

Kol'ishah

woman's voice

Traditionally, the voice of the Jewish woman was not to be heard in public, lest it arouse men. No more. These pages are for news about Jewish women, usually in their own strong voices.

"My Pain Is My Blood"

My head hurts, maybe it's because of my tooth. My stomach also hurts, and so does my heart," bemoaned the young Ethiopian woman. The nurse at Hadassah's Center for

ize that they internalize all their problems and felt them as actual pains in the body. Now we have a better understanding," Avraham Yitzhak, now a medical student at Ben Gurion University, helped bridge the cultural gap

ogist. What he is saying is that he is very sad and his heart is heavy. One patient said desperately, 'My pain is blood,'" related Yitzhak. "The belief that bad blood should be removed to cure a sickness is part of the psychological, cultural tradition," he said. In fact, Ethiopian culture views physical pain as spiritual intervention; as "punishment from God." According to Naveh, when physical pain is especially acute, it is believed that Satan or a spirit has entered the body.

"When 14,000 Ethiopian Jews arrived in Israel in Operation Solomon in 1991," continued Naveh, "we had no concept of their culture. We discovered very quickly that translating their language was not enough." In Ethiopian culture for example, it is a breach

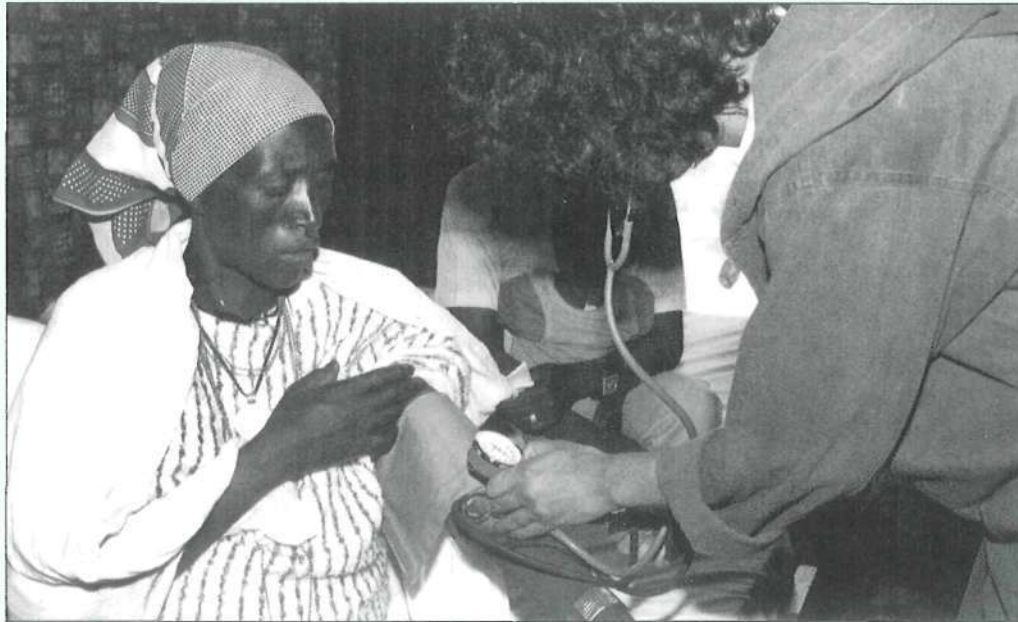
Dr. Michael Alkan, head of the Infectious Diseases Department at Soroka Hospital in Beersheva, also chairs the Association for the Advancement of the Ethiopian Family and Child (AAEFC). "In Ethiopia, there were three types of traditional healers besides the medic or doctor," said Alkan. "The herbal or folk doctor, the 'daftara' who writes amulets, and the 'zar-chaser' or 'bal-a-zar.'" 'Balazar' is a combination of two Hebrew words, "possessor" and "foreign." He literally chases the evil spirit away. "Now that there is no healer or exorcist, Kupat Holim [Israel's national health fund] has to fill the role," says Alkan.

