

The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute

Annual Assessment

2008

With a Special Section on **Women in Jewish Society**

...Women are emerging as an innovative force in Jewish life...from scholarship and study, to prayer, political communal and religious leadership and activism, cultural creativity to occupational status and careers.



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2008

Executive Report No. 5

With a Special Section on
Women in Jewish Society

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Foreword

The flagship project of the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute has been its annual assessment. While initially designed to provide a snapshot of Jewish communities around the world and to discuss whether they were thriving or declining or simply maintaining themselves, the annual assessment has naturally evolved. It provides yearly updates of general trends, it identifies developments from the preceding year, and each year it examines at least one new area of interest and concern.

This year's assessment — the fifth annual assessment — follows in the footsteps of its predecessors. Its overview of the preceding year in terms of geo-political, economic, social, and political developments internationally and in the Diaspora and in Israel is well done and insightful. Not surprisingly, it addresses the growth of Iranian leverage in the Middle East, the divisions among Palestinians, the prospective American drawdown in Iraq, the uncertainties among Arab regimes — and larger questions related to growing Russian assertiveness, the increased global reach of China and India, and the perception of a relative decline in American power.

Perhaps, it should come as no surprise that the imagery of a world less dominated by American power should be a source of concern to world Jewry and to Israel — and those concerns are flagged for consideration in the assessment. Whether all readers will agree with these concerns as written, or judge at least some of them to be overstated, is not the measure that should be used for evaluating the annual assessment. Certainly, one of its purposes is to highlight issues that may become significant for the Jewish world and to trigger planning for how to deal with those emerging factors that could have far-reaching consequences.

In this connection, the international financial crisis is also discussed in a preliminary fashion. It is too soon to know how it will evolve or how long it will last or what its real impact internationally and among Jewish communities is likely to be. However, it is not too soon to consider some of its possible effects. And, in fact, the Assessment not only offers some early judgments but also proposes a number of mechanisms that might be established to better understand and cope with the crisis, including the organization of regular meetings of editors, journalists, and specialized bloggers to improve the quality of information about the economic crisis and its impact on Jewish and other communities internationally.

Many of the proposals that are made in the Assessment are geared toward creating new means for communicating and fostering interaction. Some are related to the better use of cyber-space and the internet: for example, the creation of a web-based hotline to provide selected Jewish communities and political leaders with an accurate and timely set of indicators of relevant global and local economic conditions. Others are related to promoting greater exchanges with an eye toward affecting education in Israel and preserving the dynamism and attractiveness of Israeli scientific development: for example, pushing for Jewish and non-Jewish scientists and engineers to spend time in Israeli research institutions. Still others are geared toward using Jewish religious and communal institutions in new ways to promote gender equality: for example, using synagogues and Jewish community centers to focus greater attention and programs on the role of women in all the aspects of Jewish life — and with the purpose of also creating methods for evaluating the effectiveness of such programs.

It is the discussion of the evolving role of women in Jewish life and institutions in the United States, Europe, Latin America and Israel that may be the most interesting contribution of this year's assessment. While progress is uneven in these different settings and has even triggered a backlash among some in the Orthodox community, women are playing an increasingly powerful role in transforming Jewish life. This trend will only become more significant in time and — as the Assessment points out — will have implications for education and the work force, especially among the Orthodox. But it will also have implications for the leadership of Jewish organizations that have been the preserve of men. With so much innovation and creativity in Jewish life being driven increasingly by women, this is certain to be a positive development.

Ambassador Dennis Ross

Chairman of the Board and Professional Council
The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute

Preface

I have come to the conclusion that Moses, our Teacher, was correct — that we are the smallest among the nations and therefore we must be a Treasured People (*"am segula"*). We survive only through our high quality ... [T]he Jewish people has the qualities necessary to be a Treasured People but for that we need, more than for any other people, a unique, treasured government, for we are a small and widely misunderstood people, because we are and always have been different. We thus need a prized government. Without such a government, which will evoke trust and respect among world Jewry and the finest of the nations, we will not stand firm.

(David Ben-Gurion, 1971)

The past year has been one of significant transitions — in the realms of politics, religion, geography, organizational life, and more — affecting the Jewish people. The United States elected a new president, a Democrat following two terms of a Republican with whom the Israeli government had a very good relationship. Israel's government continued to be plagued by a series of moral and political scandals, the most extensive of which involved the Prime Minister

and which forced him to resign, a move that precipitated new national elections, which are slated for February 2009. Both of these transitions may have impact on a number of serious geo-political issues affecting the Jewish people, including the nature of American-Israel relations; the threats of Iran, specifically, and the spread of weapons of mass destruction, in general; relations with Russia and its role in world affairs, especially the Middle East; and others. They also have impact on what measures will be undertaken to reintroduce stability into the global economy. Of course, we can now only examine preliminary changes in progress, and we will surely continue to evaluate the implications of those mega-trends on Israel and world Jewry.

On another level, this past year witnessed a series of noteworthy transitions within the religious, organizational, and geographical spheres which may require new communal approaches. Among those discussed in this year's Executive Summary are the changes in the French rabbinate; the massive scandal in kosher meat production in the U.S. and its consequence on attitudes toward the meaning of *kashrut*; the reorganization of the Jewish Agency; and the disappearance of a number of small Jewish communities.

This year, the Institute decided to take special focus on the important issue of women and Judaism and, thus, the entire third section is devoted to that subject. The section opens with an in-depth look at Jewish women over the centuries, with special attention to the education of Jewish women. This is followed by analyses of women in Jewish life today, in Europe, Israel, the United States, and in Latin America. The section

concludes with an analysis of new initiates of Jewish women, secular as well as Orthodox, in Israel and in the Diaspora, and what they portend both for Jewish women and for the Jewish people.

Chaim I. Waxman and Ruth Yaron

Senior Fellows

Jewish People Policy Planning Institute

PART I

Policy Directions for World Jewry Today

Strategic Agenda and Policy Directions

STRATEGIC AGENDA AND POLICY DIRECTIONS

This year's annual assessment focuses on five critical issues facing Israel and the Jewish people. The Jewish world shows continued signs of stress — geopolitical, economic, and social — and yet there are signs of progress in key areas that reinforce the foundations for constructive policies and programs. In the discussion below we offer synopses of policy issues and recommendations drawn from this assessment and building on prior work. The main points are then summarized in a table that maps the five issues to policy options, for the global arena, Israel, and world Jewry. An area of special interest in the year's assessment is **women**: we have included an analysis of trends and policy issues concerning economic, cultural, and religious aspects of the role of women in Israel and the Jewish world.

Security and the Geopolitical Environment

The persistent threat posed by Iran's nuclear ambitions, terrorist action and growing instability in the Indian subcontinent, uncertainty

about the status and potential resolution of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, a resurgence of Russian appetite for military and political hegemony, and continued stalemate in the Israel-Palestine conflict are the geopolitical realities that most influence the security of the Jewish people. The complex challenges facing the U.S., Europe, and Israel are characterized by significant uncertainty: about shifting international power relations, the rhetoric and reality of Arab attitudes toward options for resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict, the origins and effects of Islamic extremism, the threat of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction in the hands of failed or rogue states and networked terror organizations, and the origins and management of the global economic crisis.

As the geopolitical environment grows more complex, policy options become at once more urgent and intractable. We recommend that Jewish leadership (in Israel and worldwide) *develop policies and programs to focus attention on the importance of strategic alliances and the strengthening of the image of the Jewish people, which we view as necessary (but insufficient) conditions for security*

The world economic order faces the gravest risk since the Great Depression of the 1930s

and survival. Embedded in this recommendation are several action steps that should be taken by Jewish leaders working closely with their colleagues around the world:

- Maintain and expand effective reminders to the world of the international threat posed by nuclear weapons capacity in Iran (and other demonic societies);
- Establish an on-going round-table to foster action-oriented expert dialogue on strategic geopolitical challenges;
- Develop healthier and more mutually-reinforcing relations between Israel's political leaders and Jewish leadership worldwide, including exchanges of expertise relevant to electoral reform and the reduction of corruption and political stasis; and
- Reinforce, innovate and implement effective media and information campaigns highlighting how the geopolitical and security problems facing Israel and world Jewry should concern all peoples that cherish freedom and democratic governance.

Economy and Society

It would be difficult to overestimate the severity of the world financial crisis that is evolving as we prepare this assessment. Collapse of U.S.-based institutions like Lehman Brothers and Merrill Lynch, rising unemployment in the U.S. and elsewhere, decades of growing income inequality in the U.S. and Israel, and the pounding of housing and credit markets have combined to put the world economic order — including the Jewish world — at the gravest risk it has experienced since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

At the same time, there is growing awareness of the need for major public investments — worldwide — in a number of areas, including infrastructure, health, and education. Perhaps the highest priority problem is global climate change, now almost universally understood to be real and extremely serious, for which needed technological and behavioral remedies will require steady international cooperation and substantial public investment. As important as these needed expenditures are, they will be constrained by the current economic environment, which experts do not believe will ease for at least two to three years.

The connections between emerging economic and technological realities and potentially explosive geopolitical outcomes are nontrivial. For example, to the extent that the financial crisis has had a short term positive effect on oil prices, a number of related questions arise: Will consumers go back to driving big and fuel-inefficient cars, thereby exacerbating problems of climate and global warming? How much impact will changes in Western energy and environmental policies have without significant efforts by the emerging economies of China, India, Brazil, and Mexico? Will falling oil revenues compromise political stability in Iran (and other oil-producing dictatorships)? What are the implications of growing economic inequality between the poor and developed world, aggravated by the uneven burdens of continued global warming?

In the face of these complexities and uncertainties, our basic policy recommendation to Jewish leadership worldwide is to *focus resources on improved quality and flow of information to individuals, governments, and the business sector in the hope of promoting more evidence-influenced and informed*

decision making at all levels. Specific action steps could include:

- Develop a new mechanism to facilitate regularly scheduled briefing sessions for Jewish leaders worldwide to interact with economic experts and evaluate tradeoffs between global Jewish responsibilities and local needs.
- Organize regular meetings with editors, journalists, and prominent bloggers, aimed at improving the quality of information about the economic crisis and its impacts on Jewish communities worldwide; and
- Design, pilot, and implement a new web-based “hotline” to provide Jewish communities and selected political leaders with accurate and timely indicators relevant to global and local economic conditions;

Education and Culture

Israel’s reputation as a leader in human capital development remains very justifiably strong: the enormous capacity and productive output in key sectors of the high tech economy, the high percentage of Israelis with advanced degrees in science and engineering, the internationally renowned quality of medical and biological research, the growth of an internationally respected cinema, continued excellence in literature and the arts, and of course the recent Nobel Prizes won by Israelis in science and economics are among the indicators of the handsome returns that have accrued from historical investments in Israel’s human capital infrastructure.

Against this backdrop, however, a number of threats are worthy of focused policy attention. The quality of Jewish education — in

Israel and abroad — is of growing concern to those who worry that ignorance about basic history, culture, and tradition has a corrosive effect on Jewish identity and, ultimately, threatens the survival of the Jewish People. Conflicts between religious and secular Jews, with respect to education as well as other societal functions, continue to pose daunting challenges primarily but not exclusively in Israel. A serious problem is the image of Israel and Zionism on college and university campuses, mostly in Europe but also notably in elite institutions of the U.S., many of which have become hotbeds of a virulent new strain of antisemitism that poisons the academic atmosphere, infects teaching and learning, threatens the legitimacy of the Jewish state, and discourages capable individuals who are committed to their Jewish identity from pursuing academic careers.

Our basic policy recommendation in response to these trends in education and culture is for Jewish leadership worldwide to *devote resources toward educational research, evaluation, international exchange, and institutional innovation.* Specific action steps could include:

- Continued analysis of trends in educational attainment and the capacity of their education systems;
- Re-evaluation of current funding levels for Jewish education and the potential value of increased funding for innovative programs to improve Jewish education in Israel and the Diaspora;
- Development of partnerships with mainstream colleges and universities aimed at correcting misimpressions and falsehoods about Judaism and Zionism;

- Design of incentive systems to curb the outflow of human capital from Israel; and
- Encouragement (through economic and other incentives) of Jewish (and non-Jewish) scientists, engineers, and other scholars to spend significant time in Israeli institutions of research and higher learning.

Demography

Jewish demographic trends worldwide suggest a mixed picture. The good news is that Israel's Jewish population has again grown this year (by about 1.5 percent), making it the largest single Jewish community in the world (roughly 5.5 million of a world total of 13.2 million). This growth is due largely to the record-breaking number of Jewish births in the country, about 110,000 in 2007. The less good news is that the growth rate of the Jewish population worldwide was a meager .5 percent, and *aliyah* to Israel remains sluggish at best. Moreover, the data suggest that net population gains of Jews in Israel and a handful of other countries is offset by significant losses in Europe, Latin America, and Africa. It is important to note that migration to Israel from the former Soviet Union includes a significant number who are not officially recorded as Jewish; converts from this group along with members of the Falashmura from Ethiopia represent about half of all the conversions to Judaism performed by Israeli rabbinical courts, which reached a new high of 7,500+ in 2007. Surveys of the Jewish population in the U.S. point to a reduction in numbers since the 1990s, correlated with delayed (and less frequent) marriage, the inverse relationship between fertility and family socioeconomic

status, continuing rise in intermarriage, aging, and reduced international immigration.

These trends call for renewed focus on policies aimed at *strengthening ties between Israel and Diaspora Jewry, monitoring the quality of Jewish life in Israel and elsewhere, conducting research on the effects of socioeconomic and political conditions in Israel on aliyah and other manifestations of Jewish identity, and designing policies and programs to arrest the alarming rate of income inequality and its effects on the quality of [Jewish life]*. Specific action steps could include:

- Development of improved strategies for mutually respectful and high-level coordination and collaboration on key issues between Israeli and Diaspora Jewish leaders;
- Investments in new research on the political economy of Jewry both in Israel and the Diaspora;
- Design and implementation of expanded and improved child-oriented policies (primarily in Israel), via investments in existing nursery and kindergarten facilities and increases in funding for post-K education; and
- Review of the socioeconomic conditions of women, in Israel and the Diaspora, with emphasis on policies to alleviate tensions between labor force participation and family life.

Women

Modern Jewish life in Israel and the world is characterized by extraordinary improvements in the status of women and in their opportunities for continued integration in all aspects of economy and society. Today's typical Jewish woman lives

in ways that would have been unimaginable even a half century ago, not to mention in biblical and rabbinic eras, as shown by even a cursory glance at trends in education, work, marriage, and community. For example, between 1957 and 2001 Jewish women's participation in higher education in the U.S. jumped from about 23 percent to 89 percent, essentially closing the gap with Jewish men; and the percentage of Jewish women earning a college degree rose from ten to nearly 70 percent. Similar (albeit not quite as dramatic) trends are seen in France and Israel. In the workforce, Jewish women have also made significant progress: between 1957 and 2001 the share of Jewish women employed in upper level occupations in the U.S. more than doubled; the upward trends in France and Israel were more modest, but overall the male-female gap in labor market participation has been narrowing.

But the job is not done, and there are other indications of stressors that warrant continued attention. For example, marriage and family formation patterns are indicative of continued modernization of the lives of Jewish women, but with this modernization come some important new realities: more women are postponing marriage, the percentage not getting married at all has increased, and trends in outmarriage continue to pose significant challenges. Religious pressures are frequently not just annoying but fundamentally stifling of the best talents and capacities of women.

Thus, successes of the 20th century notwithstanding, it would be wrong now to become complacent: Gender equity remains a key issue — and therefore warrants remaining high on the priority list of policy concerns — for Jewish communities everywhere. Based

on our analysis, which is elaborated in greater detail in this assessment, we are led to policy recommendations that reflect the need for action coupled with the need for continued research: *Moral, cultural, religious, economic, technological, and political imperatives are the foundation for policies designed to promote vigorous enforcement of principles of fairness and equity, for programs designed to achieve complete integration of women in Jewish life, and for methods appropriate to the continuous evaluation of progress in accomplishing these goals.* Specific action steps to be adopted by Jewish leaders (in government, business, and the academy), worldwide, could include:

- Investments in data collection and rigorous research on women, and integration of scholarship on women in programs of Jewish studies generally;
- Development of new strategies for rigorous scholarship on issues dealing with problematic texts of the Rabbinic period, especially those that viewed through a modern lens are insulting or humiliating;
- Exploration of potentially innovative strategies to accelerate the pace at which Jewish women are integrated into education, the labor force, and prominent positions in government and industry;
- Development of new partnerships with synagogues and community centers, to facilitate innovative and sustained attention to problems (and solutions) concerning the role of women in modern Jewish life; and
- Development of venues for dialogue between religious and secular Jews on issues that provoke especially heated passions.

Key Issues and Policy Directions

KEY ISSUES			POLICY DIRECTIONS
	Israel	The World & World Jewry	
1. Security and geopolitics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iranian threat • Stalled peace process • Deterrent power of Tsahal • Internal political uncertainty • Stability of U.S. alliance • Corruption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iranian threat • Iraq, Afghanistan wars • Resurgence of Russia • End of unipolarism and emergence of new superpowers • Resurgence of antisemitism • Islamic extremism • Image of U.S. 	Reinforce strategic alliances and the image of Jews and Israel worldwide, develop healthier and more mutually-reinforcing relations between political elites in Israel and the diaspora, reinforce (or reinvent) media campaigns highlighting how the key geopolitical and security problems facing Israel and world Jewry concern to all peoples.
2. Economy and society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial crisis • Income inequality • High tech sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial crisis • Globalization • Climate change and equity 	Focus resources on improved quality and flow of information to individuals, governments, and business decision makers.
3. Education and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious and secular schools • Higher education and “brain drain” • Teacher quality and credentials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trends in attainment and achievement • Shortages of Jewish educators • Jewish identity and Zionism • Image of Israel on campus 	Devote resources toward educational research, evaluation, international exchange, and institutional innovation.
4. Demographic trends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jewish population net increase • Continued trends in family formation • <i>Aliyah</i> weak 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jewish population net decline • European losses • Aging and equity • Technology and labor markets in the Arab world and Haredi communities 	Develop strategies for improved collaboration between Israeli and Diaspora Jewish leaders, investment in new research on the political economy of Jewry, expansion of child-oriented policies, and alleviation of tensions between labor force participation and family life.
5. Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender inequality • Religious pressures • Rabbinic traditions and modernity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Status of Jewish women’s studies • Rabbinic traditions and modernity 	Formulate policies based on core principles of fairness and equity, design programs to achieve complete integration of women in Jewish life, and apply methods appropriate to the continuous evaluation of progress in accomplishing these goals.

Selected Indicators on World Jewry – 2008

Country	Jewish Population (Core Definition)			Index of Human Development		GDP per capita (PPP U.S. \$)	Jewish Day-school Attendance Rate (%)	Recent Out-marriage Rate (%)	Ever Visited Israel (% of Jew. Pop.)	Aliyah	Tourists to Israel
				Value	World Rank						
	1970 ^a	2008 ^b	Projected 2020 ^c	2005 ^d	2005 ^d	2006 ^d	Most recent ^a	Most recent ^a	Most recent ^a	2007 ^e	2007 ^e
World	12,633,000	13,232,000	13,827,000 ⁱ	.968–.336	1–177	60,228–667				18,129 ^f	2,267,900 ^f
Israel	2,582,000	5,478,000	6,453,000 ⁱ	.927	23	25,864	97	5	100	–	–
North America	5,686,000	5,650,000	5,581,000	.961–.951	4–12	41,890–33,375				2,278	600,900
United States	5,400,000	5,275,000	5,200,000 ^g	.951	12	41,890	25 ^h	54	>35	2,094	541,600
Canada	286,000	375,000	381,000	.961	4	33,375	55	35	>65	189	59,300
Latin America	514,000	392,000	364,000	.892–.529	31–146	17,297–1,663				1,522	82,400
Argentina	282,000	183,000	162,000 ⁱ	.869	38	14,280	50–55	45	>50	319	15,200
Brazil	90,000	96,000	90,000 ⁱ	.800	70	8,402	71	45	>50	261	20,400
Mexico	35,000	40,000	42,000	.829	52	10,751	85	10	>70	52	18,400
Other countries	107,000	73,000	70,000 ⁱ	.892–.529	31–146	17,297–1,663	75	15–95	>50	890	28,400
Europe non-FSU	1,331,000	1,153,000	1,070,000	.968–.775	1–84	60,228–5,316				3,637	1,034,700
France	530,000	488,000	482,000	.952	10	30,386	40	40–45	>70	2,335	246,000
United Kingdom	390,000	294,000	278,000 ⁱ	.946	16	33,238	60	40–45	>75	562	171,900
Germany	30,000	120,000	108,000	.935	22	29,481	<20	>60	>50	96	101,100
Hungary	70,000	49,000	34,000	.874	36	17,887	<15	60	..	49	10,600
Other EU ^l	171,000	150,000	134,000	.959–.863	4–42	60,228–15,871	10–25	33–75	>50	315	422,000
Other non-EU ^k	140,000	52,000	34,000	.968–.775	1–84	41,420–5,316	5–20	50–80	..	280	83,100
FSU ^l	2,151,000	348,000	173,000	.862–.673	43–122	15,478–1,356				6,502	322,600
Russia	808,000	215,000	130,000 ⁱ	.802	67	10,845	<15	80	..	3,249	193,400
Ukraine	777,000	76,000	25,000 ⁱ	.788	76	6,848	<15	80	..	1,450	75,100
Rest FSU Europe ^l	312,000	37,000	15,000 ⁱ	.862–.708	43–111	15,478–2,100	<15	65–75	..	618	33,100
FSU Asia	254,000	20,000	3,000	.794–.673	73–122	7,857–1,356	<15	50–75	..	1,185	21,000
Asia (rest) ^m	104,000	19,000	21,000	.953–.508	8–153	31,267–930				282	130,100
Africa	195,000	77,000	60,000	.843–.336	50–177	16,106–667				3,795	72,500
South Africa	118,000	71,000	57,000	.674	121	11,110	85	20	>75	137	19,300
Oceania	70,000	115,000	105,000 ⁱ	.962–.762	3–92	31,794–2,563				89	24,700
Australia	65,000	107,000	97,000 ⁱ	.962	3	31,794	65	22	>65	80	21,600

a Source: Division of Jewish Demography and Statistics, The A. Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

b Source: DellaPergola, *American Jewish Year Book* (2008). Provisional data.

c Source: adapted from DellaPergola, Rebhun, Tolts (2000), medium variant.

d A measure of a country's development based on health, educational attainment, and real income. Source: United Nations Development Programme (2007).

e Source: Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (2008).

f Including country not specified.

g After downward reduction following NJPS 2001.

h Based on adjusted response from NJPS 2001.

i Revised population projections for 2020.

j Without Baltic states, Romania, Bulgaria.

k Including Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria.

l With Baltic states.

m Without Israel, FSU and Turkey.

GLOBAL PATTERNS

At the beginning of 2008 the world Jewish population reached 13,232,000 — an estimated 71,000 more than the previous year — reflecting growth of 85,000 in Israel and decline of 14,000 elsewhere. The overall growth rate of 0.5% resulted from a 1.6% increase in Israel and a -0.2% decrease in the Diaspora. These trends continued the well-established patterns of past years. Minor population increases in Canada and Australia were off-set by more significant losses in Eastern Europe, Western Europe as a whole, Latin America, and Africa. In Western Europe, Germany's Jewish community stopped increasing, while France and the United Kingdom

The causes for the decrease in U.S. Jewish population include later and less frequent marriages, low fertility and a continuous increase in outmarriage rates

continued declining. The estimates reported here refer to the concept of *core* Jewish population, mostly inclusive of self-reported Jews who do not hold another monotheistic religion, and people without religion with Jewish parents. In other countries such as the FSU, Jewish population estimates reflect declared ethnic affiliations.

