

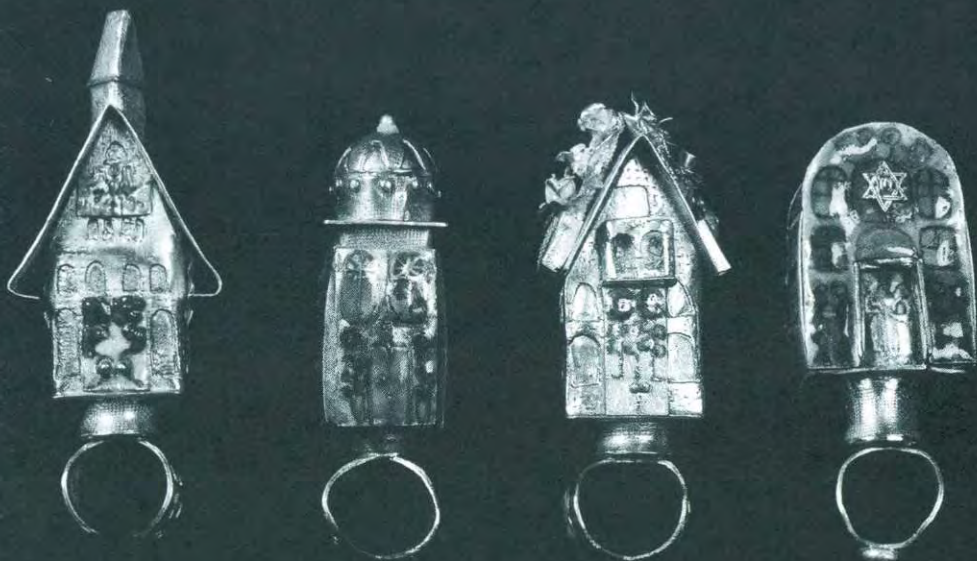
M A ' Y A N

מעין

The Jewish Women's Project
a program of the JCC in Manhattan

J O U R N E Y

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MA'YAN

15 West 65th Street
New York, NY 10023-6694

tel 212.580.0099
fax 212.580.9498
e-mail info@mayan.org
<http://www.mayan.org>

Ma'yan acts as a catalyst for change in the Jewish community in order to create an environment more inclusive of and responsive to women, their needs and their experiences. Ma'yan facilitates this transformation by training and supporting advocates for change and developing and disseminating innovative educational programs.

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M A ' Y A N J O U R N E Y

While the holiday of Shavuot celebrates the Jewish people's relationship with God as expressed in the giving of the Torah, this *Journey* focuses on covenantal relationships between people within the Jewish community. The first section explores some of the ways in which Jewish feminists are re-examining what covenantal partnership means in our own lives. Rabbi Heather Altman and Susan Sapiro explore the challenges of honoring both traditional Jewish marriage practices and their own desires to enter into marriages that envision covenant as a mutual agreement between equals. Melanie and Hope Levav describe how they created a ceremony of covenant to sanctify their relationship and inscribe lesbians into Jewish tradition. Ruth Abrams urges us to explore the ways in which other relationships, such as study partnerships, also reflect and benefit from the language of covenant. We also include excerpts from various partnership agreements and suggestions for renewing the covenants of long-term relationships.

The articles included in the second section of this issue of *Journey* do not employ the language of covenant. But they do explore the challenges of women's relationships with the organized Jewish community, a relationship that for many of us feels covenantal if at the same time continually challenging and not necessarily mutual. Rebecca Metzger explores the reasons that she and many of her peers have left their jobs in Jewish communal life. Shifra Bronznick shares the vision behind the Ma'yan inspired initiative "Advancing Women and the Jewish Community" which could be described as a plan for a new model of relationship between women, men and the Jewish world. Finally, we highlight the No Small Change Young Women's Tzedakah Collective and participants in Jewish women's foundations nation-wide who are shifting the nature of women's participation as partners in their communities, through pooled giving. As summer is approaching, we also include a listing of summer opportunities for Jewish feminist learning. Enjoy!

— Tamara Cohen and Susan Sapiro, editors





FEMINIST COMMITMENTS

ACQUIRING EQUALITY

Heather Altman is the Assistant Rabbi of Bet Torah Synagogue in Mount Kisco, NY. Susan Sapir works at Ma'yan.

Love. Acquisition. Mutual obligations. Inequality. Covenant. Partnership. Each of these words, though conflicting, reflect Jewish approaches to marriage. Therein lies the beginning of the dilemmas we faced over the year as each of us went through the process of getting married.

We are both feminists and Jewish communal professionals. Heather is a Conservative rabbi, Susan works at Ma'yan. We are both women who had dreamed of finding a partner to marry and who believed strongly in the power of ritual. Yet as each of us learned more about the rabbinic treatment of marriage (in Hebrew *kiddushin*) we found it increasingly difficult to separate the wedding ritual from its patriarchal history. In Judaism marriage is based on a legal form of acquisition. It is a one-sided deal; the groom "acquires" rights to the bride. He speaks and acts; she is silent and passive.

Kiddushin comes from the Hebrew root *k-d-sh*, which is often translated as consecrated, made holy or set apart. "*Harei aht mekudeshet li*," the phrase uttered in the wedding ceremony, is often translated as "Behold you are consecrated to me," implying being set apart for holy use. The problem with this is that only the woman can legally be set apart for the man. A man, according to Jewish law, cannot be consecrated or set apart for a woman. (And technically, he can also set more than one woman apart for his holy use, a practice forbidden to women.)

Kinyan (Hebrew for 'acquisition') is what establishes a Jewish marriage. *Kinyan* is effected when a man says to a woman the "Behold..." phrase, and gives her something worth more than a penny, which she accepts with the intention of being married. She has then, in a sense, been acquired by the man. It is important to note that in order for the marriage to be valid, the man must initiate the action and there can not be a perception of mutual exchange in the transaction. According to tradition, the role of the woman is only to be acquired; she is a recipient and not an active participant. Thus, despite the panorama surrounding the marriage ritual, marriage *is* a

form of acquisition. *Kinyan* is used in the Talmud and later texts to signify commercial transactions. Although acquiring a woman differs somewhat from buying a field (a common Talmudic analogy for marriage) it is clear that in classical Jewish texts, women are classified as objects and ownable property. In biblical and modern Hebrew, a husband is a *ba'al*, which literally means master or owner of property. A wife is simply an *isha*, a woman. By implication, all Jewish women are wives-in-waiting.

Given all of this profoundly distressing information, we, Jewish feminists who try to find meaning and inspiration in Jewish texts and rituals, could not ignore the clear fact that women are circumscribed in the *halachic* (Jewish legal) view of marriage. Given that inequity is *not* part of either of our views of marriage, could we reconcile our desire to have wedding ceremonies that would represent our ideals of marriage with the traditional form of a Jewish marriage?

The marriage ceremony wasn't the only problem. The inequality reflected in the marriage documents also disturbed us. The *ketubah*, generally thought of as a wedding contract, is not a contract between partners. Underneath the flowers and pastel images of Jerusalem is a statement from the groom that details his financial obligations towards the bride (calculated according to her sexual status — virgin or non-virgin). Many rabbis and modern Jews value the *ketubah* for its authenticity and even claim that it was meant to protect women. In *Rereading the Rabbis*, Judith Hauptman makes the case that the rabbis of the Talmud made far-reaching legislative change to the biblical marriage laws as women became regarded as individuals with a right to consent to (or withhold consent from) a marriage.