—Sharon Kanon (WZPS)

London: Jewish Women's Aid

London's Jewish women have successfully launched plans to establish England's first refuge for Jewish women and children who experience domestic violence. "It's one thing to tell someone that they shouldn't go outside the community for help," Jane (not her real name) told LILITH, "but having said that, it is wrong that there are no services provided within the community." Jane, a Jewish woman, a survivor, and now a member of Jewish Women's Aid (JWA), a group of over 200 women culled from all sectors of the Jewish community who have pooled their resources to support victims of domestic violence.

Since mid-1992, staffers in London's Jewish social service agencies started to share their concern informally about increased violence in Jewish homes. "Twenty-two known cases of domestic violence were identified within their current case loads, and 24 other instances over the last two-year period were cited. They estimated that 20 women would have used a refuge," explained Judith Usiskin, the founding chairperson of Jewish Women's Aid. Three hundred thousand Jews live in the U.K., with over 200,000 of them in the Greater London Area. "Additionally, a telephone help line in Leeds



Community Health in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Kiryat Yovel was confounded. So many complaints at the same time. She asked the patient to describe her problems in more detail. "I'm alone here. My husband died," said the woman. "My father and sisters are in Ethiopia and I long for them."

"When we first started treating Ethiopians, and they complained about pains in the heart and stomach, we took them literally," said Pnina Naveh, the clinic's Head Nurse. "Then we began to real-

between the medical staff and the Ethiopian immigrants. "I was translating from Amharic to Hebrew and back, but I was also trying to translate cultural codes," recalled Yitzhak, who completed three years at the Addis Ababa Medical School before joining his parents in Israel. "If a woman said that her abdomen hurt, the doctor might suggest Maalox. In fact, the woman could really be saying that she has an infertility problem.

"When an Ethiopian says: 'I have a pain in my heart,' he doesn't usually need a cardiol-

of ethics to ask direct questions. "It's simply not proper," said Naveh. Telling an Ethiopian woman she has a serious illness is also unacceptable. "One man was very angry when we told his wife that she needed an operation. The husband must be told first." Health workers found that separate group meetings for men and women on treating tuberculosis, nutrition, etc., were more successful than joint meetings. Women don't ask questions or participate in meetings with men present.

for Jewish women who suffer violence had been receiving an increased number of calls from its national advertising."

In November 1992, JWA organizers held a public meeting in a large Reform Temple to gauge support for a Jewish women's refuge. Judith Usiskin reflected that, "The turnout was a surprise from women who hadn't been to the synagogue for years, to women with *shaitels* (wigs) from Stamford Hill (the large ultra Orthodox Chassidic community) who had never been inside a Reform Temple. But they were able to talk to each other."

Phyllis Agam, a London architect, echoes this diversity. "I was also attracted by the loose hierarchy and the cross section of women lawyers, accountants, social workers, media professionals, religious and secular. We will ensure that the policies and procedures being developed are sensitive to the needs of the Orthodox women who may come to the refuge."

In June 1993, JWA was officially inaugurated, and electing officers with a clear mandate to secure funding for a permanent refuge - in the interim, a temporary refuge

will open in the next few months. A free confidential telephone help line in London was launched in November 1993 to provide a "listening ear" for women and direct them to other available resources. A public education campaign is underway and JWA plans a national course to train rabbis and their partners. "Rabbis are often the first port of call for a women in distress," notes Judith Usiskin, "and they should be given the resources and training to recognize abuse and deal with it appropriately."

Esther Cohen, a probation worker in inner London, is aware that the community is scared to acknowledge any flaws in its foundation. "There are refuges for Chinese, African and Hindu women, but, at some level, English Jewry does not want to acknowledge its ethnicity. We look British, we want to be British, and we desperately want to fit in."

Jewish Women's Aid will give victims of domestic violence their own place to fit in.

For further information, contact JWA, BM JWA, London, WCI 3XX, U.K.

—Sally Berkovic

A First: Female Rabbi Serving in Ukraine

Rabbi C. Ariel Stone, the first American liberal rabbi to accept a full time position leading a congregation in the former Soviet Union began her new assignment on September 1st.

