menstruating woman is called a *niddah*. Etymologically, the term can be derived from either the root n-d-d = "to depart, flee," or n-d-h = "to chase away." Conceptually, the term most likely describes the physiological process of the flow of blood, rather than the social ostracization of the woman from her household or the larger social context. Such an ostracization cannot be shown for the case of biblical or rabbinic culture. After the cessation of her bleeding and an additional period of seven days she goes to the mikvah to immerse herself in accordance with detailed rules. Only after her immersion is the couple permitted to have sex again. Without mikvah no children.

Further, men and women who convert to Judaism have to immerse in the mikvah. And finally, in certain communities, Jewish men use the mikvah as well on special occasions, such as chassidic men before the holidays and in some cases regularly on Friday before Shabbat. However, such uses by men are only customary and not always halakhically prescribed.

Photo: Marion Kahnemann

Meanwhile, more recently there has been a proliferation of popularized halakhic literature manuals on how to observe the laws of "family purity" *(taharat ha-mishpakhah)*. Introduced into halakhic discourse only in the nineteenth century, this term is actually a misnomer, since primarily the menstrual laws are concerned with sexual discipline and not with ritual impurity that is relevant for the temple only. Additionally, only the married couple's sexual life and not the entire family, is affected by the wife's menstrual period. Perhaps the term took hold at a time of orthodox concern about assimilation and loss of identity in modern society, especially after the Shoah. Thus, Jewish women are attributed with the responsibility for preserving Jewish identity and observance.

In front of this background we have to ask whether the mikvah is or can be a woman's institution and in what sense it could be such? As far as we are able to judge women did historically go to the mikvah, but whether they went for the reasons as they are prescribed in the male-authored halakhic literature can no longer be established. There are almost no historical texts authored by women about their own religious beliefs. In the contemporary literature authored by Jewish women, traditionalists argue that the mikvah is not only an institution that guarantees a healthy marriage, regulating periods of sexual abstinence and affirmation. Rather, it also provides an important framework for a Jewish woman's spiritual life: "Through the mikvah she brings herself in immediate contact with the source of life, purity and holiness—with the God who surrounds her and is within her always." (Rivkah Slonim, ed. *"Total Immersion: A Mikvah Anthology,"* 1995, p. 36) Further, the mikvah here is described as the means to connect to Jewish women of previous generations.

Conservative and Reform Jewish women, on the other hand, pose the question whether the mikvah, if being readapted for feminists, should at all be considered within the framework of the sexual prohibition or ritual purity or impurity, in as far as the latter still have any practical value at all. The mikvah can in fact rather serve as the basis for innovative rituals especially for women, for examples as part of the process of healing after illness, operations or miscarriages, or as part of the psychological of experiences such as sexual abuse and rape, divorce or death. (See Laura Levitt and Sue Ann Wassermann, *"Mikvah Ceremony for Laura,"* in "Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality: A Sourcebook," ed. Ellen Umansky and Dianne Ashton, 1992) Women have also begun to use the mikvah as a ritual marking for the beginning or the end of a significant period of life. Thus a few of the rabbinical students at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York decided to go to the Mikvah preceding their ordination in May of 2001. Further, Anita Diamant, author of the popular novel *"The Red Tent"* (1997) and a few other women has started a campaign for the first "progressive" mikvah in the United States. Beyond the traditional function of the mikvah the dream for this mikvah is a combination of health spa, counseling and educational center for the Jewish community.

In the end, such contemporary adaptations of the mikvah to women's lives and their interests specifically may not much resemble the traditional halakhic circumscription of the mikvah. However, the contemporary mikvah movement can be regarded as one of the important avenues of the transformation of Judaism into a culture in that women take on defining roles.

Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert is the author von „Menstrual Purity. Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender" (2000).

Alice Shalvi

Agunah – the Abandoned

Marriage: The traditional halakhic marriage ceremony is an act of *purchase* (kinyan) that, according to Jewish law, makes the wife the *property* of her husband and places her under his authority. The Hebrew word for husband is, in fact, *ba'al*, that is "owner." The verb from this noun—li'vol—means "to have intercourse (with a woman)." However, the marriage contract (ketubah) also gives the woman security, her husband being obligated to honour, support and maintain her in proper style, pay her medical bills, ransom her if she is taken captive and provide for her burial. He is also obligated to satisfy her sexually. The ketubah also protects her in case of divorce, obligating the husband to pay a sum over and above the dowry he received with her. Since the 11th century, halakha has also ruled that the woman must agree to the divorce.

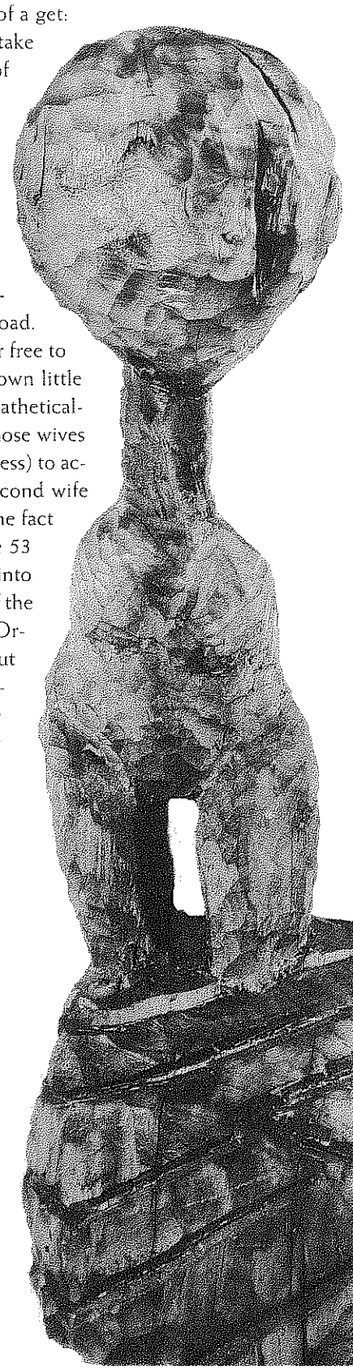
Divorce: While either husband or wife may request a divorce, the rabbinical court (bet din) must authorise it and it is not effective until the husband of his own free will and being of sound mind places the get, or bill of divorcement, into his wife's willingly outstretched hands. (The rabbinical courts' initial response is, frequently, to suggest *shalom bayt*, namely an attempt at reconciliation.) Should the husband not perform the required act, the wife is powerless to attain her freedom.

The reasons for such refusal may be sheer spite, the desire to profit by demanding a "ransom" in the form of property or payment, or a display of power. The man also has less of a motive for desiring a divorce, since he may co-habit with another woman, provided she is unmarried and even have children by her, without their being considered mamzerim (bastards)—an option not available to the wife, who would be considered an adulteress.

There are several options available to the rabbinical court should the man refuse to grant the get once it has been authorised. These range from *k'viat get*—ruling that there *must* be a divorce, through *hiuv get*—ordering a get – to *k'fiat get*—compelling a divorce, even if this entails using physical force or other means of persuasion, such as ostracism or excommunication. In Israel, compulsion can include imprisonment. As a last resort, the courts can also annul the marriage, though usually they are reluctant to do so, since this cannot be considered as something done willingly by the parties concerned.

There are also two ways to prevent the withholding of a get: pre-nuptial agreements, whereby both parties undertake not to impede or delay the granting or acceptance of the get; and a conditional get, whereby the husband agrees that in case of his disappearance it will be as if the wife has received the get from him.

In some places (the State of New York and Canada), Jewish couples cannot receive a civil divorce if the get has not occurred. In Israel, where there is neither civil marriage nor civil divorce, hundreds of women are being held ransom by recalcitrant husbands or husbands who have "disappeared," often by going abroad. They are in a tragic limbo – neither really married nor free to marry again. So far, the rabbinic authorities have shown little willingness to address the problem seriously or sympathetically. Yet every year an average of 15–18 Israeli men whose wives have refused or been unable (for reasons of mental illness) to accept the get receive rabbinical approval to take a second wife without being divorced from the first—this despite the fact that there is a civil law forbidding bigamy! In all the 53 years of statehood, only 14 men have been "coerced" into giving a get. Could there be a more blatant example of the inequities from that women suffer at the hands of the Orthodox rabbinical establishment? The problem cries out for solution. Fortunately, women of all religious denominations and from all over the Jewish world have joined together to challenge halakhic (mis-) rule. Let us hope and pray that they may be successful!