But women's status today is much different from the way it was in Talmudic times. Thus marriage laws and ritual must also change. If we are today finally equal, we should have a legal document that reflects this hard-won reality. Isn't there a way to maintain authenticity while revising the marriage contract to involve the intentions and obligations of both partners?

As we pondered these questions, *Engendering Judaism*, a recent book by Jewish feminist theologian Rachel Adler, caught our attention.² In it, Adler proposes a radical new construct for marriage based on partnership rather than acquisition. We read her book

1. Judith Hauptman, *Rereading the Rabbis: A Woman's Voice*. Colorado: Westview Press, 1998, pp. 60-76.

2. Rachel Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*. Jewish Publication Society, 1998.

eagerly and discussed it endlessly. We were both in serious relationships, struggling not only with the idea of committing to a partner for life, but also wondering how we could create marriage rituals to reflect our beliefs in the equality of men and women in Judaism. Our relationships were based on respect, mutuality and partnership; our weddings should also reflect these principles.

Adler's ceremony, the *B'rit Ahuvim* (lovers' covenant), is based on an ancient Jewish legal business partnership in which each partner contributes to a joint entity by pooling their resources in a pouch and lifting it together.³ The partnership model also solves another problem that stems from *kiddushin* — the *agunah* (chained woman). Since a marriage based on *kiddushin* is created with the sole action of the groom, the termination of the marriage is also solely in his hands. If a husband refuses to give his wife a *get* (Jewish divorce document), the marriage continues until he relents. With Adler's model which eliminates *kiddushin*, the marriage is a joint partnership from the beginning. The *B'rit Ahuvim* is also appropriate for same-sex Jewish marriages, unlike *kiddushin*, which is solely heterosexual.

We both loved Adler's idea, but our commitment to *halacha* (Jewish law) prevented us from stepping outside the boundaries of tradition so radically. We realized that it would be a very long time before the *Brit Ahuvim* would be recognized as a legal marriage. Most Jews, even self-identified feminist rabbis whom we consulted, seemed willing to live with the contradictions between their aspirations for a marriage of equality and a ritual based in inequality.

Intellectually energized but confused, we discussed the various options, and then went to our fiancés to figure out how, if at all, we could incorporate the *B'rit Ahuvim* into our respective weddings. Both of us decided to go ahead with the partnership ceremony in addition to the traditional *kiddushin*. The partnership would come first, so in our eyes, it would be the marriage ceremony. The *kiddushin* that would follow would be our homage to tradition. The *B'rit Ahuvim* includes many elements that mirror the traditional *kiddushin* ceremony, such as rings, blessings over a cup of wine, and a document that lists the couple's obligations to each other. It was with this document, or *shtar*, that each couple expressed its creativity and commitment.

3. *Itatil' b'kis*, (lifting a pouch) is the method described in the Talmud for acquiring a partnership (M. Ket. 10:4).

In creating their *shtar b'rit* (covenant agreement), Heather and her husband-to-be Eric followed Adler's suggestion that the partnership be based on covenant. They used elements of Adler's model of a *shtar b'rit* in *Engendering Judaism* and cited biblical images of covenant and the principles embedded in them. Susan and her husband-to-be Lewis wanted their *shtar shutafut* (partnership agreement) to be more specific in listing mutual commitment and obligations. So they sat down one night, surrounded by many different sources including copies of egalitarian *ketubot* from friends, *Engendering Judaism*, and ceremonies and documents from *Lifecycles*, vol. 1, and started to think about what they wanted in a partnership agreement.⁴ They created a document that was similar to traditional *tena'im*, conditions stipulated by both bride and groom before the wedding. Unlike the traditional *ketubah*, *tena'im* have historically been mutual. Susan and Lewis's *tena'im* focused on their obligations to each other in different facets of their marriage — economic, domestic, and personal — with different biblical and rabbinic quotations as prooftexts. The focus of the *ketubah* is on what happens if the marriage ends; they wanted a document according to which their marriage could *live*.

In the actual wedding ceremonies, each couple began with their variations of the *B'rit Ahuvim*. Heather and Eric signed the *shtar* (along with two other witnesses), as they were the parties to the agreement. (Traditionally the bride and groom do not need to sign the *ketubah*, it only needs to be witnessed by two others.) They then read aloud to each other from the *shtar*. Once they declared their intention to be true partners, they each put some of their belongings into a pouch. They chose car keys and new house keys to symbolize the financial side of the partnership, private letters to each other that reflected the emotional and spiritual promise of the partnership, and their wedding bands. Once Heather and Eric raised the pouch together, everything inside became part of the partnership.⁵ They recited the blessing that Adler suggests, which recalls the *b'rit* and is said upon seeing a rainbow: "Blessed are You, who remembers Your covenant and is faithful to Your covenant and keeps Your word."

At Susan and Lewis' wedding, the English and Hebrew versions of their *shtar shutafut* were formally witnessed by two pairs of friends

4; for a full list of these and other resources see p. 25.

5. A *halachic* note: in the *kiddushin* ceremony that followed, they used a separate set of rings.

at Susan's *tisch* (reception) while Lewis held court in a separate reception. After Lewis was led by a throng of singing and dancing guests over to Susan, Heather facilitated the *shutafut* ceremony. Susan and Lewis signed the *shtar* and Heather then read a short section of the document aloud. Susan and Lewis placed personally significant items (including a miniature replica of *Engendering Judaism*) and coins in a bag that was specially decorated by Susan's Rosh Chodesh group for the occasion. They lifted the pouch together and declared in Hebrew: "May our marriage, which will soon take place under the wedding canopy, be a covenant of partnership and trust, and thus may we establish a household among the people Israel." After *kiddushin* under the *chuppah* (wedding canopy), where Lewis gave Susan a ring and the traditional *ketubah* was read, Susan gave Lewis a ring. Heather, one of the four rabbis who participated in the ceremony, read the *shtar shutafut* aloud.

The *b'rit shutafut* ritual was, in our eyes, a complete marriage ceremony. In the eyes of *halacha*, however, the *kiddushin* under the *chuppah* was the main event. In the end, while we both incorporated and made central the partnership aspect of our wedding ceremonies through our adaptations of the *B'rit Abuvim*, we still both decided to be acquired through *kiddushin/kinyan* as part of the wedding. We allowed ourselves to be "co-opted by the system" for a complex set of personal, historical, and *halachic* reasons. Sometimes the weight of tradition, as distasteful as it can be, is too difficult to abandon. We hope that more couples will be conscientious objectors to *kiddushin* and will solemnize their relationships with the *B'rit Abuvim*. Community customs and "facts on the ground" have led to radical changes in Jewish law. We hope that this detailed sharing of our process will make it easier for you to join us in re-negotiating the covenant.



Selection from the *Shtar Shutafut*/Partnership Agreement of Susan Sapiro and Lewis Polishook

On the first day of the week...the bride, Susan Ellen, said to the groom, Lewis Aaron, "Be my companion and husband in covenant according to the customs of the people of Israel." The groom, Lewis Aaron, replied, "Do not call me master, call me husband," and accepted a ring from the bride, Susan Ellen. The bride and groom then declared that they are entering into this marriage as a full and equal partnership, according to the terms of the agreement set forth below.... They will live a life of full and equal partnership in all that requires decision, in domestic duties, and in family roles. They will make their home their first priority, and the source from which their lives will flow, as it is said, "A house is built by wisdom, and is established by understanding; by knowledge are its rooms filled with all precious and beautiful things" (Proverbs 24:3-4)... They will strive to nurture each other's personal and professional growth and joy of living... They will honor each others' opinions and concerns when they disagree, as it is said, "The more counsel, the more understanding" (Sayings of the Fathers 2:8). They will not conceal from each other any of their material possessions, and will work together as equal partners to secure sustenance for themselves and their families, as it is said, "Two are better off than one in that they have a greater benefit from their earnings" (Eccles. 4:9). The bride and groom will always seek to actualize in their daily lives the vision set forth in this partnership agreement. May the One to whom past and future are as one bestow a good name and longevity to the terms of this partnership and its undertakings.