Rabbi Stone was invited to serve Congregation HaTikvah during a visit to Moscow and Kiev last year. She was delighted with the invitation—but didn't think the congregation could afford her. When the synagogue urged the Reform movement to send a rabbi, she was the perfect match. "An offer I couldn't refuse," she says. Her duties will include travelling throughout the Ukraine, training Jewish professionals and providing Jewish counselling and education to the entire liberal Jewish constituency (estimated to number close to 8,000) in the area. It is estimated that as many as three million Jews still live in the former Soviet Union.

"They're afraid to practice Judaism now," Rabbi Stone said, referring to the fact that for 70 years Jewish religious expression was suppressed under Communist regimes. "They want someone to tell them what to do, but I won't do that. "Instead," she said, "my goal is to break down their fears, to let them create their own Ukraine Jewishness, and teach them that they have every right to learn, feel and practice. Most of all, I'll be accessible."

Rabbi Stone was graduated magna cum laude, with a B.A. in International Studies from Emory University, ordained in 1991 from the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, and has spent the last two years as Assistant Rabbi at Temple Israel in Miami, Florida.

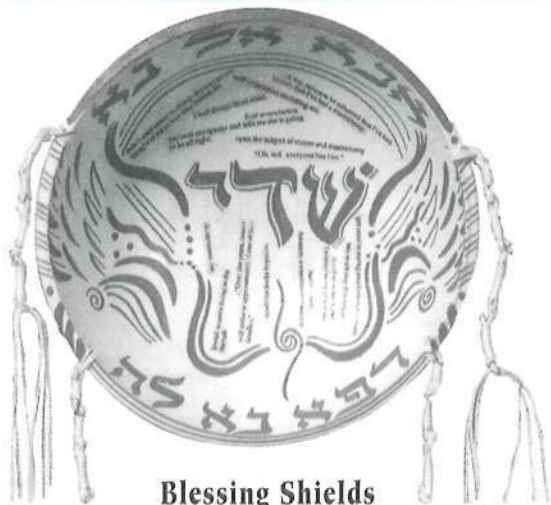


Another First: Jewish Women Gather in Kiev

For the first time in modern history, Jewish women from around the world will gather in Kiev, Ukraine, where a five-day International Conference of Jewish Women, titled "Reconnecting for the First Time," is scheduled for May 23-27, 1994. The conference is being held in Kiev in order to reach the more than one million Jewish women remaining in the former Soviet Union, many of whom have expressed a desire to reach out globally, learn about their Jewish identity and reconnect with the Jewish birthright their mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers were forbidden to pass on to them.

The conference will feature lectures, discussion groups, films by Jewish women, workshops, exhibitions, panel presentations and more. LILITH Editor-in-Chief Susan Weidman Schneider will be one of the featured speakers, and Alice Shalvi of the Israel Women's Network will deliver the keynote address.

For more information, please contact: Project Keshet, 1134 Judson Ave., Evanston, Illinois 60202. Phone (708) 332-1994.



Blessing Shields

Please God, Heal Her, Shaddai

Artist Leah Lynn Rosen of "Yetzirah Pottery" has created a triptych entitled, "Warzone / Blessing Shields." After losing a dear friend to breast cancer, Rosen writes that, "I thought about areas that need our blessings and protection." The breast plates memorialize the struggle against AIDS, homophobia and breast cancer.

In discussing the breast cancer shield, Rosen stated that it seemed ironic that "Shaddai," a word meaning "my breasts," whose imagery is one of nurturance and life-giving has become for so many women a place of struggle and illness.

The artist wants to honor, through her work, women's battles with breast cancer as well as other illnesses. "The breast plates

should send a clear message to the medical community that women will use their collective energies to fight for recognition and repair."

Ms. Rosen includes images of ovaries, wings, and breasts in her work. She explains her use of *tzitzit* in the blessing shields as, "a powerful meditation on God's oneness and our covenant, that can be reclaimed by Jewish women."