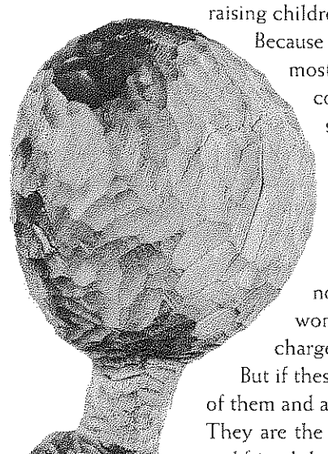


In advance of the next Bet Debora Conference, which will be devoted to the theme "Power," we—Rachel Monika Herweg and Rea Gorgon—would like to compile an anthology on "The Power of the Category 'Gender' in the Social and Religious Context." We invite everyone to contribute to this anthology.
rachelherweg@gmx.net

Hanna Rheinz

A Cassandra Call

Marion Kahnemann, "Jacob and Leah"



As Jewish women, we have indisputably shown a great deal of courage and plurality. We have done this in reference to our historical breaks, but also in describing various Jewish sociotopes in that many try to survive and define themselves. It occurred to me in Alice Shalvi's lecture how much the older generations still experience positive solidarity and value of Zionism, the building of the Jewish State. As a representative of the Jewish community resident today in Germany I see myself as a minority because I am prepared to issue a Cassandra call at this Bet Debora conference that, if my experience is consistent, will not make me very popular.

What happens to women who don't have families? Are women without families imaginable at all? Don't the chavurot [communities of friends], the communities, that we have set up at this conference as alternatives to the traditional family have exactly the characteristics that we wanted to get away from—namely, the production of black sheep and outsiders—who even show up here? They do not fit in and do not correspond to the new understanding of roles that we want to develop here together. Bet Debora is not ultimately directed at women who do not have significant others or no longer have families because they are single, widowed or divorced. It is not directed at women who live at the edges of the Jewish community because they are raising children on their own.

Because they live in Germany, these women exist in some senses on the outermost edge of the Jewish community because the infrastructure of many communities has failed to even identify them as a target group. I am not speaking here of those women who did political work in the tradition of the women's union (Frauenbund), or who are active in WIZO, or are integrated in other community organisations or women's networks. I do not mean successful career women who are in the limelight.

I am talking about women in the shadows. These are women who are no longer or have not yet been integrated into the community. These women experience the Bet Debora conference as an opportunity to recharge their Jewish and human batteries ... that is how it has been for me.

But if these women return, they come back to communities that take no notice of them and are only just tolerate them.

They are the women who stand alone at the gravesides of their parents, children and friends because there are no men, no fathers and no sons, who can say Kaddish for them. Women who are members of the orthodox unified community are officially discouraged from saying Kaddish. Women who live alone continue to be in lonely positions, particularly when they do not, as here in Berlin, have the opportunity to form a community. But even in Berlin there are women who are very lonely.

In my workshop I portrayed one of them who went to the mikvah [ritual bath] for two years even only to be rejected again and again. And it was not just that the rabbis let her know she was unmarried and as a result in the position of an outsider. She also felt stigmatised by other, married women. They repeatedly made it clear to her that she did not belong and was unwelcome.

In my workshop Galut ha-Neshama [Exile of the Soul], I tried to remind participants of the actual idea of Jewish femininity, to get them to recall that the body provides space for the soul—a positive reference to the body that had nevertheless been lost. And finally, these women are left alone and given no opportunity to experience community. Bet Debora was established to include these women as well, who are in a period of isolation and alienation during that it is even difficult for them to recognise common interests in a Jewish environment and use them as a basis for their behaviour.

Bet Debora has made a good start. But chavurot offer family substitutes in an only limited way, because most people are so caught up in their own worlds that the opportunities for establishing solidarity based on empathy, rachamim, the legacy of Jewish empathy, are overshadowed by indifference. It is true that during the course of the story it happens again and again that outsiders contribute creative ideas and move into the centre when their ideas are adopted. Yet for individuals it is difficult to bear the loneliness. They feel they only have one life and it is passing them by and they never come down off the shelf and become the centre of their own lives.

I am making an appeal that we recognise and develop our common interests beyond an understanding that is linked to the family, because being alone and living with-

Hanna Rheinz (2nd from right)

out a family does not have to mean just loneliness. It is often the case that precisely this juncture is where feminine strengths become apparent. Those who become aware of being alone tend to rely on their own creativity to resolve difficult situations.

My vision of a modern Jewish identity as a woman is that we recall what sounds anachronistic today, solidarity within the kehille (community). But it can only be experienced if we first recognise that we bring ourselves up short when we frequently, voluntarily and subconsciously uphold conventional images of deficient feminism. We make contemptible women who are not integrated in families in the conventional and socially acceptable sense. They are pitied because they are not really "fully valuable as Jewish women." We can no longer tolerate letting each other remain on the fringes, hoping only that future generations will bring those of us into the centre who today stand on the outside. The task is to stop excluding each other. We must demand and accept our place in within the community, both as individuals and as a group.

Dr. Hanna Rheinz, psychologist and university lecturer, is the author of "Die jüdische Frau. Auf der Suche nach einer modernen Identität" (The Jewish Woman—the Search for a Modern Identity) (GTB 1998).

Adina Ben-Chorin, American-born, living in Zurich/ Switzerland, teaches and lectures on Judaism and Jewish texts. Bible study is a major theme as well as women's role in Judaism.

Adina Ben-Chorin

Death and Mourning

The modern (at least Western) tendency is to push old age, illness and death aside. Even those closest to a terminally ill person are often forbidden to relate publicly or privately to that illness; we use sweet euphemisms for death, e.g. passing away; we hide ourselves or our loved ones away at a time of illness and in old age. All of the above is contrary to the traditional Jewish approach.

How do we relate to aging and to the aged? Pirkey Avot [Sayings of the Fathers] tells us that 40 is the age of wisdom and 50 is the age of counsel. In other words, having reached the height of spiritual achievement (wisdom), it is our responsibility to share it with others. This also means that the others have to be willing to listen to us. This is, of course, an idealized model but it highlights the honored place that the elderly should have in the society. This may always have been difficult; today, given the emphasis on youth, creativity, newness and innovation, such an attitude towards elderly and old people is almost unthinkable. Is there any way in that to make it workable? For the talmudic sages, 60+ was considered old, 80 was unique and beyond that was nothing very admirable. Today, the scale would have to be shifted upwards but the principle of the older generation having something valuable to pass on is an issue that requires serious attention. Furthermore, as humans increasingly live longer (at least in Western society), the practice of kibud av va'em [responsibility for one's parents and proper behaviour towards them, often hard to define] and *al tashlicheni l'et zikna* [caring for the needs of the old] become more and more problematic.

Respect for life, inherent in Jewish principle and practice, translates itself into respect for the sick, the dying and the dead. Jewish Law [halakha] and Jewish practice [minhag] give us very clear guidelines in this matter. For example, we are enjoined to the mizvah of bikur cholim [attending to the needs of the sick and the dying and not leaving them alone] and of concern for the body of a dead person, as expressed in the practice of the ritual preparation of the body for burial. (In this context, cremation clearly presents a problem as it is seen as a desecration of the body.) But what about organ transplantation, a dying person's "quality of life" and the thorny issue of "death with honor" and its extension, euthanasia, all of which are hotly debated in the Western world. Jewish law and practice have had to address these issues and with the exception of the last mentioned, the resulting decisions have been positive, albeit within defined parameters.

Death is a part of life. The rabbinic saying is "Repent one day before you die," i.e. we must be aware all the time of the fragility of life and the possibility of death and behave accordingly. The widespread Jewish tradition of 'ethical' wills, practiced over the centuries in many communities, indicates the importance that Judaism attaches to passing on our moral/ethical/religious values, but even more importantly, it indicates the willingness to contemplate death and deal with it well before it becomes a painful reality. The approaching death of a loved one should be a precious time, a time for speaking without pretence, an opportunity for healing wounds and family quarrels. What happens after death is a matter of belief and beliefs differ in this respect. What can be said with certainty is that human beings transcend death: biologically, by having children; spiritually, through the memories that remain with the living; through the influence a person continues to exert upon the living.