These population changes primarily reflect the different internal demographic balances of Jewish communities in different countries, but also the exposure of individual Jews to the political and socioeconomic constraints and opportunities within national societies and in the

framework of an open global system. Levels and changes in the Index of Human Development (HDI) provide an apt background to these demographic trends. Based on the latest avail-

able data (2005) Israel kept its 23rd place out of 177 in the global ranking of countries by HDI, but it recorded a faster improvement than the aggregate of OECD countries where the major Jewish populations are concentrated. Israel was 10th best in terms of health, 26th in income per capita measured by real purchasing power in U.S.\$, 28th in educational enrollment, but only 46th in gender equality, and 63rd in income distribution equality. In 2007 Israel was rated 30th in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) — an improvement of 4 places over the 2006 ranking.

In Israel a comparatively young age composition and a persisting preference for nuclear families with children stand behind an annual natural population increase of 73,000. The highest number of Jewish births ever recorded in the country (108,000 in 2007) strengthened the argument that Israel has become the largest Jewish community worldwide with 5,478,000 Jews plus another 315,000 non-Jewish members of Jewish households.

In the United States, our estimate of 5,275,000 represents the middle range between two large national surveys conducted in 2001. The National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) and the American Jewish Identity Survey (AJIS) provided national estimates of 5,200,000 and 5,350,000 Jews, respectively. These surveys pointed to effective Jewish population reduction versus the early 1990s and coherently indicated the causes for such a negative trend: later and less frequent marriages, low fertility, a continuing increase in outmarriage rates, population ageing, and the weakening of international migration.

In 2007, as in previous years, international migration between Israel and the rest of world

Jewry played a minor role in global Jewish population redistribution and resulted in a net balance of 6,700 in favor of Israel. A total of 18,129 new immigrants went to Israel — a decrease of 6% versus 2006. Of these, 6,500 arrived from the FSU (-13%), over 4,000 from Africa and Asia (-5%), 1,500 from Latin America (+12%), 2,300 from North America (-4%), and 3,600 from Europe (-1%). Among the latter countries, migration to Israel diminished by 6% from France, and by 5% from the United Kingdom. In 2006, 22,400 Israeli residents left the country for more than one year, and 9,600 returned to Israel after staying more than one year abroad — a negative balance of 15,500. Migration to Israel includes a growing share of non-Jews in the framework of the Law of Return. Most of these immigrants who are recorded as non-Jewish come from the FSU. In addition, the whole immigration from Ethiopia consists today of members of the Falashmura group who undergo conversion to Judaism before immigration. These converts represent about one half of total conversions to Judaism performed by Rabbinical courts in Israel, which for the first time grew above 7,500 in 2007.

Tourism to Israel, which was comprised of 2,268,000 individuals in 2007, increased by 24% versus 2006. Increases were quite significant

from the FSU (+146%), but came all across the board and from Africa (+20%), Latin America (+19%), Europe (+18%), Oceania (+18%), Asia (+13%), and North America (+10%). While the majority of tourists to Israel are non-Jewish, their yearly numbers tend to respond to economic circumstances in the countries of origin and to the security situation in Israel. The global economic crisis may well be expected to result in lower numbers in the next year or two.

The overall extent of visits to Israel by Jews from different countries shows great variations with the lower frequencies in the United States and plausibly the FSU republics.

The available estimates on Jewish day school attendance also show significant variation with higher rates of attendance among major Jewish communities in the Southern hemisphere and in English speaking countries out of the U.S. Although the data are far from exhaustive, they indicate a clearly negative correlation between the extent and reach of full-time Jewish education and the frequency of outmarriage.

The global economic crisis is expected to reduce tourism to Israel in the next year or two

PART II

Significant Recent and Current Challenges

Developments in the Geopolitical Arena and their Potential Consequences for Israel and the Jewish People

Developments in the geopolitical arena over the last year impose a heavy burden of challenges and tough dilemmas for Israel and the Jewish people. Alongside continuing familiar strategic challenges, we are witness to trends that threaten to erode the international dominance and power of the U.S., trends which have intensified within the context of the serious economic crisis the U.S. is experiencing. The unprecedented thriving of the Jewish people during the past several decades has been tied to the U.S. as both home to almost half of the Jewish people and a strategic partner of support for Israel. Therefore, the threat to the stature of the U.S. along with the values it represents is a potential crack in the strength of the Jewish people.

The International Setting

- The severe economic crisis currently plaguing the U.S. and undermining the global economy is causing serious damage to the wealth and international standing of the U.S., Israel's ally and home to nearly half of world Jewry. The effects of the economic crisis intensify the impact of deep trends that have been in operation in the global arena for several years and are marked by growing focus on

the East: the flourishing of China and India and the increasing geopolitical assertiveness of Russia (recently demonstrated in the Georgian crisis). The damage to the U.S.'s power and the ideals it represents — liberty, human rights, free markets, democracy — is spurred by the failure to curb Iran's nuclearization efforts, the Iraq imbroglio, the war in Afghanistan, and the intractable challenge of Islamic terror in Pakistan. This decline in U.S.'s 'soft' and 'hard' power is eroding the universal image of the 'free world' ethos, and adding to the appeal of authoritarian regimes in countries that have impressed the world with their high growth rates over the last decade. The year ahead will reveal the extent of the damage these processes are causing the Jewish people. Along with Israel, the U.S., the 'West', and the values of the free world are the physical and spiritual home to the Jewish people, where it has flourished and made unprecedented achievements. In this context, the questions facing the Jewish people in the new year are extremely significant:

- ◆ Will the U.S. and the free world recover from the economic crisis any time soon?

- ◆ How badly will the global crisis affect Israel's economy?
- ◆ Is a new world order emerging, less accommodating to Israel and the Jewish people?
- ◆ Will the international community's capacity and determination to curtail Iran's nuclear progress diminish?
- ◆ Will the U.S.'s weakness and the crisis in the West increase Middle East instability and embolden Iran, radical Islam and other actors who deny Israel's very right to exist?
- ◆ Will the erosion of the 'wealth of the Jewish people' affect its ability to sustain community life and education systems?
- ◆ Is the political power of U.S. Jewry in any danger?
- ◆ Will the crisis heighten antisemitic trends?
- The economic crisis, together with the Russian invasion of Georgia (August 2008) has facilitated and enhanced changes in the international balance of power and has led to a multi-polar 'world order' that is no longer characterized by the dominance of a single superpower. The 'unipolar moment', created in the wake of the collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War, is gone. The U.S. has invested huge resources in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The American economy is in grave crisis, its international prestige has dwindled (although the recent election of Obama may help in reversing this trend), while at the same time China, India, Russia and Brazil are quickly emerging as major players in the international arena. The 'new world order' could soon turn out to be 'world

disorder'. The U.S.'s diminished capacities and 'appetite for running the world' do not automatically educe an alternative world order. Hence a transition period may follow, until a functioning multi-polar system is established. This transition period may be marked by instability and lack of 'management' on a global scale.

The Georgian Crisis and the New Russian Assertiveness

- Under the leadership of Putin, and relying on its soaring gas and oil export revenues (which at this stage have decreased dramatically), Russia has shown growing political aggression in recent years. This process reached a crescendo with its invasion of Georgia. Faithful to his declared view that the dismantling of the USSR was "the greatest catastrophe of the century," Putin is striving to reinstate Russia as a superpower and erect a barrier against the U.S. and Europe, who are perceived as constantly encroaching into what Russia regards as Moscow's natural sphere of hegemony. Russia seeks to dominate Europe's oil and gas supply by controlling energy sources, pipeline routes and distribution channels. The Caspian Sea region has rich oil reserves and Moscow wishes to keep the U.S. and European presence there at bay. The penetration of the European Union and NATO into what Moscow considers the Russian sphere of hegemony is interpreted as a threat. Indeed, the invasion of Georgia sent a double message, aimed to deter the West and block Georgia and Ukraine from joining NATO, while also deterring neighboring governments from 'surrendering' to

the West. Moscow is especially irritated by the U.S. plan to deploy missile-defense systems in Poland and the Czech Republic.

- On the face of it, Moscow seems to have come out the winner in Georgia, but that does not resolve Russia's basic weaknesses: an economy that is dependent on gas and oil exports (and therefore on the existence of an interested market), lack of investment in infrastructure and human resources, and a population diminishing at an annual rate of 700,000 people. Moreover, the Georgian crisis has intensified the West's motivation to divest, diversify oil and gas sourcing, and enhance the use and development of alternative energy sources. Regrets and second-thoughts are being expressed in both the U.S. and Europe on a range of themes: from mismanagement of the relationship with Moscow since the collapse of the USSR, through blaming Georgian president Saakashvili for instigating the crisis, to explaining Moscow's conduct as a response to the West's humiliating attitude following its defeat in the Cold War. Yet this reassessment is not sufficient to confront the difficult dilemmas faced by the West and the need to formulate a strategy to counter the new Russian assertiveness. At this stage, the U.S. is showing restraint and is trying to deter Moscow from taking further violent steps, while avoiding any moves which may escalate and intensify tensions. It is still unclear whether the challenge posed in Georgia will lead to greater cooperation between the U.S. and Europe, and whether Europe will pull through and act as a united force willing to protect its interests. The Georgian crisis could generate

multiple scenarios: Is a new pattern of 'cold war' emerging as the organizing principle of the international order? Alternatively, Russia may choose to show restraint and allow for a process of gradual denouement and stabilization.

Israel and the Jewish People in an Increasingly Multipolar World: A New Strategic Dilemma

- For Israel and the Jewish people, the crisis in Georgia exposed an emerging international reality that is less favorable than that of the 'unipolar era'. The shift to a multi-polar system, along with the depreciation of the U.S.'s relative power, and Washington's need to operate in multilateral frameworks, may prove problematic for Israel. The emerging superpowers (China, India) need the energy sources in the Middle East and may be expected — along with Russia — to become less sensitive to Israel's interests. Such developments could adversely affect Middle East stability, Israel's position, the intensity of the struggle against radical Islam and international terrorism, and the efforts to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons (which would have helped in curbing broader nuclearization processes in the region).
- The U.S.'s demonstrated weakness reveals an Israeli strategic dilemma: The U.S. is indeed losing some elements of its power, but Israel still has no reliable alternative allies. The Georgian crisis exposed Europe's feebleness

The U.S. is losing some elements of its power, but Israel still has no reliable alternative allies

and showed that it cannot serve as a strategic crutch for Israel. The image of American weakness may rub off on the way radical Islam regards Israel's power, which it identifies with Washington's might. The 'Georgian precedent' could also be interpreted as the U.S. deserting its allies, which could lead Israel's enemies to assume that Washington would not come to Israel's aid in a time of need.

- The deterioration of U.S.-Russia relations may project on the relationship between Israel and Moscow (and possibly on its attitude toward Russian Jewry). Although Russia seems currently focused on its borders and the threats it perceives from China, Europe and the Muslim zone to its south, it is possible that Moscow could increase its involvement in the Israel-Arab conflict by strengthening its relationship with regional factors hostile to Israel.
- The Russian invasion of Georgia exposed a classic, fundamental dilemma for Israel and the Jewish people: in a time of international crisis, should it side with the 'right side', 'the strong side', 'the side where the largest Jewish minority resides', or 'the side that Washington supports'? Israel's reaction showed caution and avoidance of clearly supporting any of the sides.¹ It highlighted Israel's interest in maintaining a positive dialog with Russia in light of its power and the fact that Russia is home to a sizeable Jewish population. It also suggested that Israel was careful to withhold

¹ Prime Minister Olmert visited Moscow in mid-October, shortly after Russia's invasion of Georgia.

recognition or support of any ethnic minority demanding 'self-determination', fearing that this could backfire in the Israeli-Arab context. The few voices arguing that Israel should have expressed a resolute view of the Georgia crisis, based on universal concepts of morals and justice and the ethical lessons of Jewish historical experience, attracted little attention.

Iran

- In the past year, Iran's endeavor to obtain nuclear power has not been curbed. Economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure did not achieve their goal. The U.S. and the West failed to mount a united front against the Iranian nuclear challenge. Russia and China are in no hurry to join this effort, and the tension in the relationship between Washington and Moscow following the invasion of Georgia could further erode Russian willingness to help restrain Iran. The capacity to exercise an integrated array of diplomatic moves and economic measures against Iran already took a beating in late 2007, with the publication of a joint assessment issued by the 16 intelligence bodies of the U.S. (NIE, December, 2007) which asserted that Iran has shelved its military nuclearization plan. Despite the fierce criticism the report has provoked and the fact that president Bush responded to it by saying that Iran remained as dangerous as always, the publication further fractured the ability to consolidate a hard-line and unified coalition against Iran. Notwithstanding the American report, other international estimates are of the opinion that Iran is 1-10

years away from achieving success in its persistent efforts to obtain military nuclear capabilities. Despite Iran's weaknesses — a fragmented elite, economic problems, an outdated and vulnerable army, unemployment, ethnic division, and embittered youth — the probability of a regime change in Tehran, before it obtains nuclear weapons, is decreasing. Iran's supreme spiritual leader, Ayatollah Hamenai, has declared that president Ahmadinejad should prepare for another term in office (presidential elections in Iran are scheduled for June 2009).

- The view generally expressed by leaders of the Jewish people (in Israel and the Diaspora) regards a situation in which Iran gets hold of nuclear weapons as extremely grave. The nature of the threats faced by Israel in the Middle East would worsen considerably. A country led by extremist Muslim clerics, which for years has been aiding Israel's enemies and proclaiming that Israel must be annihilated, is achieving massive lethal destruction capabilities. Even without putting such weapons to actual use, the balance of power in the Middle East is expected to change radically. Iran's temptation to gain regional hegemony would grow; it could blackmail its neighbors and use the weaponry of terrorism more freely against Israeli and Jewish targets around the world. In addition to all of the above, a nuclear arms race in the area will pick up speed, intensifying the existential threat hanging over Israel (and perhaps also increasing the pressures on Israel to dismantle its own alleged nuclear capabilities).
- The past year has aggravated the Israeli

dilemma of how to act vis-à-vis Tehran, and there is a mounting sense that the international community would rather leave Israel to deal with the problem on its own.

- President-elect Obama has stressed his commitment to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons and has emphatically proclaimed his commitment to Israel's security. He has expressed an intention to personally be involved in diplomatic contact with Tehran aimed at reaching an agreement to halt its nuclearization plans.
- The potential success of such expected efforts remains questionable. President Bush himself signaled a change in the American position when he dispatched Undersecretary of State William Burns for multilateral talks with Iran in July of 2008. The advent of the new administration in the U.S. could be accompanied by an overall political reassessment, so it should be taken into account that the Iran issue could come to be viewed as the key to the stabilization of the Middle East, and that a strategy seeking a comprehensive 'regional deal' may be devised, which would include a relatively aggressive effort to resolve the Israeli-Arab conflict, and perhaps even to bring about the nuclear disarmament of the Middle East.

In the past year the U.S. and the West failed to mount a united front against the Iranian nuclear challenge

The Middle East: Regional Trends

- The developments of the last year have raised hopes for the stabilization of Iraq. The surge of U.S. forces in Iraq and the U.S.

tactical shifts have brought about a significant decline in the scope of terror attacks and number of casualties there. The Iraqi political system seems to be managing and containing the Shiite-Sunni rift and shows encouraging signs of stabilization, although it is extremely difficult to estimate whether such processes will persist. The nature and the timetable of U.S. withdrawal from Iraq — as pledged by President-elect Obama — will affect the future of Iraq and the entire region. A potential decrease in U.S. willingness to remain involved in the area may diminish the impact of the external ‘strong hand’, which has so far provided the Middle East with a semblance of stability, albeit a fragile one. The international system is slow in adjusting to a new and effective world order, so an ‘American desertion’ could destabilize the region.

- The social, economic and religious reality that is fertile ground for the thriving of Islamic terrorism and extremism did not change for the better this year. The Middle East continues to be violent and deeply divided: radical Islam vs. a moderate camp that finds it hard to fight back, Sunni vs. Shiite, reformists vs. authoritarian conservatives, Gulf States steeped in petrodollars vs. the rest of Arab countries plagued by poverty. Concomitant with the encouraging signs in Iraq, American intelligence reports suggest that Al Qaeda is on the rise and remains a significant threat; the Taliban is boldly exerting and strengthening its power in Afghanistan; and Islamic terror elements continue to nest in nuclear and unstable Pakistan, where presidential candidate Benazir Bhutto was assassinated in December 2007.

- The global economic crisis is expected to adversely affect Middle East economies; together with the aforementioned clefs and rifts this could intensify the pressure on moderate regimes and further diminish their ability to contain rival ethnic groups within unitary political frameworks. Sentiments of frustration and deprivation could be directed against the authoritarian establishments in the region, and as they are weak, economically inefficient and non-representative — these regimes may totter and even collapse.²

The Peace Process

- The joint announcement read by President Bush at the conclusion of the Annapolis Summit (November 2007) marked a significant shift in the general outline for the Israeli-Palestinian process. Until Annapolis, that outline was defined in the Road Map as a sequential process: the condition for advancing from one phase to the next had been linked to the fulfillment of obligations by each party, as specified in the program’s three chapters. Based on this logic, the Road Map stipulated that the third chapter’s permanent status negotiations could begin only upon completion of the plan’s first two phases. Indeed, when Ariel Sharon was Prime Minister, he was careful to reiterate that there would be no progression from one step to

² Egypt is expected to face the test of a generational change of power in the near future: President Mubarak, having ruled for 30 consecutive years, turned 80 this year, and presidential elections are scheduled for 2011.

the next without a full and complete fulfillment of the obligations of the previous step. At Annapolis, Israel waived this condition. The sequential logic behind the Road Map was eliminated and both parties agreed to an agenda to be implemented in two parallel channels: implementation of requirements stipulated in Chapter A of the Road Map, on the one hand, and simultaneous negotiations for a permanent agreement, on the other.

- The abandonment of the sequential agenda attested to the failure to implement the original outline of the Road Map and to the *de facto* acceptance of the argument that without serious negotiation to finalize a permanent agreement, the Palestinian side lacks the motivation to fulfill its commitments, primarily to stop terrorism. Supporters of the parallel channels agenda explained that setting up a clear “political horizon” would strengthen the moderate Palestinian camp, lend credibility to the process and pave the way for a decision, acceptable to the majority of the Palestinian public, in favor of a historic compromise with Israel.
- The change in the structure of the process created a reality in which the discussion of sensitive core issues — borders, Jerusalem, refugees — is no longer postponed to an indefinite future date. The discussion is supposed to take place now. The recognition that Israel will soon face historical decisions gives rise to much commotion and mixed feelings in both Israel and the Diaspora. The very outbreak of a heated discussion of the “right” of Jews who are not Israeli citizens to have a say in such decisions suggests that the Annapolis process is perceived as potentially momen-

tous in its impact on the future of Israel and the Jewish people. As expected, the fate of Jerusalem is at the eye of the storm, due to its historical, religious, national and emotional weight.³

- The talks conducted so far suggest that the most significant gaps to be bridged (which at the moment of truth will likely require a series of tradeoffs for final resolution) focus on the following points:
 - ◆ What sort of arrangement will govern the Holy Basin in Jerusalem? Division of sovereignty, no sovereignty, a special internal regime, international presence, etc.
 - ◆ Will Israel be ready to absorb in its territory, for a number of years and as a ‘humanitarian gesture’, a limited quota of Palestinian refugees?
 - ◆ Will the territorial exchange be based on a 1:1 ratio, and what would be the upper limit of Judea and Samaria territory that Israel would be allowed to annex?
- Given the damage to U.S. stature and the lessons learned from its unilateral conduct in international issues, it is expected that the effort to resolve the Israeli-Arab conflict would reflect an increased inclination to proceed in multilateral frameworks, to relax the preconditions for contact with extremist regimes (such as Iran or Syria), and to see a greater linkage between the Israeli-Arab conflict and other key issues in the Middle

3 Such a situation in fact emerged in the failed attempt of the Kadima head to form a government. The Shas party demanded that Tzipi Livni commit not to conduct talks on the future of Jerusalem. She refused this condition saying it was tantamount to holding no negotiations at all.

East which concern the U.S.: Iraq, Iran, terror, Islamic extremism, etc.

- The six years that have passed since President Bush's speech (June 2002) and his call to solve the conflict based on the 'two-state formula' have not yielded an agreement. The next government in Israel will have to navigate its way in this matter among an array of difficult constraints. The increasing skepticism among the Palestinian public about the chances of achieving a solution combined with the strengthening of the Israeli hold on Judea and Samaria enhances the appeal in some quarters of an alternative Palestinian formula, 'the one state solution'. Supporters of this approach argue that they would garner sweeping international support if their struggle against Israel were framed by 'equal civil rights', instead of the right to 'self-determination'.
- Hamas, which has continued to fortify its rule in Gaza, managed to secure a ceasefire with Israel, brokered by Egypt (June 2008), without releasing the kidnapped soldier Gilad Shalit. Egypt's efforts to resolve the severe internal divisions between Fatah and Hamas are still ineffective. Hamas has even threatened that, as of January 2009, it will no longer recognize Abu-Mazen as president, because his term will have concluded by then. As time passes, the success of Hamas is no longer seen as a momentary episode in the life of Palestinian society, but as an authentic expression of strong and deep currents of Islamic radicalization in the region. Neighboring countries are taking notice of Hamas's power. Egypt has been an active broker between Fatah and Hamas, and Jordan has recently initiated

contact with Hamas leaders. The dilemma that this situation poses for Israel seems to contain an internal contradiction: on the one hand — a divided Palestinian partner lacking the legitimacy and power required to implement a historic compromise; on the other hand — a joining of Palestinian forces may turn the Palestinian side into a futile partner for dialogue, in light of Hamas's position, which negates the very recognition of Israel's existence.

- The Palestinian predicament prompts the examination of additional ideas, including an increased reliance on a comprehensive peace approach, based on the Arab Peace Initiative (Beirut, 2002). This initiative, which evolved from a Saudi plan, indicates Arab readiness for comprehensive peace with Israel, an end to the conflict, normalization and good neighborly relations. This language expresses a significant turnabout, especially if examined in comparison with the Khartoum Resolution (1967) — no peace, no recognition and no negotiations with Israel. During the past few months — and to a great extent as a result of the encouragement of Israel's President Shimon Peres — the Arab Peace Initiative has returned to the political discourse. The supporters argue that Israel has an interest in a comprehensive peace process because that would allow for increasing the returns that Israel would receive for the concessions it will make in the bilateral negotiation channels. Israel will be able to achieve peace, security arrangements and economic ties with the entire Arab world (and even with all Muslim countries, except Iran, that support the Arab initiative). According to this con-

ception, integrating the Arab world into the diplomatic process, through a track which is focused on regional cooperation progressing gradually, will give greater credibility to the process, will strengthen the moderate Palestinian camp and will help isolate and marginalize Hamas.

The opponents of this approach point to the profound price that the Arab initiative entails: a return to the 1967 borders, the division of Jerusalem, and a solution of the Palestinian refugees in accordance with UN Resolution 194 (according to the Israeli initiative's opponents, it implies recognition of the refugees right of return).

- Another approach calls for focusing on the Syrian channel, as Syria is perceived as a partner capable of keeping its commitments. In this view, an agreement with Damascus carries great strategic importance: it would remove Syria from the camp that poses a serious military threat to Israel, provide Damascus with an alternative to its axis with Tehran, and make possible Syrian action to soften Hamas and Hezbollah. This decrease in the flow of arms currently reaching these organizations — could help eventually facilitate a successful move vis-à-vis the Palestinians and may even help Lebanon join the peace process. Indeed, the Israeli government has renewed (in May 2008) talks with Syria with Turkish brokerage. This move has yet to ripen, though it did help Syria break the international diplomatic stalemate that had been imposed upon it.
- Israel's entry into negotiations on a permanent agreement puts on the agenda sensitive issues close to the heart of the Jewish people

in its entirety: securing the state of Israel's safe existence, the nature of the agreement on Jerusalem, the future status of holy and historical sites in Judea and Samaria, the evacuation and dismantling of settlements, the preservation of Israel's Jewish majority and its Jewish-democratic character. All these strain and threaten internal solidarity in Israel and in the Diaspora, and could perhaps even lead to bloodshed. It is no coincidence that the Annapolis process triggered an internal Jewish argument — not only regarding the promise or danger the process carries, but also regarding the question whether (and how) Diaspora Jewry should participate in historical decisions that could affect the future of Jerusalem, Israel and the entire Jewish world.