The shields which can be used for personal ceremony or display, can be made to honor specific people, events and rites of passage.

For more information contact: Yetzirah Pottery, 2427 A Tenth Street, Berkeley, CA 94710, (510) 204-9282.

—Leslie Margulies

CELEBRATING TEN YEARS OF WOMEN AS CONSERVATIVE RABBIS



TOO BAD if you missed "Women in the Rabbinate: Dynamics of Change," the Jewish Theological Seminary's celebration of its tenth anniversary of its Rabbinical School faculty's decision to ordain women as rabbis. Thirty five women rabbis (out of a total of fifty) traveled from everywhere to be there, and their presence, their individuality, their learnedness, their seriousness, their warmth and their commitment were magnificent to behold.

The two-day conference, chaired by Rabbis Nina Beth Cardin and Allan Kensky, included lectures by historians Paula Hyman (of Yale) and Jenna Weissman Joselit (of Princeton) on historic models for change; the retelling of the ten-year-old

decision to ordain women by participants in that event; text studies; and panel discussions that included faculty members Anne Lapidus Lerner, recently appointed (and the first female) Vice-Chancellor of the Seminary for Public Affairs, and Judith Hauptman, Professor of Talmud. We also heard, and were inspired by, the life stories of the spiritually persevering women who have become Conservative rabbis.

"What we need to be doing is cultivating both sides of our natures," Francine Klagsbrun, who served on the Commission on the Ordination of Women, told participants at the gathering. "Male rabbis need to allow themselves to be open and accessible; female rabbis need to allow themselves to be seen as rigorous and meticulous in their scholarship, savvy about financial matters in their synagogues, strong administrators. Respect comes and will continue to come from being able to look up to the rabbi not as a social worker or therapist, but as an authority who can bring authentic, learned Jewish perspective to an issue."

In a session on women's spirituality, Rabbi Pamela Hoffman of Halifax spoke of the role of rabbi as "spiritual homemaker," inviting individuals to make themselves at home in an often unfamiliar Judaism, and how she learned to be a better *shlichat tzibur* (the prayer leader) from the singing group Sweet Honey in the Rock. Feminism, she said, had taught us the redemptive power of bringing one's own personal story to a group.

Rabbi Debra Cantor of

Brooklyn told us that female rabbis may need to defend themselves against the expectation that they be superwomen. "Our calling, however lofty," she warned, "does not demand that we sacrifice our lives in the process of serving God and Israel. Self-destruction, the neglect of family and friends, workaholic, these are pernicious late-twentieth-century American values. They are not Jewish values."

The feeling of elation most participants felt at this historic gathering peaked at a candle-lighting ceremony led by Rabbi Lori Forman celebrating women in the many roles they serve the Jewish community — as rabbis, teachers, principals, scholars, counselors, and chaplains. It was followed, roller coaster fashion, by the dismay that swept over the assembly an hour later during a panel on "The Contours of Pluralism within the Conservative Movement," where Rabbis Joel Roth and David Feldman shared their regrets that in the process of enfranchising women at the seminary those who opposed the decision on halachic (Jewish legal) grounds were made to feel unwelcome. Both men suggested that the Seminary and the Conservative movement were "deeply impoverished" by the eventual departure of these opponents. Rabbi Feldman said he could not accept "the way that the Halachic process had been broken."

Rabbi Debra Newman Kamin clearly spoke for many when she stood and expressed her outrage at being invited to a conference only to be categorically dele-

gitimized by these speakers. "We women (who wanted to be) rabbis stayed with the movement when they disagreed with us. Why can't those who disagreed with this decision stick it out too?" asked Rabbi Nina Bieber Feinstein of Los Angeles. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, on the faculty of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, responded to a question about allowing women to be witnesses for ritual purposes (such as weddings) by suggesting that since Roth felt the Conservative Committee on Jewish Law and Standards would not be able to muster the authority to do so for some time, a body of women should designate itself as authorized to make the necessary *takanah* (correction) to the biblical injunction.