Rituals associated with death include the nearest of kin closing the eyes of the dead; tahara and immediate burial; and the obligations of the recognized mourner (i.e. one who is bereaved of mother or father, sister or brother, spouse or child), including onanut [special status of a mourner before the burial], shiva [the seven days of "severe" mourning] and the additional days (30 days for husband/wife, son/daughter, brother/sister; one year for a parent). While death is a personal issue, in Judaism it is undeniably an event to be shared with the community. The latter provides physical and spiritual sustenance during the shiva, making sure that the mourner is not alone, is provided with food and that there is a minyan [prayer group] so that the mourner can recite the kaddish [mourner's prayer] as required.

On the Shabbat of the shiva, the mourner changes clothes, leaves the house and goes to the synagogue, in honor of the Shabbat but also as symbolic of the mourner's commitment to the community and eventual return to it and to the world of the living. Today, most Jews do not live within such traditionally oriented communities. Moreover, they tend to accept at least some of the mores of the cultures within that they have chosen to make their homes, most of which conflict with the traditional Jewish model. In the Western world, for example, burial is delayed, mourning is private ("no visits, please") and there is no formal recognition of the need for a special mourning period for individuals so that the mourner may not be able to take time off from work in order to "sit shiva". Many of us are not part of any Jewish community, while those around us (family or friends, if we are lucky) know next to nothing about Jewish practice, or worse still, cling irrationally to tidbits of information and memories that are no longer in context and therefore have little supportive or healing power.

There is great wisdom embedded in the Jewish tradition with respect to illness, aging, death and dying. That wisdom must be studied, distilled, reinterpreted and repackaged in order to meet the needs of today's Jews.

Adina Ben-Chorin

Sylvia Rothschild

The Courage to Create New Liturgies

When I was growing up it was made very clear by my teachers that the word defining my Judaism, "reform", was in the present tense and was deliberately chosen to indicate an ongoing process. There was never one historical and monolithic orthodox Judaism that was reformed at one moment in time. Rather, the Judaism of my community was a living and dynamic religious expression. My teachers and rabbis knew that the process of reforming Judaism was a continuing one and that everyone in the community was responsible for it.

When I was taught about Judaism people would use the words "prophetic" and "ethical" and "responsible". My teachers also used the word "traditional", but would be honest enough to recognise that there are many traditions in Judaism and we tend to favour the ones we know and devalue the ones we don't. The idea of responding to the people and to the contexts and real lives of people in the same way that the biblical prophets did was a very powerful lesson for me. At the same time I was taught to respect authority, but not necessarily to accept it without question. A word that has been used in this conference about what we as Jewish women can expect to do in our lives was "courage". A second important word has been "plurality". And there is a third word I would add to the mix—"responsibility". We need to have a sense of our own responsibility for keeping Judaism alive and in good health.

I am myself a passionate creator and writer of liturgy. And in writing new liturgies I am conscious always of the courage it takes to recognise topics liturgically when they never have been marked this way before, of the many ways in that important ideas and events can be expressed and most of all I am conscious that the liturgy has to be Jewish. It has to use Jewish forms and expressions, Jewish structures and Jewish imagery: It has to speak on a deep level to Jews. Liturgy has to be a religious expression, not simply a cultural one or a form of therapy. It has to have a sense of connection to our history and our future as well as be relevant to our present situation. I am very conscious, as people are starting to discuss liturgy more and more, that liturgy has kept Jews together with our particular identity. I sat in the serviced this morning and it was totally different from the service yesterday—but both of them were recognisably Shacharit services. They were also different again from the Shacharit of my community in England and yet there was a commonality and a

Power and Mysticism

"Is the Kabbala worth something or not?" In a letter written in 1925, Chaim Nachman Bialik put this question to the young Gershom Scholem. The query drove Scholem to research Jewish mysticism as a Zionist. He wanted to know if the system of ten Sefirot (currents of divine energy streaming into matter) would provide a useable framework to perceive and shape the political world from the point of reference of the Jewish experience of God.

As a Jewish feminist, I ask myself this question today, in a post-modern Europe more than half a century after the Shoah. The Sefirot refer not only to concepts like justice and mercy, but also to the origins of injustice, abuse of power, and evil in the world of God's creation. Their names may reflect times long past, for example: Keter (crown), Malchut (kingdom), Nezach (glory), or Hod (majesty).

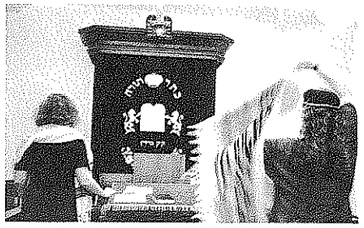
The interplay between these concepts is decisive. A dynamic perception of God is contained in the balance. The Tikkun Olam (reparation of the world) occurs when the Sefirot are in correct relationship to each other. This is in no way simply an intellectual game.

During one of the services at the Bet Debora conference, Lori Klein and I, both rabbinical students of the renewal movement, brought up different kabbalistic ideas.

We formulated the Birkot Haschachar (the morning blessing) as a meditation on the Sefirot. The aim was to make us aware of the interplay of the Sefirot in the world around and within us.

Religion is an increasingly feminine domain. Now, more women than men are actually studying at the liberal rabbinical schools. And women are also those who are now more active in the communities. Precisely they are becoming responsible for seeing to it Judaism will not end up occupying a meaningless niche divorced from daily affairs.

Sylvia Rothschild



connection. There is something that binds us together in services and I think that is about how we pray, what structures we are following, the narrative and the story we are telling ourselves.

Liturgy is only a tiny part of the Jewish experience, but it is important. It creates our identity and it empowers us. It tells us what we really need to know and it allows us to tell each other what we really believe. Liturgy allows us to express and experience our Judaism. It allows us to have a dialogue. One of the great pleasures I discovered in studying liturgy was just how little new writing there is—I really recommend to everyone that you get hold of an annotated siddur with notes about the history of the prayers and where they all come from. It is such a satisfaction to see how over the centuries Jews have plucked phrases from biblical books and used them differently, rephrased them or put them into a new context and so created new prayer. Jews have found dialogue with God that has worked for someone else and used it in a new and different way to create a dialogue that works for us. One of my delights is not so much in the writing of new poems and prayers—although I do that too. It is when I read through the Tanach and find just the half verse that says what I wanted to say. Then being able to feel brave enough and responsible enough and knowing that I am well within rabbinic tradition—to take that half verse and use it in a new framework. Sometimes even to alter its original meaning by taking it out of its context, or by not taking all the words in the phrase or the verse. It is not new—this process is as old as Jewish prayer, but we need courage in these days to take our texts and reframe them. We need the belief that these texts are ours, that they can speak to us differently, that they can mean something new. And we need the sense of responsibility to these texts so that we create something new, something Jewish, something prayerful.

Morning service of **Elisa Klapheck** and **Lori Klein**

The strict interpretation or translation of many current prayers can repel us, but that doesn't mean we have to turn our back on liturgy. Much of the liturgy that is being written at the moment is women's liturgy. That is simply because of the fact that we have lost most historical women's prayers. It is not new that women are writing prayers, we know that women prayed as far back as biblical times, but women's prayers have not been transmitted in the same way as men's prayers have. Often silent, they have very rarely been published beyond perhapssomeone's hand-written notes. So it is very important that we not only continue to write new liturgy, but that we actually put it out into the public domain—women need to be visible in the liturgy.

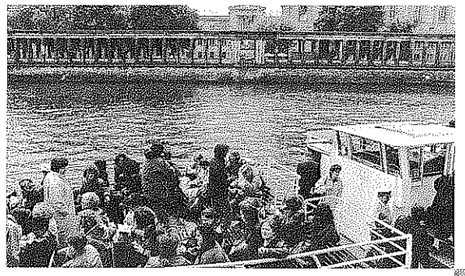
So I would suggest to this conference that we should be actively creating communities for ourselves that express a Judaism that we find relevant and enriching and not engage in passing on tradition for tradition's sake. I believe we should accept the rich variety of ways to express Judaism; that we should be courageous in challenging anything that stifles Judaism's relevance to people's lives; and that we should accept the responsibility of creating a Judaism with rituals and liturgies that are meaningful to us and not simply comforting or habitual. My experience in the rabbinate and as a writer of prayers and new rituals is that unless we actually take on the responsibility of reshaping, reforming and re-defining our Judaism, it will become a museum piece, something that we may fondly conserve and look at occasionally, but that has no meaning for our lives and the lives of our children.

Hannah Arendt said power is the freedom to begin. Power is present in the synagogue. I perceive the service as an exercise in beginning to realise my potential. Said differently, it is an opportunity to open myself to let God work within me.