- If the talks indeed ripen over the coming year toward the possibility of achieving an Israeli-Palestinian agreement, it is likely that the U.S. may exert pressure on Israel to make some final concessions in order to enable the parties to sign. Tensions may develop in the Washington-Jerusalem relationship as a result. This could also happen should a new Israeli government rescind the Annapolis process.⁴

4 Binyamin Netanyahu, who is one of the leading candidates for election as Israel's next prime minister, announced that he will refuse to hold talks on the future of Jerusalem, a stance which is in direct opposition to the traditional American position, to the principles of Annapolis, and to the Road Map.

The success of Hamas is seen as an authentic expression of Islamic radicalization in the region

- Such a reality could put the American-Jewish community in an uneasy situation, all the more so in light of arguments such as those made by Walt and Mearsheimer, to the effect that U.S. policy in the Middle East is influenced by Israel and the Jewish Lobby in a manner that is at odds with America's own interests

Israel

- In the past year Israel has experienced major political shocks, primarily Prime Minister Olmert's announcement (July 2008) that he would resign from office because of pending criminal investigations against him. Tzipi Livni failed to establish a new coalition government and, as a result, the president announced early elections, now scheduled to take place on February 10, 2009. The composition of the future new government and the identity of its leader will of course determine its political-strategic direction. However, any government will have to cope with the geopolitical reality described above, under conditions of greater uncertainty about the reliability of Israel's deterrence.
- The final report of the Winograd Commission (January 2008) revealed grave deficiencies in the functioning of the government, the IDF, the military-cabinet interface, preparation of the home front, and strategic thinking overall. The work of fixing these faults is far from over and the alleged achievements attributed to the war are being questioned: Hezbollah has not disarmed, has demonstrated its might in a number of tests in the internal Lebanese arena, and is currently a powerful actor in the Beirut government. The prisoner exchange deal between Israel and Hezbollah (July 2008) exposed another angle of Israel's failure in Lebanon — in return for the bodies of the two kidnapped soldiers (whose kidnapping had been the impetus for Israel's initiation of the war), Israel delivered to Hezbollah, among others, Samir Kuntar, who is regarded by many Israeli's as the ultimate embodiment of the inhuman cruelty of terrorism.
- Israel's image of deterrence, which was damaged in the Lebanon War, has been somewhat restored in the past year, thanks to two moves attributed to Israel by international media: the killing in Damascus of Imad Muraniah, head of the military arm of Hezbollah (February 2008), and the bombing of a facility related to Syria's nuclearization efforts in collaboration with North Korea (September 2007).



The geopolitical scene in the coming year burdens the new Israeli government with a host of extremely difficult challenges: the global economic crisis and its effects on Israel; the Iranian threat; the unfavorable changes in the international arena and the harm to the power of its American ally; the Israeli-Arab conflict; Hamas; Hezbollah; radical Islam; fissures in the stability of the region, and more.

In view of these serious challenges, perhaps the most important recommendation is the one of the Winograd Report: radical change is required in the quality of strategic thinking in Israel and its informed integration into decision-making processes.

Leadership Transition in Israel and the U.S.

The close of 2008 found both the U.S. and Israel on the cusp of leadership changes, the former by constitutional design, at the close of a fascinating electoral cycle, the latter by virtue of the chronic instability of Israel's system of government, as well as its persistent problem of corruption; indeed one hope is that from the rubble of the Olmert government a cleaner political culture may emerge.

THE UNITED STATES

As of this writing traditional Jewish voting patterns, as seen in polls and other studies, have held firm. Simply put, the long-held and widely-shared Jewish support for the Democratic Party shows little sign of eroding. This has been remarkably consistent over time — indeed the last Republican presidential candidate to garner more than forty percent of the Jewish vote did so in 1920 (and his share represented a decline relative to 1916!). Ronald Reagan managed only 38–39% in 1980 (with 15% going to John Anderson and an historic low of 45% to Jimmy Carter) and no Republican presidential candidate since has done any better. George W. Bush, despite his being regarded by many as far and away the most pro-Israel president in recent

memory, received only 24% of the Jewish vote (which was, though, a modest gain over the 19% he had garnered in 2000).

Jewish allegiance to the Democratic Party is of a piece with the overall demographic and socio-economic and cultural posture of the Jewish community in the U.S. as an urban, meritocratic, information society group. While Jews tend to be wealthier than most Americans, they identify their long-term interests with liberal policies, and are regularly moved by the perception that the Democrats are the standard bearer of a number of traditionally Jewish ethical concerns. (This latter contention is of course profoundly contested by Jewish Republicans, among whom are to be counted a large number of leading Jewish thinkers and intellectuals.) Here as elsewhere Orthodox Jews are an exception to the prevailing patterns and, given their social conservatism and identification with more right-leaning views on Israel gravitate more towards Republicans than do other U.S. Jews.

It must be noted that Republican and Democratic establishments alike are fundamentally committed to the survival and well-being of the State of Israel, specific policy differences notwithstanding (much to the longtime consternation of Israel's more severe critics in the

U.S. and elsewhere). As a result, Jewish voting patterns more readily line up with the socio-economic and cultural positions of American Jews overall.⁵

While Jews are a numerically insignificant share of the population, their role in presidential politics looms large due to: the economic resources they bring to bear on the candidates of their choices; their prominence in American culture and society; and their numeric concentration in states with large numbers of electoral votes, including “toss-up” states which historically do not automatically prefer one party or another. The prime example is Florida, which gave George W. Bush his hair-breadth victory in 2000.

Throughout the presidential campaign, John McCain, the Republican candidate, was able to draw on his long years of experience in the U.S. Senate and long-standing ties to the pro-Israel community and his strategic view of America’s place in the world to present himself as a candidate with strong pro-Israel credentials. The Democratic candidate, Senator Barack Obama, given his much shorter record of public service, and his identification with less-established and often more left-leaning elements of the Party had a greater challenge in this regard (indeed, much of the pro-Israel Democratic establishment had supported Hillary Clinton in the Democratic primaries). He worked to meet this challenge by traveling to Israel (as did Senator McCain) crafting nuanced policy statements

and increasingly surrounding himself with well-known figures known to be sympathetic to Israel (including Ambassador Dennis Ross, Chairman of the Board of Directors and Professional Guiding Council of JPPPI).

Several elements of the U.S. presidential campaign are potentially significant for future trends affecting U.S. Jewry.

- 1) The Obama campaign has made extraordinarily effective use of the Internet in mobilizing grass-roots support, both political and financial and as an instrument of community-organizing. Careful study of his campaign will yield significant insights for future uses of the Internet in building and galvanizing communities.
- 2) Obama’s appeal to younger Jews — including during the primary season — derives from a number of factors, including his cosmopolitanism, insurgent style, appeal to the rhetoric of community organizing and social justice and, relative to Senator Hillary Clinton, his anti-establishment stance. This in turn indicates the kinds of identification resonating with younger generations of U.S. Jews.⁶
- 3) A particularly vivid example of this generational divide is the effort known as “the Great Schlep,” mounted by a pro-Obama group called JewsVote.org and popularized by the well-known and frankly uninhibited comedienne Sarah Silverman, who forthrightly announced “if Barack Obama doesn’t

⁵ 2008 also saw the creation of JStreet, an avowedly left-leaning Jewish lobbying group explicitly aiming to counter AIPAC. Still a very young organization it has yet to make its presence felt in Washington.

⁶ For a helpful analysis, see Steven Windmueller, “Only in America: The 2008 Jewish Vote” HUCNEWS, Nov. 6, 2008.

become the next president of the United States, I'm going to blame the Jews," and implicitly charged any Jew who did not vote for Obama with racism.⁷ While taking care not to read too much into this one episode, and not to indulge overmuch in generalizations, it does illuminate emerging trends among younger Jews who tend to be unconcerned with established organizations, drawn to post-ethnic and cosmopolitan identities and less immediately concerned with Israel.

- 4) Another generational divide is the growing number of young Jews who, polling and press reports indicate, voted Republican; chiefly, though not exclusively among the Orthodox.

This too represents an independence from the received wisdom of the Jewish community at large and is further indication of young Jews encountering and expressing their concerns on terms of their own choosing.

ISRAEL

2008 was a dismal year in Israeli political life. The long-simmering crisis of Israeli political leadership brought to the fore by the Second Lebanon War of 2006 showed no signs of abating.

Following on the resignation in 2007 of President Moshe Katsav resulting from a number of criminal charges, including rape, 2008 saw the indictment of Finance Minister Avraham Hirschsohn for theft, money laundering, fraud

⁷ See <http://www.thegreatschlep.com/site/index.html>

and other crimes involving diversion of charitable funds for his own personal use. This was only the latest in a series of prosecutions and criminal allegations involving high-ranking Israeli officials in recent years, including the former justice minister as well as the two chief rabbis.

The multiple criminal allegations against Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, culminating in the police's recommendation that charges be brought against him and the subsequent submission of his resignation on September 21, 2008, offered a depressing climax to this parade of corruption in high places. Olmert has remained unrepentant and defiant, confident that he will in the end be vindicated and have the last laugh over his many foes.

The narrow victory edged out by Foreign Minister Zippi Livni over Transportation Minister Shaul Mofaz in subsequent primary elections in the Kadima party, did not suffice to establish her as an immediate successor to Olmert and on October 26, she formally ended coalition negotiations, with new elections being the inevitable result. Interestingly, her place as Prime Minister-designate made for women standing at the head of all three branches of government, alongside Knesset Speaker Dalia Itzik, and Chief Justice Dorit Beinisch.

One change in the Israeli leadership landscape in 2008 was President Shimon Peres' new presence as elder statesman and goodwill ambassador. Among his many activities he hosted, in May 2008 and as part of the celebra-

In Israel – a series of prosecutions and criminal allegations involving a primeminister, a former president, a former finance and a former justice ministers and two chief rabbis

The Israeli Presidential Conference (May 2008) made for extraordinarily rich exchange and provides a valuable mode for future events

tions of Israel's 60th year of independence, the first Israeli presidential conference many dignitaries, world leaders in government, business, science and the humanities, and literally hundreds of Jewish thinkers, leaders and activists from around the world.⁸ The conference's triple focus on the future of Israel, the Jewish people and the world, featuring wide-ranging discussions of geopolitics and finance, Jewish identity and Israeli society, scientific and technological development and innovations in arts and humanities made for an extraordinarily rich exchange and provides a valuable model for future exchanges and events.

The office of attorney general has assumed increasing importance in recent years; at the same time, the current Justice Minister Professor Daniel Friedman has mounted a sustained campaign aimed at curtailing the standing of the judiciary in general and the Supreme

Court in particular. While Professor Friedman's pronouncements are regularly controversial he does resent genuine currents of thought and opinion to which the court and related institutions will be reacting in coming years; it seems safe to say that we are entering a new chapter in the ongoing conversation between the judiciary and Israeli society.

The crisis of Israel's elites has many causes — including a culture of cronyism, a constitutionally unstable government system and the collapse of old ideologies, while unrelenting security challenges and Israel's inability thus far to resolve its conflicts with its neighbors make dealing with reforms in political structure and culture a nearly impossible task.

At the same time, extraordinary leadership continues to be demonstrated at other levels of society such as the military, the non-profit and volunteer sectors and entrepreneurial circles. The current system inhibits these leaders from attaining political prominence, and structurally deters reform, a situation which shows little sign of change.

⁸ Among the foreign guests in attendance were George W. Bush, Tony Blair, Mikhail Gorbachev, Henry Kissinger, Rupert Murdoch, Google founder Sergey Brin, Yahoo CEO Susan Decker, Bernard Henri-Levy, and Elie Wiesel. The Conference was planned and organized by JPPPI; videos of all the sessions can be seen at www.presidentconf.org.il Background policy papers written for the conference are available at www.jpppi.org.il

Antisemitism, Anti-Zionism and Global Attitudes Toward Jews

This past March the U.S. State Department issued its report to Congress, *Contemporary Global Antisemitism*, culminating four years of research conducted after U.S. legislators approved a bill in 2004 commissioning the report. The process was accelerated in 2006 with president George W. Bush's appointment of Gregg Rickman as the first ever U.S. special envoy on antisemitism. While the report does not deal with antisemitism within the borders of the United States — the mandate of the U.S. Department of State pertains only to foreign countries — it finds and describes an upsurge in antisemitic activity around the globe.

Further, it describes antisemitism as an “adaptive phenomenon,” and identifies an evolving, virulent strain that sometimes combines traditional features of classic antisemitism — from blood libel to conspiracy theories about pervasive, often hidden, Jewish influence, to accusations of dual loyalty — with undue, disproportionate criticism of Zionism and Israeli policy. The net effect is to foment prejudice against the whole of the Jewish people by demonizing Israel and Israeli Jews and ascribing their “perceived faults to their Jewish character.”

The report acknowledges that “new antisemitism” in the guise of anti-Zionism, which

has grown steadily in the last decade, is often “more subtle and thus frequently escapes condemnation” and meets the following five criteria defined by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), the predecessor of the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), in determining when criticism of Israel or Zionism crosses the line and becomes antisemitism:

- Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination;
- Applying double standards to Israel;
- Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism to characterize Israel or Israelis;
- Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis; or
- Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.

Not surprisingly, the report finds the most frequent and intense manifestations of anti-Zionist rhetoric in Arabic-language media throughout the Middle East and in many Muslim communities of Western Europe, but one does not have to strain to find it also lurking in the halls of academia, houses of government, the United

Nations system, cyberspace, and in a wide array of media throughout the world.

It rather succinctly states:

“The collective effect of unremitting criticism of Israel, coupled with a failure to pay attention to regimes that are demonstrably guilty of grave violations, has the effect of reinforcing the notion that the Jewish state is one of the sources, if not the greatest source, of abuse of the rights of others, and thus intentionally or not encourages antisemitism.”

Of course, this new antisemitism has not replaced more traditional forms and expressions of Jew-hatred, but rather exists alongside them. The report details an increase in physical attacks, property damage, and cemetery desecrations. It points out that “over much of the past decade, U.S. embassies worldwide have noted an increase in antisemitic incidents, such as attacks on Jewish people, property, community institutions, and religious facilities.” Meanwhile, publication and consumption of antisemitic screeds such as *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* and *Mein Kampf* are commonplace.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad gets special attention in the Report as a Holocaust denier and because the government of Iran officially discriminates against its Jewish minority — not to mention his menacing rhetoric towards Israel. Hugo Chavez, Venezuela’s president, is also singled out for his hostility toward Israel and his promulgation of stereotypes regarding Jewish financial influence and domination.

Syria’s government is said to “routinely demonize(s) Jews through public statements and official propaganda,” and the report says in Belarus, “state enterprises freely produce and dis-

tribute antisemitic material.” The state-sponsored media of Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates, and Venezuela are regarded as “vehicles for antisemitic discourse.”

The Report also moves beyond state actors with whom the U.S. and its allies have regularly contentious — and at times hostile — relations. Thus, Poland’s conservative Catholic radio station Radio Maryja, owned by the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer and financed by the donations of its audience is referred to as “one of Europe’s most blatantly antisemitic media venues.” Radio Maryja, directed by Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, reportedly has a listenership of more than 10% of Polish adults and has been criticized by several members Poland’s Catholic leadership.

The report takes note of recalcitrant societal antisemitism even in places where there is a history of confronting and combating the problem, such as Poland, Ukraine, Russia, France, Germany and the United Kingdom. It also cites recent increases in documented antisemitic incidents in Argentina, Australia, Canada, and South Africa.

Contemporary Global Antisemitism, in one of its simplest and most resounding sentences says, “Today, more than 60 years after the Holocaust, antisemitism is not just a fact of history, it is a current event.”

It bears noting that the report is dedicated to the memory of the late Tom Lantos, the Congressman who represented California’s 12th district from 1981 until his death this past February. He was the only Holocaust survivor to have served in the United States Congress and a staunch defender of human rights around the globe.

THE SPECIAL CHALLENGE OF IRAN

One issue to have emerged in the past few years is the saliency of Iranian antisemitism. The striking characteristic of Iranian antisemitism are its linkage with the nuclear menace of course, but also the fact that it is not just an Islamic, and in particular Shiite, version of Jew-hatred, but one closely intertwined with a “progressive” third world ideology committed to struggle against what it regards as the new imperialism.

Since 1979, revolutionary Shiism has ruled Iran. The Shiite-Iranian position today is imbued with an anti-imperialistic ideology characteristic of the third-world in the formulation found today in Latin America, for example, and in the self-described progressive movements in other areas. To be sure, the Iranian Revolutionary regime’s bond with Palestine was authentic — *a fortiori* because Israel collaborated with the Shah and his security and intelligence service (SAVAK). Yet it primarily served as a manipulative tool to strengthen Shiite hegemony in the area and to goad the Sunni regimes who collaborated with the U.S. (and some with Israel). There is no question that the first and second Lebanon wars worsened the phenomenon, which was embodied in the slogan, “From Teheran to Jerusalem and from there to Mecca” (the seat of the most hated Sunni regime).

Of course, the conflict was infused with traditional Shiite themes concerning the impurity of the Jews, such as their rebellion against Ali ibn-Talib — the founder of Shiism. Other classic factors play in Iranian antisemitic propaganda, such as the greed and theft which have always characterized Jews and of which the theft of Palestine from her legitimate owners is but one

example. (This claim was found not only in the mouth of Khomeini but even in the interview of then-president Khatami with CNN in 1998.) Moreover, the Jews at one and the same time manifest power and presence, and on the other hand their small numbers reflect vulnerability. Jewish success rouses curiosity and suspicion about the power of a “world tribe” and also raises questions about Jewish cabals that govern the world.

All of these themes rely on traditional Shiite animosity in the Middle East (notably in Iraq) toward the Jews; Shia were much less tolerant than were the Sunnis who dominated in Iran until 1501. Jews — along with other minorities — suffered under the Safavid Shiite dynasty which ruled Iran and forced it to espouse Shiism from the 16th century onwards and which emphasizes separation between believers and non-believers, and expresses this in terms of impurity. Thus the Jews, since they are impure, cannot drink water from the cup of a Muslim and cannot touch vegetables in the marketplace. It is no coincidence that religious leaders headed the opposition to the struggle to award equal rights to non-Muslim during the constitutional campaign (1906–11).

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 sharpened this traditional animosity because it saw Israel as the focus of the international struggle against post-colonialist imperialism which in turn is at the service of the United States. Indeed Ahmadinejad is not the first to call for the destruction of Israel. Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenai, called for Israel’s destruction already in 2000, a year later the reformist Hatami repeated that, and it was expressed in a similar spirit by another relatively moderate politician, Rafsanjani, who twice served as president

and leader of the parliament and currently serves as the leader of the upper coordinating council. What they all share is the conception straight out of the Khomeini school concerning the international struggle between the Third World and colonialism of which Israel is the arrowhead and therefore deserving destruction. Rafsanjani's pronouncements are typical of the dichotomy concerning Israel: Israel manipulates the U.S. and the U.K.; at the same time, it is tiny and artificial. All of this is taken from Khomeini's attack on Israel in his book, *Islamic Government*, in which it should be noted that the emphasis was on Israel as a tool of the U.S. and not on the Jews.

ANTISEMITIC DISCOURSE IN THE WESTERN WORLD

Beyond the Islamic world as such, antisemitism sadly endures as an abiding presence in Western discourse. Antisemitism has shifted its form and emphases many times over the course of history, and so too today. In remarks to the Israeli presidential conference in May, and in recent writings and interviews, the celebrated philosopher and human rights activist Bernard-Henri Lévy has well characterized the current form of antisemitism in terms of three key elements — the demonization of Israel, denial of the Holocaust (as fact and/or as moral watershed in human history), and “the competition of victimhood,” whereby Jews exaggerate their own sufferings so as to negate the sufferings of others. When all three elements come together, we have the picture of Jews as moral criminals, who invent or exaggerate their own sufferings in order to promote a uniquely criminal and illegitimate state, namely Israel.

Even as it bears repeating that legitimate criticism — the EUMC's 5 criteria mentioned above provide an effective tool to determine what's legitimate and what is not, but there are various other tools — of Israel is not antisemitism, the themes and ideas outlined by Lévy are undeniably at work, to varying degrees, in a number of circles the world over, including, most disturbingly, academic and intellectual elites. The constellation of ideas to which he points is uniquely destructive and deserving of attention and criticism

PROCESS OF BEATIFICATION OF POPE PIUS XII

The Catholic Church renewed the beatification process of Pope Pius XII. The initiative aroused strong negative reactions among large sections of Jewish public opinion in Israel and worldwide who stigmatized the Pope's alleged silence or insufficient action facing Nazi Germany's planning and implementation of the final solution. Church circles strongly argued that the critique was unwarranted since the Church actively helped Jews during World War II. They stressed Jewish testimonies in support for Pius XII. Jewish leaders and intellectuals stressed the Pope's pro-German sentiments and his indifference or ineffectiveness facing the deportation of the Jews in his own Rome. The argument unveiled deeper layers of mutual mistrust between Catholic and Jewish voices that threatened ongoing interreligious dialogue. Pope Benedictus XVI finally decided to postpone a decision until all the documentary evidence would be available.

PART III

Women in Jewish Society

Jewish Women Through the Ages

There exists within Judaism a multiplicity of traditions regarding women's role, status, customs, etc., and there have been significant changes over time.

While the task of summarizing how any particular religion or cultural tradition relates to women may be a formidable one, it seems especially challenging with regard to Judaism. In addition to great historical and geographical diversity, Jews for the most part have not had centralized, hierarchical authorities, and Jewish life has been characterized by a culture of diversity, debate and controversy. Thus, even in a given historical period and in a given community, different customs and practices developed. Today's Jewish communities include a whole variety of approaches, from ultra-Orthodox (with its many varieties) through both traditional and liberal movements to secular-humanist. "The Jewish tradition," therefore, is polyphonic vis-à-vis many topics, but certainly one as complex as women and gender in society.

Having said that, it is important to acknowledge that, until recently, as a traditional society, Jewish society was for the most part patriarchal, with a hierarchy of males over females.

Most importantly, as with other traditions,

we should be careful about anachronistically applying modern assumptions about education and human rights to earlier periods. Thus, issues of importance to us that mark modernity will be highlighted in this paper but do not necessarily reflect the concerns of earlier periods.

Our concerns were not necessarily self-evident to our ancestors. Not only did previous generations not always share our notions; women did not always feel "left out" or oppressed in the ways we do when we read the legal traditions.

Still, almost all of the modern Jewish movements have attempted to confront, and sometimes rectify, this heritage, as it is challenged by modernity.

Until the late 20th century, scholarship in Jewish studies tended to ignore the role played by women in Jewish life. In recent years, there has been a veritable explosion of research and writing in the area of Jewish women's studies, touching upon Biblical and Talmudic scholarship, history, philosophy-theology, law, literature, etc. In this framework, we will be able to discuss only some of the findings.

During the transition from the Bible to the Talmud, women's legal status improved, but their social status declined

THE BIBLICAL AND RABBINIC LEGACIES

In our exploration of the social history of Jewish women, we will follow a chronological approach. For the earlier periods, our main sources will be the Bible and the corpus of Rabbinic literature. For later periods, a more diverse selection of sources will be available to us.

Many women mentioned in the Hebrew Bible — from Eve and the matriarchs to Queen Esther — are proactive, pivotal figures whose actions move the plot along, changing the course of history. One significant omission, whose importance will emerge in our discussion of the Rabbinic period, is that while women assumed many roles of leadership in society, these did not include ritual-cultic leadership. There were no priestesses in the ancient Israelite religion.