...sustenance for themselves and their families, as it is said, "Two are better off than one in that they have a greater benefit from their earnings" (Ecclesiastes 4:9). The bride and groom will always seek to actualize in their partnership agreement. May the One to whom past and future are as one bestow a good name and longevity to the terms of this partnership and its undertakings. This agreement is not to be regarded as a legal agreement and has been drawn up in accordance with all legal technicalities which render it an effective agreement. This agreement in no way obviates the groom's obligations as witnessed today. Everything is valid and confirmed.

Susan Sapiro
Lewis Aaron Polishook

Bride
Groom



Selections from *Shtar Brit Shutfut/Document of Covenantal Partnership of Heather Altman and Eric Flam*

On the first day of the week,... Heather and Eric entered into a holy covenant like the ancient covenants of our people, mutually made in faithfulness and trust to bind them together for all time.

This partnership is a covenant of protection and hope like the covenant God swore to Noah and his descendants. Heather and Eric agree to protect each other and strive to nurture each other and their partnership....

It is a covenant of mutual lovingkindness like the wedding covenant between God and Zion, as it is said, I will espouse you forever. I will espouse you with righteousness and justice and lovingkindness and compassion. I will espouse you in faithfulness and you shall know God. (Hosea 2:21-22).

In the presence of witnesses, the following declaration Eric said to Heather, and then Heather declared the same to Eric: "With all my heart, soul and might, I enter into this sacred covenant to be your partner in life, love, and learning. I set myself apart for you to be yours exclusively. I will respect you, honor you, and support you..."

Heather and Eric willingly and joyfully agreed to the conditions of this sacred and intimate covenantal partnership. Each contributed from their property to symbolically join their being and possessions. The rings which they contributed will serve as a reminder of their partnership covenant, as the rainbow did for God's everlasting covenant with Noah and his descendants.



TRANSFORMING COVENANT

Melinda Kahler Levay is the Director of Jewish Education at the Jewish Community House of Bensonhurst. Hope Berger Levay teaches humanities at the Manischewitz Community Day School in Brooklyn.

On August 20, 2000 we entered into a covenant with each other, before God. Surrounded by friends and family, we publicly declared our love and pledged our commitment to one another. We had a great deal of work to do in order to get to that day, as Jewish tradition doesn't offer many models for a marriage between two women. With the guidance of our rabbi, the support of friends, a thick binder filled with copies of ceremonies we'd collected, and knowledge gained from our attendance at about a dozen gay and straight weddings in the previous years, we embarked on a wonderful journey that culminated on our wedding day.

There were certain things we agreed on right away. Our wedding would incorporate many aspects of a traditional Jewish ceremony: we would have a *ketubah* (marriage contract) signed both by us and by witnesses; we would stand under a *chuppah* (canopy); we would exchange rings; and the *sheva brachot* (seven blessings) would be recited. Of course, we had to adapt the language of the *ketubah* and the *sheva brachot* to make them relevant for two women.

We looked at a number of modern interpretations of *ketubot* and pulled ideas from a few of them. Our *ketubah* retains a hint of the traditional structure, though the main text is worded as a mutual declaration of love, respect, and support. We view this document as an articulation of what drew us together as individuals and propels us forward as a couple. Though the rabbi reminded all present at our wedding that we are still living in a time when gay marriage is not binding according to the law, by publicly accepting the rights and responsibilities outlined in our *ketubah*, we bind ourselves to each other. The *ketubah* was signed before the ceremony under the *chuppah*, in the presence of our guests, by both of us, two witnesses, and our rabbi.

For the *sheva brachot*, we borrowed a wonderful idea from the wedding of two dear friends. First, the *sheva brachot* were chanted in

Hebrew. Then, some of our closest friends presented a personal, interpretive version of each blessing. This structure allowed us to retain much of the richness of the ancient tradition, while giving us room to adapt the language. It also made the ceremony so much more personal, as our friends spoke of the connections between the themes of the blessings and our relationship.

We decided to use the traditional consecration text: “*Harei at mekudeshet li b’taba’at zo, k’dat Moshe v’Yisrael*” “Behold you are consecrated to me according to the laws of Moses and Israel.” We were concerned with the final words of the phrase, which translate as, “according to the laws of Moses and Israel.” Could these words be used to consecrate a marriage between two women? As lesbians, we had worked (and continue to work) hard to find our place in Judaism. We felt that the tradition belonged to us, and by not using that phrase we would only be strengthening the position that we were “other” in our own faith. So, under the *chuppah*, before God, in front of our families of origin and family of choice, we spoke the words that joined our hearts together as one.

There still remained the question of our names. How would we present ourselves as a newly formed family in the Jewish community — would we hyphenate, combine, or completely change our last names? Melanie felt strongly about presenting us as a new family unit, and her initial preference was hyphenation. Hope saw the advantages of a shared name, but felt the hyphenation would create a name that was too long and cumbersome. When someone suggested that we completely change our last names and take on a new one, we were surprised; but after some thought it seemed the best option. We agreed that we wanted a Hebrew name and had fun exploring different choices, based on *gematria* (Jewish numerology), translations of our “maiden” names, thematic meanings, and sound. We thought of concepts that were important to us and we kept coming back to *lev*, heart. The value of the word *lev* in *gematria* is 32, the same as the number of letters in the consecration phrase “*Harei at....*” We had chosen a verse for our wedding invitation that transformed the noun *lev* (heart) into an active, passionate verb. “*Levavtini achoti kallah*, You have captured my heart, my sister-bride” reads the verse from *Shir Hashirim* (Song of Songs) the most beautiful love poem in the *Tanach* (Bible). This verse suggests a variant form of the word *lev*,

which is *levav*. If you take the word *lev* לב with the numeric value of 32, and add a letter *vet* ב with the numeric value of two, you are left with this alternative word for heart, *levav* לבב. So, we took the idea of heart, added two (one for each of us) and arrived at the name Levav. Presently we are each using our original family names plus Levav, but eventually we will use Levav alone.

Just before entering the *chuppah*, we circled one another three times each, then made one circle together, creating a new family circle. Seven circles were formed, symbolizing the *sheva brachot* and the seven days of creation. Just as the world was created in seven days, so too our marriage was an act of creation. We created a covenant with each other and with God that serves as the foundation for the life we are building together.



Ketubah of Melanie Kohler Levav and Hope Berger Levav

On the first day of the week...the Bride, Melanie Joy... and the bride Hope Miriam... established:

With hearts full of joy, we stand together under the *chuppah*, linking past to future, uniting our lives. In exchanging these rings, we consecrate ourselves to one another, entering into a sacred covenant of love, trust, and commitment. We promise to cherish, honor, and support each other, striving ever to be loving, patient, and loyal partners. Respecting our differences and sharing our strengths, may we together meet life's challenges and live passionately. Nurtured by our union, may our souls blossom, our talents flower, and our dreams bear fruit.