For that reason, it is my opinion that Jewish women must pose the power question by activating Jewish works of intellect. In this respect, Jewish mysticism contains a surprising amount of stimuli for developing ethics of power and enabling an individual to take power, two preconditions for joining actively in the shaping of social reality.

Elisa Klapheck

Rabbi Sylvia Rothschild is spiritual leader of the Bromley and District Reform Synagogue in London and Chair of the Rabbinic Assembly. She is the co-editor of "Taking up the Timbrel. The Challenge of Creating Ritual" (2000



An historic tour of places Jewish women made their presence felt.

Cantor Avitall Gerstetter sang at the dedication of the memorial to Regina Jonas and the opening of the conference.

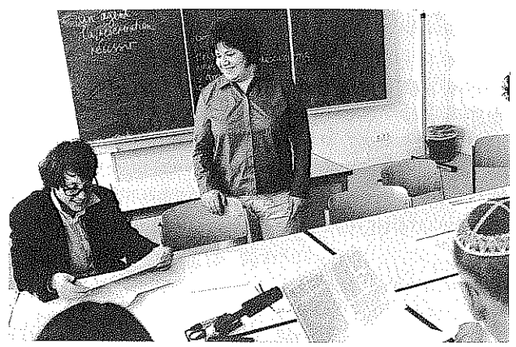
The Girls' Orchestra of the Berlin Jewish High School got things off to a flying start in the auditorium.

Grit Beel and Katrin Baumeister in the conference office.

Head caterer Gaby Nonhoff always had something new and tasty ready to eat.

Carolyn Naumann, the head of the conference office, kept everything running smoothly.

Cantor Mimi Sheffer during her workshop: "Moses, Miriam, and Aaron." On the Motzae Sabbath, she gave an unforgettable Hawdala concert.



Natalja Sharandak

A Jewish Grandfather

Every family has its secrets. In our family, it's my mother's extraction on the paternal side. So who exactly was my grandfather? An evildoer-murderer or a thief? He was simply a Jew. "Because you have misfortune/ Because you have a star"—as Ehrenburg wrote. Thus, half a misfortune fell to my mother and just a quarter to me.
I shall try to reconstruct the history of my mother's father's family. And at the same time to find answers to the question of what has happened to turn a state that declared the equality of all nations, into one where a person has to hide his background.
Mama's father—Oskar (Oyser) Berlyand (born in 1887)—had his origins in a Jewish village, which he left to go to the "Pale of Settlement." His grandfather, my great-great-grandfather Shimon, was a member of the Haskalah movement—the Jewish Enlightenment. He was among those who advocated Jews having a European education. His son (my great-grandfather Semyon) maintained the same stance. All of his sons had a solid education, despite the quotas limiting the number of Jews who were accepted at institutes of higher education.
The usual regulated structure of the Berlyand family, like that of many other Jewish families, was overshadowed by the unbridled outburst of anti-Semitism that were among of the main indications of the demoralization of the Nikolai regime. The peak of the anti-Jewish campaign was the pogroms that flared up at the height of the revolution of 1905.
My grandfather Oskar and his brother Aleksandr, or Sasha (Isril, born in 1890, a father to my mother and a grandfather to me after the early death of his brother)—the youngest children in the family, were inseparable. For a time, though, their paths led them in different directions. Oskar studied in Moscow and Sasha entered the chemical-pharmaceutical faculty of the Kiev University and completed his course in 1917, that fateful year for Russia. My grandfather and his brother were not very interested in politics. Like most of their compatriots, they just tried to survive those years of civil war and turmoil. For Jews, this was particularly difficult. A terrible wave of pogroms rolled over the whole of Ukraine.
At first, the Soviet state gave Jews ample opportunities, allowing them access to many spheres of activity that had previously been closed to them. With no obstacles in his way, Oskar was able to pursue his desire to move to another city. Work took him to Petrograd, where he happened to meet my grandmother, Lillian, an ethnic Estonian and at that time a young librarian.

Oral History as Spiritual Witnessing

Irene Reti: I am the daughter of Holocaust refugees from Germany and Hungary who tried to protect me from their trauma by not telling me they were Jewish. The recovery of my family's story from silence has been my life's path. Interviewing my family has helped me piece together the shattered fragments of our history in my memoir The Keeper of Memory. Oral history was the gate I stepped through to begin that spiritual and creative journey. It is also the center of my professional work at the University of California, Santa Cruz.
What is oral history? It is spoken memory with historical significance, which illuminates the ways in that we are both shaped by history and shapers of history. It is as new as the tape recorder and video camera and as ancient as stories whispered around a fire. For oral history is not a conversation, but more of a directed monologue.
How were our families different than other families? What are our most significant memories of growing up? Who was marginalized in our families? How did the Shoah affect us? What is the history of gender roles in our families? Finally, how do we define family? Do we define it as biological, or do we think of community members as family?
On a rainy afternoon in Berlin, twelve Jewish women stepped through the gate of oral history and became each other's witnesses. After an hour we shared some of what we had learned. It was intimate in a way some of us had never experienced. Before the workshop ended there would be tears. Women who had never met before, who were separated by country of origin, language, age, even by continents, were startled to discover how much history we have in common.

Lori Klein: I am second to third generation American Jew, whose parents and grandparents proudly claimed their cultural identity as Jews, but turned their backs on most religious and spiritual expression. For the past ten years I have been deeply involved in designing creative ritual. For me, every occasion, including an oral history workshop, can be deepened spiritually.
The sacred container of our workshop was the Shema at the beginning and the holy fire of all the letters of Torah at the end. In the Torah scroll, the letter ayin at the end of the word Shema (listen) and the letter dalet at the end of the word echad (one) are enlarged. Together they form the word "ayd," or witness. In this way, we learn that listening, witnessing, is for us a sacred duty. After we had spent more than an hour telling each other our stories, the air was rich with the white fire that embraces the black fire of the letters on a Torah scroll.

Irene Reti and Lori Klein

Natalja Sharandak, born in Kiew, is an art historian, writer and filmmaker. She lives in Berlin.

Sasha completed his course at the Institute of Medicine, defended two dissertations, one after another, and became a professor of medicine. But soon it became clear that anti-Semitism had far from disappeared. The battle against the threat of "Jewish domination" became more or less the general line taken by the party and the Soviet leadership, although it occurred silently, with the help of secret directives and instructions. The "fifth point" on passports and on forms indicating citizens' ethnicity came into effect in 1932 and promoted this selection procedure.

Left-hand page: **The author with her grandfather**
Photo: Private Collection
Left above: **Irene Reti** (centre)

In the lottery of life, my grandfather Sasha pulled a lucky ticket. He not only survived but even managed to pursue his calling without having to sacrifice his conscience and his principles. Though he occupied prominent positions, he remained a non-party man until the end of his days, something not easily done, and a fact that cast suspicion on him.
The war began in autumn 1941. Kiev was under threat of occupation. The Institute of Medicine where Mama's uncle worked as head of the therapeutic department offered to evacuate him. If he hadn't taken his brother's children with him, who knows whether they wouldn't have ended up on the edge of Baba Yar.
In 1948, I came into the world. I had a happy childhood. It was only many years later that I realized that the happiest days of my life were the "black years" for Soviet Jews. The final stage of the persecution of the Jews unleashed by Stalin was the "doctors affair". When the hunt for the ringleaders began, Aleksandr Semyonovich Berlyand went to his superiors proposing that he voluntarily hand in his notice. But they told him that he could continue with his work. Some of his patients preferred to do without services rendered by a "suspicious" Jewish doctor. The epitomy of this outburst of anti-Semitism was to have been exiling the Jews beyond the borders of the European part of the USSR (although today a number of academics reject this version). The Jews were saved by a miracle in the form of the death of the tyrant.
Two years later my grandfather died. One night, hooligans defiled Jewish graves at the cemetery where he was buried. They knocked off the nose of my grandfather's marble likeness. I think that for Mama this was a signal that she had to defend herself. This is where the story of Mama's "psychosis" regarding her Jewish background began, one which gradually took hold of me, too. It was made worse by the atmosphere of hostile anti-Semitism in the Brezhnev era. In an attempt to "save" their children, the parents of "half-breeds" registered them as having a "positive" ethnicity.
I was lucky with my teachers. They managed to create an ordinary humane atmosphere for us, their students. But as soon as they took their first steps into the world outside without them, my Jewish school-fellows increasingly realized the sad truth that in the country that they had considered their home since they were children, they were merely outcasts. That they would fail the entrance exams to universities and a number of other prestigious institutes of higher education was decided before they even took them by the guardians of sacred Soviet science against Jewish invasion.
What was nearly impossible for my Jewish contemporaries became a reality for me. I entered the Academy of Artists in Leningrad. The fact that I was concealing my grandfather's Jewishness was the sole reason. In the museum where I worked for many years, there were fairly latent anti-Semites, but there were also overt ones. One fine day I realized that I didn't want to be "one of us" for the anti-Semites. I have no reason to be ashamed of my grandfather. This is what gave me the idea to write a book about the history of my family, a book I'm still working on today.