In the final session, on "Ministry for the Next Generation," Myrna Matza, a rabbinical student, spoke of bringing together Jews "in recovery." Every synagogue, she said, should have a bottle of grape juice on the kiddush table to let adults recovering from alcoholism know they are welcome.

Significant and uplifting, at this conference, were many moments of singing together. Over and over, speakers said that feminism has changed the Seminary and it will never be the same. A few lamented this; others only pray that the momentum will continue.

(The proceedings of the conference will be published in installments in *Conservative Judaism*, a publication of the Rabbinical Assembly, 3080 Broadway, New York, NY 10027.)

—Naomi Danis

WOMEN CANTORS CELEBRATE SCHOLARSHIP AND SONG

The Women Cantors Network (WCN) was founded in 1982 by Debbie Katchko-Zimmerman to provide a support group for what was then a small minority of women cantors working in the Conservative movement. This group recently presented an exceptionally varied three-day conference at Gratz College in Philadelphia, in which I participated. Over 40 women attended, from as far as Texas. The sound of 40 trained women's voices chanting *Birkat HaMazon* together is probably as close as one can get in this life to the sound of angels.

At this conference, it was not only the voices that blended; it was the spirits and the minds. This group is unfortunately too often regarded as a poor stepchild by full members of the ACC (American Conference of Cantors) or CA (Cantors Assembly). Yet many members of WCN are themselves full or associate members of those "official" organizations who choose to support the WCN because bonding and networking in a small, intimate group like this does not exist at larger and more impersonal conferences.

Historically, cantors learned their trade by growing up with a role model (a male cantor, in the past) and apprenticing to that role model. Schools for both the Reform and Conservative movements were first established only in the 1940's. Therefore they are a very recent innovation, and the division they have created between "official" and "unofficial" cantors is largely artificial. Many WCN members learned their skills the traditional way, from cantors who served as their mentors. Many work in the Conservative movement and have gained respect in their communities for their knowledge and professionalism.

Yet support for the WCN even among women cantors is not universal. A friend of mine asked a woman cantor if she was a member of the WCN; the cantor responded "No—most of their members are not

certified." Such a caste system does exist within the cantorate.

This "fringe group"'s most recent conference included Rabbis Linda Holtzman and Marcia Prager, Dr. Ellen Frankel, Dr. Herb Levine, and Dr. Marsha Bryan Edelman. Along with tremendous diversity in subject matter and approach, a high level of technical knowledge and total professionalism was evident in all of their presentations.

Rabbi Holtzman, the first presenter, is a 1979 graduate of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, where she is currently the Director of Practical Rabbinics. Rabbi Holtzman has a long-time involvement with Beth Ahavah, Philadelphia's gay and lesbian outreach congregation. Her topic was "Inclusiveness throughout the Life Cycle," and dealt with ways of including the gay and lesbian community in a synagogue's life-cycle celebrations. The hope was that we as cantors could bring back fresh ideas to our rabbis and congregations that might move them in new directions.

Participants asked numerous questions about Rabbi Holtzman's personal situation; how do she and her partner parent their two children? What do the children call them? Cantors mentioned cases of being asked to officiate at commitment ceremonies where their rabbis would or would not cooperate. One woman said she didn't understand why couldn't gay or lesbian couples simply join a synagogue and keep quiet about it? Rabbi Holtzman explained that in her own situation, she and her partner simply wanted to join a synagogue, with their two sons, as a family. They never wanted to "make a big deal." But the rabbi had to take their request to a board, which had to decide whether to accept them as a family unit.

In this as in any women's group, a certain percentage of members are lesbians. There had not been any open dia-

logue between the lesbian and straight women of WCN in the past; in fact, there has been some friction and paranoia, keeping most lesbian members in the closet. But as this session progressed, some of the women began to speak more openly of their lives than they had previously.

Several cantors mentioned that their congregations have formed a gay Havurah, which is not restricted to gay members but is at least a place they can feel safe while still belonging to the larger synagogue community. Maybe this will become popular as a solution to the sense of isolation now suffered by many gay and lesbian Jews.