As a Jewish family, we will weave a tapestry of celebration, sanctifying the cycles of our years and the seasons of our lives. May we grow together, our souls forever intertwined, our love bringing us closer every day. May *Shechinah* protect and guide us on our life's journey, blessing our hearts with happiness and wisdom, and our home with openness, friendship, abundance and peace. All is valid and binding.



A PARTNERSHIP OF STUDY

Ruth Abrams, a feminist writer and researcher in Somerville, MA, is a member of the core editorial group of *Bridges: A Journal for Jewish Feminists and Our Friends*.

In traditional *yeshivot* (schools devoted to the study of Talmud and other Jewish texts) and *batei midrash* (houses of study; schools for higher rabbinic learning), students pair off to study and prepare for their classes. A study partner, or *chevrutah*, is a person with whom one can debate vigorously. When *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers) urges “*u’kne l’cha chaver*” (acquire yourself a friend), it is likely referring to precisely this partnership. As women have gained access to institutions for Torah study, they, too, have entered into same-sex and opposite-sex intellectual partnerships for the sake of heaven.

I have written a *chevratiyah*, or comradeship ceremony that would recognize and formalize the commitment of partners to study together. The *chevratiyah* would not be exactly like the *chatunah*, the Jewish wedding, nor would it be exactly like a *bar* or *bat mitzvah*, because it would not be celebrated at the beginning of a study partnership. Rather, it would affirm the maturity of a study relationship. The *chevratiyah* would ritually concretize an informally recognized relationship that Jews have long recognized as important to the learning process. For Jewish women, these relationships have a particular importance in light of our long exclusion from the intellectual enjoyment and spiritual growth of Torah study.

The partners would invite a group of at least ten to join them for this event. These could be members of a Rosh Chodesh group, friends from the synagogue, or members of a Talmud class. They would gather around a table as for a *tisch* (reception) at an Ashkenazi wedding. The partners would present a short *drasha* (sermon), which their friends would interrupt with silly singing. An honored teacher could then read a contract that the two friends drafted. All present could then sign the document.

The reading of the *shtar* (document or agreement) would be followed by a symbolic exchange of books by the two partners. This would symbolize their willingness to continue to exchange not only knowledge in the abstract sense, but a sense of trust about lending

each other books! The group could then share a *kiddush*, a festive snack during which participants can talk about the ceremony.

The *chevrutah* ceremony has a particular feminist significance, because it recognizes the intellectual capacities of women, the emotional attachments of men, and the strength of relationships not based in biology. A ceremony between two male partners would be a welcome opportunity to recognize the closeness between men. Between a female and a male partner, this ritual illuminates the possibility of men and women learning from one another in a non-sexual relationship. The sense of equality between study partners would be heartily appreciated in communities where women and men study together. Two female partners could use this ceremony to show the importance of women's intellectual support for one another. Two women who pledge this support in public are also acknowledging the centrality of women's friendships in community. In each case, assembled friends and family would celebrate the value of close, non-sexual friendships and the Jewish life of the mind. This would contradict the biologically-based emphasis of only celebrating love in sexual pairings.

It is my hope that this ceremony will suggest the possibility of celebrating many close relationships outside the family: students and teachers, people who pray together in a *minyan*, or people who work together for social change. These new rituals would give people the opportunity to show their love for each other in a Jewish context.



Sample Chevrutah Contract

On (date), (partner's name) _____ and (other partner's name) _____ agreed to continue their partnership. For the sake of heaven, they will challenge each other's reasoning but never each other's intelligence. While always respecting the power of each other's minds, they will never neglect the care of each other's spirits. While they wrestle with difficult texts and difficult truths, they will never lose their hold on their image of God in each other's humanity.

On this day, _____ said to _____ "I promise to remind you of your resolution to respect teachers in the face of difficult texts and troubling questions. You are my partner in this holy endeavor."

On this day, _____ said to _____ "I promise to remind you of your ability and intelligence and to try to never let you leave a text frustrated. You are my partner in this holy journey." The partners agree to work together until (date) or until one of them leaves (the community, this *yeshivah*, the university) and they pledge to continue in friendship thereafter. The following people have witnessed this commitment and are further strengthened in their desire to study, teach and learn.

This piece was adapted and reprinted with permission from *Rosh Hodesh Exchange* (vol.1 no.2, Tamuz 5755/June 1995.)

ON BEING SINGLE

Rabbi Pamela Hoffman is a pulpit Rabbi at Congregation Kol Ami in Annapolis, Maryland.

...In Judaism, as in many traditions, the growth of the individual is measured largely through life-generating acts. In many ways, birth, childhood and adolescence form a kind of one-directional corridor leading ultimately to the wedding canopy. At birth, the community projects its aspirations onto every newborn (male) child with the blessing: *Letorah, lehuppah, ulema'asim tovim*. "May [he] be privileged to learn Torah, to arrive at the wedding canopy, and to do good deeds." The echoes of this ancient blessing reverberate throughout the twists and turns of life's lengthy passage-way, and find their fulfillment under the wedding canopy.

...Now all of this constitutes a grave problem for me and many other "non-attached" Jewish adults. For we, perhaps more than any other population in the Jewish community, find ourselves in a kind of "no-man's" land where, because structure is utterly lacking, chaos prevails. With what communal recognition do I, as a non-married person, celebrate a committed human relationship, avail myself of opportunities for maternal nurturing, participate in ritual events which acknowledge my standing in the community as a vital contributor to its time-honored values? Sadly, the answer is: None.

As a single woman, I have had ample cause to think about the lack of a ritual of personhood in Jewish lifecycle observance. Jewish theology finds its articulation in rituals which embrace both the "macro events" of its mythic history as well as the microcosmic signs of God's providence — which is to say, its family events.

But I, too, have a history that calls for acclamation, a present in need of celebration, and a future demanding to be renewed by the power that ritual can provide. I look for a natural pausing point where I might recognize the contours of my own life — with its achievements, struggles and steppingstones; where I might celebrate my own acts of generativity in the world — for I have given birth to dreams, and I have created and nurtured ideas that have since taken on a life of their own. I have in my more sanguine, less anxious moments, watched and helped my garden grow.

My guess is that I am not alone in this search for a ritual expression of adult personhood, unrelated to family status. It is no

accident that the last several years have witnessed the proliferation of Adult *Bat Mitzvah* (belated coming of age ceremony). Nor is it surprising that significant numbers of these celebrants are single professional women who seem to be seeking a way of honoring their personhood within a community that has become highly important to them. This innovation, however, is not the kind of ritual expression that I am speaking about...The type of celebration I am proposing could operate throughout the life of every Jew, and would not be contingent upon being either parent or spouse. Like other lifecycle events, it would mark a transition and thereby become an occasion for examining that complex process we call living.

For some time I have contemplated appropriating the occasion of my birthday and investing it with a ritual ceremony and structure. Admittedly, the recognition of a birthdate is distinctly foreign to Jewish observance. In fact, the only mention of a birthday observance in the entire Torah is that of Pharaoh, the arch-gentile. We Jews have been good at *yartzeit* (anniversary of a death), at celebrating a life in retrospect, rather than as it is being lived. Birthdays evoke associations with transition — even with anxiety or chaos — especially, though not exclusively, for the single and unattached. It is a boundary in time that thrusts itself upon us, uninvited. It is the most individualized marker that we are given, and like it or not, it summons us to engage in personal inventory and reflection. Navigating our way across this boundary can be a turbulent business. Hence there is much that “good ritual” could do to transform chaos into cosmos, to keep this highly charged time from violently erupting. Formulated in the positive, there is also much that “good ritual” could do in celebrating that piece of the divine image with which we are entrusted at birth, to do good works in the world just as we are.