Translated from Russian by Catherine Johnson

Lidia Drozdzynski

My Secular Judaism

I feel I am a part of the Jewish community without being a member of it. How is that to be understood? I am nonreligious and the community is a place of religious faith. Does that mean there is no place there for me? My position regards both liberal and orthodox orientations. Because there is no cultural programme in an organised Jewish community, I count myself as a member of a quite large, loose group that is worldly and not organised. My work as a journalist is part of my secular identity, because that is when I concern myself in a professional way with everything that interests me about Judaism. And finally, there is the connection to Israel and the people who are close to me there and belong to my history.

As a child from an atheist, interfaith marriage, finding my identity was not easy. In addition, life defined me as Jew, before I could ever choose Judaism for myself. External events frequently outpaced my personal development.

I am the daughter of a non-Jewish mother and a Jewish father. Before the war, his name was Alexander Kahane. He belonged, therefore to the "Kohanim." Shortly after the war he changed his name and Kahane became Drozdzynski. He was a young and committed Communist, ready to sacrifice a great deal, even his name, for his ideals.

At the time of my marriage, I had the opportunity not only to take my husband's name, but also to find my way back to "Kahane". I decided in the end to keep the clumsy and consonant rich version of my name. I looked back and determined there was a great deal of identity behind it, so I decided to remain "D—as in Dora," "R—as in Richard," "O—as in Otto" and so on, spelling out my name and therefore remaining longer in the memory of many a public official. Nevertheless, I still wish from time to time that I could take the name Kahane.

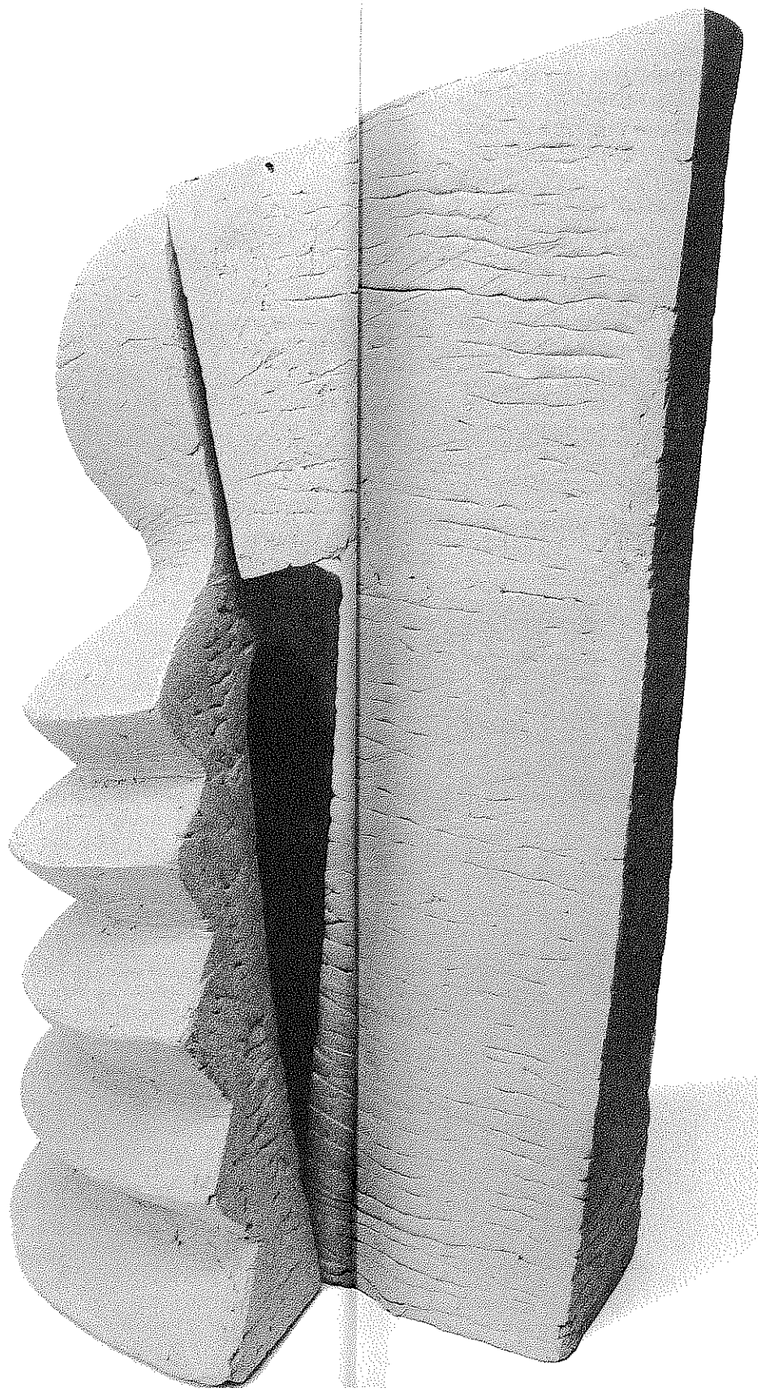
When World War Two began, my father was just fourteen. In the Lodz ghetto, Bundists, Zionists and Communists tried to ease the situation of the residents and encourage them to carry on. Youth organisations worked with them. They fought for a fair distribution of food rations, established soup kitchens and invigorated everyday life with cultural events. They listened to hidden radios to gain information. They formed the underground. It is likely that my father joined a Communist group during this period.

You can say in all seriousness that my father owed his survival in Auschwitz to his comrades from the organisation and that all his hope came from Communist ideals. He did not want to go to Palestine. That is why I was born in Poland, not Israel.

My father was a journalist and close observer of the mood at home and abroad. A break with the system was pre-programmed by the time it became important for me to blaze an ideological or religious trail. In March 1968, when I was 14, the first student strikes began in Warsaw. Schoolchildren were not allowed to leave the buildings and we were made to copy out dictated propaganda in our notebooks. I was already feeling like a member of the opposition and on the streets despite the curfew. The regime was anti-Semitic, as were many Poles. Out on the street I heard that and had my first shock. It made me into a Jew. Suddenly, my position was clear.

But I did not discover active Jewish life until I emigrated. When I want to put a positive spin on the anti-Semitic ranting of the Polish government in 1968, I say it forced me to leave Poland and genuinely strengthened my identity as a Jew.

Rachel Kohn, "Relationship"



Lidia Drozdzynski works as a television and radio journalist in Cologne/Germany.

The thought of conversion was always an alien one to me, because this step is a sign of union with G-d, to whom you obligate yourself to conduct your life in a way that I cannot and will not afford. For me, the synagogue is a place I go on the High Holidays to honour my father and symbolically demonstrate a bond to my murdered grandparents. I have only been going for a few years. This house, for me, is a place where I take time to meditate and hold disputes with my relatives. Sometimes, when I am standing in the synagogue, I see my father in front of me. He was a Communist, but he never stopped being a Jew. Then, I have to smile. He looks on at what I am and what I do. Sometimes he sceptically acknowledges the situation with a good-natured joke or parable. What else could he do? He collected Yiddish humour. Part of my secular Judaism is being a chronicler or an archaeologist of the family's history. Here I feel I belong in a long line of "Second Generation" children who must understand these activities as a legacy and a lifelong task.

Wanya Kruyer

Insiders and Outsiders

At Bet Debora I (a Jewish writer from Amsterdam) was surprised to encounter several non-Jews who took part in the debates. For European Jewry, non-Jews participating in Jewish life is a new phenomenon. After the Shoah, Judaism in continental Europe was seldom perceived as a rich heritage or as a meaningful and vital civilisation to share with others. But during my visits to the Anglo-Saxon Jewish world, I discovered such perceptions were possible for my American and English contemporaries. It seems they are able to pick and choose what they want from Jewish heritage in order to compose their own personal identity. In those societies, Jewish communities are perceived to be successful and others are encouraged to participate.