Rabbi Holtzman also proposed that a book similar in concept to *Heather Has Two Mommies* needs to be written for the Jewish community. Children in Hebrew school are bombarded with messages and pictures of "traditional" Jewish families. Much has been done to make texts more egalitarian; few texts now show *Abba* walking in the door with a briefcase while *Ima* is baking Challah. Yet Hebrew books with references to gay and lesbian families do not exist; there are no texts featuring *Ima* and *Ima*, for example. Thus children in these families feel completely alienated while sitting in their Hebrew school classrooms.

In the evening, well-known composer and cantor of Congregation Adath Jeshurun in Elkins Park (Pennsylvania), Dr. Charles Davidson, held a music-sharing session. He surprised us with a new piece, a congregational *Sim Shalom*, dedicated to the WCN on the occasion of this conference.

There is much interest among WCN members in certification programs. Though members never ask one another "Did you graduate from a cantorial school?" or "Where did you get your certification?" nonetheless all are aware of the value of that piece of paper in the wider synagogue community.

There was some grumbling

from the group when it was explained that certification involves taking a lengthy exam and a fee of \$300 is required to obtain the syllabus ahead of time and for the exam itself. Debbie Katchko-Zimmerman jumped to her feet and proclaimed that the time is ripe for women to enter the Conservative Cantors Assembly. She and fellow member Beth Weiner went on to tell us how the two of them passed the certification test this past spring.

Debbie Katchko-Zimmerman learned *hazzanut* from her father, Cantor Theodore Katchko, who in his turn had studied with his father, renowned Cantor Adolph Katchko, whose liturgical compositions form the backbone of the cantorial school curriculum. At the 1993 CA Convention, a workshop featuring Katchko's compositions was scheduled. Debbie asked permission to sing some of those compositions, since she had literally learned them from the source. The organizers told her "Sorry, you're not a member so you can't sing." Exasperated at running up against this wall every year, Debbie decided on the spot to become a member, by taking the exam that can be requested at any CA Convention (in marked contrast to the Reform movement's more formal procedure). Beth agreed to study and prepare together with Debbie, and to attempt the exam herself.

This WCN conference highlighted the tremendous resources we as professional Jewish women possess in our ranks. We are not only liturgically skilled, but we reflect a tremendous musical diversity. We value pluralism and we're united by our mutual supportiveness and common purpose.

The next Women's Cantors Network Conference will be held on Sunday, May 22 thru Tuesday, May 24, 1994 in Mount Vernon, NY. For more information call Cantor Doris Cohen at (718) 291-3089.

—Cantor Helen Leneman
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Two Plays by Jewish Women

"The Survivor," a play by Susan Nanus, had its first life ten years ago as a Broadway production focusing on the life of a young man who managed to survive the Holocaust. Rewritten by Nanus, and directed by her sister Sasha Nanus, the play now tells the story, very movingly, of a group of teenagers in the Warsaw Ghetto, including girls and young women, who fight to resist the Nazis. The play is now playing off-Broadway, to audiences of adults and Jewish schoolchildren, and is available for booking in other locations after its New York run.

For information contact: Richard Kornberg
1350 Avenue of the Americas, Suite 2703
New York City, NY 10019 (212) 582-9456



Cast of *The Survivor* photo by Hickey Pantano

Here, in outline, is the story of "Naomi," a remarkable one-woman play from Israel. Naomi is a young Bedouin woman who is forced to marry a complete stranger. He rapes her on their wedding night, and three days later her mother and sister hold her down while she undergoes *Tohar el Banat*, in which her clitoris is removed using a razor blade. She escapes the family tent and eventually becomes a student at a modern Israeli university where she realizes that she is trapped between two worlds.

After seven years of research among the Negev Bedouin, Israeli social worker, Ruby Porat-Shuval, wrote this play, winner of the 1992 Acre Theater-Festival. It has been performed over 300 times in Israel and the author/actress is now available for bookings of "Naomi," in English, for the U.S. and Canadian audiences in 1994. The audience sits on pillows and is served traditional coffee and pita in Naomi's tent while she tells her tale.