The celebration would ideally take place in the warmth of one’s home, amidst close family and friends. It can be used to acknowledge passages, goals, and contributions in any Jew’s life, though the celebration fills a special need for the non-married... More important than the specifics of the ritual, is the value that we will, I hope, learn to assign to all our lives, whether they are lived in marriages or in other constellations.

SANCTIFYING BIRTHDAYS

- One of Pam Hoffman's suggestions is to keep a scroll of days, and once a year record meaningful events of the year. The inspiration for writing a scroll of days comes from Psalms; "Then I said I will bring a scroll which contains my story. To do your will, My God, is what I desire. Your teaching is deep inside me" (after Psalms 40:8-9).
- For her 39th birthday, Rivkah Walton asked her friends to join her in banishing the demons "that make maturing so hard and frightening." As she and her guests called out their fears of aging, they responded to each with calls of "Away, away...". Walton also invited her guests to offer her new names to take on, so that she could hide from the "demons" that were targeting her.
- Decide to mark your birthday by adopting a new Jewish ritual, like wearing a *tallit* (prayer shawl), or by learning to read Hebrew, lead prayers, or read from the Torah.
- Ask your friends to donate money in your honor to an organization of their choice. At your celebration, have them talk about the different organizations and how they relate to you and your values. Or, instead of a traditional party, invite friends and family to join you in a volunteer effort in honor of your birthday.
- Write your own covenantal document detailing your commitments. Think about who you would like to sign it as witnesses. Decorate the document and hang it in your home. Every year or every few years, go back to your covenant and re-evaluate it, remind yourself of it, add to it, as your life changes.

RITUALS FOR RENEWING THE COVENANT

WEEKLY RING CEREMONY

It is traditional to wash one's hands before reciting the blessing over the bread. The following ritual takes advantage of the fact that people take off their rings before washing their hands in order to ensure that the water reaches every spot on their fingers. It turns the mundane act of removing one's ring into an opportunity for couples to renew their commitment to each other. Arthur Waskow and Phyllis Berman suggest that on Friday night after washing, each partner pick up the other partner's ring and think about re-making the conscious choice to be together. Each can then replace the ring on the partner's finger and recite the phrase from the Jewish marriage ceremony, "*Harei aht/atah mekudeshet li be-taba'at zo ke-dat Moshe ve'yisrael*, Behold, you are consecrated to me according to the laws of Moses and Israel." One suggestion is to alternate weeks, so that partners take turns initiating the renewal of their covenant. If you are single, you might want to take a moment to recall your sacred vows to yourself as you replace your rings on your fingers.



See Arthur Waskow and Phyllis Berman, *A Time for Every Purpose Under Heaven*, to be published in 2002 by Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.

BLESSING THE BELOVED/BIRKAT AHUVOT VA'AHUVIM

Traditionally, married men would recite *Eshet Hayil*/A Woman of Valor (Proverbs 31:10-31) to their wives on Friday evenings before *kiddush* (blessing over the wine). Marcia Falk has reconceptualized this ritual, using verses from the Song of Songs, to make it usable for different types of intimate relationships. As Hebrew is a gendered language and requires that grammar be appropriate to the genders of both the subject and object of a sentence, Falk offers three Hebrew versions of this mutual blessing; one for a woman and a man, one for two men, and one for two women. The English version of the blessing can be used for any couple.

ONE PARTNER: How fine
 you are, my love,
 how fine you are.

THE OTHER PARTNER: How fine
 are you, my love,
 what joy is ours.

TOGETHER: Of all pleasure,
 how sweet
 is the taste of love.

After Song of Songs 1:15-16; 7:7

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TO A WOMAN: *Hinakh yafah, ra'yati,
hin'akh yafah.* לאהובה: הַנָּךְ יָפָה, רַעֲיָתִי,
הַנָּךְ יָפָה.

TO A MAN: *Hin'kha yafeh, dodi,
af na'im.* לאהוב: הַנָּךְ יָפָה, דּוּדִי,
אִף נָעִים.

TOGETHER: *Mah-yafit
umah-na'amt,
ahavah bata'anugim.* יחד: מַה־יָפִית
וּמַה־נָּעַמְתָּ,
אַהֲבָה בַּתְּעֻנּוּגִים.

TO A WOMAN: *Hinakh yafah, ra'yati,
hin'akh yafah.* לאהובה: הַנָּךְ יָפָה, רַעֲיָתִי,
הַנָּךְ יָפָה.

TO A WOMAN: *Hin'kha yafah, ra'yati,
af n'imah.* לאהובה: הַנָּךְ יָפָה, רַעֲיָתִי,
אִף נְעִימָה.

TOGETHER: *Mah-yafit
umah-na'amt,
ahavah bata'anugim.* יחד: מַה־יָפִית
וּמַה־נָּעַמְתָּ
אַהֲבָה בַּתְּעֻנּוּגִים.

TO A MAN: *Hinakh yafeh, dodi,
hin'kha yafeh.* לאהוב: הַנָּךְ יָפָה, דּוּדִי,
הַנָּךְ יָפָה.

TO A WOMAN: *Hin'kha yafeh, dodi,
af na'im.* לאהוב: הַנָּךְ יָפָה, דּוּדִי,
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וּמַה־נָּעַמְתָּ,
אַהֲבָה בַּתְּעֻנּוּגִים.

על-פי שיר השירים א:טז-טז; ז:ז

RENEWAL OF COVENANT AFTER MANY YEARS

From Dark to Light

After 35 years as friends and lovers, Ruth Berman and Connie Kurtz celebrated their relationship during *Havdalah*, the ritual that ends *Shabbat* and moves us into the new week. For them, *Havdalah* “represented so much of what our life together has been and is...existing in differences and in sameness, a continuation from light to dark to light.” During the ceremony at their synagogue, friends from different generations shared *drashot* (speeches), and guests serenaded them in Yiddish, Hebrew and English. After their rabbi blessed them, they spoke about and to each other. Following the meal, there was singing and dancing, and they were lifted up onto chairs by their guests.

Love and Lox/ A Welding

In 1998, author and ritualist Esther Broner and her husband, artist Bob Broner, decided to celebrate their fifty years of marriage with a series of events one weekend. On *Shabbat* at their synagogue, the Broners, accompanied by three of their children, grandchildren and siblings, were called up to the Torah, after which they were showered with daisies. On Sunday morning, they held a ceremony in their loft apartment under a *chuppah* (wedding canopy). The Broners included objects that were important to them in their ceremony: a flag from a women’s *Sukkot* gathering, a “talking” stick, and a vase that had been broken and repaired, “like a long relationship that always needs repairing,” said one of the rabbis. Their children and grandchildren blessed them, and at the end of the ceremony they both stamped on lightbulbs wrapped in napkins, symbolizing regret over the passing of youth. According to Esther Broner, the event helped the couple place themselves “in history.” It also served to communicate to their children and grandchildren “that there can be immortal connection between mortals, and that they came out of love and continuity. And numbers mean something.”¹

¹ E.M. Broner, *Bringing Home the Light: A Jewish Woman's Handbook of Rituals* copyright ©1999 by E.M. Broner. Used by permission of Council Oak Books, 1290 Chestnut Street, San Francisco, CA 94109.