This is different in post-Shoah Holland. Many Jews, myself included, are at times astonishingly closed to "the other". This is all the more remarkable because many of us were raised in a liberal and open society. I occasionally heard myself defending the "right" to be in a Jewish space "among ourselves". I know I have that right, living in a society where people can organise on their own terms. But my "right" felt wrong in a progressive Jewish space, where openness towards all kinds of "othernesses" is advocated. I could find no proper arguments to support it, other than personal emotions. And they certainly were not arguments based on traditional Jewish thought, which is profoundly open to the friendly other.

Thundering Silence

"I really felt strange at Bet Debora, a bit like a peasant at a party of aristocrats", says Maja, a non-Jew from Switzerland. "My brother suggested, 'Why didn't you just invent a Jewish grandmother?' Of course ancestry is a strong point to emphasise a difference. This was a strange experience for me, someone who was taught not to differentiate between people. In a workshop I tried to express some of those thoughts, and all I got was kind of a 'thundering silence.' I think, dragging a swastika out of my right ear would have had about the same effect." She adds: "Afterwards, in the toilet, a young woman told me, I wasn't so wrong. But I got the message: Never speak about Jews when you are among Jews, if you're not a Jew yourself."

Maja studied Islamic culture, modern history and literature. From working at a counselling centre for religious groups, she acquired a lot of knowledge about group identities and dynamics. On a personal level she struggles with the consequences of group identification: "I have heard many Jews see mixed marriages as a danger. But how should I see this as a non-Jew? If, for example, I were to fall in love with a Jewish man, should I marry him of not? To marry him would mean the children would be non-Jewish, not to marry him simply because he's a Jew would somehow be anti-

As a Guest in Debora's House

Some of the participants at Bet Debora are non-Jewish friends, journalists, speakers, partners, ministers, or academics. For many, it was the first conference they had attended where non-Jewish women were in the minority. The organisers of Bet Debora have accomplished a major achievement, creating a space where Jewish women are at the centre and able to discuss and articulate their experiences outside of the patriarchal structures of religious communities and a majority culture that has been shaped by Christianity. The men and non-Jewish women who attended were welcome in this Jewish feminist context, but abstained, for the most part, from active discussion in the plenum sessions to avoid subliminal conflicts along the lines of man vs. woman and Jew vs. Christian. It became clear how quickly such conflicts could occur in a small group discussion on the topic "Judaism as a Vocation—Religious and Secular Identities." A badly thought out critical statement by one of the non-Jewish women participants about the central position of the Holocaust led to a complete derailment of the discussion. Her choice of words was viewed as a minimisation, a lack of comprehension and indifference with respect to the destruction and loss, which led to vehement reactions that prevented any continuation of debate on the original subject.

Had there been several more "misunderstandings" of this type, the quality of the space created by the organisers would have been severely compromised. The presence and participation of those who represent majority culture, qua gender, religion, sexual orientation, or skin colour can easily provoke defensive strategies that prevent an open exchange of ideas.

Our roles, as non-Jewish women and men, were as a result restrained and observant, rather than of intervention. If and when there will be a time when discourse between the women organised in Bet Debora, men from the Jewish community who support their cause and non-Jewish women will become more active is still undecided. My hope would be that parallel to the development of the assertive, European, Jewish feminist movement that is establishing itself at this time in Bet Debora, structures with similar aims develop that would provide fertile ground for later coalitions.

Katharina von Kellenbach

Semitic, so what's the solution? Not getting close to Jewish people to prevent falling in love? Personally, I place the interests and freedom of the individual above the interests of the group."

Usually the subject of mixed marriages comes to me through single Jewish women complaining about the lack of available Jewish men. In their view, too many Jewish men do place "the interests and freedom of the individual above the interests of the group". And who would deny someone this right in the most personal choice one can make? But for Jews this is not just a matter of freedom of choice. A Jew, especially a Jewish man who actually chooses to "marry out" will always hear a voice whispering "little Shoah" or "helping Hitler to finish his job". Even if he is secular and not affiliated to the community, most Jewish men will feel the consequences of this choice throughout the marriage, when a son is born, and when a child reaches the age of Jewish adulthood. At those moments the Jewish man has to face the consequences of marrying out of a community that was almost exterminated.

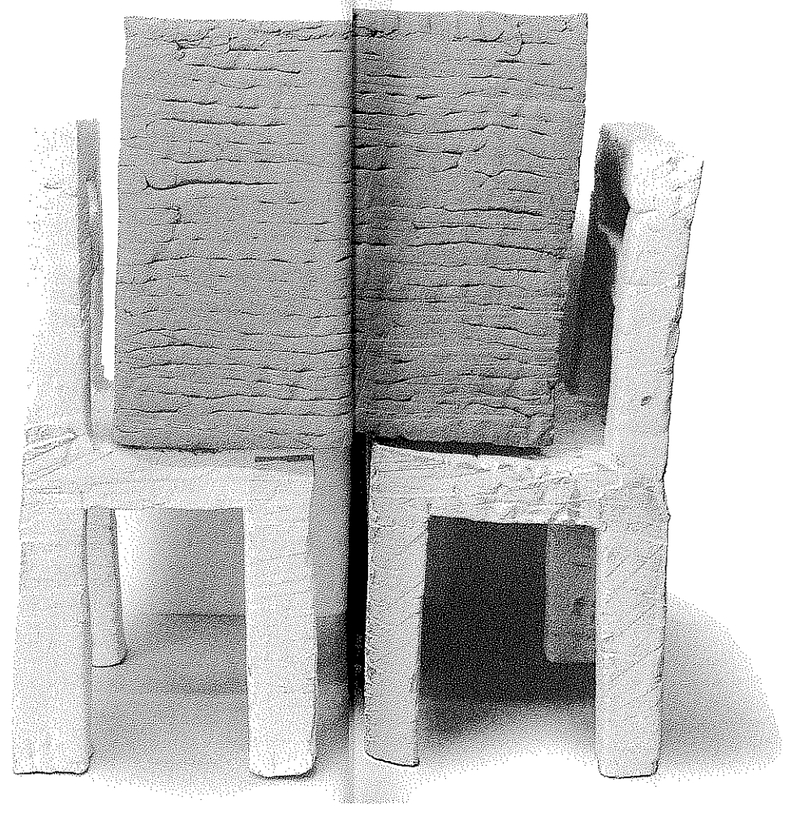
Maja tells me about her experiences: "When I worked at the counselling centre for religious groups, I visited mosques and Hindu-temples, Buddhist feasts and different churches, and I nearly always encountered two attitudes: Curiosity ('Why have you come? What are you interested in? What do you think about this and that?'), and the wish to show and explain customs: 'Now we are praying for this and that. This meal is for the monks,' etc.)." She continues: "Once, I visited a synagogue on Friday evening with a group of other non-Jews, but this was like visiting a museum or a zoo. The curiosity I experienced elsewhere was not present. At Bet Debora I felt the same way."

I tried to explain to her the unease I felt when recently, during a liberal service in Amsterdam, I heard a non-Jew saying Kaddish, or watched a non-Jew carrying a Torah scroll like a baby going around the worshippers. Maja takes this a step further. In a world in which universal values are the norm, she questions particularism: "There are other 'blasphemous' questions like: What is the sense of seeing people as members of groups? Do we really need groups? What about people, who belong to several groups or to none?" She continues: "To see people as members of groups can distort the view of reality. Not everything somebody does is a result of being a member of a specific group. That a terrorist is a Muslim doesn't mean that he's a terrorist because he's a Muslim. Regarding Jews and Israel I often hear, 'They suffered so much, why do they make other people suffer?' This is a really stupid idea, because when somebody is victim of a crime, it simply means 'one is a victim of a crime,' it doesn't say anything about one's character. Suffering normally doesn't improve people, it destroys them."

Colourful Fish

I fully agree with Maja. Being a member of a group is not a valid predictor of behaviour or opinions, let alone character. And it certainly can't be an excuse for bad behaviour. But on another level Maja and I differ profoundly. I love groups of all kinds, temporary, floating, creative subcultures as well as group cultures consisting of a solid set of traditions, customs and values inherited from places far away, or times long gone.

To me, all of those differences are like the scales of a colourful fish in a tropical aquarium. The precondition is that the aquarium itself, society as a whole, is kept together by shared democratic political and social values and mutual respect for individuals in daily life. Because I love groups, subcultures, and the interaction of civilisations, I love to be "among ourselves" on occasion. Living in an open society I realise I want increasingly to enjoy those moments in a private space. Like the people I choose to be with on the eve of the Sabbath or at the seder table. To be "one of us" however, in my perception doesn't mean having "a Jewish grandma" as Maja's brother suggested. Not even having a Jewish mom and dad is enough.