Several scholars have suggested that this may be a kind of reaction against ancient Canaanite fertility cults, in which goddesses and priestesses played central roles. The late feminist Bible scholar Professor Tikva Frymer-Kensky has written, “A serious vacuum in biblical religion is caused by its denying or ignoring two important aspects of human experience, gender and sex. There is little gender talk in the Bible, and no sense of gender differences. It presents an ideology at variance with the social reality of people living in a world organized along gender lines.

That is certainly not the case with Rabbinic literature, in which these subjects are of central concern.

One of the paradoxes of the transition from the Bible to the Talmud is that while women’s social status declined, their legal status improved. It seems clear that with regard to certain key

legal issues, such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance, the legal status of Jewish women improved greatly from the Bible to the *Mishnah* and from the *Mishnah* to the *Gemara*. Marriage and divorce became more complex and institutionalized, with specification of procedures, grounds for divorce, and, perhaps most importantly, women’s prerogatives in accepting or rejecting a new status, that, to be sure, was always initiated by the man.

The scholar who has perhaps stressed this point most in her work is Professor Judith Hauptman, of the Jewish Theological Seminary. In her *Rereading the Rabbis: A Woman’s Voice*, Hauptman maintains that “Law tends to develop over time in the direction of the more humane treatment of the underprivileged.”

Her assessment of the Rabbis is that they conducted a “benevolent patriarchy.” The rabbinic sense of justice and of the Torah as unfolding the will of a merciful and benevolent God were responsible, according to this approach, for changes in the above-mentioned laws, in the direction of greater protection for the rights of women. Certain feminist understandings might deem these changes paternalistic and ultimately of harm to women’s status. But Hauptman’s interlocutors are those who generally view the Rabbis as misogynists; thus, her approach is a defense of the Rabbis in relation to women, which some might even call apologetic.

But it does appear that with regard to the changes, the over-all legal status of women seems to have improved. On the other hand, their social status declined. One of the ways in which this may be seen is that far fewer women are mentioned in the Talmud, as compared to the Bible. Most of them are nameless and are

identified simply as “the mother of,” “the wife of,” or “the daughter of.”

It would appear that the major reason for this decline in social status derives from the absence of women’s cultic leadership in the Biblical period. When the Temple was destroyed, the synagogue replaced it, with prayer and study replacing the sacrifices and rabbis replacing priests. Since women had not held positions of leadership in the Temple and had not served as priestesses, it was “natural” that they would not be rabbis or scholars.

However, since the roots of Rabbinic culture precede the Destruction of the 2nd Temple, we must look to other, complementary explanations, as well. One would be the influence of Greek culture, in which intellectual women were morally suspect.

Moreover, the Rabbinic *Bet Midrash* turned into a kind of “old boy’s club.” Scholars who have used a gender perspective to analyze Rabbinic culture and its notions of masculinity include Ari Elon and Daniel Boyarin. Elon perceives the study of Torah as a male erotic activity, with the desire being focused on the Torah itself, often personified in female terms. Boyarin sees homoerotic feelings among the male study partners. But according to both analyses, a human female presence in the *Bet Midrash* would indeed be an unnecessary distraction and the women would feel like strangers.

Women seemed so foreign to the Rabbinic enterprise that the Talmud states, “Women — they are a separate people!”

This is an echo of Simone De Beauvoir’s classic statement that men are the norm and women are the other. In Rabbinic Judaism, this would definitely appear to be the case. “In the

history of Judaism, women have been marginalized, excluded, and silenced”, observes Laurence J. Silberstein in his article, “Others Within and Others Without: Rethinking Jewish Identity and Culture,” The norm for the rabbis is the adult free male; children, slaves and women are the other, with concomitant relationships to the system of *Mitzvot* that are different from those of the male norm. Jewish feminist theologian Judith Plaskow has expressed this perhaps most succinctly: “Like women in many cultures, Jewish women have been projected as other. Named by a male community that perceives itself as normative, women are part of the Jewish tradition without its sources and structures reflecting our experience. Women are Jews, but we do not define Jewishness. We live, work, and struggle, but our experiences are not recorded, and what is recorded formulates our experience in male terms. The central categories of Torah, Israel, and God all are constructed from male perspectives”.

On the other hand, it should be noted that at least on one occasion, the Talmud records that the rabbis made a Halakhic decision — to allow women to participate in the ceremony of *Semikha*, laying hands, on the festival sacrificial animal — “in order to cause pleasure to the women.”

Since the term for pleasure used in this instance — *nahat ruah* — would imply “spiritual” pleasure, not physical, as in “*oneg*,” or “*ha’na’ah*,” we might conclude that concern for

In Greek culture, which influenced the rabbinic culture of the 2nd Temple era, intellectual women were morally suspect

women's spirituality was not entirely foreign to the rabbis. But it was, at best, peripheral, and, in most cases, non-existent. The spirituality of the rabbis was bound up with study of Torah and performance of the commandments. Women were exempt from Torah study and from many of the key positive commandments. To the extent that they developed their own forms of spiritual expression, they were different and marginalized.

This is not to suggest that women were totally excluded from the synagogue. Archaeologists have unearthed ancient equivalents of today's "donor plaques" attesting to significant contributions made to early synagogues by wealthy women. Indeed, there are references in Midrashic and Talmudic sources to the *matrona* (matron), a term used to designate affluent women who gave financial support to synagogues and houses of study. On some occasions, they even brought

learned questions to the rabbis. In some cases, they had married affluent men; in others, they were of independent means.

The Talmud in the tenth chapter of *Pesahim* raises the question as to whether women recline at the *Pesach Seder* or not. The conclusion reached is that most women do not recline in the presence of their husbands (as students do not in the presence of their teachers, or slaves,

their masters.) But "important women" — *nashim hashuvot* — do. It is unclear as to whether what may be meant by this phrase is scholarly, aristocratic or, perhaps, independently wealthy women.

Attempts are being made, by both scholars

and popular groups, to reclaim the "lost" heritage of Jewish women's spirituality. Many of the efforts center around women's *Rosh Chodesh* groups throughout the world.

But an analysis of Rabbinic texts reveals not only the marginalization of women and the need to re-conceptualize certain categories for more fruitful and inclusive research. The texts contain many statements about women that are insulting and even humiliating. When a woman or a girl reads them, it is a painful experience; when a man or a boy reads them, they can dangerously re-enforce negative stereotypes. Whether or not these stereotypes are related to other forms of discrimination or even spousal abuse, is a matter for research. But in a Jewish educational setting, they are a challenge to the psychological sensitivity and educational acumen of the teacher — for example, what happens in a contemporary Jewish school when the class reaches the following (JT — Jerusalemite Talmud — *Sotah* 3:4): "The words of the Torah should be burned rather than transmitted to women?"

Above we noted that the ancients did not necessarily share our sensibilities. Yet from two stories about Beruriah, we may conclude that the sense of humiliation is not a modern invention. The first story occurs in BT (Babylonian Talmud) *Eruvin* 53b, when R. Jose of the Galilee asks Beruriah, "By which of these roads shall we go to Lod?" Her answer is, "Foolish Galilean, did the Rabbis not teach us, 'do not talk too much to a woman?' You should rather have said, 'Which to Lod?'"

Similarly, in Rashi's commentary on *Avodah Zarah* 18b, Beruriah mocks to her husband the Rabbis' dictum, "Women are foolish/light-headed." This mockery leads to her ultimate

Rabbinic texts contain statements about women which are insulting, even humiliating

downfall, in a nefarious plot constructed by her husband, R. Meir. In both cases, the text is showing her mock a Rabbinic statement imputing negative qualities to women or to the contacts with them.

We also have evidence from Lithuania in the late nineteenth century — from the memoirs of R. Baruch Epstein, *Makor Baruch* — that his aunt, Reyna Batya of Volozhin, the wife of the Netziv — was critical of Rabbinic attitudes towards women. Thus, while the development of feminism as a full-blown ideological movement is indeed a product of the 20th century, some dissatisfaction with the role and status of Jewish women and, especially, with traditional attitudes towards them, definitely pre-date contemporary or even modern times.

We have noted above that women's legal status improved in the areas of marriage and divorce, from the Bible to the *Mishnah* and *Talmud*. (Probably the most comprehensive work on this topic is by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin.) The Rabbis did introduce changes that safeguarded women's rights and the lot of Jewish women was frequently better than that of their counterparts in the surrounding society. Still, the process became frozen in the 13th century. Even in our own day, many women suffer years of abuse but can not end an untenable marriage, nor can they go forward with their lives.

THE MEDIEVAL HERITAGE

One of the fields in which there has been a flurry of activity in the last several years is the study of Jewish women in the Middle Ages. This is undoubtedly connected with a concomitant development — one might perhaps say, a revo-

lution — in the academic study of history over the last two or three decades. For many generations, history was largely the study of kings and wars. Jews were lacking in political and military history, but they had a great corpus of traditional literature, and Jewish history was often taught as the history of Jewish literature. The number of women authors in this corpus was infinitesimal.

But then history began to be taught as social history. When the focus is on social and economic fields of activity, commerce, travel and migration, the family, medicine and midwifery, childhood, and so on, women begin to play a more central role as objects of study. A concomitant development is the creative use of sources such as rabbinic Responsa, marriage contracts, family records, etc. Judith Romney Wegner made a point with regard to the Talmud: "A literature produced by men offers very little testimony to the actual experiences of real, historical women." But the use of Responsa — the questions even more than the answers — for the study of Jewish social history, has been raised to an art by a young scholar at Bar-Ilan University, Elisheva Baumgarten. Her book, *Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe*, has become a model for how this can be done.

Avraham Grossman, Israel Prize-winning historian, published an important book called *Pious and Rebellious: Jewish Women in Medieval Europe*, where he notes:

"The status of Jewish women in the Middle Ages was affected by the Biblical and Talmudic heritage, the situation in the non-Jewish societies and the economic status of the Jews"

“The status of the Jewish woman in the Middle Ages was affected by three main factors: the Biblical and Talmudic heritage; the situation in the non-Jewish society in which the Jews lived and functioned; and the economic status of the Jews, including the women’s role in supporting the family.”

In many periods and in many communities, women have been the primary providers for their families. As has been pointed out, rabbinic texts depict women in a variety of wage-earning tasks and consider women’s labor and production, domestic and otherwise, an essential element of the family economy. On the other hand, labor is not automatically valorized for men but rather stands in tension with the ideal of full devotion to Torah study.

One of the results of women’s exemption/exclusion from many aspects of Jewish learning and ritual practice was that this enabled them to devote more time to both family and economic activities. These patterns have persisted over time within the ultra-Orthodox communities, to our own day.

We will follow Grossman’s listing of important changes in the status of Jewish women that occurred in Europe in the Middle Ages. Among others, he lists as positive changes the following:

1) The improvements in women’s status vis-à-vis marriage and divorce, which had begun in the Mishnah and the Talmud, continued in medieval times. Under certain circumstances, a woman could initiate a divorce. It was prohibited to divorce a woman against her will and, in Ashkenazic countries, to

take another wife. Severe punishments were meted out to physically abusive husbands.

- 2) Jewish women played an important role in economic activities and in supporting their families and enjoyed enhanced freedom of movement, especially in Christian Europe.
- 3) The Rabbinic prohibition against teaching Torah to women was relaxed somewhat. There were more examples of learned women. Ashkenazi women increased their share in the performance of the commandments, including the recitation of blessings over positive time-linked commandments from which they are officially exempt.
- 4) There had been a prohibition against marrying a “murderous” or “lethal” woman, i.e., one who had been widowed twice, the Biblical model for such a case being Tamar in Genesis 38. But during medieval times, this stricture was effectively abolished.

Grossman lists the following under positive changes:

- ◆ The important place of women in the teaching of the Kabbalists, both in family life and in the picture of the Afterlife, within which marital relations were also understood as an important religious value. The woman facilitates the relationship of “mating” between her husband and the *Shekhinah*. As Moshe Idel put it: “From this point of view, one is to assume that the woman is considered not only as an addition to the man, who requires her for his own perfection, but also a comprehensive and necessary element for the existence of reality, whose activity has a

decisive influence upon the situation of the universe as a whole.”

- ◆ It is hard to imagine that such outlooks did not influence the attitude towards women on the part of those close to Kabbalistic doctrine. Some of these changes, particularly those relating to the place of women in religious life, fit in well with the general atmosphere of Christian Europe during the thirteenth century, in which women played a more respectable role in religious life than they had in the past, and the individual played a greater role in society.

An objection to Grossman’s observation that constituted a positive change is based on two grounds. First, from a comparative theoretical perspective: Seeing a cosmic role for the female, or, indeed, even having a concept of a female divinity, do not necessarily impact for the good on the role of actual women in society. This can be seen quite clearly with regard to women in Hindu society, where the existence of female deities did not prevent the practices of female infanticide or widows throwing themselves on their husbands’ funeral pyres.

Secondly, the *Kabbalah* actually contains many very negative references to women. The origin of some of the negative changes Grossman offers such as greater strictures in relation to menstrual laws, lies in *Kabbalah*. Jewish mysticism is one of the few forms of mysticism on record with no noteworthy female participation.

Let us now see how Grossman characterizes the negative changes brought about during the medieval period:

- 1) There was greater insistence on exaggerated customs of modesty in the Muslim countries. As distinguished from Christian Europe noted above, there was also greater restriction on the women’s freedom of movement. This was most likely as a result of the cultural influence of the surrounding society. (Within the ultra-Orthodox community, the phenomenon — although seemingly not influenced by Muslim practice, is still very much alive in 2008.)
- 2) As mentioned earlier, there were greater strictures in relation to the menstrual laws. Some of these came about as a result of greater interest in magic and enchantment, and in connection with an emphasis on blood. (Although Ashkenazim and Sephardim never developed the menstrual hut to which women were sent by the Jews in Ethiopia, they did largely confine women during their menstrual periods. Folk culture sometimes mandated that women would not enter the synagogue on those days of the month.)
- 3) Grossman notes the negative influence of certain strands of medieval philosophy. He mentions the negative approach of Spanish and Provencal philosophers, most notably R. Isaac Abrabanel.

Finally, Grossman devotes much space to a description of what he perceives to be the greatest ill of medieval Jewry vis-a vis women. He calls it “the silencing of creativity.” He says:

“Throughout the Middle Ages — about a thousand years — we did not find so much as a single woman among the sages of Israel”

“In one area, that of the spiritual life, women had a decidedly inferior position. Throughout the Middle Ages, which continued for about a thousand years, we did not find so much as a single woman of importance among the sages of Israel... This is even more surprising if we compare the absolute silence of Jewish women with the significant creativity of women in Christian society, particularly in the area of mysticism. This difference does not seem restricted to the realm of creativity alone. One is speaking here of a profound and important indicator of their place in society. About 14 percent of the saints of the Catholic Church are women. Moreover... in Muslim culture too mention is made of women who transmitted religious traditions. The silence of Jewish women thus speaks volumes.”

CONFRONTING MODERNITY

There is a certain kind of Jewish education in which comparisons are drawn with the surrounding cultures only in order to “prove” the superiority of Jews and all things Jewish. According to this school of thought, in every age, Jews were always more advanced and better educated than their gentile neighbors. Unfortunately, this belief is a myth. We have already seen something about the comparative status of Jewish, Christian and Muslim women in the Middle Ages. With the onset of modernity, German Jewish women compared themselves to their Christian neighbors, who could, in many cases, read and write; the Jewish women complained in their communities that they could not understand the prayers or the scriptural readings.

The Christian women were more conversant with their sacred texts than were the Jews.

The encounter with the modern world — what Jacob Katz so aptly characterized as “tradition and crisis” — had different effects on Jewish women and Jewish men. The process of modernization was carried out in different ways in different communities and different social strata, at different rates.

One of the terms Katz used in his book was “the neutral society.” What Katz meant was that the European *Haskalah*, or Enlightenment, held out a promise to Jews of the creation of a neutral society — i.e., one in which neither religion nor nationality would be the determining factors in social intercourse. People would be judged as individuals, on their own personal merits. The criteria would be largely intellectual and cultural.

In Jewish women’s history, there was a small group of women who played a central role in developing this neutral society. They were the women of Berlin, (and, to a lesser extent, Vienna and Paris) who opened their salons to the literati and leading intellectual lights of the times.

During the quarter century between 1780 and 1806, Berlin’s courtly and intellectual elites gathered in the homes of a few wealthy, cultivated Jewish women to discuss the events of the day. Princes, nobles, upwardly mobile writers, actors, and beautiful Jewish women flocked to the salons of Rahel Levine Varnhagen, Henriette Herz, and Dorothea von Courland (nee Mendelssohn), creating both a new cultural institution and an example of social mixing unprecedented in the German past. The salons emerged out of courtly society, commercial leisure institutions, and the city’s new intellectual

clubs. There were complex social and personal motives for salon participation. Noblemen, for example, needed Jewish financiers for private loans, but they also wanted access to more progressive cultural currents. For Jewish women, salon leadership offered not only an escape from a restricted home life but also social and personal power, power that was frequently consolidated in their upwardly mobile marriages to noblemen.

However advantageous and stimulating these salons were for their participants, they were the product of a transitory convergence of social and cultural structures. Both underground anti-semitic gossip and the new patriotism unleashed by the upheavals in Prussia after 1806 destroyed Jewish salon life in Berlin.

One of the interesting features of this brief period was the high rate of intermarriage, as a form of upward mobility for Jewish women. What is noteworthy is that throughout the late 18th, 19th and into the 20th centuries, there were many intelligent and talented Jewish women who were lost to a Jewish community that had little opportunity for internal women's leadership to emerge. A subject of some controversy among Jewish women's historians is the differential rate of modernization between men and women in different Jewish communities, and the question to what extent were women agents of social change or preservers of tradition.

Basing herself largely on the memoirs of one woman in Russia (Pauline Wengeroff, 1833–1916), Shulamit Magnus points to the role of the Jewish woman as “the guardian of tradition against the outside world.

Other scholars have emphasized the role of women as agents of social and cultural change.

Women were more likely than men to study languages and secular subjects and to be in daily contact with the outside world. Lacking a good Jewish education, this exposure often led to assimilation.

Iris Parush, in her groundbreaking work on women's reading habits, “Reading Jewish Women: Marginality and Modernization in Nineteenth-Century Eastern European Jewish Society,” turned the marginalization of women into a cultural advantage. But this is the case if modernization and Enlightenment are seen as purely positive developments; as we have noted, they can be a double-edged sword for the Jewish community and its survival. This can be seen clearly in the work of Sholem Rabinovich, better known by his literary pseudonym Sholem Aleichem, the great Yiddish author (1859–1916) who was an astute observer of the Jewish scene in Eastern Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In his stories about Tevye the dairyman, on which were based the very successful Broadway play and Hollywood film known as “Fiddler on the Roof,” the three daughters of Tevye — Tzeitel, Hodel and Chava — marry in non-traditional ways. Tzeitel falls in love with her childhood friend, Mottel, the tailor. This is already a break with the tradition of match-making, but at least, the couple still seek Tevye's permission.

In the second case, Tevye brings home a young revolutionary to teach Torah and other topics to his daughters. He is attracted by Hodel's wit and sharp tongue. They, too, fall in

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love, but this time, they seek Tevye's blessing, not his permission. Seeking parental permission implies remaining within a traditional authority structure; seeking blessing means the traditional structure has been abandoned, but there is an emotional desire to remain connected. We don't actually see the wedding taking place, the young man is sent to Siberia for his revolutionary activities, and Hodel follows him.

Finally, Chava is attracted to a Gentile when he gives her a book to read. Marrying a Gentile is clearly outside the range of what Tevye will permit in the name of adherence to tradition. Thus the stories show that marrying for love, teaching women and giving them books to read — all manifestations of modernity — can lead to a breakdown of tradition and ultimately to intermarriage and assimilation.

Leaving the realm of literature and returning to social history, in addition to the handful who hosted salons, there were many Jewish women who were attracted to radical and revolutionary movements either within the community (e.g., the Bund) or outside it (socialists, communists, anarchists, etc.) Names such as Rosa Luxembour and Emma Goldman come readily to mind. One is tempted to wonder how Jewish history might have been different if these women had been given a solid Jewish education and the opportunity for leadership roles within the mainstream Jewish community.

JEWISH EDUCATION AS A CASE STUDY

Jewish learning has been characterized popularly as a “life-long enterprise.” This was not always the case with the women. Women were exempted by the rabbis from the command-

ment of Torah study. Various explanations have been offered to account for this exemption. Some have compared it to the general exemption from certain positive commandments that might interfere with practical considerations for the woman's domestic role in society. A feminist analysis might explain the exclusion as an attempt to exclude women from the centers of power and decision-making in traditional Jewish society. Beyond that, certain classical religious authorities posited sources of women's inferiority in their inferior cognitive skills or in their inferior moral natures. Positions such as these tend to spawn self-fulfilling prophecies; if you don't educate girls, because you think they are not intellectually suited to learn, then they will never be given the opportunity to develop their skills and understanding.

More critical than the reason for the exemption is the question: “Does being exempt from the study of Torah mean being excluded from it as well?” There were some communities in which it was forbidden to teach Torah to girls, from books. But since women must keep many of the commandments, and since if a Jewish wife didn't know anything, it would be difficult for her husband to live with her, (The husband would have to depend on the wife's knowing some of the laws of ritual purity and of *Kashrut*, or, at the very least, what questions to put to a rabbi), girls had to be given at least a rudimentary education. This could be accomplished informally in the home, through observing what their mothers or other older female relatives were doing. Thus, the norm in most Jewish communities and in most periods of history was that while girls did not generally attend institu-

tions of formal learning, they were also not kept totally ignorant.

A second norm developed, as well, that we can call ‘the exceptionally learned woman.’ Again, we find a few examples of this in almost every community and in almost every period — girls who either were taught by their fathers or were self-taught. But we might view them as the exceptions that proved the rule.

This situation began to change in the mid-15th century, with the invention of the printing press, making printed books available en masse and, therefore, accessible to women. New genres arose, particularly in Yiddish, for women, and sometimes, by women. Among these were the “*t’chiness*” — supplicatory prayers in Yiddish.

One of the important documents in Jewish women’s history — the diary of Gluckel of Hameln — dates back to the late 17th century (specifically, 1691–1719.) We can learn much about the lives of Jewish women in early modern times from reading this work.

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the German Jewish community started a system of schools for girls. The schools had only a very rudimentary curriculum, stressing traditional women’s crafts, alongside basic literacy skills. They were enriched through the work of Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888), a German rabbi — educator — philosopher and the founder of the neo-Orthodox movement within Judaism. Under his leadership, even some coeducational schools were started, and the education of girls became a value in and of itself.

But in Eastern Europe, the bastion of Jewish Orthodoxy and ultra-Orthodoxy at the time, there were still no Jewish schools for girls,

under religious auspices. The Eastern European rabbinic authorities respected Hirsch and his project, feeling it appropriate for Germany, where both assimilation in the form of intermarriage and conversion to Christianity, as well as acculturation, in the form of liberal religious movements, were on the rise. But, they maintained, this innovation could not be adopted or emulated in their own communities.

Meanwhile, the religious ideal was for men to occupy their time in the study of classical texts. Thus, the responsibility of earning a livelihood often fell on the shoulders of their wives and unmarried daughters. (We have noted this phenomenon several times during the course of our historical survey.) Many Jewish women began to acquire extensive linguistic and vocational skills, which helped them to support their families. In Poland, Jewish girls would sometimes be sent to study in Catholic schools, run by nuns, with the result that sons and daughters within the same family might grow up living in totally different cultural worlds. Many of the girls began to question the religious values and traditions which they had been taught by their parents. There developed a discrepancy between their secular accomplishments and their relative ignorance of Jewish sources.

In 1903, at a rabbinical conference in Krakow, the *Admor* (Hasidic leader) of Zvirtche proposed establishing religious schools for girls. He was shouted

“Does being exempt from the study of Torah mean being excluded from it as well?”

By the 1920s, Jewish education for girls had become a value espoused by all the Jewish movements, even the ultra-Orthodox

down and his proposal was almost unanimously defeated. The arguments used against him were of the sort that maintained that “My grandmother never went to school, so why should my daughter go to school?”