The play is powerful on many levels, for it is not only the shocking reality of one Bedouin women's life, it is a metaphor for the oppression all women endure. Along with the gruesome pain, Porat-Shuval is also



able to celebrate the humor and joy of one women's life. Despite the cultural gap between the Israeli actress and her creation, she explains, "If I peel back all the layers, she is me." For more information: Renee Schreiber—Assistant to the Consul for Cultural Affairs
Consulate General of Israel
800 Second Avenue
NYC, NY 10017

—Robin Beth Schaefer

JEWISH BOYS LESS SEXIST THAN THEIR NON-JEWISH PEERS?

A NEW STUDY OFFERS HOPE.

This year a group of over 700 girls and 750 boys in grades one thru six at five different private schools in Southern Florida, including one Jewish day school, were asked if they would like to see a girl become president. The majority of the girls, including the Jewish girls, responded with a resounding "yes." But for over 750 boys the responses to these questions and a group of other questions were not nearly as positive. In fact 40% of all boys said "no" they would not like to see a girl grow up and be president and over one third said they did not think it would ever happen.

Interestingly, more girls (40%) than boys (37%) said that they would like to be President. When asked if only boys were smart enough to become president, 7% of the girls and 41% of the boys answered yes. We found that 45% of the boys and 43% of the girls were told by others that only boys can become president of the United States. It is clear that boys and girls react very differently to this conditioning, 96% of the girls say "yes" they would like to see a girl as president and 93% believe that someday it will happen. But the boys clearly disagreed with the girls, 40% of the boys responded that they would not like to see a girl become president and 34% said they didn't think it would happen.

When the responses from students attending the Jewish day school were separated from those attending the four other private schools, we could see that the Jewish girls and boys have more positive attitudes about having a woman as President.

Only 3% of the Jewish boys agreed with the 41% of boys in the larger group who thought only boys are smart enough to become President. And only 3% of the Jewish boys, compared to 45% of all boys, had been told that only boys can become president. Happily, 82% of the Jewish boys said they would like to

see a girl grow up and be president, compared to the 60% of the boys in the larger group. Eighty-one percent of Jewish boys and 66% of all boys believed that a girl will be President.

A slide show, "How I Grew Up Feeling I Could be President of the United States" helps boost girls' confidence in themselves, and help boys overcome their prejudices. The 41 artist-illustrated slides depict a unisex child who grows up believing that he or she can become President of the United States. For example, one slide shows the child asking Mom, "Can only boys be President?" She answers, "Girls can also be President." On the next slide, the child asks Dad, "Can girls be President?" He answers, "Of course girls and boys can both be President."

On another slide, the child asks teacher, "Is a girl smart enough to become President?" The teachers respond, "Of course." On the following slide, the child goes on to say, "My teachers told me girls have been elected president or prime minister of England, Israel, India, the Philippines, Pakistan, Nicaragua and Canada." When the child says, "It would be great if we could add our country's name to that list" the child's statement is reinforced on the next slide. "My teachers told me I was right," says the child.

Schools alone cannot change children's attitudes, of course. One teacher reported that one of the girls in her classroom had gone home after the slide show and told her father she would like to be President; her father responded, "No way." The teacher said, "I hope she doesn't listen to him." Many teachers have expressed the need for parents to become aware of their own negative attitudes and to learn how those attitudes can crush a girl's hope that someday she can be President of the United States.

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own staff and board. According to Reshet Coordinator, Renee-Anne Gutter, the centers will operate both separately and together, with joint activities coordinated by a committee of five Israeli and five Palestinian women, among them Zahira Kamal and Sumaya Farhat-Naser.

The Reshet (which will continue to operate as the political force behind the Link) has begun organizing a series of leadership seminars on topics identified by Palestinian women as high priorities, including political and election strategies. Meanwhile there have been meetings among women from Israeli kibbutzim and the Gaza Strip, and visits of the Reshet to Jericho and to Gaza.