Rachel Kohn, "Relationship"

As in every group "to be one of us", to be an insider, means to speak, act, and move as the other members do. In other words, I like to be with people who have the same kind of neshamah [soul]. The hidden signals people pick up from each other, distinguishes "insiders" from "outsiders". These signals are much stronger than any inherited or acquired status, or claimed identity. This means that I certainly do invite non-Jews to my Sabbath table who have the same kind of neshamah as "us", whereas a lot of people who have Jewish grandmas I'd rather not see in private.

This observation regarding "informal Jewishness", played a role in the last issue Maja and I discussed: the place of religion in Judaism. My dialogue partner wondered: "I don't really understand what 'Jewish' means outside the religious domain. It seems the word Jewish is used in such different ways. It is something like a container different people fill with different meanings."

I tried to explain this "informal Jewishness" and the multi-layered identity most Jews experience. The multi-layered identity is particularly present in Europe, where Jewishness is, unlike in the United States, rarely described as a "belief system" like Christianity or Hinduism. A recent survey on the Dutch Jewish population showed that for the huge majority, "religion" is a minor determinant of "Jewish identity." Affinity with customs in the family or origin, affinity with Israel, be it positive or critical, and for more than half, dealing with the aftermath of the dark days of 1940-45, are much stronger determinants than "religion." There is a great deal involved. "Jewish speech," behaviour, certain attitudes, and other elements of informal Jewishness make it difficult for "the other" to fully sense the whole of our communities. Maybe, if the Jews of Europe follow the American path, in one or two generations Jewishness will also be a very personal choice for a specific affiliation or belief system. And everybody will be a "Jew by choice." Ancestry will be no more than a superficial layer, or, after some generations of mixed marriages, a partial particularity, like being a "Greek American" or "Irish American". Maybe "Jewishness" will be for some in the end a cultural role, temporarily played, as Maja observed in her work at the counselling centre: "Some people are religious tourists, they change their religion every two years. I've even met people who changed their ethnic identity several times."

Yet, in most European countries this religious or ethnic tourism seems a long way off. Judaism is still perceived as a struggle with many complex determinants. Those who identify themselves publicly as Jews find they are challenging societal consensus. A lot of courage is needed to claim the right to be different and the right to be "among us", and be at the same time a respected member of the society.

Wanya F. Kruyer studied history and sociology, and works as a journalist specialising in Jewish thought.

Katharina von Kellenbach is a Protestant theologian and associate Professor of Religious Studies at St. Mary's College in the US State of Maryland.

Dragica Levi

La Benevolencia – A Multi-Religious Jewish Vision

Sarajevo is a really multi-religious town. In three—four hundred square meters you'll find synagogues, mosques, Christian-orthodox churches, Catholic cathedrals and an institutionalised neighbourhood—to have a good neighbour is something like an institution in Sarajevo. This is the reason why everybody helped us when we became active in 1992. The beginning was sad. Almost all our members left the city for a safe place. We even considered closing the doors of our synagogue. It was a very difficult moment. But then two things happened. Jews all over the world stood up and were with us. "La Benevolencia"—that is Ladino or Judeo-Espaniol—became our cultural, educational and humanitarian society by the help of many friends all over Europe. The second thing that happened was that people came to our community. They were not members before the war, but they brought original documents proving that their fathers, mothers or grandparents were Jewish—and we are lucky to have old record books, both Ashkenazi and Sephardi, so that we were able to check it. So all of a sudden we had 340 Jews. And lots of friends of different religious or national backgrounds wanted to help us too.

With the help of the whole Jewish world and the friends of La Benevolencia a great job was done for all the people of Sarajevo, for all our friends, all our neighbours, for everyone—Jews, Muslims, Croatians and Serbs. For example, in 1993 La Benevolencia in Sarajevo distributed more than 50 percent of the medicine. We opened soup kitchens, we had a First Aid Department with physicians and nurses, three pharmacies in the town and a home care programme for old people—people really in need, . who without our help for sure wouldn't have survived. One other interesting thing: In the beginning of the war some Jewish children, members of the community, came and we suddenly started a Sunday school. Now they asked: "I have my best friend nearby, he is Muslim or he is Croatian. May I bring him too?" Our answer was "Yes." So together they learned about Jewish tradition and history. And then we did the same with the young people of our community.

Now to be honest about the spiritual history of the communities in Eastern Europe: We still do not have a rabbi, but all of us are learning a lot. I can proudly tell you that we now have weekly Shabbat services and guest rabbis from Israel for the main holidays. But if you ask what kind of synagogue we have—I really cannot answer,

Dragica Levi (right) at the panel discussion **"Courage for Plurality"**

because on the one hand men and women sit separately, but on the other we don't keep kosher at all. But we are trying, we are learning...

I think that our Jewish community got a lot of credit for the future, because we were open for everybody and we helped all our friends and neighbours in Sarajevo. I give you a few examples: There is no foreign guest, no ambassador in Sarajevo, who does not come to our community to ask: What do you need? All of them heard what La Benevolencia did during the war. Thanks to the help of the Norwegian government the old Jewish cemetery, which was the frontline during the siege, was de-mined. The rabbi of Norway came to the official reopening of the cemetery. Not only do we experience solidarity in Sarajevo, but also in other cities of Herzegovina, where there was fighting against Muslims and Croatians. The tiny Jewish community of Mostar, a handful of members, helped people in need. Last April we celebrated the laying of the cornerstone of a new synagogue and Jewish cultural centre in Mostar. It is financed by the city of Mostar, due to the credit given to Jewish life in our country.

Statement at the Bet Debora panel discussion, "Courage for Plurality."

Nelly Shulman

The Jewish Miracle

Nelly Shulman

When I first came to work as a rabbinical student in Minsk—I grew up in St. Petersburg—I was amazed how many people actually took on their Jewishness and started to act according to their Jewishness. I was amazed at how many people chose not to hide, which is a very good sign! Every day people enter my congregation who choose to rediscover their Jewish identity. A lot of them hid their Jewishness during the Communist years and many are still afraid to accept themselves as Jews. We need to tell them every day: Be courageous! Be honest to yourself! Say: "I am Jewish." If we didn't have so many people who are courageous, we wouldn't have the Reform movement in Belarus, we wouldn't have 18 congregations there. And we wouldn't have nearly 100 Reform congregations in the former Soviet Union—if not for the people who are courageous.

When you enter organised Jewish life in the former Soviet Union today, you carry heavy luggage. Often you come with the wrong family—whether it is a mixed marriage or whether you are halakhically not fully Jewish. People who are 30 years old and older come with the experience of life under the Communist regime, with the experience of hiding, of fear, of not being able to be plural, to freely, openly, fully express their opinion. And most of them do not yet understand what Jewishness means to them and whether they want or don't want to be Jewish. And we are working with them day after day—turning them into Jewish people.

I have been working for three years in the Reform congregation of Minsk, under not very simple conditions. Life is difficult, the government of the country is not very helpful to the Jewish community and the Jewish community itself is very diverse. In addition, the economical conditions are influencing the activities of people. People are very much concerned about work, unemployment, salary and things like that, but nevertheless they are still trying to be Jewish. The hunger for learning is unbelievable. They want to learn any time of the day or the night! I will just tell you a small incident that happened to me recently. I had to leave a youth camp with around 50 kids in Siberia. My flight back to Minsk was scheduled at three o'clock in the morning, so I had to leave at about one o'clock. A car was coming to pick me up. I went to the kids to say good-bye. They were about 15–17 years old. There was actually a disco that night. I came in, but not a single one was dancing. Every one, every single kid, was sitting outside in a little hall. Just before, during the dinner, I had given them a copy of Tanach [Hebrew Bible], which I had in Russian and Hebrew and a copy of Pirkey Avot [Sayings of the Fathers, Mishnah]. Now they had divided themselves into two groups—one of them was reading Tanach, the other one Pirkey Avot. And as I wanted to say good-by, they said: "Well, the car isn't here yet. Sit with us the next twenty minutes and study with us, so that we may learn from you, because we don't have other chances to study with a rabbi." At one o'clock in the night! And this was not even an exceptional situation, it happens every day.