Resources for Celebrating Your Relationships

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Ramon, Einat. "A Wedding in Israel as an Act of Tikkun Olam." *Lifecycles* vol. I, ed. Rabbi Debra Orenstein. Jewish Lights, 1994.

Also: Visit www.ritualwell.org a new website launched by Ma'yan and Kolot: The Center for Jewish Women's and Gender Studies of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. Discover a wealth of ritual resources at your fingertips. Currently the site features an article by Debra Nussbaum Cohen, based on her new book *Celebrating Your New Jewish Daughter* (Jewish Lights, 2001), a how-to manual for composing original welcoming ceremonies for girls, complete with blessings, songs and readings from a range of religious perspectives.





COMMUNAL COMMITMENTS

SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO?

Young Women Professionals And Jewish Organizations

Rebecca Metzger is a freelance writer and poet living in Brooklyn.

I am twenty-four years old and, after two years of working at a Jewish organization, I have sworn to myself that I will never work at another. I admit that I needed to leave my first job out of college partly to have a comparison for my experience. Yet at the same time that I left, a rash of my young female friends — all women in their 20's and 30's dedicated to the Jewish community through their synagogue affiliations, ritual life, activist and volunteer work — left their jobs at Jewish organizations and pledged never to return. I don't think it's a coincidence. Many of us have subsequently chosen non-profit jobs, so it's not the non-profit work environment in general that we rejected but the Jewish one in particular. Why?

It isn't easy to write this, especially for a Jewish publication. I fear being confrontational and over critical. I don't want to betray my old workplace. I want to protect myself. So do all the young Jewish women I spoke to while gathering material for this article who asked me to keep their stories anonymous. Our silence, however, will only contribute to the continuation of the problem.

GLASS CEILING

Jewish organizations are overwhelmingly staffed by young women whose prospects for being promoted are not high. Statistics reveal that only two out of 40 major national Jewish organizations are headed by women while 51 percent of secular foundations have women CEOs ("New initiative aims to advance women," JTA, 10/12/00). But it's not just that the "glass ceiling" is keeping women out of top executive positions. There are a limited number of staff positions at most non-profits. In addition to the fact that executive staff don't tend to move on quickly, there are very few middle management positions. Many young women at non-profits find that there is no chance for promotion, no matter how hard they work. The glass ceiling exists for these women because of their gender and their age.

When I interviewed for my prior job, I had recently graduated from college. I asked if there was any chance for advancement if I stayed at the organization. The answer was “No.” I would be given good recommendations to move laterally but the organization could not accommodate me beyond a few years. The reality was that there were no middle management positions within the organization to which I could advance. The message was that there was no future for me as a young woman in the Jewish workplace.

Once I started work, no one took me under his or her wing or nurtured me as a potential future leader within the community. No one seemed to take an interest in what the Jewish community could provide for me or what I could provide for it. The work I did could have been performed by a non-Jew for all that my Jewish identity was called upon.

One woman I spoke to who left her job at a Jewish organization in exchange for a for-profit job, said that down the line, she planned on returning as an executive for a Jewish non-profit. After four years without a promotion, however, she felt that she had to leave the Jewish organization to further develop her skills. In her mid-30s, this woman sits on the boards of several Jewish organizations but there is no career path for her within the Jewish community.

CONTINUITY & MONEY

As a young employee at a Jewish non-profit, I often worked 50-hour weeks, was paid a barely livable wage, and received no overtime compensation. Jewish organizations are no different in this respect than other non-profits. What irks me is how much this contradicts the Jewish community’s combined emphasis on “continuity” and on raising money. When Jewish organizations plan benefits for young Jews and charge admission prices that exceed \$100, who is expected to show up? Certainly not someone like me who worked at a Jewish non-profit. Do such price choices reflect an interest only in those whose career tracks as doctors, lawyers, bankers and business people outside of the Jewish communal structure might make them the future philanthropists of the Jewish community? Does the Jewish community really prefer young people to make money and become lay people rather than to contribute their creativity as professionals in the

community? Are Jewish organizations more interested in raising money than in acknowledging the realities that many young people can't afford \$100 tickets?

A Jewish artist used to attend the young membership meetings at my former workplace. She continually voiced objections to the exorbitant pricing of events, suggesting that tiered prices be offered. After months of her opinions being dismissed, she ceased her involvement in the group and returned to do her work in a non-Jewish environment. Without money to contribute to Jewish organizations, what options are there for young Jews to get involved?

There is a lot of lip service paid to the importance of young people in the Jewish community, but this is not translated into involving young, non-wealthy Jews nor in treating young staff at Jewish organizations as valuable resources. I remember sitting at a meeting at my old job while the executive staff wondered aloud how to involve more young Jews in the organization and never once solicited my opinion. I spoke up at that meeting, noting that three young Jewish women sat around that table. For the first time — and one of the only times while I worked there, the senior staff asked us about the Jewish activities that personally interested us.

When I hear the word “continuity,” I don't feel like I or the artist I mentioned are being counted in the ranks of eligible young Jews. As a community we need to count all young people in, whether it's money or ideas that they have to offer.

SEXISM

Young women are still encountering inappropriate behavior in the Jewish communal workplace. One woman tells of a boss who repeatedly commented on how pretty she looked and asked her if she was dating anyone. Another shared that she was flown, at the expense of a board member, to another state in order to go on a date with that board member's son. A fund raiser at a Federation was asked by her male colleagues to leave the room when money was being solicited from other men. A male supervisor of mine thought he was complimenting me by reducing me to a stereotype and telling me how much he enjoys working with “feisty Jewish women.”

All of these incidents reveal the fact that the Jewish community is not yet a place where women employees can expect to be evaluated

on the merit of our work, not our bodies, our eligibility, or our willingness to accept inappropriate comments. The message seems to be that, in the end, it's not young Jewish women's work or ideas that are valued, but whether or not they will marry nice Jewish men — and how soon.

Jewish organizations consider the workplace a family setting and treat their staff like family. In my interview for my former job, this family environment was trumped as a positive attribute. I agreed until I saw how it played out on a daily basis. When the women in my office weren't being treated like future wives, they were being treated like children. My male boss took a paternal attitude toward me, calling me *Rivkeleh*. One woman I interviewed told me of the board members who pinch her cheeks.

What strikes me is that Jewish organizations do not hold themselves up to the same professional standards as non-Jewish organizations. It is as if, with the weight of a 3000-year old patriarchal religion behind us and the belief that we are working toward a higher calling we can eschew all of the hard-won accomplishments of the feminist movement in the workplace. Certainly, we cannot excuse the Jewish workplace from upholding the standards of feminism, gay rights and labor rights. We also cannot accept workplaces in which non-Jewish women are treated worse than Jewish women are.

INSULARITY

“Do you go to *shul*?” The staff at my former workplace expressed concern over the religious affiliations of young women in the office. I was teased for going to a Reconstructionist synagogue. “Are you kidding?” a male supervisor asked me, laughing. After that incident, I never again spoke about my religious life.

Daily language in that office was peppered with Yiddishisms and references to Jewish texts that I didn't always understand. I worried that if I appeared ignorant of Jewish text and practice, I might be considered incapable of professional responsibilities. None of these were terms that were required for my job yet they were indicative of assumptions made by senior staff about what it means to be a committed Jew. They communicated a sense of an inside and an outside and there was no easy or welcoming bridge offered. There

was no recognition of the different ways one can be committed to the Jewish community. This lack of recognition of Jewish diversity reflects the narrow and inward focus of many contemporary Jewish organizations.