It took fourteen more years, a World War and a dedicated and courageous young seamstress from Krakow to change the picture and

find a solution to the problem.

Sara Schenirer had lived in Vienna briefly during the War and was exposed there to the disciples of Hirsch. Upon her return to Poland, she founded a women’s educational movement known as *Bais Ya’akov* (“the House of Jacob.”). Not only did this movement grow rapidly throughout the Jewish world, but it also spawned many imitations.

By the 1920s, Jewish education for girls had become a value espoused by all the Jewish movements, even

the ultra-Orthodox, and not because of any laws of compulsory education. It was, simply put, an idea whose time had come — born out of social and economic necessity.

Within the ultra-Orthodox world, to this day, the separate schools are not necessarily equal. There still exists a cultural gap between the girls, who receive a more substantial secular education, and the boys, who focus almost exclusively on classical texts and laws. But in the rest of the Jewish community, especially in the last quarter of the 20th century, there has been a significant growth in Jewish educational opportunities for girls and women. In some communities, almost full equality of opportunity has been achieved. In today’s Jewish community, there is still some

gender inequality with regard to Jewish education. Unfortunately, in many segments of the community, both boys and girls are equally uneducated, or inadequately educated. In the more traditional circles, it was really only during the last quarter of the 20th century that girls’ education became a priority. Jewish women have quite a bit of “catching up” to do in order to be on a fully equal footing with their male counterparts.

An outstanding young educator in Jerusalem named Yael Unterman has written the following:

“Being treated as intellectual equals by their father was a formative experience for several unusual women. In some cases, like that of Zionist leader Henrietta Szold, this occurred in the absence of male children and was therefore perhaps more of a default; in others, such as in the Leibowitz home [that produced two of the 20th century’s outstanding Jews: Nechama Leibowitz, the great Bible teacher, and her brother, philosopher-scientist Yeshayahu. Leibowitz, 1903–1994], it was more a matter of principle or culture. A leading contemporary female Torah scholar, Aviva Zornberg, was also taught intensively by her father, her most important teacher.”

The late feminist scholar and educator Chana Safrai (1946–2008) once said, “Behind every feminist of my generation is a feminist father.” That was certainly the case with regard to Safrai’s own background, being the daughter of Professor Shmuel Safrai, a renowned Talmudist at the Hebrew University.

**“Behind every feminist of my generation is a feminist father”
(Chana Safrai, 1946–2008)**

MODELS OF LEADERSHIP

Jewish education, particularly when it aims to help a young person develop a deep sense of Jewish identity, often builds on the notion of role models. Thus looking for women role models is part of the re-education process.

As we mentioned earlier, the Jewish mystical tradition, certainly as opposed to those of other religions, does not yield a fruitful source of female role models. The only Jewish mystical movements in which women were centrally involved were Sabbateanism and, as an outgrowth of it, Frankism. We have on record one unusual case — surely the exception that proves the rule — of Hannah Rachel Webermacher, the so-called Maid of Ludmir.

Bertha Pappenheim (1859–1936) was an intense and energetic personality who tried throughout her life to integrate feminism and Judaism. She founded the Jewish feminist movement in Germany and led it for twenty years (1904–1924), imbuing it with her passionate zeal.

Manya Wilbushewitz Shohat (1880–1961) was one of the founders of the *Kibbutz* movement. She was both an ideological and a practical leader.

Nechama Leibowitz did not start out to be a leader or a pioneer or a role model for Jewish women. But she probably touched the lives of more Jewish women and men in the 20th century than almost any other educational figure. Many people have called her their *rebbe* or rabbi, especially if the original meaning of rabbi is “my teacher.” Accessible, humane, humble, and, at the same time, brilliant, knowledgeable, creative — she was loved and admired by her students,

those who attended the classes she held in her modest home in Jerusalem and those who knew her only through her writings. Nechama was the Jewish world’s foremost Bible teacher for many decades. She asked that on her *matzeva* there be written simply the word, *Morah*, “teacher.”

But it is Henrietta Szold (1860–1945), born almost two generations before Nechama Leibowitz, who provides us with a true example of intentional and successful leadership, by a woman. The eldest of eight daughters born to a Hungarian-born liberal rabbi in Baltimore in the U.S., she was exceptionally learned in Jewish sources among the women of her community. Although her professional life had involved both teaching and scholarship, she is most famous for the organizations she founded, such as the Hadassah Women’s Zionist Organization in the U.S. and the Hadassah Medical Organization in Israel, or helped found, such as Youth Aliyah.

Less well-known are her theoretical writings, in which she expounded on three themes, well ahead of her time: Jewish religious pluralism, changing the role of women within Judaism, and striving as a Zionist for Jewish-Arab cooperation in the Land of Israel. She was tied through bonds of friendship and collegiality to the members of *Brit Shalom*, but never officially joined the group. They were a small elite group of Zionists, such as Martin Buber, Judah Magnes, and Gershom Scholem, who advocated the establishment of a bi-national (Jewish-Arab) state in Palestine. In one of her letters during the Arab uprising that began in 1936, she wrote that if the Jews cannot find ways of living at peace with the Arabs, “Zionism has failed utterly.” Active in the world Zionist movement, she was finally elected to its Palestine Executive Committee in

1927. Much earlier, in 1896, she had given her first Zionist speech in America, that one Jewish weekly had found to be “almost too profound for an American woman.”

Szold’s letters, written to her sisters over a period of decades, reveal both her sense of humor and the frustration she sometimes felt, when confronted by the conditions in pre-state Palestine, the bureaucracy or the politics. She was not reluctant to be critical, either of what she saw as the arrogant new generation being raised in the Land of Israel or of the political machinations of some of the religious parties.

Szold was a woman of deep faith and conviction; yet she had moments of doubt. Those moments perhaps helped her be a more accessible role model and helped her

understand more what the situation she faced was, in all its complexity. But she persevered. And when she encountered opposition she handled it with a combination of firmness and gentleness. An example of this combination is in one of her most famous letters, written in 1916, to a family friend, Hayim Peretz. On the death of Szold’s mother, Peretz had offered to say the *Kaddish*:

“It is impossible for me to find words to tell you how deeply I was touched by your offer to act as “*Kaddish*” for my dear mother. I cannot even thank you — it is something that goes beyond thanks... You will wonder, then, that I cannot accept your offer... Jewish custom is very dear and sacred to me. And yet I cannot ask you to say *Kaddish*

after my mother. The *Kaddish* means to me that the survivor publicly and markedly manifests his wish and intention to assume the relation to the Jewish community which his parent had, and that so the chain of tradition remains unbroken from generation to generation, each adding its own link. You can do that for the generations of your family, I must do that for the generations of my family.

I believe that the elimination of women from such duties was never intended by our law and custom — women were freed from positive duties when they could not perform them, but not when they could. It was never intended that, if they could perform them, their performance of them should not be considered as valuable and valid as when one of the male sex performed them. And of the *Kaddish* I feel this is particularly true.

My mother had eight daughters and no son; and yet never did I hear a word of regret pass the lips of either my mother or my father that one of us was not a son. When my father died, my mother would not permit others to take her daughters’ place in saying the *Kaddish*, and so I am sure I am acting in her spirit when I am moved to decline your offer... I know full well that it is much more in consonance with the generally accepted Jewish tradition than is my or my family’s conception. You understand me, don’t you?”

This is a gracious and respectful lesson in how to educate and to lead in the direction of social change.

In 1972 the Hebrew Union College of the U.S. Reform movement ordained its first female rabbi

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES

Liberal movements within Judaism, beginning in the early 19th century, placed women's issues squarely on their agenda. They were usually resolved in the direction of mixed seating in the synagogue (the so-called "family pews.") Sisterhoods or women's auxiliaries were often set up within congregations. But other than that, it was not until the second half of the 20th century that more significant changes would be introduced, in terms of women's roles within the synagogue and even ordination to the rabbinate. Regina Jonas (1902–1944), born in Berlin, was privately ordained as a Liberal rabbi in Germany in 1935. Unfortunately, she perished in the Holocaust. She is the first woman to be ordained in modern times

1972 was a pivotal year, in which the Hebrew Union College of the Reform movement ordained its first female rabbi, Sally Priesand and the women's group known as *Ezrat Nashim* (Although the majority of the group were products of the Conservative movement, some of the leaders were Modern Orthodox or identified with the post-denominational *Havurah* movement) made a big "splash" in the New York Times in March, showing up uninvited to the annual convention of the Conservative movement's Rabbinic Assembly and lobbying for change. One of the changes they called for, the ordination of women at the movement's Jewish Theological Seminary, was not instituted until a dozen years later.

It is, therefore, somewhat surprising to read the following paragraph from Jonathan Sarna's book (2004) *American Judaism: A History*:

"Equality for women was anything but a new issue for American Judaism. Beginning in the colonial era...women had begun to frequent synagogues. Thereafter, debates over how visible women should be, where they should sit, what roles they should play, how much power they should wield, and how their status in Jewish law should be improved...had flared repeatedly, affecting at some point every synagogue, temple, and movement in Judaism. The fact that American culture considered the treatment of women to be a gauge of modernity heightened the stakes in these debates."

One wonders why it took so long for these issues to become translated into action. In 1984, the American Jewish Congress sponsored its 20th annual Israeli-Diaspora dialogue, held in Jerusalem. The theme was: "Woman as Jew, Jew as Woman: An Urgent Inquiry." Several of the participants asked, "If it was so urgent, why did you wait twenty years?" One of the positive developments that emerged from the dialogue was the formation of the Israel Women's Network, headed for many years by Professor Alice Shalvi.

One of the challenges facing women on the Jewish contemporary scene is that when the various religious movements try to get together and develop a common program, it is, typically, at the expense of gender equality. This point has been made by such different observers of the Jewish scene as Professor

"Jewish women played a disproportionate role among leaders and theorists of the feminist movement, and some of them extended their criticism to Judaism itself"

Paula Hyman of Yale University and Dr. Barbara Meyer, a Lutheran pastor and scholar who teaches at Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem

Jonathan Sarna maintains that feminism transformed the character of late twentieth-century American Judaism: “Jewish women played a disproportionate role among the leaders and theorists of the feminist movement, and some of them extended their criticism to Judaism itself...The emergence of women rabbis in Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Reform Judaism both symbolized and advanced feminism’s impact...” The impact of feminism was felt even within Orthodox circles, initially in the area of Jewish education. In 1972, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik pioneered a major innovation in American Orthodox Judaism when he gave an advanced Talmud lecture at the newly instituted Beit Midrash Program at Yeshiva University’s Stern College for Women. Rabbi Soloveitchik had long been committed to religious co-education and had instated it at the Maimonides School, in Boston, founded in 1937. His 1972 lecture, however, was the first on the advanced Talmud level. In 1979, Rabbi David Silber founded Drisha Institute, in New York City, for women’s advanced learning of classical Jewish texts.

Beyond the realm of Jewish education, the impact of feminism on Orthodox Judaism as felt with the founding of JOFA — the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance in New York in 1997 and Koleh, the parallel Orthodox feminist movement in Israel, in 1998.

Quoting the work of sociologist Sylvia Barack Fishman, Sarna concludes:

“...these Orthodox women produced no less

a revolution in the late twentieth century than women did in so many other realms, religious and secular alike. By challenging Judaism, they ended up strengthening Judaism. The discontinuities that they introduced into Jewish life worked to promote religious continuity.”

Recently, Jewish women in Israel and abroad have begun in a serious way to make up for the silenced creativity we mentioned earlier. They have produced shelves full of books in genres previously untouched by them, including legal writings, theology, and, most impressively, biblical commentaries and *Midrash*. The proliferation of books on Jewish theology is noteworthy; so, as well, is the phenomenon of “lay” people writing about *Halakha* in a serious, scholarly way. The work is uneven, to be sure; but it holds out much promise for continued creativity.

People who grew up in the West, especially in America of the 1950’s and early 1960’s, often heard “freedom and equality” mentioned in the same breath, as though they were virtually the same. Not only are the two values not the same; sometimes they are even contradictory. The challenge for a democratic society is to determine the appropriate balance between the two.

We might do well to focus on the value of equality, in the sense of equality before the law, equal worth and equal opportunity. Two people who are equal in those ways are not necessarily the same in other ways. Equality does not imply sameness. As Yoske Achituv of the Religious Kibbutz movement has taught us, “Striving for equality within difference will challenge us in

the post-modern period, instead of striving for similarity.”

Within the modern Orthodox community, as we have noted, there is a growing feminist movement, both in Israel (represented by *Kolech*, the Forum for Religious Women) and the Diaspora, particularly North America (represented by the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance). There are a number of congregations on the fringes of modern Orthodoxy, both in Israel and abroad, which have been experimenting with women leading certain parts of the traditional service or reading Torah together with men. They have been referred to as “partnership *minyanim*.” However, for a combination of Halakhic and feminist-ideological reasons, most of the modern Orthodox feminists have gone in the direction of “separate but equal” — women’s *Tefilla* groups, separate women’s Torah reading, *Rosh Hodesh* groups, women’s *midrashot*, and so on.

It would appear that the non-Orthodox movements have, in many cases, legislated equality-through-sameness. In other words, there are no longer any differences whatsoever between the religious expressions of men and women. It appears that the fastest growing “denomination” is “traditional egalitarian.” This becomes carried to an extreme, when, for example, girls have a *Bat Mitzvah* at 13, because that is when boys have a *Bar Mitzvah*. This practice obviously ignores the blatant differences between the physical growth rates and patterns of the two sexes. It has been argued that by celebrating the *Bat Mitzvah* at 13, we can keep the girls in a Jewish school for an extra year. That argument obviously would not apply in Israel. Moreover, we must explore ways of extending Jewish edu-

cation far beyond the *bar/bat mitzvah* experience. As it has been suggested, the celebration should be “a milestone, rather than a tombstone of Jewish education.”

We should not ignore research findings by Professor Sylvia Barack Fishman of Brandeis University. Sociologist Fishman, herself a religious feminist, has documented a disturbing trend.

American Judaism has a male problem. After several thousand years in which women were relegated to the sidelines of worship and community leadership, scholars and denominational leaders now say that women are significantly outnumbering men in numerous key segments of non-Orthodox Jewish community life.

At the Reform movement’s seminary, 60 percent of the rabbinical students and 84 percent of those studying to become cantors are female. Girls are outnumbering boys by as much as 2 to 1 among adolescents in youth group programs and summer camps, while women outnumber men at worship and in a variety of congregational leadership roles, according to the Union for Reform Judaism.

“After bar mitzvah, the boys just drop out,” said professor Fishman, “American Jewish boys and men have fewer connections to Jews and Judaism in almost every venue and in every age, from school-age children through the adult years... Contemporary liberal American Judaism, although supposedly egalitarian, is visibly and substantially feminized.” As

“[M]en’s decreased interest in Jews and Judaism walks hand in hand with apathy towards creating Jewish households and raising Jewish children”

with so much about gender, everything about this subject is highly controversial. Some Jewish leaders dispute the statistics, citing contradictory evidence, or pointing to the continuing presence of men at the helm of the biggest community organizations and synagogues. Others question whether a preponderance of women is a problem, or just progress. No one is clear whether the trend, which has only emerged in the last few years, is a temporary phenomenon or a sea change.

But scholars and rabbis say they are concerned that diminished participation by men in Judaism threatens the health of the Jewish community.

Fishman's study argues that "men's decreased interest in Jews and Judaism walks hand in hand with apathy toward creating Jewish households and raising Jewish children."

"Men need to be encouraged to come back into the synagogue," said Stuart M. Matlins, editor in chief of Jewish Lights Publishing, who has a long list of women's studies books, but this fall is publishing a guide for Jewish men, and next spring is publishing a modern men's Torah commentary. "The welcoming of women into leadership positions is something I have worked very hard on, but we don't want to lose the men."

The phenomenon is most pronounced in the Reform movement, which is the largest branch of Judaism in the United States, but is also being observed, to a lesser extent, in Conservative Judaism.

Some Jewish leaders argue that the pre-

ponderance of women in segments of Jewish community life reflects pent-up demand for involvement by a gender excluded from leadership for much of religious history.

It would appear that all of the movements within Judaism have their own orthodoxies. Just as separation of the sexes is a largely unchallenged norm within orthodoxy, so total co-education, mixed seating and sameness-of-roles has been unchallenged within the liberal movements for decades.

However, a recent column that appeared on the daily blog, Ten Minutes of Torah, sponsored by the North American Union for Reform Judaism — July 15, 2008 — had a remarkably fresh approach. The column appeared in a *Mishnah* lesson taught by HUC professor Mark Washofsky:

"Today, certainly in liberal Judaism, we no longer organize our community in this way. Our governing ideology is one of gender equality, at home, in the synagogue, and in the wider society, and we therefore no longer reserve particular or public duties for men while denying them to women. At the same time, we have hardly achieved a state of "gender neutrality" in our religious life. We speak of such things as feminist theology, of women's spirituality and of men's spirituality, and gender-specific men's and women's clubs are still a familiar element of our synagogue programs. Committed as we are to the religious and civic equality of women and men, do we still believe, as did our ancestors, that each gender has its own specific religious needs and means of expression?"

Contemporary Jewish Women

Before looking at women in Jewish communal life today, a survey of sociodemographic differences between Jewish women and men in the three countries with the largest Jewish populations, Israel, the U.S., and France, is presented:

The massive transition from lower managerial and clerical, to professional and higher managerial posts seen among Jewish women in the U.S. did not occur in Israel.

A. Jewish Women and Men: Socio-demographic Differences

EDUCATION

Higher education achievement is translated into the degree of academization of the younger generation. There is constant growth in the share of younger adults in their late 20s and early 30s who ever went to college and completed at least a first cycle with a B.A. degree. In the U.S. in 1957, 23% of Jewish women vs. 38% of Jewish men ages 30–39 had ever attended college. Among these, 10% of women vs. 26% of men had an academic degree. By 2001 these percentages had spectacularly increased: 89% of Jewish women and 88% of men ever attended college, while 67% of Jewish women and 71% of men had a degree. Most of the increase occurred

by 1990, when the gender gap in educational achievement nearly vanished.

In France and in Israel the extent of academization was quite high and expanding, though not to the level of U.S. Jewry, implying wider margins for further growth. In France in 2002, 73% of Jewish women vs. 69% of Jewish men aged 30–39 had some college, and 43% of women vs. 45% of men had a college degree. Frequencies in Israel were initially much lower but grew much faster than elsewhere. Israel's college exposure in the 1960s was about one third that among American Jews, but around 2000 it reached three fourths of the U.S. standard. College completion in Israel grew from about one fifth to nearly one half of the U.S.

Jewish achievement. The growth in higher education is particularly impressive among Israeli women whose rates passed from 7% exposure and 2% completion in the 1960s, to 66% and 35% respectively around 2000. Younger adults tend to be better educated than older people and represent the edge of a continually expanding trend.

In the beginning of modern times, there was a huge educational attainment gap to the disadvantage of Jewish women, but over time convergence occurred and eventually women attained more years of education than men. Notwithstanding the different levels of academic achievement of Jews in the three countries, the transformation over time of the gender differential was quite similar. During the 1960s, college attendance of Jewish women lagged behind men by 49–50%, but around 2000 women surpassed men. Educational equalization is even more impressive in terms of completing college, where women in the three countries lagged by 60–70% behind men in the 1960s, but around 2000 they actually surpassed men in Israel, while in the U.S. and France they lagged behind men by a few percent points.

The similar achievement paths in the three countries point to a general trend in women's reaching equal opportunities in college attendance and completion, rather than to country specific factors. The trends tend to upwardly expand to graduate studies such as Masters and Ph.D's. In Israel, for the first time in 2006 there were more women than men receiving a Ph.D.

degree. The Jewish gender gap is over regarding higher education while Jews continue to be far better educated than the general population.

WORK

The evolution of Jewish gender gaps can also be assessed in occupational achievement. To bring to a common denominator occupational data of different countries is far more complex than for educational levels. To make data from the U.S., France and Israel compatible the only solution possible is to give up on detail and limit the comparison to three broad occupational — or rather social status groups: *upper*, inclusive of professionals and managers; *middle*, inclusive of lower managerial, clerical, sales, and services; and *lower*, inclusive of crafts, operatives, and unskilled.

The distribution of Jews across the three major occupational groups evolved coherently with educational changes, with a growing Jewish presence among the upper social strata. Upward mobility of Jews was particularly remarkable in the U.S. where the share in the upper stratum out of all employed women increased from 24% in 1957 to 63% in 2001. The share of men in the same upper stratum passed from 55% to 65%. In France, women in the upper stratum progressed from 17% in 1975 to 24% in 2002, vs. an increase from 30% to 38% among men. In Israel, the progression was from 25% in 1961 to 38% in 2005 among women, and from 17% to 38% among men. It should be noted that in Israel women's participation in the labor force among those aged 18 to 34 increased from 30% around 1960 to 70% around 2000. Indeed, labor force participation is still usually higher among

Non-marriage as a norm becomes more visible among U.S. and France Jews than in Israel

men, and this is not unrelated to occupational distributions by gender.

Put differently, in the U.S. around 1960 the presence of women at the upper occupational level lagged by 60% behind men, but by 2001 the gap had disappeared. Some of the effect reflected higher female labor force participation and a first entry in the labor force by better educated women. In France the trend of women's increasing professionalization and involvement in managerial jobs proceeded in the same direction but significantly more slowly than in the U.S.. In Israel women were much more over-represented at the upper level of professionals and managers in the 1960s than now. It is as if men were closing the occupational gap versus women, contrary to the typical trend. But this is significantly an artifact of the enormously increased and more diverse female participation in the labor force.

At the middle level of lower managerial, clerical, sales and services, Jewish women were over-represented over men all the time and in each of the three countries. In the U.S. this relative surplus was rapidly decreasing with the growing passage of women to the upper occupational stratum. In France the surplus was much smaller and only moderately increasing. In Israel the women's surplus was intermediate between the U.S. and France in the 1960s, but it remained overall stable and ended up by being by far the largest around 2000. In other words the massive transition from lower level managerial and clerical, to professional and higher managerial posts that we saw among Jewish women in the U.S. did not occur in Israel.

By converse, relatively few Jewish women were found at the lower occupational level,

including crafts, operatives, semi-skilled and unskilled labor. This group is largely composed of men and, in fact, the under-representation of women is growing all the time.

Overall, gender occupational gaps significantly decreased, but the experiences in the three countries were different. The occupational configuration of Jews in the U.S. is quite unique, although other Jewish populations are following more slowly on the same mobility path. The U.S. has kept a unique position regarding upward occupational stratification and mobility, but Israel has still retained a minimum edge regarding the gender allocation of jobs of higher quality and academic background.

One interesting aside is the relationship between occupational status and Jewish identification. In the U.S. the 2001 NJPS data classified the respondents' Jewish status. Following the criteria adopted by the UJC, three groups can be compared within Jewish households: Jews, Persons of Jewish Background [PJBs], and non-Jews. Jews in the U.S. tend to fare occupationally better than the PJBs, and significantly better than non-Jewish members of Jewish households. These differences are more visible among men than among women and are mostly related to marriage patterns.

Given the smallness of the Jewish minority and its overwhelming concentration at upper social and occupational strata, Jews who marry out may find a shortage of suitable partners within the ethno-religious and socio-occupational group, thus marrying somewhat downwardly. This is much truer for Jewish women marrying non-Jewish men than the other way around. An interesting implication follows. The broader aggregate of Jewish and non-Jewish

relatives — defined as the *enlarged* Jewish population — tends to be significantly less educated and less involved in professional and managerial activities than the smaller *core* Jewish population. Expanding the definitional and identificational net thus brings to higher population estimates but carries significant implications for the social profile of U.S. Jewry.

MARRIAGE

The pace of family formation has diminished in more developed societies. Since women tend to marry younger than men, the proportions of ever-married at younger ages are higher than those of men who may eventually catch up at later ages. But the overall proportion marrying is also being affected by increasingly older ages at marriage. The assumption that the rate of ever-marrying will catch up in spite of later marriages is not supported by the data. Rates of singlehood relatively late in life, such as after 40, tend to grow.