Other Israeli women's organizations, whose activities among Arab women were formerly restricted to within the so-called green line, have begun developing new strategies in keeping with the new political reality. Na'amat has held a series of consultations with representatives from the UPWWC and other groups. According to Nelly Karkaby, an Israeli Arab from the Galilee who has served as head of the organization's Arab Women's Department for many years, "There has been an expressed interest on the part of women from the West Bank and Gaza in learning from our experience in Israeli Arab villages. They want to know about building women's organizations in general, about fundraising and about developing political leadership.

At its October meeting, the board of the Israel Women's Network (IWN), chaired by Alice Shalvi, pledged to place joint activities with and for Palestinian women on upcoming agendas. Among the recommendations was the mobilization of Israeli Arab women who have participated in IWN's political leadership course, as a potential bridge with women from the West Bank and Gaza.

In addition to political campaigning and strategies for getting women elected to governing bodies, the new Palestinian agenda items includes religious and personal status laws; legislation to protect the rights of women and guarantee equal access to opportunities; educational curricula sensitive to gender issues; health care and family planning services that give women control over their bodies and respect their rights to reproductive freedom and choice.

Israeli women continue to be engaged in uphill battles over many of these same issues; they, too, belong to a traditional, and in many respects, Middle Eastern society with a strict dichotomy of gender roles that has effectively blocked their equal participation in pub-

lic life. Thus, Israeli women are likely to be willing partners in the exchange of ideas. They stand to learn from the experience of Palestinians who succeeded in mobilizing poor and rural women through grassroots activities, empowering them rather than making them the objects of middle-class programs.

Experience shows that conflict resolution is best achieved through the search for solutions to common problems. Women have shared not only the effects of the prolonged conflict on their families and communities, but the experience of subordination and discrimination as well. As such, they may identify more easily than men with the oppression of others, moving beyond a passive acceptance of existing arrangements toward a vision of a new social order.

Finally, women, who remain the primary caretakers, socializers, and educators of the next generation, have a critical role to play in banishing fear, mistrust, and hatred. According to Mariam Mar'i,

who was the first Israeli-Palestinian woman to earn a doctoral degree, "Education and reeducation are areas where we as women can make a unique contribution to the peace process. Rather than belittling our traditional functions, we must instill them with greater empowerment and legitimacy."

Nonetheless, it remains to be seen whether women will play a role in peacemaking or be pushed aside by the men who faced each other on the battlefield. And perhaps no less significant than the question of women's contribution to peace is how peace will benefit women. Will it be linked to social justice, equal status and an end to discrimination as universal principles? Or, will feminism and the rights of women remain as secondary and marginal to peace as they have been to war?

Dr. Amy Avgar is a sociologist and free-lance writer. She lives in Jerusalem with her husband and three children, the oldest of whom, a son, is currently serving with the Israel Defense Forces.

POSTSCRIPT

On October 21-24, 1993 the Association for Women in Development held a forum in Washington, DC, entitled "Joining Forces to Further Shared Visions." The conference was attended by over 1,200 women from around the world who shared experiences and strategies to advance and improve their women's status. The author of this article and Professor Alice Shalvi of the Israel Women's Network, led a workshop on "Leadership Training as a Strategy for Social Change."

In contrast to similar gatherings of women from Third World countries, Palestinian and other women from neighboring Arab countries seemed to be magnetically drawn to our session and to the lunch that was organized by region (at which we proudly displayed a sign delegating our table as a Middle East meeting ground.). The kits that we had prepared for the workshop, bearing the logo of the Network, were quickly swept up; and women came primarily to listen rather than argue.

The discussion was not devoid of tension. One Palestinian woman, now living in the USA, told of her family's wanderings as refugees since 1948. Without missing a beat, Shalvi recalled her own family's trail from Russia to Germany, to England and finally, Israel. To this, the young woman replied, "We are not responsible for the plight of your family; but you are the cause of our uprooting."

What distinguished this exchange from others, however, was the ability to move from past injustices to future possibilities; from talk of victimization to potential cooperation. The discussion ended with women excitedly exchanging calling cards, reflecting mutual hope that we might meet again in our home countries.

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