So hopefully—that is my vision—our young people from the former Soviet Union, from Eastern Europe will go and study for the rabbinate and, which is even more important, will return to be rabbis here. Hopefully every city with a sizeable Jewish population will in about fifteen years have a progressive congregation and a progressive rabbi. And I invite all of you to come to the former Soviet Union to see with you own eyes the Jewish miracle that is happening every day.

Statement at the Bet Debora panel discussion, "Courage for Plurality."

Rabbi Nelly Shulman, born in St. Petersburg, Russia, received her rabbinical ordination at the Leo Baeck College in London in 1999. For the past three years she has been working for the Belarussian Union for Progressive Judaism.

Lara Dämmig and Elisa Klapheck

Horizons

The Haggada says it is praiseworthy for a parent to tell their children about the flight from Egypt. The youngest child questions. The parents answer. Jewish experience is passed from generation to generation—Ledor Vador.

We are both, by choice until now, single and childless. Doesn't it seem a bit odd that we, of all people, would organise a conference on the topic of the "The Jewish Family?"

But we too, belong to the Jewish family, and even though we do not have kids, we are still a link between the generations! We too have a place at the Seder table. And we have questions and answers.

The celebration of Passover does more than unite the nuclear family. Friends, relatives and even the needy, have always been invited. At the ritual on the evening of the Seder, the community extends beyond the bounds of the biological tribe. Even the institution of the minyan demands the responsibility for the whole community.

Is being Jewish really as family oriented as myth would have it? The communities will only have a future when they begin to credit the realities of society today. Even in the past, they reacted to changes in the family by, for example, setting up kindergartens and homes for the elderly. In that sense, the development of the family is by no means a private affair.

To whom are our demands addressed? Who is the community?

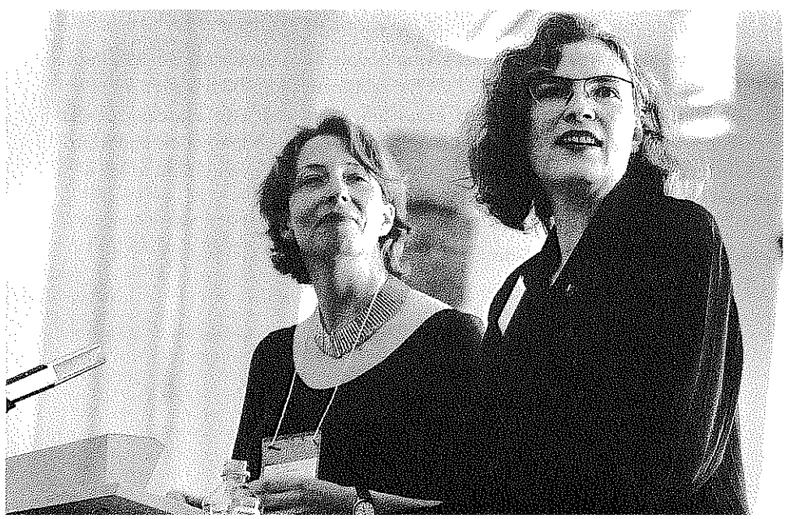
We are! That is what obliges us to introduce our initiatives. We should shed our perception that we exist in a niche for outsiders just as we have said farewell to experience of being painted into stereotyped images of Jewish women.

Let us not be intimidated by existing structures! And let us learn from the generations that have gone before us. The contributions of the generation of our mothers shows that they certainly had something to tell us and that they opened new horizons in the context of Jewish life at that time. We must also include issues to stimulate coming generations and allow them to develop their own standpoints.

That means, too, that we cannot remain daughters and sons forever. We must go beyond being "only" the second generation ... meaning that we are the descendants of those who experienced the Shoah. We must at some point become the "first generation after."

As this generation, we have the right to introduce something new. We have the right to question roles for women, family models, and power relationships. We can certainly learn a great deal from the experiences of American feminists. But different historical reference points in Europe force us to find our own way by ourselves and for ourselves.

Ledor Vador—al yisrael—ve'al rabbanot—ve'al talmidotehon—ve'al kol talmidot talmidotehon—all those who learn and teach, here and everywhere, give them the ability to hear people, allow diverse opinions, have confidence in themselves and to develop the courage to make their goals in to reality.



A call to our readers

Jewish Women's Groups
Rosh-Chodesh, Shiurim, Prayer and Study Groups, Egalitarian Minyanim

We are accepting contributions from Jewish women's groups and related activities for a Bet Debora handbook.

Who are you?
How often do you meet?
What is your aim?
What do you do?

Contact: rachelherweg@gmx.net

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על ישראל
ועל רבנות
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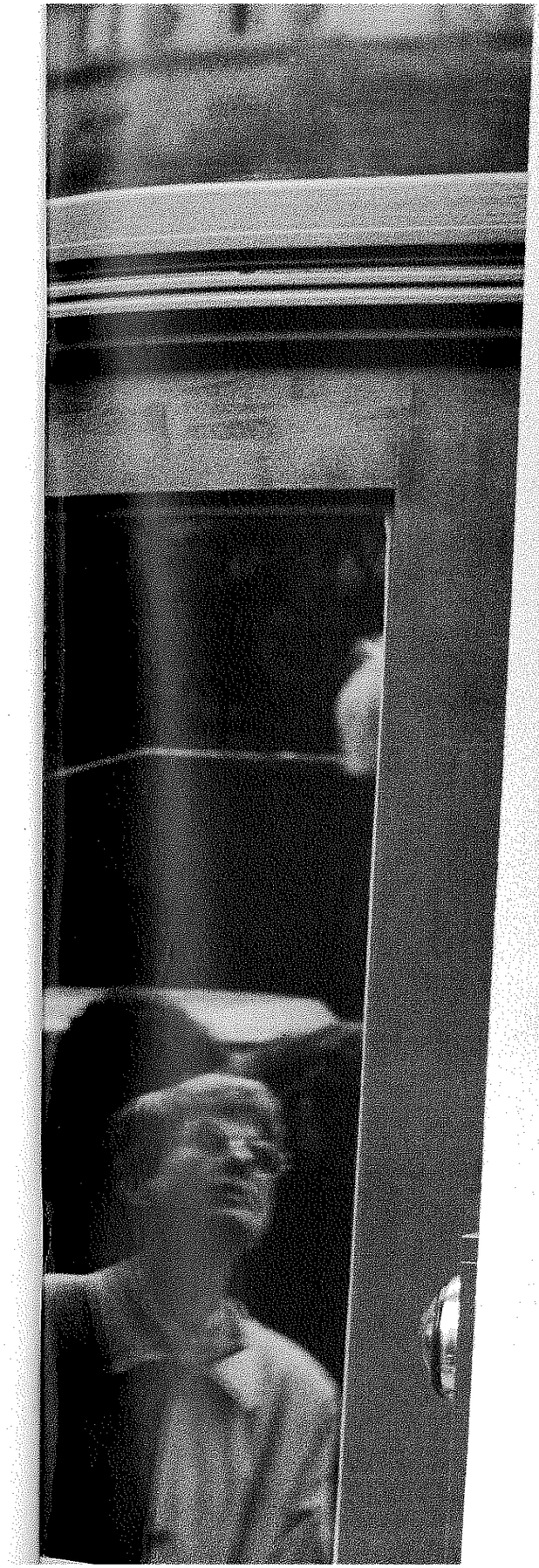
Lara Dämmig and Elisa Klapheck



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Front cover overleaf: Dedication at the start of the conference of a memorial to the first woman rabbi, Regina Jonas (Berlin 1902 – Auschwitz 1944), at her former residence. (Photograph by Silke Helmerdig)
Back cover overleaf: Text of the memorial. (Photograph by Burkhard Peter)
Back cover: sculpture by Marion Kahnemann, „Im Anfang..." (In the beginning...)

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Berlin, December 2001

בית דבורה

The traditional nuclear family continues to be seen as one of the foundations of Jewish tradition in which the role of women seems to be clearly defined. And yet Jewish women and men also live in single households, as single parents, in "mixed" partnerships or in lesbian and gay partnerships and they attribute very different importance to their Jewish identity. How does the diversity of lifestyles that exists enrich Jewish life? What new perspectives for Jewish tradition open up against this background? What issues does it bring up? What challenges and opportunities lie in this development?

In order to discuss these issues, 200 Jewish women and men from all over Europe participated in the second conference of Bet Debora—entitled "The Jewish Family: Myth and Reality"—which took place in Berlin from the 1st to 4th of June, 2001.