In the U.S., in 1957, 90% of Jewish women and 84% of Jewish men aged 25–34 had ever married, down to 64% and 48% respectively in 2001. At ages 45–49, the respective shares — similar for both sexes — had diminished from 98% to 90%. In France marriage propensities increased significantly under age 30, where it was extremely low in the 1970s. But at 45–49 the share of the ever-married declined from 95% in 1975, to 89% in 2002. In Israel in the 1960s the percentage ever-married at 25–34 was 92% for women and 83% for men — quite similar to the data for U.S. Jewry — but in 2005 it was 73% and 57% respectively — visibly higher than in the U.S.. At age 45–49, the proportion of

ever-married passed from 98% for women and 97% for men in the 1960s to 94% for either sex in 2005. While nearly universal marriage was the norm among Jewish communities in a past generation, non-marriage becomes more visible in the U.S. and in France than in Israel. In turn divorce has increased, remarriage being more frequent among men than among women.

Choice of partner is an important aspect of marriage that relates to the debate on the influence of intermarriage on Jewish demography. In general a growing share of Jewish-born marry with spouses who were not born Jewish nor are currently Jewish. Gender differentials in this respect were not consistent. In the past, outmarriage was far more widespread among Jewish men than among Jewish women. Over the last decades, however, the trend goes toward greater equality in marrying out, consistent with the women's narrowing lags in educational and occupational achievement. Women gained access to interaction opportunities with others on campus and in the workplace similar to those of men.

Looking at the general frequencies of the outmarried in the U.S., taking all age groups together, Jewish adults with a currently non-Jewish partner comprised 5% of women and 9% of men in 1970, 28% for both genders in 1990, and 29% of women and 33% of men in 2001. The great opening-up of Jewish marriage patterns occurred before 1990, but the 2001 data show that it had not yet run its full course. The lower outmarriage propensity of women seems to have disappeared by 1990. There was even a slight surplus of women among marriages performed just before 1990. In 2001, gender behaviors had reverted to a more traditional

pattern, with fewer Jewish women outmarried than Jewish men in the younger age groups.

In France, the trend to narrow the gender gap still operates through periodic adaptations. Among earlier marriages there was a very big gap in gender propensities to outmarry. Fewer Jewish women overall (7% vs. 15% of men) were outmarried in the 1970s. In 2002 the overall outmarried pool looks very similar to the NJPS data (26% of women and 35% of men), pointing to an outmarriage trend which is intensifying all across Jewish communities. Among younger adults, however, outmarriage is more frequent in the U.S..

In Israel, the incidence of outmarriage among the veteran population is extremely small. The current frequency of marriages between Jews and Israeli Arabs would be far below one percent. With the arrival of a substantial number of non-Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union in the framework of the Law of Return, the share of non-Jews in Jewish households grew to over 5%. The share of mixed couples among Jews in Israel stands roughly where it stood in the U.S. and France in the 1950s-1960s.

In historical perspective, the concepts of interaction of Jews and others and assimilation of Jews in a non-Jewish context used to be associated with upward mobility. Marrying up for the members of the socially inferior minority was a way to be accepted in the majority. By converse, co-opting and incorporating a few of the lower-ranked into the dominant elite and mainstream was possible. When outmarriages were infrequent, the chosen ones were more often Jewish women than Jewish men. For the Jewish minority that was ranked socially very low, such mechanism of admission into the club

of the more privileged meant that marrying out implied marrying upwardly.

With the expanded opportunities for Jews to join the mainstream, men had more opportunities than women to marry out of their group. Over time, eventually Jews turned out to be one of the groups with the highest socioeconomic standing if not necessarily social acceptance. Since the turning point of the 1990s, outmarriage appears again to more often involve a man of higher social status (now a Jew) and a woman of a lower social status (now a non-Jew). What we use to call assimilation is becoming more frequent among those with lower educational achievement and less financial resources, or are downwardly mobile.

This is partly related to the high costs of Jewish life. Those who cannot afford Jewish schooling or JCC membership or other kinds of Jewish membership and donations because they are too costly, risk drifting away from the mainstream of the community. They consequently tend to interact with others who are less Jewishly involved or simply non-Jewish. The direction of the relationship between social status and the attainment of Jewish identity has been reversed. Today weakening of Jewish identity goes down the social ladder, while a stronger group identity may be achieved thanks to resources mustered moving up the ladder. Because of its differential impact, outmarriage affects Jewish population composition. This, also, is one key to the changing impact of gender in partner choices.

Those who cannot afford Jewish schooling or any kind of Jewish membership because of the cost risk drifting away from the mainstream of the community

Many of the most significant aspects of women in Jewish communal life in the United States and Israel have already been discussed in the previous part of this section. Therefore, the discussions here of those communities will be brief and limited to important issues not

previously covered or will amplify points of previously discussed issues. On the other hand, since the previous part did not address the role of women in European and Latin American Jewish life, the analyses of those communities will be somewhat more elaborate.

B. Jewish Women in Europe

It is only very recently that Jewish women have succeeded in making professional careers in Jewish communities. In addition to the typical factors inhibiting women's accession to leadership in most societies, the widely held opinion that Halakhah, traditional Jewish law, forbids women's communal leadership, resulted in the absence of women from leadership positions. Over time, a number of rabbis have reinterpreted positions such as the presidency of a community as being secular/political rather than religious roles, thus enabling women to assume leadership positions.

It was through Jewish women's organizations that Jewish women traditionally made an impact. Indeed the metamorphosis of traditional Jewish women's associations into modern organizations is worth pondering for the light it sheds on the possibilities of institutional and communal change. Many of these organizations grew out of traditional Jewish women's associations engaged mainly in charity and social work, such as committees for burial (*hevra kadisha*), visiting the sick (*bikur holim*), providing poor brides with a dowry and wardrobe (*hakhnasat kala*) and welfare (*zedaka*). These committees functioned solely within the community.

In the wake of emancipation in Western and parts of central Europe in the 19th century, many Jews left the narrow framework of the old communities, entered the bourgeoisie and obtained middle class status in less than two generations. Jewish women aspiring to be upwardly mobile transformed the old associations into

new women's associations under public law and gave them new meaning, while still upholding the communal framework within the new bourgeois communities. They now engaged in fundraising for purposes such as building Jewish hospitals and orphanages. Social tasks were still predominant and concentrated primarily within the Jewish community, but their scope was widened to the world beyond. Providing relief and assistance to the poor and the persecuted in the wider Jewish world — such as support for the victims of pogroms in Czarist Russia — became more important. Increasingly, Jewish women became engaged in charity beyond the Jewish community that was attempting to ease the social consequences of industrialization and rapid urbanization. Some also participated in broader struggles for social justice, including women's rights.

While women in general and Jewish women in particular were attracted to independent activity and to the fight for women's suffrage, equal pay for equal work, equal opportunities and economic independence, the Women's International Zionist Organization (WIZO, founded in 1920) took up many of the traditional social and welfare concerns of Jewish women's groups, shifting its focus from the framework of the local community to the *yishuv* in Eretz Israel and later to the State of Israel. WIZO has traditionally focused on the welfare of immigrant women, providing vocational training, education and child care, and it currently maintains numerous schools, day care centers, summer

camp, battered women shelters, and other social welfare institutions — in addition to actively lobbying for women's rights.

In the mid-to-late 1930s and especially during WWII, many Jewish women's organizations' social, organizational and political skills were in great demand. Jewish women's organizations became essential in aiding Jewish refugees, particularly children, and in trying to supply support for the communities of Nazi-occupied Europe, bringing relief to survivors and helping to rebuild Jewish life in Europe. Most significant was the umbrella organization, the International Council of Jewish Women (ICJW).

National umbrella organizations of local organizations of Jewish women had been already founded in the 19th century; first in the U.S. in 1893 (National Council of Jewish Women), then in England in 1902 (Union of Jewish Women in England), followed by Germany in 1904 (Jüdischer Frauenbund). In France, a national Jewish women's organization came into existence only in 1959.

The ICJW was founded shortly before WWI, but the war and its aftermath interrupted the development of international Jewish bodies.

Following the International Jewish

Women's Conferences in Vienna in 1923 and in Hamburg in 1929 the ICJW reconstituted itself, but broke down again during the 1930s and the years of the Shoah.

In 1946, at a convention in Dallas, the U.S.-based National Council of Jewish Women took the initiative to reconstitute the ICJW, a task which was accomplished in Paris between May

29 and June 1, 1949. The founding members were the National Council of Jewish Women, the National Council of Jewish Women of Canada, the Union of Jewish Women of South Africa, the Union of Jewish Women of England, the National Council of Jewish Women of Australia, and the Swiss Union of Jewish Women's Organizations — all representing Jewish communities spared by the War. The re-founding was part of the effort to achieve relief and reconstruction of a devastated Jewish Europe by those more fortunate. While reconstruction and relief were central in the immediate aftermath of the Shoah, the ICJW very early gained observer status at the United Nations and involved itself in the struggles for human rights, universal social justice and welfare alongside its specifically Jewish efforts of defending Israel and aiding Soviet Jewry. It has developed into a major political organization and has provided a voice for Jewish women in many important international forums where it is active on behalf of the wider Jewish community and women in general.

ICJW currently represents 52 Jewish women's organizations from 47 countries around the world with two to three million individual members. While more than half of its affiliate organizations are based in Europe, its headquarters is currently located in Zur Hadassa, Israel, because that is where the current president, Leah Aharonov, lives. The ICJW has permanent delegations at all four of the seats of the United Nations in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Paris. It has consultative status as a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) where it sits on the leading board. ICJW representatives regularly attend meetings of the

During WWII, many Jewish women's organizations became essential in aiding Jewish refugees, particularly children

UN General Assembly, ECOSOC, UNICEF and UNESCO and participate in consultations with other NGOs. While the ICJW is thus involved in international politics, it is also an important player on the European level. It is represented at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg and sits on the European Women's Lobby in Brussels where it provides a Jewish point of view on general, gender and human rights issues. It is also represented in Religions for Peace and the International Coalition for Agunah Rights. In 2004, it was accepted into the European Council of Jewish Communities (ECJC).

A main activity of especially the Eastern European ICJW has been the fight against racism and antisemitism which are again on the rise. For example, the ICJW affiliate, Council of Jewish Women of the Czech Republic, has protested against schoolbooks with antisemitic content. In Hungary, the ICJW affiliate is part of the fight against Hungarian Neonazis.

HOLDING THE COMMUNITY TOGETHER

Affiliates also continue many of the traditional tasks of Jewish women's organizations. The Dutch National Council of Jewish Women holds fund-raising gatherings for social projects in Israel. The German Jüdischer Frauenbund (JF) emphasizes — despite the Shoah, the destruction of German Jewry, and the refounding of the community in 1953 — the historical continuity of the organization since the 19th century. Welfare for the many Jewish immigrants from Poland was essential after the Shoah, and the JF still stresses welfare and social work; first in the community formed by survivors immediately after the war and then among the more

than 100,000 Jewish immigrants from the FSU who have arrived since 1990. The JF was historically one of the founding members of the Zentralwohlfahrtsstelle der Juden in Deutschland (Central Council of Jews in Germany), which is still the main body of the German Jewish community not only for distributing welfare funds and integrating the Russian Jewish immigrants — many of whom are still on welfare — but also for organizing activities for the young and supporting youth movements and student organizations. The JF also promotes the social integration of immigrants from the FSU, a task which is complicated by the fact that immigrants are the majority in many communities. It provides courses in Jewish religion and tradition in order to foster Jewish identity among the immigrants, many of whom are totally estranged from Judaism. It organizes numerous social activities to this end, and its members also meet regularly for seminars and weekends and are organizing many new courses. Especially in the new smaller communities lacking infrastructure, it is the women's organizations that maintain organized Jewish life, cooking and baking for communal Friday evening dinners or Shabbat Kiddush and are once again doing the burial rituals such as the sewing of clothing for the dead and *tahara*, the washing and preparing of the body for burial. Women's organizations have, thus, come full circle.

There appears to be a revival of the traditional tasks of Jewish women's associations. For example, in the main Jewish community in Zurich, which is Orthodox-affiliated but where

In Germany's smaller Jewish communities, it is the women's organizations that maintain organized Jewish life

most of the members are non-Orthodox, there is also a new women's association for the sewing of *sargenes*, the traditional burial clothing for the dead.

On the other hand, the Swiss umbrella organization, the Bund Schweizerischer Jüdischer Frauenorganisationen, stresses involvement in Swiss and international politics. While being deeply involved in community work, it serves as an advisory body to government and NGOs and takes public stands on many women's issues. For example, during the recent European football championship (Euro 08), it took part in a protest against the influx of women from Eastern Europe and Asia who served as prostitutes in Swiss cities during the tournament. Despite small numbers, Swiss Jewish women have been deeply involved in the ICJW since its re-founding and wield significant influence on framing its policies.

PRIVATELY FUNDED AND DEMOCRATIC

The ICJW receives no money from any major Jewish community, organization or the State of Israel; it is entirely member-driven. It is not funded by philanthropists who might wish to both lead and essentially own the organization, but rather by membership fees and by an endowment bestowed by a now-deceased former president. While this provides the ICJW with a large degree of operational independence, it also limits its operations, as money is always a concern when it comes to lobbying, organizing conferences or taking public action. As will be shown below, lack of funds will also pose a problem when engaging in the battle against Durban II, the continuation of the UN

conference against racism which turned into a global anti-Israel and anti-American spectacle in September 2001. The organization could not function without the readiness of its officials to volunteer and even pay their own expenses — such as travel fees to many board meetings all over the world and office costs. Of course, this also means that women without personal funds would probably find it difficult to rise to the ICJW's top. There are also very few full-time officials, which in today's world is a serious handicap when speedy decisions, actions, and reactions are frequently required.

Nevertheless, the ICJW takes great pride in its democratic structure, which sets it apart from many Jewish organizations that function in the time-honored *modus operandi* of the *shtadlan*, the rich Jewish trader or merchant who represents his community with the authorities, the organizing principle of Diaspora Jewish politics since the late Middle Ages (and in many respects until the present day). The ICJW is led by a democratically elected president and 14 democratically elected vice-presidents who come from various affiliated organizations and are responsible to a board and general assembly.

AGUNOT AND DURBAN II

In Europe the ICJW and its affiliates are influential both morally and politically despite shrinking numbers and the rather limited economic and electoral power of European Jews. Jewish women's organizations are a powerful voice in political and social discourse, whether for moral reasons — be it because of shame and guilt (in a Europe still preoccupied with the Shoah), or be it — more recently — because of concerns over

Europe's so-called Judeo-Christian heritage (a notion which has gained increased currency in reaction to the rise of Europe's Muslim populations).

A central issue with which the ICJW has been preoccupied in recent years is the improvement of the status of *Agunot*, women who are not granted religious divorces by their husbands, and therefore, cannot remarry within the framework of Halakhah. The ICJW has been quite successful at lobbying, with many rabbis currently introducing prenuptial agreements inoculating women from becoming *Agunot* in the case of the dissolution of a marriage or the abandonment of a family by the husband. However, it has not yet succeeded in convincing the Israeli Chief Rabbinate and the rabbinical establishments in Israel and America to take the similar steps. A meeting on the issue with Israeli Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar was cancelled at the last minute.

The major issue that has preoccupied the ICJW in 2008 is the second UN conference against racism, Durban II, scheduled to take place in Geneva in spring 2009. The first such conference in Durban, South Africa, seven years ago, demonized Israel and Zionism. The conference is to be repeated with countries such as Syria taking the lead. As soon as ICJW officials became aware of Durban II, they fought to prevent a repetition of Durban I and to limit the ensuing negative consequences to Israel and the Jews worldwide. Together with UN Watch, an NGO partly funded by the American Jewish Committee, the ICJW organized a conference in Switzerland for Jewish leaders last spring to make them aware of the threat. It wants to organize another such conference in preparation for Durban II, and plans a series of events in Geneva to be held while Durban II is taking place.

C. Jewish Women in Israel

Israeli Jewish women present a complex picture. On the one hand, recent years have seen a greater range of social, economic and political opportunities opening up to them. At the same time, new forms of inequality have been generated by some of those same trends, which channel women's opportunities into distinctive and often secondary frameworks.

In contrast to most other advanced Western countries, Israeli society as a whole still has a very strong pro-family orientation, shared by almost all sectors of the population, religious and secular, Jewish and non-Jewish alike. While one does see the age of marriage and first parenthood drifting upward, nonetheless Israel maintains higher fertility rates than Europe and the U.S. If in Europe the average family has 1.2–1.9 children, the average Israeli family has 2.95, and the average Jewish Israeli woman has 2.8 (the absolute numbers are higher for the Orthodox population). Israeli women bear the primary responsibilities of child-rearing (and the phenomenon of nannies and *au pairs* is uncommon in Israeli society). And Israeli social policy encourages fertility, by actively subsidizing fertility treatments, surrogacy and so forth.

The complex relationship between liberal democratic values on the one hand and traditional religious values on the other with respect to women's status in Israel is illustrated by the fact that, while family law in Israel is determined by one's ethnic and religious affiliation, decisions concerning property, including alimony and child support are generally decided by secular courts.

In brief, Israel is still overwhelmingly a family-oriented society; this strong family orientation is shared by all sectors and is not, as is often the case elsewhere, limited to segments of the society who have not yet internalized, or who affirmatively reject, processes of modernization. At the same time, Israel's steady integration into the post-industrial and capitalist framework of globalization will likely have effects on its family life as well.

Within Israel's Jewish society, one does find genuine differences between religious-traditional and secular Jews. Thus the latter exhibit a rising divorce rate; the former regularly maintain a strong ideological and religious commitment to having many children and keeping the family unit intact.

The continuing primacy of the Orthodox rabbinate with regard to matters of family law is a regular bone of contention. Orthodox feminists, chiefly those affiliated with Koleh, have in recent years begun to challenge the rabbinical courts and authorities across a range of matters. These efforts have thus far attained only limited results for a variety of reasons, including the significant pressures exerted from within the Rabbinic fraternity on those Rabbis who work to improve women's status, the role of the religious parties in maintaining the political status quo, the lack of interest or technical wherewithal on the part of the secular population to challenge the status quo, and the success of the rabbinic camp in establishing its own very

successful women's organizations to counter Koleh, such as Binyan Shalem.

Recent years have seen mounting awareness of the problems of domestic violence and of sexual abuse and harassment, and the public rebuke of some of those involving public figures is a sign of some progress, although domestic violence and sexual harassment are still ignored in some sectors of Jewish society in Israel.

Economically, Israeli women receive roughly 80 percent of the pay that men do for equal work; Israeli women also work part-time in far greater numbers than do men, and their incomes are thus even lower as a result. In the last thirty years the number of women in managerial positions has increased threefold, yet women still fill only a third of senior management positions and just less than a tenth of CEO slots. Women comprise roughly two-thirds of Israel's large public sector; yet they are just a third of the senior civil service despite, on average, having far better education than their male counterparts.

The current Knesset has seventeen female members, roughly fourteen percent. The reasons for this are several: The structural organization of nationwide party lists entrenches the power of party central committees and inhibits new grass-roots leadership; the standard routes for political advancement are senior military experience and fulltime political work, neither of which are readily open to women (leadership of women's organizations has yet to prove itself a viable route to political office); the women's groups within the political parties have come to facilitate a kind of ghettoization within the party structures. Moreover the ultra-Orthodox parties, Shas and United Torah Judaism, who

together hold eighteen seats, on principle do not have women MKs. Women who do succeed in national politics frequently tend to be outstanding on what are perceived as "women's issues" such as health, education and social welfare. Indeed, in this instance, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, like Golda Meir earlier, may be the exception who proves the rule. Women have been active in extraparliamentary protest movements which draw on the imagery of motherhood in making their points, such as "Four Mothers," and "Women in Black," on the left, and "Women in Green" on the right.

Israel is the among the small number of countries in the world (about 10) with compulsory military service for women. Though the number of Jewish women exempted from military service for religious reasons is on the rise, women still comprise roughly one third of the active duty military and from a fifth to a third of the junior officer corps, from second lieutenant to major. (And many of the women who are exempted still perform a year or two of national service.) Beginning in 2001 the IDF opened the ranks of a wide range of positions and tasks to women, while still giving women the option of a shorter term of mandatory service. Women who have entered hitherto male-only roles, including combat roles have exhibited an interesting range of adaptations, from assimilating male behaviors to creating what they regard as non-gendered forms of behavior. At times, though, the entrance of women into new roles, such as firing instructors or staff work, has in turn led men to view those roles as "women's work" within the army. This is thus a complex picture whose impacts on the position of women in society as a whole will only emerge over time.

D. Jewish Women in the United States

WOMEN'S RISE IN MAINSTREAM JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS

Until the mid-to-late 20th century, the only public leadership that Jewish men recognized in Jewish women was their role in single-sex women's organizations. But even in these cases, which represented sources of empowerment for the women involved, women had to fight their male counterparts to keep control of the money they raised. Similarly, women had long been employed as Hebrew school and Sunday school teachers, but had not received respect or fair compensation in these roles (and this is all-too-often still the case).

Women's activism has transformed Jewish society in this domain and is continuing to do so. In the United States, for example, feminist Shifra Bronznick has created a well-regarded organization, Advancing Women Professionals and the Jewish Community, whose purpose is to examine the working conditions of women in Jewish organizations (e.g. federations) and to strive for the goal of equal gender representation and compensation in top leadership positions.

JEWISH WOMEN AND PUBLIC JEWISH LEADERSHIP

In 1972 the Reform movement ordained its first female rabbi (Sally Priesand) in the United States, followed in 1974 by the Reconstructionist movement (Sandy Eisenberg Sasso). In 1985, urged on by Ezrat Nashim and a determined

group of rabbis, the Conservative movement's first woman rabbi, Amy Eilberg, was ordained. Today, women comprise a large proportion or even majority of rabbinical and cantorial candidates, and serve as professionals in numerous Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Reform American congregations. A sign of the greatly changing times as the winter 2005 edition of *Women's League Outlook for Conservative Judaism*, the magazine of the movement, shows on its cover approximately 50 female rabbis and student "who are transforming the Conservative Movement," in a photograph with the Jewish Theological Seminary's then Chancellor Rabbi Ismar Schorsch and Rabbinical School Dean Rabbi William Lebeau, both smiling broadly. Current feminist concerns no longer center on the right to become a rabbi, but rather on the kinds of pay and positions women rabbis are able to obtain.

Enabling women to serve as rabbis — "Imah on the Bimah" — has led to the valuing of women's experiences and insights into Jewish spiritual life. As a result, Jewish feminists have achieved much more than rabbinical status. They have created new rituals for girls' and women's life-cycle events such as special baby naming ceremonies for girls, the double-ring wedding ceremony and the breaking of two glasses at the end of the marriage ritual.

Another priority has been upgrading the Jewish education and Jewish cultural literacy of girls and women, including opportunities to study Talmud. From a negative point of view,

only if women know the Talmud well, and the law that derives from it, will they be able to protect themselves against harmful rulings. In a more positive vein, women conversant with the Talmud can better appreciate Jewish scholarship. Among the highly successful new schools of this genre is the New York-based Drisha, cited recently for “remaining profoundly innovative in the way it has moved the agenda on feminism and women’s leadership in the traditional Orthodox community for 25 years. No organization has had more of an impact on the halakhic feminist community.”

Feminist innovations also include the creation of ‘gender-aware’ synagogue liturgy and prayers, and the elimination of prayers that express negative ideas about women. Prayer books are continuously being retranslated and reorganized to reflect this sensitivity. In addition, The Jewish Publication Society in 2006 published *The Contemporary Torah: A Gender-Sensitive Adaptation of the JPS Translation*, with special attention to the references to human beings and to ‘divine beings’, evidence of the far-reaching impact of re-examining our basic sacred documents. Extremely important is the examination of Jewish religious texts, laws, customs and culture through the prism of feminist theory and issues of equality. Instead of including only the “four imahot” (Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel and Leah), for example, Jewish feminists stress the importance of including Zilpah and Bilhah. Sometimes the inclusiveness goes beyond Jewish women to include women in general. For example, the “*bencher*” distributed at an Orthodox bar mitzvah in 2005 included the following prayer in the “*birkat hamazon*” immediately after the prayer for the soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces:

“May the Merciful One grant peace between the descendants of Sarah and the descendants of Hagar.”