Repeatedly, young Jewish women told me that they left their jobs at Jewish organizations because they found the environment "insular," "parochial," "conservative," "irresponsible." When asked what they want Jewish organizations to be, they said "relevant," "progressive," "pluralistic," "responsive," "engaged." We in our 20's and 30's were raised in an era of unfounded prosperity for Jews, and our politics encompass a large community. We are concerned with the rights of prisoners, sweatshop laborers, and unions. We are worried about the homeless, about domestic violence and rape, about gun control, about hate crime legislation. We are agitating for the rights of women in Afghanistan and for political prisoners around the world. We want to be able to do this work through the Jewish community because it is, at least in part, our Jewish values that inform our concern. Is there no place for this activist work within the agendas of Jewish organizations?

For the first 18 years of my life I felt alienated from everything Jewish. In college I discovered a Jewish community that was progressive, activist, pluralist and engaged. I wanted to continue to be a part of that community so I sought out a job in the Jewish community. But until the day that Jewish organizations value young women's ideas, compensate us appropriately, treat us like adults, mentor us, and recognize in us the potential future leaders of our community, young women professionals like me will continue to flee. Non-Jewish organizations will reap the benefits of a hard-working, bright cadre of young Jewish women, and the Jewish community will permanently lose a valuable resource.

CHANGING THE COMMUNAL AGENDA

Shifra Bronznick is a founding partner of Bronznick Jacoby, LLC, a change management consulting firm.

Recently, The Trust for Jewish Philanthropy announced that it was funding its first initiative, *Advancing Women Professionals and the Jewish Community*. The goals of *Advancing Women* are ambitious: we plan to shatter the glass ceiling in Jewish organizational life.

The Trust, a new public charity founded by the United Jewish Communities in January 2000, is establishing new models of venture philanthropy within the organized Jewish community. After embarking on a nation-wide "listening tour" to identify Jewish communal needs and to explore the possibility of meeting these needs through new partnerships, *Advancing Women Professionals and the Jewish Community* was the first project to be chosen by The Trust.

We were congratulated on the outstanding achievement of being selected from among dozens of projects, particularly since, as a number of people commented, "surely there are so many more important communal problems to resolve." We responded by pointing out that the tough issues that our community must tackle require that we put first-rate professionals in place who are capable of taking on these challenges successfully.

For a community facing a crisis in personnel, framing our commitment to advance women as a talent recruitment strategy was convincing to many who then became enthusiastic about the project. Embedded in this pragmatic business case is our conviction that when we succeed in leveling the playing field, we will transform Jewish institutions into more equitable, fulfilling and productive work environments for all professionals.

This major undertaking grew out of a plan that was started more than eight years ago, when Ma'yan was just preparing to open its doors. Nessa Rapoport suggested to the founders, Barbara Dobkin and Eve Landau, that they commission research that would give the community an

accurate picture of the standing of women in Jewish organizational life. The report that was published in 1998, based on research conducted by Dr. Bethamie Horowitz, Dr. Pearl Beck and Dr. Charles Kadushin, focused on the role of women on the boards of major national Jewish organizations.

Those who helped guide the project were not surprised by the researchers' documentation of the tangible gender gap between men and women on these national boards, and the strikingly small number of women who held top volunteer or professional posts. However, Ma'yan staff and volunteers were taken aback by the complacent reaction of many top lay leaders and executives to the findings.

In a series of meetings with Executive Directors of these organizations that I attended in my role as consultant to the project, with Ma'yan Director Eve Landau, we were assured that as women continue to make strides in the private sector, government and the general not-for-profit field, the imbalance in the Jewish world would gradually correct itself. The increasing numbers of women rabbis — which now account for 50% of every non-Orthodox seminary program — seemed to make a number of organizational executives even more confident in their assertion that little action was needed to be taken to remedy the situation.

Ma'yan decided to initiate a long-term systemic effort to challenge these assumptions, and to build support for initiatives that would advance women in the organized Jewish community. The responsibility to develop and implement the plan was given to me and my business partner in change management work, Jonathan Jacoby.

Our strategy has been multi-faceted: we have developed a network of women who are deeply involved in the organized Jewish community and are committed to the full participation of women in the community's leadership. Through consultations with hundreds of individuals and small groups, we have begun to shift the issue of women's advancement from the margins to the mainstream. This has been a difficult task, because we have found that ethnic and organizational loyalty often trumps gender. As a result, women — even those expressly concerned about women's role — find that when they advocate this position, it may diminish their status within their own organizations. The primary commitment of

women board members often is directed to the organization on whose board they sit; that is why they have become leaders within that organization. Creating an effective way to work for gender equity within that setting, without compromising their position, is often a delicate balancing act.

To test some strategies about various ways to help organizations strengthen women's leadership and involvement, we have been working directly with two institutions, a national organization and a local Federation. The insights that we gain from these pilot programs will inform our efforts to create a technical assistance outreach program that can be used by organizations across the country.

In addition to these aspects of the project, we have set our sights on forging a new consensus about the realities of gender inequality among the leadership of the organized Jewish community. Speaking at public conferences to audiences of both women and men — at the Jewish Funders Network, Leadership 2000, the national teleconference of the Jewish Communal Service Association, and the Rabbinical Assembly — has allowed us to reach decision makers, both men and women.

We have used these forums to educate the Jewish public about the urgency of creating opportunities for women to participate equally in the leadership of our community. While emphasizing the talent drain that we are experiencing as a result of the loss of women's involvement, we have also focused on the chance to make use of initiatives to advance women as a laboratory that will develop new ideas to improve the overall quality of Jewish organizational life.

This intersection — between the issue of women's advancement and Jewish communal transformation — has become increasingly significant over the years. When we survey the Jewish communal landscape, our institutions have a powerful history of tremendous impact. These Jewish organizations have accomplished virtual miracles from the building of the State of Israel to the rescuing of Jews in peril from Ethiopia to the Former Soviet Union. From community centers to synagogues, museums to day schools, university centers to religious seminaries, social service agencies to organizations for research, advocacy and public policy: the extraordinary network of organizations that we have established touches on almost every aspect of our identities and our lives.

On the other hand, as you can read in the pages of Rebecca Metzger's article (see page 28), her sojourn in the heart of the Jewish organizational world uncovered deep problems within the system. When her journey began, this young woman was filled with passion and commitment; by the end, she left the Jewish organized world not just in sorrow, but also in anger.

Lots of people are fleeing; many more aren't even joining. Others stay, but are often disheartened. More and more, committed Jews are openly wondering why they should accept the hierarchy, bureaucracy, insularity, and lack of innovation that seems to characterize so many Jewish organizations. Like Rebecca, many feel their voices are unheard, even at meetings where the topic is the need to reach out to the young people like them.

Would women CEOs function differently? Certainly, all women do not lead in a collaborative, inclusive way. But all women know firsthand the difficulty of being heard. Every woman I have interviewed, including many high-powered leaders, reports the frustration of having her ideas credited to someone else, most often a man, in the course of a meeting. These experiences may, in fact, influence many women to create contexts for consultation and involvement across hierarchical boundaries.

Advancing women to leadership posts in the Jewish world requires that we structure leadership opportunities that are vital and viable. When we surveyed women board members, some were striving to achieve greater leadership roles in the major organizations in the Jewish community; others adamantly preferred to focus their involvement on local and/or general organizations. These women were skeptical of their potential to influence the calcified patterns of leadership and institutional norms, and spoke of the need to find real opportunities for substantial impact and results.