Jewish feminists’ concerns have led to important avenues for freedom among women whose husbands refuse to give them a *get*, or who will give them a *get* only after payment or child custody. Creating religious and secular legislation to end unequal power relationships and abuses against women who are *agunot* or *mesoravot get* has led to the creation of new roles such as “*yo’atzot*” or advisors. In Canada, Jewish feminists such as Norma Baumel Joseph are working effectively with the secular legislature to protect such women; and others are making films to bring this pernicious problem to public attention.

It is, however, the case that major American Jewish organizations that are not specifically women’s organizations are headed by men, and that in only 2 of the 39 largest American Jewish federations are women in the highest leadership positions. These indicate that, though significant strides toward gender equality have been taken, much more is still necessary.

**In Canada,
Jewish
feminists are
working with
the secular
legislature
to protect
Agunot and
Mesoravot
Get**

JEWISH WOMEN’S INCREASED AND MEN’S DECREASED JEWISH ENGAGEMENT IN JEWISH LIFE

During the first half of the 20th century, more than a third of America’s Jewish girls received no formal Jewish education in part because they did not have to prepare to become a *bat mitzvah*.

When *bat mitzvah* celebrations became ubiquitous, the gender educational gap narrowed and disappeared and has now reversed itself — girls are somewhat more likely than boys today to be enrolled in Jewish educational activities in the elementary school ages, and dramatically more likely to continue through the teen years. Research shows that, except among the Orthodox, boys leave Jewish educational settings in much greater proportions than girls immediately after the *bar mitzvah*.

U.S. Jewish women increasingly serve as synagogue presidents, rabbis, cantors and teachers in all synagogues except Orthodox

In adult educational activities, men slightly outnumber women in Orthodox settings, while in Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist and trans-denominational settings women now outnumber men two to one. For adult women, preparation for and celebrating the *adult bat mitzvah* — a ceremony unknown in historical Jewish communities — has emerged as a meaningful tool for motivating continuing education. Researchers who study Jewish education have remarked that women’s passion for acquiring these skills often brings their husbands into classes as well.

A custom is also developing for a woman to learn to read from the Torah on the occasion of the *bar* or *bat mitzvah* of her child.

Since the 1960s, the increasing involvement of American Jewish women in public Judaism, including synagogue and ritual settings, and their increasing access to Judaic texts, has generated excitement among women to such an extent that some men define Judaism as women’s

activity. Mature women studying Hebrew, trope, Torah and *Haftorah* reading, and Jewish history in preparation for adult *bat mitzvah*, for example, is the impetus for many innovative synagogue and communal educational programs. There is no parallel movement for men, even if the occasional man does become an adult *bar mitzvah*.

On the other hand, sociological study of the American Jewish community shows that today women’s involvement is powerfully influential in rescuing public Jewish rituals and customs, along with Jewish texts and traditions. Occasionally, when women in Reform temples proudly don *kippot* (head coverings) and *talitot* (prayer shawls), men who never considered doing so follow their lead. In sociological language, women increasingly serve as “brokers,” connecting not only other women but also men with their Jewish cultural heritage.

Women increasingly serve as synagogue presidents, rabbis, cantors and teachers in all synagogues except Orthodox. In some cases, these new activities by Jewish women have not only brought Judaism to the center of women’s lives and women to the center of Judaic life, but have also served to ignite the religious sensibilities of the acculturated Jewish men around them. In other cases, women’s involvement has discouraged men from getting or staying involved. Jewish women’s transformative influences on contemporary Jewish religious life have been sweeping and powerful. Now they face a new challenge: helping their sons, fathers, brothers, husbands and friends find their own path to Jewish spiritual engagement.

CONCLUSION

The change in the roles and goals of Jewish women worldwide is among the most important events of the 20th century. The question now is how will Jewish women and men respond to the challenges of the 21st century? One issue that could be addressed concerns *gender* rather than women only. The current concern that men (and boys) are less involved than women (and girls) in all aspects of Jewish life except among the Orthodox is a gender issue and may

reflect a form of backlash by men against Jewish women's assertiveness. It is important to understand that backlash never eradicates a social movement, nor does it bring the society back to a stage before the movement emerged. Rather, what it does is interact with its target in a dialectic way, leading to unanticipated new directions. For example, concerns about men's withdrawal from Judaism in light of women's enthusiastic involvement is leading some people to create new men-only Jewish forums.

E. Jewish Women in Latin America

Latin American Jewish women epitomize, through their singular traits and their shared condition, the contemporary nature of Jewish life in which unity and diversity are interwoven beyond a myriad of individual and collective options, institutional forms of association, values and identities.

The place and role of Jewish women in Latin America reflect the coexistence of diverse historical developments and social and communal times; the sustained struggle of Latin American societies to fully enter into modernity and their backlashes are part of a reality which at times gradually shifts into the Postmodern. The way Jews have perceived and internalized it and the way Jewish women have experienced it has become part of a complex interplay between narratives and reality.

In Latin America there is Jewish life in 27 diverse countries that differ territorially, nationally, culturally, and politically. Latin American Jewish women have shared with men the challenges of guaranteeing continuity while negotiating different degrees of integration, both through strong patterns of group organization that have acted as frameworks for defining their roles and status, and through more individualized routes of identification and social action. Jews have developed a rich array of communal spaces, associations and institutions in almost all spheres of Jewish life, among which women's organizations acquired a visible importance. Institutional density and strength varies through the region, while Brazil and Argentina represent

models of centrifugal communities — the latter more centralized, the former more federated — Mexico is a model of both centralized and internally diversified community. Membership rates are higher than 80 %, as compared to Brazil at 60% and Argentina at 50%. In the latter's case, the confluence of antisemitic attacks, political and economic upheaval and failed leadership has led to the decline of the community. For Brazilian Jews, their positive perception of growing social integration has confronted the old concept of *kehilla* with the need for a more pluralistic approach to the community's institutional paradigms. In the region, gender has followed the above mentioned trends.

Shared contexts and internal diversity tended, paradoxically, both to reinforce and dilute differences, deriving in a wide spectrum of patterns. Sephardic and Oriental women have developed their own spaces and institutions: *Sephardim* from Turkey and the Balkan countries, Middle Eastern Jews from Aleppo, Damascus, Lebanon and Palestine, North Africans from Morocco and Egypt and small groups of *Sephardim* from Italy and other countries in Europe. Their sense of belonging has been essentially rooted in their ethnic identification. However, the more traditional charitable networks allowed their entrance into the communal public sphere. In this sense, the role gender has played as a channel of participation to negotiate their status in collective spaces has been meaningful.

Ashkenazi women originally experienced their organization through political and ideolog-

ical axes which characterized Eastern European Jewish life. The extended roles women played are visible in a sizable community as that of Argentina, the largest in Latin America. Women helped to create communal organizations while participating in labor unions and human rights groups. The liberal credo that favored public education as a shared ground for integration explains how both inside the community in its initial stages and in the society as a whole, Jewish women became recognized cultural activists.

Women's militancy in social and political leftist movements — a characteristic found in several communities — tended to advance egalitarian roles in the communal sphere. The preeminence of the Zionist idea and the State of Israel in Jewish life provided Jewish women an additional domain in which to become active and acted as a catalyst to strengthen Jewish institutional activity, with women's organizations channeling their efforts towards local philanthropic endeavors. If at the beginning mainly Ashkenazi Jewish women were involved, with time women of all communities participated as well.

Women's participation in the organized Jewish world developed extensively in what may be defined as their particular spheres of action: aid and welfare; social and philanthropic organizations; sisterhoods; elder care or youth organizations and family-oriented activities. The public domain incorporates activities, institutions, and forms of associations that link, rank, organize, or subsume the particular definitions related to women.

The strength of Jewish women's traditional spaces interacts today with their participation

in additional frameworks. Different surveys in the region point to the complementarity of communal and social frameworks. Argentina's case is again quite remarkable. Women have participated intensely in Jewish organizations leading efforts towards the protracted investigation and closure of the bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center in Buenos Aires in 1994. They were the founders of and main actors in groups of families and friends of the victims who came together both to mourn and to fight for justice. This was the case of *Memoria Activa* which organized weekly demonstrations in front of the federal tribunals as a forum to openly share personal testimonies and to undertake collective reflections on the topic of impunity. Jewish women also became actors in key women's organizations heading the struggle against human rights violations for which the military dictatorship is held responsible.

Brazil, Mexico and Costa Rica display a more individualized but not less important trend with Jewish women participating in the national arena. They participate within diverse spheres in society at large, achieving positions of leadership in the academic and scientific worlds as well as in the public arena, including governmental institutions and social and political organizations.

Structural and cultural characteristics might explain the roles Jewish women have played as a result of the dynamics between the principle of individual equality and that of group differences. Globalization and democratization in the region have brought pluralism and multiculturalism to the forefront of societies and imaginaries. Beyond the fact that Latin American Jews have undergone transformations, global changes as well as local factors have enhanced the apparent

Jewish education in Latin America reflects the fundamental role Jewish women have played in identity shaping

contradictory processes of integration and ethnic preservation. These trends can be also analyzed by approaching the interaction between the public and the private spheres. While the organized Jewish community is a space in which

public energy is displayed and women's organizations have been, as stated, strong and important, women have not achieved leading positions in the political communal structure. During a recent visit to Washington, DC by leaders of Latin American Jewish communities — all men — to engage in collective conversations with American Jewry, government officials and multilateral organizations, some interlocutors expressed surprise at the absence of women in leadership positions in

the region's Jewish political universe.

A particular realm where the presence of women is most evident is Jewish education. Women dominate by large the communities' outstanding educational network. Jewish education has represented for Latin American Jewry the basis to define their continuity; the main channel to transmit, create and project their cultural profile and to build upon the differences both between communities and their host societies as well as between the various communities themselves. Education reflects the fundamental role Jewish women have played in identity shaping while underscoring the downside of an increasingly feminized area associated with lower levels of income and occupational status. Thus, while the figure of women teachers has become an icon of both gender and Jewish life in the region, it also reflects a deriving hierar-

chical inequality. In recent years women have taken directive roles as professionals in the field while still not well represented among the lay leadership.

The educational system has experienced transformations in terms of gender issues as well as the communities' cultural identity profiles. It expresses overall religious and cultural developments while acting concurrently as shaping arena. Historical, political and ideological currents that brought about the original differentiation of schools have been replaced by communitarian and religious criteria.

A comparative look into the communities shows similar trends towards increased institutional and curricular religiosity as well as a reinforcement of women's participation. While acknowledging the fact that the ascendancy of religious education is related to the incidence of social policies — as expressed in the massive support offered through scholarship by religious schools — it must be underscored that this process manifests an increase in religiosity and observance which constitutes part of the significant transformations in Latin American Jewish life.

Two simultaneous trends intersect in the world of Jewish women: a continuous secularization process and the reemergence of primordial religious identity. While on one side identities are built through cultural bonds and tradition gains importance with no apparent religious mandate, on the other the resurgence of religion is reshaping communal ethnic boundaries. Observance is not a common practice among the majority of women in Buenos Aires, in fact 3 out of 10 declare themselves very or rather observant, while only 2 out of 10 follow at least one rule of

kashrut. In Mexico, while the majority of women define themselves as traditionalist, this category shows an ongoing decrease (77% in 2000; 62 in 2006, and 59% among women younger than 40). There has also been a meaningful increase in observant (6%: 17% and 20% respectively); and very observant (4%: 7% and 12%).

Among Syrian women, the division along religious lines is still more evident. To a large extent their identity and power traditionally derived from participation in activities involving women's organizations within their synagogues rather than devout religious practice. They also equated religiosity with a sense of being Jewish, rather than the quality of being religious.

The interplay between the historical ethnic components of identity and new religious trends in Orthodoxy reflects a differential behavior throughout the region both in women and men. In the 1960s the Conservative movement spread to South America. As it adjusted to local conditions, the synagogue began to play a more prominent role both in community life and society in general. The Conservative movement has mobilized thousands of otherwise non-affiliated Jews, who now participate actively in Jewish institutions and religious life. Women have played a significant role in the movement and, following the pattern in the United States, though notoriously slower, they are becoming religious functionaries.

Today, however, South American communities are a clear example of how *Chabad* grew out of socio-economic and cultural changing conditions. Religious developments responded to the need for reconstitution of the social fabric, to cultural and spiritual transformations as well as to the existence of new religious functionaries.

In this sense, identification appears as an anchor for belonging and of social order and as a moral code providing responses to unresolved expectations by the prevailing patterns of organized communal life.

In communities in which collective loyalties and the prevailing structural density and norms are still powerful in shaping Jewish life, one has to explore additional reasons. We observe a newly expanding claim for religious experience that is connected in relevant and practical ways with and within the known universe of Jewish community institutions and patterns transnationally connected. Its expression may be seen in the current process of embracing an observant ultra-Orthodox Sephardic life-style among women of Syrian-Jewish communities. In Mexico and Panama, among others, in the last decades, women have adopted and adapted practices and rituals introduced by the *Shas* movement. It is interesting to analyze the shaping of an identity that modifies the original Syrian-Jewish orientation and moves towards an inclusive Sephardic ethnicity.

The emerging trends of ultra-Orthodoxy may also be explained as an essential questioning of the basic paradigm of peaceful integration into the local national-civil mainstream, of being equal while at the same time preserving a significant amount of Jewish community autonomy. The common characteristics of Orthodoxy in the region, as in other parts of the Jewish world, seem to be today related to the maintenance of the prevailing *enclave* model

In Mexico and Panama in the last decades, women have adopted and adapted practices and rituals introduced by the Shas Movement

which may allow its survival in changing conditions (where interactions grow and boundaries became more porous).

These changes certainly impact identification processes. Israel has always been a central referent for communal and individual identification in the region; today it continues to act as such while the family and the community also act as identity transmitters. The majority of women tend not to see or feel contradictions between their national and Jewish identities; they declare themselves very/rather worried about the situation in Israel and consider the importance of the State very/rather important for the Jews. Its importance, however, is increasingly interwoven with other referents, such as religion or memory.⁹

During the transition to democracy, especially in the Southern Cone, repression and human rights violation as well as violent attacks

on Jewish institutions, as is the case in Argentina, lead to the revision of the place of memory, Jewish and gendered, acquiring a growing influence. Memory of impunity was related to an historical *Zahor* related to the Shoah. Claims for justice; remembering as a way of Jewish practice and civil commonality have been advanced by dozens of Jewish women intellectuals, writers, poets and thinkers. Jewish Women in Latin America are experiencing new

venues of gender expression.

From a socio-demographic perspective,

While the percentage of Jewish working women is 81% in Argentina, it is only 41% in Mexico

the region shows different profiles. Argentina has more developed socio-cultural and demographic profiles, while Mexico and Venezuela exhibit more traditionalist patterns. However, the general behavior in the region has been adequately defined as transitional, attuned with a global tendency among Jewish women. The great majority were born and educated in the Latin American countries. As in other areas of the Jewish world, probably the most impressive change has been in the status of women in education, were they have gradually closed the gap that separated them from men. In Buenos Aires, Argentina women and men show the same percentages of close to 40% of university level, while in Mexico there are still differences which certainly tend to decrease. Women with university level education were close to 30% (2000) while men reached 43%. Today both reach over 43%.

Consistent with the trend toward diminishing gender-related educational and socioeconomic gaps, Jewish women are gradually becoming more equal, even though there are still differences in the academic and professional fields in which they specialize.

In the the last decades, following new paths, women have entered the labor market. In the past the role they played in the survival and economic integration of the immigrants was closely related to scarcity of resources. Upward social mobility enhanced their private spaces as housewives and their roles were expressed in the strengthening of the home and maternal chores as a privileged feminine sphere. However, interacting with educational achievements, women entered the labor market as part of a trend towards self-fulfillment. The recent economic

⁹ The data refer to Argentine, Chile, Mexico and Venezuela.

crises enhanced this trend. The scope and intensity of their impact varied according to the size of the middle class, the place of the community in the social and national arenas, and the ability of groups and leaders, both national and communal, to maneuver in each country. While the occupational structure in Argentina shows the highest percentage of working women, at 85%, in Mexico it reaches only 41%. It is worth pointing out that in the United States this figure is 82%.

When looking at the labor insertion, Argentina shows a trend that combines structural socio-cultural development with long lasting economic upheavals. Women show an occupational behavior similar to men. Thus, there is a meaningful proportion of professionals and managers, 33%, while simultaneously there is over 23 % of non-qualified employees. In countries such as Mexico, with a less developed profile, women are overrepresented in the sales sector and over 70 % are in the categories of professionals and self-employed business owner. Throughout the region there is a constant improvement in managerial and professional levels and a growing presence in intermediate occupational levels — clerical and trade services employees.

The renewed presence of mother/housewives in the labor market is followed by significant changes in the family role structure thus developing family forms such as dual-earner and dual-career families. However, the family remains the main source of demographic, economic and cultural reproduction, still significant changes are evident. There is a general trend in all the communities to delay marriage and childbearing.

Outmarriage influences the configuration of women, families and communities. While in Argentina and Brazil it reaches 45 percent, thus showing a similar pattern as in North-American and some European communities, in Mexico it is still below 10%. These figures impact on identity building for the new generations. In Argentina and Brazil there is a low rate of conversion to Judaism, while in Mexico over 80% of outmarriages are mediated by conversion. The importance of Jewish collective life density for the inmarriage pattern, as expressed by affiliation, space concentration, Jewish education, attitudes and values, and certainly the stratification profile of surrounding societies, should be stressed. Diminishing rates of affiliation mediated by the economic crisis of the last decade and the growing rates of exogamy certainly point to the close interaction between the structural dimension of Jewish life and its place in diverse size population communities.

A living example of concomitant cultural changes in women's worlds may be found in the growing spaces for women's reflection, such as literature, fiction, theater and literary essays. Essential links have developed between practice and narrative and the interplay of the personal and collective dimensions of identity. In Latin America we are witnessing a literary boom by Jewish women that has become part of the national and regional creativity. This phenomenon, which can be explained in the light of the larger boom of women's literature initiated twenty years ago, addresses specific aspects about each author's relationship with her Jewish identity and with past and present challenges of Jewish life. Literature thus has become a terrain in which to explore, analyze and discuss their

gender and collective condition. Jewishness as a subject is not equally present in their work. While in some of them it has a highly visible place, for others this search may be found in explorations of otherness, roots and belonging. Some initially revived the immigration experience through their grandmothers', mothers' and daughters' voices; others retrace their own past questioning of the role assigned to women by tradition; some honor feminine figures as symbols

***In latin
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of family survival, while others praise the value of rupture amidst symbolic continuity. In many cases the awareness and commitment to Jewish identity went hand in hand with their literary production. Their literature provides an opportunity to explore the interaction between gender and ethnicity as hard cores of identity. Thus, cultural creativity reflects the new profile of Jewish

women who face increasing processes of individualization amidst the renewed importance of collective identities, and still have serious gender imbalances in the organized Jewish world;

gender differences have to be approached in terms of the required communal, organizational and institutional changes the region demands.

The varied picture of Latin American Jewish women testifies to the coexistence of diverse historical, both social and communal, times. While in communities such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay their condition reveals the prevalence of developed patterns of individual achievements and collective life in spite of still facing challenges related to gender imbalances, as in other parts of the developed Jewish world; in communities such as Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia and Costa Rica their accomplishments are structurally related to lower levels of development while having also to deal with unattained gender equilibriums. The wide range of identity options that lie behind their role in the socialization of new generations points to a constant process of pluralization in the Jewish world, expanding ways of belonging and narrowing the consensual normative core, consequently redefining their particular roles and common challenges both in the private and the public spheres.



Future Trends Among Young Jewish Women

A majority among young Jewish women — born after the cultural revolution of the 1960s, daughters of the 70s, 80s and 90s — approaches the future with a sense that the opportunities open before them are greater than ever before, due to more than a century during which the revolutionizing force of feminism has been at work.

These young Jewish women — most of them, especially in the communities of North America and Western Europe are urban, educated and emancipated — approach their future with a belief that “they can have it all.” In other words, the notion of the female condition as one of sacrifice is alien to them. They tend to reject being told that in shaping their lives they would need to make trade-offs, either between family life and professional advancement, between romantic love and community belonging, or between their Jewish selves and female selves. They have a strong sense of their right and ability to choose the kind of lives they wish to lead and the equal legitimacy of all female life choices. Even for some young Jewish women living in traditionalist, ultra-Orthodox closed communities, the sense of possibility might be constrained, yet it is still there. These women have greater educational opportunities than ever

before, access to better and more jobs and positions of prominence in their own communities.

Yet, as Jewish women are inspired to take advantage of the possibilities newly opened to them, great or small, they face resistance. In its most overt form this resistance is ideological. Mainly in ultra-Orthodox circles, where Jewish texts and traditions continue to be interpreted and practiced in a manner opposed to female emancipation and equality. This kind of ideological resistance, insofar as it emerges from revered texts and thinkers, often resonates with ultra-Orthodox women themselves, even as it constrains their possibilities. But even outside deeply traditionalist circles ideological resistance is at the core of several dominant institutions that have deep impact on the lives of Jewish women who are not ultra-Orthodox, most notably the state-supported institutions in Israel, such as the Rabbinate and the rabbinical courts. Women who outside of Israel would be likely to choose to carry their personal lives outside religious law, find themselves subject to it as part of their being citizens of the State of Israel. Aside from the Rabbinate, one could argue that in spite of some progress, the Israeli Defense Forces continue to promote a secularized ideological resistance to female equality in the form

of various arguments against women in combat roles.

However, outside highly traditionalist circles and Rabbinic institutions, overt ideological resistance to female equality and emancipation,

Secular women in Israel who find the power of the Rabbinic oppressive might choose “Exit” by executive marriage and divorce outside its institutions

based on Jewish texts and traditions has become significantly less acceptable, much in the same way that ideological racism has. The more widespread resistance that most Jewish women face is institutional — the deeply rooted hurdles to female advancement that exist even in the absence of any official cause. Jewish communal institutions and political institutions of the State of Israel officially subscribe to the language of female emancipation and equality, but the raw numbers attest to their failure to realize it. This form of resistance is high, especially when compared with the status of women in comparable environments, such

as the non-Jewish non-profit world and in political institutions of most developed countries.

When young Jewish women empowered by a sense of possibility meet ideological and institutional resistance, they respond in a variety of ways that combine to transform Jewish life. Whether loudly or *sotto voce*, Jewish women are increasingly responding to resistance with the question “Why Not?” and in doing so they are innovating Jewish life. They are questioning certain interpretations of Jewish texts and offering others, they are demanding a greater share of the pie in a variety of existing institutions, and perhaps most intriguing — some of them are initiating new structures and practices

outside the existing institutions that better suit their vision of Jewish life.

In examining the diversity of responses by young Jewish women to the resistance they meet and their roles as innovators in Jewish life, the theoretical structure of *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* developed by the celebrated economist and social thinker Albert O. Hirschman, should prove useful. Young Jewish women, who have a general sense of affinity to the Jewish community and to their Jewish identity, struggle between Exit and Voice as they formulate their responses to the resistance they face. Exit is typically exercised when existing structures are too oppressive, the alternatives outside more attractive and the cost of leaving not unreasonable. Voice is typically exercised when existing structures demonstrate a measure of openness and adaptability, alternatives are limited and the cost of leaving prohibitive. Voice moreover, entails a refusal to exit which in turn demonstrates fundamental loyalty and further legitimates voice.

For example, secular women in Israel who find the power of the Rabbinic oppressive might choose to circumvent its institutions — Exit — by executing key life events such as marriage and divorce outside its institutions. Some of these women go further, not only refusing to submit their private lives to the authority of the Rabbinic, but also publicly and actively fighting against it through political and civic routes. The choice of Exit in this case is exercised because the existing structures, at least from the perspective of secular women in Israel, are contrary to feminism and to female equality and distinctly at odds with their aspirations for advancement and freedom. Thus, the concerns of feminist women in Israel remind one of those

of women in the liberal West 20 years ago. The key issues are family law, violence, sexual harassment, unequal pay and limited infrastructure for working mothers and mothers seeking work. In most of these issues the Orthodox Jewish establishment and its role in the affairs of the State is considered useless at best and more commonly a hurdle to female and social development inasmuch as it feeds into other forms of patriarchal injustice.

While secular women in Israel might Exit the ultra-Orthodox structures and fight against their dominance in the public civic sphere, within avowedly traditionalist, ultra-Orthodox circles, an increasing number of women are demanding and exercising Voice. These highly traditionalist women increasingly incorporate feminist perspectives and roles — and make their own distinctive contributions to feminist causes and struggles — yet they don't shed their own deep commitments to tradition and to traditional structures and authorities. Traditional Jewish women — like their counterparts in other traditions — might simultaneously deepen their religious observance and attachment to tradition even as they become more assertive as religious Jews not only in the public sphere but in the Orthodox arena as well. Some do so out of commitment to feminist ideals of equality and self-expression while others are acting out of the greater awareness and legitimacy of self-expression and personal experience which characterize contemporary society as a whole.

The choices of Exit or Voice are multiple, with Jewish women frequently exercising a range of responses combining the two depending on the context and goals. In doing so, women are innovating a range of areas in Jewish life,

from scholarship and study, to prayer, political communal and religious leadership and activism, cultural creativity to occupational status and careers. The “trailblazers” among these women are taking ownership of their Judaism and exercising a right, which they feel they have, to formulate new forms of Jewish practices — to them no less legitimate than others — that are compatible with their lives as emancipated women. Readings of Judaism as supporting women's equality and emancipation gain prominence with some detecting an affinity between Judaism and female empowerment, especially when approaching Judaism as a form of spirituality — Judaism, spirituality and womanhood are melded to emphasize the female empowered condition as one that is more in tune with Jewish spirituality. In other forms, Jewish women adopt a progressive-feminist reading of the Torah as providing imperatives for pursuing justice, equality, rescue, caring for others and generally for *Tikkun Olam*.

An example of the process of advancement, resistance and adaptation is illustrated in examining the question of prayer within the Orthodox community. Orthodox women first began to establish prayer groups in the early 1980s, in the U.S. and later in Israel and in the ensuing years women's prayer groups have taken a variety of forms. Some follow the same liturgy and rituals as traditional male services, while others rework the traditional liturgy and rituals in order to stay within the bounds of Orthodox *halakha*, and in

Highly traditional women in Israel increasingly incorporate feminist perspectives and roles, yet they don't shed their deep commitments to traditional structures and authorities

Jewish women in intermarriages are more likely than Jewish men to insist on a Jewish household, even when their husbands don't convert

the process develop their own liturgical forms. Some have met with opposition, at times fierce (most notably the Women of the Wall), while others have found a place within their respective communities. For some decades a number of Orthodox communities have experimented with various enhancements to women's participation within the existing communal synagogue such as having women carry Torah scrolls or speak from the pulpit, or having women run their own occasional services or Torah readings. Recent years have seen an interesting development: congregations that maintain Orthodox practice and structure — most obviously the *mechitzah* — while enabling women's participation in select portions of the service and in Torah reading, thus pushing conventional Orthodox *halakha* to its very

limits. This experimental development began in Jerusalem and is now to be found in Modi'in; New York; Boston; Washington, DC; Melbourne and elsewhere.

COMMUNITY BELONGING

One field where the innovating impact of women is particularly felt is in the definition and re-definition of community belonging. Young Jewish women, like young Jewish men, especially outside strictly traditionalist communities, inhabit a world in which borders are blurred and fault lines are not so easily demarcated. Daughters of a networked age, they view Internet life as highly integrated with their lives

in general. They do not inhabit an 'either-or' world of 'virtual' vs. 'real'. To them it is more of a continuum in which they fully live their social and community lives. With this experience of community as more malleable, young women, and men, are less inclined to think of the Jewish community as clearly demarcated with people being either completely 'in' or completely 'out'. This provides greater room for innovation as women witness that introduction of new practices need not necessarily result in their being found 'outside' the borders of the community to which they are loyal.

Many young Jewish women feel greater freedom to redefine the relationship between family life and community life. For example, single parent households are overwhelmingly single-mother households, requiring certain accommodations of practices and norms. Or, another example, Jewish women in intermarriages are more likely than Jewish men to insist on a Jewish household, even when their husbands don't convert. As a result, young Jewish women in intermarriages are highly likely to insist on their continued community involvement, while rejecting the implicit and often explicit demands that to be full community members, their husbands must convert. In that sense, these women are engaged, whether consciously or less so in a general project to broaden possibilities about what marriage should look like, what Judaism should look like and what being in the community means.

The success of initiatives such as Birthright is likely to accelerate many of these trends as more and more Jewish men and women who were not previously affiliated with Jewish institutions, who might have never taken any note

of their Jewish identity and who might have grown up in mixed-marriage families with a wide variety of forms of Jewish, semi-Jewish, non-Jewish and ‘whatever’ upbringing, come to view themselves as being in the Jewish community rather than on its fringes and would search for ways to define it and transform it according to their needs and vision.

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Another field where woman’s transformative impact is beginning to be felt and which is likely to become greater is the roles of women in the community, and especially their leadership roles. Jewish women form the vast majority of the workforce of Jewish communal life. They are the employees in federations and JCC’s, teachers in the schools, clerks in the Israeli public sector. They find in these places of employment a combination of family-friendly working hours, reasonable benefits, and often, a sense of meaning and conduit for exercising their community belonging and Jewish and national commitments. Yet, the upper echelons of these organizations, whether the heads of federations, members of Knesset, government ministers, or heads of major Jewish organizations are staffed almost exclusively by men. In that, the Jewish world is lagging behind much of the developed world. For example, in the non-Jewish non-profit world, women fare much better than their counterparts at Jewish groups. In the U.S., more than a third of non-profit groups with budgets of \$1 million or more are led by women, and nearly two thirds of the smaller groups have women in the top jobs. Women, Jewish and non-Jewish,

are also increasingly occupying top jobs in universities and secular foundations.

In politics, Israel can boast several women in top positions, such as Chair of the Knesset, Chief Justice, and, as of this writing, Prime Ministerial candidate. but these women are not the tip of an iceberg — they are only a tip. That is, their advancement reflects mostly their efforts rather than the broad-based social advancement of women in politics. As far as representation in parliament and local municipalities, Israel finds itself lagging far behind the developed and even the non-developed world, though women fare far better in Israel’s judiciary . As a result, for the numerous women who flock to Jewish and Israeli public and political organizations out of a sense of purpose, their sense of alienation and frustration increases as they find their ambitions stymied by institutional hurdles.

In responding to the resistance they encounter to their ambitions for positions of prominence and leadership in the political, communal and religious institutions that govern Jewish life, young Jewish women have exercised a variety of strategies combining Voice and Exit. At its most extreme, young women respond to the resistance, by complete Exit, not affiliating themselves with any of the ‘establishment’ institutions. The choice of non-affiliation is rarely driven by a conscious response to feminist-resistant attitudes, but more by a general sense of alienation and irrelevance. However, the stunted ambition that alienates women from male-dominated institutions, often

Concerning representation of women in parliament and local municipalities, Israel lags even behind the non-developed world

Within the Orthodox community in Israel, increasing numbers of women are training as halakhic advisors

drives them to create new institutions that, if only by the virtue of their new-ness, do not pose institutional resistance to female advancement. Thus, young Jewish women are to be

found in large numbers either as initiators, partners or participants in various alternative forms of community arrangements such as study groups, book clubs, and learning circles. Many prominent women are leading new kinds of spiritual communities such as IKAR and Kavanah. Women have also created new organizations such as Jewish Women's Archives, Lillith, Kolot, and Moving Traditions. JWA and Lillith both feature many columns and blogs by young women and there are many

other Jewish blogs by young women as well that voice a fiery, passionate set of concerns about Jewish life.

While some women innovate simply as a way to provide an answer to their own needs, an answer they fail to get in the existing structures, others consciously innovate with the purpose of making the establishment irrelevant by robbing it of the energies of youthful innovation. To these women, the Jewish pie is not a singular one, and if men continue to inhabit the top roles in the established Jewish organizations or govern, they can simply 'bake their own pies' and engage in activities that if do not render the organizations marginal, at least force them to recognize that they represent only a small share of the community.

However, many women refuse to give up on the 'establishment'. They engage in political and civic activism to 'shame' the establishment into

opening routes to leadership for a greater number of women. Organizations such as "Advancing Women Professionals" in the U.S., the Women's Lobby and WePower in Israel operate as advocacy groups to document the gender gap in leadership, locate and train potential women leaders and pressure Jewish organizations and the Israeli public sector and political parties to adopt policies that allow more women to realize their potential and rise to the top. The attentions of young secular women in Israel are still mostly far from questions of leadership of the division of the political power pie. At the moment, Israeli women do not exhibit a major concern with the substantial under-representation of women in the government, parliament and municipalities. While they might generally voice frustration with the fact, there is very little willingness to engage in political activism to change this situation. However, looking into the future, and observing similar trends in the liberal West, this might mean that in a decade or two the concerns of women in Israel will increasingly turn to the issue of political power and representation, and more and more women will act to demand and take a greater share of the pie.

Within the Orthodox community in Israel, increasing numbers of Orthodox women are training as *halakhic* advisors, particularly as regards matters touching on intimate issues such as family purity, and others have trained as rabbinical pleaders (akin to lawyers) within the rabbinical court system which has jurisdiction over family and divorce. These two phenomena neatly illustrate the twin faces of women's increasing religious education (which will be discussed in greater detail below); while the latter group, the advocates, regularly challenge

rabbinic authority in the context of what they perceive to be injustices within the system, the former group serve in their work to preserve traditional *halakhic* structures and generally uphold rabbinic authority, albeit with a sensitivity that is itself a result of feminist consciousness. In the U.S., a small number of Orthodox congregations have begun to experiment with new roles for women. Thus, in several large congregations women serve as rabbinic assistants who perform tasks traditionally reserved for male rabbis such as teaching and pastoral care. In one Orthodox congregation in New York a woman serves as *rosh kehilla*, doing all the above as well as serving as the community's *halakhic* authority. These developments have been met with praise in some quarters and stringent criticism in others.

Women of Mizrahi origin (mostly Arab countries) in Israel present a slightly different picture. The Shas party encourages vocational education for women, though formal advanced institutions of Torah and text study are not to be found in its networks. Shas is in many ways Haredi and yet, in keeping with its broadly heterogeneous and comparatively inclusive character it has a women's organization which engages women of varying degrees of religious observance in the party's political and social activities. In addition, within Shas, the female relatives of rabbis do enjoy public and quasi-political stature within the party's network of social organizations. It bears remembering that neither among Ashkenazi Haredim nor Shas are women seen as authoritative teachers or decision-makers on matters involving traditional texts and subject matters and such influence as they may wield on religious leadership and

the actual workings of power is unofficial at best.

ACTIVISM

Young Jewish women of a wide diversity of backgrounds and traditional attachments are found at the forefront of civic and communal activism. The rapid expansion of the NGO/Third Sector combined with the institutional resistance to women's advancement resulted in the prominence of women in various activist roles. This activism is likely to be accelerated by the approaching step-change in the financial status of Jewish women and their ascendance into major philanthropists. In the coming decades more and more Jewish women are likely to find themselves managing large funds and foundations, either as self-made entrepreneurs and high-powered professionals, or as widows and daughters managing family fortunes. There are increasing instances of women of all ages with mid-level funds banding together to invest their philanthropic funds collectively. Today's young Jewish women have grown up at a time when they have seen successful female driven giving, and the idea that women have a capacity and a voice in philanthropy is not foreign to this generation. A significant share of these women is likely to be minded towards women issues and to put their money where their ideologies lie. Many of the prominent young Jewish women are working out of private family foundations where they are able to make their mark and impact policy.

Recent years have also seen the founding of a number of organizations seeking to promote a broadly feminist agenda from within Orthodox

communities. JOFA, the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, was founded in 1997; following on that model, Kolech was founded in Israel the following year. Both organizations hold regular conferences, issue scholarly and other publications, engage in consciousness-raising and advocacy on a number of issues. (Other organizations are more tightly focused on specific issues, and in particular on easing the plight of *agunot* and *mesuravot ghet*.) These organizations have had their successes and yet their overall influence within the Orthodox world should not be overestimated. Kolech has given rise to an alternative organization, Binyan Shalem, which also draws its members from the more avowedly conservative ranks of the Religious Zionist community and engages nearly double the participants. (The average Kolech conference has some 1,500–2,000 participants, while a typical Binyan Shalem conference has 3,000–4,000.) Moreover, the Orthodox Rabbinate in Israel shows little signs of change in the direction of feminist goals or orientations; to the contrary, the advent of feminism has, along with other recent developments, led the Rabbinate to take more conservative and even reactionary stands on a number of issues than it did in the past. At the same time, many younger religious women who regard themselves as active feminists do not identify with existing organizations such as JOFA and Kolech and it is yet unclear what if any organizational shape their activism will take.

It is also worth noting in the Israeli context that on issues such as settlements and the Palestinians, a commitment to feminism by no means equals automatic support for positions such as territorial compromise and the recogni-

tion of Palestinian aspirations. In other words, as Orthodox women increasingly craft their own futures by the lights of feminist ideals of empowerment and equality they do so on their own terms and not necessarily according to the conventional scripts of liberal progressivism.

SCHOLARSHIP AND STUDY

By far the most dramatic and consequential development in recent decades is the extraordinary emergence and growth of Torah study for women at almost all ages and levels. Women's education underwent change through the modern period; but it was only after the advent of feminism that high-level Torah study (and specifically the study of texts hitherto reserved for men such as the Talmud, Responsa and Kabbalah) emerged as a mass phenomenon. The importance of this development cannot be overstated, both because of the centrality of Torah study in religious culture and because of the empowerment it brings. In a fascinating instance of Israel-Diaspora exchange, high-level Talmud study for women was initiated by Orthodox women (acting in concert with sympathetic rabbis) in the U.S. in the 1970s and was brought to Israel in large part by immigrants from the U.S. There it struck deep roots, to the point where today young women come from the U.S. to study in *yeshivot* (as do their male counterparts). Today women study in a range of settings, from *batei midrash* and *yeshivot* meant especially for them (including some *yeshivot hesder* for women), to mixed institutions. Women from traditional backgrounds are increasingly bringing their classical knowledge to bear on academic Jewish studies as well. Increasingly, women are doing

the teaching in these institutions. In addition, academia regularly provides outlets for religious women who are unable to assume rabbinical teaching roles.

Outside the traditional Orthodox world, women have been making great gains taking advantage of the willingness of non-Orthodox streams to ordain female Rabbis. Within Israel's secular circles, women have also gained prominence leading new forms of Torah study, as in the Alma Beit Midrash and other similar institutions (such as Bina, Oranim, Siach ba-Galil and many others) in which secular men and women study canonical religious texts, not as religiously binding as such, or with academic detachment, but as powerful resources for their own moral and spiritual reflection and engagement. These institutions, which the journalist Yair Sheleg has characterized as "the fourth stream," are emerging as an innovative force not only in Israel, but also abroad in creating new and meaningful ways of study for those who do not submit fully or even partly to religious law.

OCCUPATIONAL STATUS AND CAREERS

For the vast majority of young Jewish women, their concerns regarding occupational status and careers, to the extent that they are not working within strictly Jewish organizations, are similar to those of their fellow women in the societies in which they live. At the same time, many religious women (Religious Zionist and Modern Orthodox) engage in the full range of professional life in the public and private sectors and the professions, along with the economic gain and socio-cultural presence their work lives bring, without an explicit ideological orienta-

tion towards feminism; many explicitly reject feminist calls for change regarding the synagogue, religious practice or their children's educations.

Turning to the Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) sector in Israel, a striking and complex development of recent years has been the growing and striking numbers of women entering the workforce—largely from the so-called Lithuanian sector and some Hassidic groups. These women work in education, computers, graphics, marketing and accounting and often study in educational frameworks designed for them. (Striking here is the college developed by Adina Bar-Shalom, daughter of Ovadia Yosef) This development is driven by socio-demographic factors, i.e. as Haredi families grow women must venture into fields beyond teaching in order to support their families.

The fact of women working outside the home was a common feature of the traditional Jewish lifestyle in Europe which contemporary Haredi society claims to take as its ideal and model. However, while in Europe ultra-Orthodox males also worked as they do in the U.S. and Europe today, in Israel they largely devote themselves to lifelong study, which in turns makes women's entry into the workforce a more complex phenomenon. Moreover, entering the contemporary workforce regularly entails a substantial degree of education and of acculturation into Western social mores. It is yet too early to tell what will be the longer-term ramifications of this development for Haredi family life and

As Haredi families grow, women must venture into fields beyond teaching in order to support their families

social structure, if any, but it is a phenomenon deserving of careful study.

NET ASSESSMENT

It has been noted by many that of the many revolutionary “ism’s” formulated in the 19th century and brought to fruition in the 20th, only one revolutionary ideology survived as a radical force in the 21st century and that is feminism. The emancipation of women is one of the most powerful forces transforming the Jewish community and its impact is likely to be deep and enduring. Women are emerging as an innovative force in Jewish life. Driven by their own experiences and need to find new answers to new problems, women are redefining the Jewish community’s borders and rules of inclusion, they are forcing communities to deal with and accept new types of families, and they are assuming new roles — sometimes even leadership roles within their respective communities. They are activists for a wide range of causes, often reading Judaism in a way that spurs them to be active in causes far beyond the confines of the Jewish community. Women are even innovating the core of Jewish tradition, changing liturgies, prayer practices and interpretations of standard texts.

In the near-term, some of these developments, notably within Orthodoxy, might lead to

conservative backlash. For example, several significant U.S. congregations which formerly held occasional women’s Torah readings no longer do so. Ultra-Orthodox groups in both Israel and the U.S. are in many ways increasingly assertive not only in their efforts to maintain their internal boundaries and practices but also in the claims they assert in the public space, including as regards women (for instance, the Shas party’s attempts to win rabbinic courts a legal status on par with secular courts, and the tightening of Orthodox conversion policy in both Israel and the U.S.). In addition, Israel’s Chief Rabbinate, as part of its ongoing war on the Religious Zionist rabbinate in Israel and the Modern Orthodox rabbinate in the U.S., has begun to single out for de-legitimization rabbis who allow or support women’s prayer groups.

These reactions notwithstanding, feminism is a powerful and regularly radicalizing force that leaves no community untouched and in the long-term its gains are rarely reversed. With women expecting more of themselves, more of their lives and more of their communities, looking into the future we should expect to see women achieving more, both within and outside the Jewish world and in doing so bearing significant influence on Jewish communities and on the very idea of what it means to be Jewish and what it means to be leading a Jewish life.

JPPPI Main Publications

The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute - Annual Assessment 2004–2005 The Jewish People Between Thriving And Decline *JPPPI Staff and Contributors 2005*

To succeed, large resources, judicious coping with critical decisions and careful crafting of long-term grand-policies are needed. The full volume contains analyses of the major communities around the world and in-depth assessments of significant topics.

Between Thriving and Decline — The Jewish People 2004, Executive Report, Annual Assessment No.1 *JPPPI Staff and Contributors 2004*

Facing a Rapidly Changing World — The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, Executive Report, Annual Assessment No.2 2005 *JPPPI Staff and Contributors 2005*

Major Shifts — Threats and Opportunities — The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, Executive Report, Annual Assessment No.3, 2006, *JPPPI Staff and Contributors 2006*

Societal Aspects — The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, Executive Report, Annual Assessment No.4, 2007, *JPPPI Staff and Contributors 2007*

A Strategic Plan for the Strengthening of Jerusalem, *JPPPI Staff 2007*

Institut de Planification d'une Politique pour le Peuple Juif, Rapport Annuel du JPPPI 2005/2006, Le Peuple Juif en 2005/2006, Entre Renaissance et Déclin, Special edition in French, *JPPPI Staff and Contributors 2006*

China and the Jewish People: Old Civilizations in a New Era *Dr. Shalom Salomon Wald 2004*

This is the first strategic document in the series: Improving the Standing of the Jewish People in Emerging Superpowers Without a Biblical Tradition.

Position Paper: Global Jewish People Forum *JPPPI Staff 2005*

The position paper examines president Moshe Katsav's initiative to establish a "Second House" and makes a number of recommendations.

Soft Power — A National Asset *Dr. Sharon Pardo 2005*

Today's global changes in the international arena require more consideration of soft assets possessed by the Jewish people. Prepared for the 2005 Herzliya Conference.

Strategic Paper: Confronting Antisemitism — A Strategic Perspective *Prof. Yehezkel Dror 2004*

The increasing ability of fewer to easily kill more and more makes new antisemitism into a lethal danger that requires comprehensive, multi-dimensional and long-term counter-strategies.

Alert Paper No. 2: Jewish Demography — Facts, Outlook, Challenges *Prof. Sergio DellaPergola 2003*

There may be fewer Jews in the world than commonly thought, and if the current demographic trends continue unchanged, there might be even fewer in the future.

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The new anti-Jewishness consists of discrimination against, or denial of, the right of the Jewish people to live, as an equal member of the family of nations.

A Road Map for the Jewish People for 2025 *JPPPI Staff 2006*

Published in the context of the Alternative Futures for the Jewish People 2025 project. Prepared for the 2006 Herzliya Conference.

THE JEWISH PEOPLE POLICY PLANNING INSTITUTE (ESTABLISHED BY THE JEWISH AGENCY FOR ISRAEL) LTD

The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute was established in 2002, as an independent non-profit organization. The Institute examines the challenges, threats and opportunities facing the Jewish People, and engages in strategic policy planning to assure long-term thriving. Interface with actual policy making is enhanced by helping the major Jewish organizations and the government of Israel in agenda setting and presenting analyzed and innovative policy options.

Among the projects in process in 2008–2009:

- Annual Assessments of the Situation and Dynamics of the Jewish People
- Alternative Futures of the Jewish People: 2030
- Jewish Demographic Policies
- Improving the Standing of the Jewish People in Emerging Superpowers
- Developing Jewish People Leadership
- A Jewish People Strategy Towards Islam
- Global Jewish Identity and Identification
- The Image of the Jewish People
- Geo-political Environment: Opportunities and Challenges

The Institute promotes Jewish leadership policy discourse by publishing policy papers, preparing background material for decision-makers and holding workshops for decision-makers and policy professionals. In addition, the Institute provides advice and helps with staff development in an effort to help build-up strategic thinking and policy planning capacities of the Jewish People.



Shimon Peres
*President,
State of Israel*

The Hebrew prophets throughout the generations inscribed a vision of peace and social justice among mankind. They bequeathed to the Jewish people, indeed to the entire world, a great inspiration through which they taught us to rebel against evil and never to acquiesce with injustice. They admonished us to strive to transform that which exists and to plan and mold a better tomorrow.

The long history of the Jewish people oscillates as a pendulum between resignation and rebellion, between the tragedy of a powerless people who fall victim to a harsh destiny to one of its being active, takes its destiny into its own hands, and shapes for itself the future of which it dreamt.

The establishment of the State of Israel after 2000 years of exile is an astounding expression of the weaving of history by human hands. This is a foundational example of a people that takes control of its destiny, molds its national vision and outlines its human mission. Major historical turning points are indeed the work of human hands. The future is given to our decisions, our inventions, our dreams, and our imagination.

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The most outstanding achievement of the 20th century is the liberation of women from their intolerable bondage. The most important liberation movement for a people should be focused on the liberation of the subjugated half. The liberation of women and their equality fall in line with the core values of Judaism.



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