The Jewish community can respond to these critiques by deciding to change its organizational culture and its infrastructure. The community is capable of becoming a central address for innovation and experimentation; and by expanding its vision, the community will expand the leadership talent pool.

The choice is ours. If we persuade our institutions to revitalize themselves and to shape a more compelling agenda, we will engage women, young people, artists, academicians, those with intellectual capital willing to provide the human capital of commitment and hard work.

In designing the best ways to include and advance more talented women, we will create a prototype for recruiting the next generation of leaders. We need to identify and cultivate these new voices and visions. These organizations that frustrate us also need us; the generations who preceded us have done the hard work of establishing a solid infrastructure that has good will, a good name, cash and clout. It needs renovation, re-envisioning, reforming and transforming.

As a catalyst for change, Ma'yan has made significant strides in inserting women's concerns onto the Jewish communal agenda. Now we need to play an even more assertive role, and actively transform our community's agenda. Sounds like a great and important job for great and important women.



change maker profile: NO SMALL CHANGE

YOUNG WOMEN'S TZEDAKAH COLLECTIVE



From left to right: Mara Kaplan, Briana Waldoks, Rachel Katz, Ariel Gros-Werter; Eva Sandler; Merrill Zack. Not pictured: Sarah Blustain, Shira Hanlon, Rachel Hyman, Susan Sapiro, Stephanie Zelkind, Jordan Namerow, Amanda Rautenberg.

For the past three years, I've been part of a group of Jewish women in their 20's and 30's who meet monthly to explore our thoughts and feelings about money. Originally a Ma'yan program, we met with Ma'yan's founder and chair Barbara Dobkin, who guided us in our process. We discussed what it meant for women who didn't make much money to be "philanthropists," we analyzed how we saw money functioning in the Jewish community, and we wondered if we looked at money differently because we were women. We each gave \$5 a month to a collective fund that we would allocate collectively to an organization at the conclusion of our process. After months of discussing our values and the issues we cared about, we decided that we wanted to support women in grassroots organizations. By the end of the year we had over \$800 which we donated to Avodah: The Jewish Service Corps. Our money supported the work of one of their female participants who works in community-based anti-poverty programs. The \$800 check we gave to Avodah was more than any of us had given as individuals, and it helped me realize the impact of collective giving, especially on a small organization. Being in the collective also helped me to figure out how to incorporate *tzedakah* (righteous giving) into my wedding last August, something that wouldn't have been in the forefront of my mind had I not participated in the collective giving process.

After our first year, the *tzedakah* collective continued to meet on its own, joined by some new members, and we raised our individual

contributions to \$10 a month. Our experience had been transformative. How could we transfer the knowledge that we had gained as a collective to others? We decided to re-create the *tzedakah* collective as an intergenerational group and invited high school girls to join us. We would go through our *tzedakah* process with them as participants and as mentors. We drafted a curriculum, and asked Ma'yan, the JCC, and the Jewish Fund for Justice to be our sponsors. No Small Change: the Young Women's Tzedakah Collective, started meeting this past October, with 6 great high school girls and 7 rotating facilitators from our group.

By the end of this year, No Small Change had planned to collect approximately \$1000 — the adult members contribute \$10 a month, and the girls contribute \$5 per month. Yet, thanks to the generous contributions of four nights of Ma'yan seder participants at the end of March, our fund expanded beyond our wildest expectations. We now have almost \$11,000 to give away to organization(s) that we choose. We thank all those who donated to our collective for sending us the powerful message that you value the process of women's and girls' collective giving. Thank you for supporting our changemaking effort.

— Susan Sapiro



Jordan Namerow, a senior at Ridgewood High School in New Jersey and a student at the Ivry Prozdor of JTS, will begin Wellesley College next year.

Every Friday evening before we begin our *Shabbat* meal, each member of my family drops thirty-six cents into our porcelain *tzedakah* box. While our traditional contribution was, and still is a fulfilling endeavor, I have recently engaged in a far more active and thoughtful process of giving. I joined No Small Change, a young women's *tzedakah* collective, with very little knowledge about cooperatively participating in philanthropic *tikkun olam* (repair of world). In my home, I had grown very accustomed to my father's donations to our synagogue, the New York Philharmonic, and the UJA, among others, but I had not explored the process of making intelligent, philanthropic decisions collectively on a budget. In a group

with many people of different backgrounds and interests who have limited time and resources, how do we decide where to direct *zedakah*?

In our collective, I have learned about the importance of identifying my values prior to making a contribution. This is no easy task. The members of our group feel strongly about many issues ranging from service and compassion, to environmental preservation and reproductive rights, to diversity and education. With such important ideals, it is difficult to identify one cause on which to focus our energies and resources.

During many hours of discussion, we agreed that all of our values were embodied in one general goal: improving the quality of life for women. We are currently exploring several organizations that provide for the realization of this goal. Zonta International is a worldwide service organization that works to advance the status of women through clubs in 71 countries and many programs in partnership with the United Nations. Shelter our Sisters is a Bergen County women's shelter for victims of domestic violence. Nisan Young Women Leaders is an organization committed to the advancement of young Arab and Jewish women in Israel through leadership training workshops and programs. Girls Incorporated of NYC is an organization that is committed to inspire girls to be strong, smart, and bold in assuming roles that defy gender stereotypes through advocacy and direct service. Dress for Success is an organization that collects business clothing to be distributed to women who need, but cannot afford business attire. Finally, the Women's Empowerment Fund of American Jewish World Service supports grassroots efforts led by and for women in the developing world to raise the status and improve the quality of life for women and girls.

I derive a tremendous amount of pride and pleasure from participating in a collective project. Giving *zedakah* is an important aspect of my life as a Jewish woman, but it becomes so much more meaningful when the process of contributing bears as great an impact as the product. Through No Small Change I have experienced a valuable process of decisionmaking that will undoubtedly help me make productive monetary contributions in my future.

For more information about No Small Change, contact Susan Sapiro at Ma'yan at 212. 580. 0299 ext. 209 or email us at: zedakahcollective_nsc@hotmail.com.

CHANGING FUNDING/ FUNDING CHANGE

Nancy Schwartz Sternoff, director of the Dobkin Family Foundation, recently organized a gathering of Jewish women's foundations.

In recent years we have witnessed an explosion of interest in collective women's philanthropy. A more than twenty-year-old effort is gaining steam and visibility as women's pooled foundations, donor circles and funds have burst onto the fundraising and grantmaking scene all over North America. They provide sorely needed monies for programs to benefit and empower women and girls, and create opportunities for donor activism and advocacy. As women have flourished in the marketplace, they have articulated their intention to give back by strengthening the lives of other women and girls. In their determination to move "women's issues" away from the margins, they have institutionalized women's collaborative philanthropy.

Jewish community federations are following suit. Longtime donors to federation campaigns, along with women who have not been connected to the mainstream Jewish community, are creating new donor-advised structures to address issues vitally important to them as women — through a Jewish and a feminist prism. Although women's foundations have been in existence in federations such as Minneapolis and Seattle for over a dozen years, only recently has there been a groundswell of activity. Communities as diverse as Springfield, Massachusetts and Detroit, Michigan have initiated or are about to initiate vehicles for pro-active pooled women's philanthropy. In addition, Hadassah has demonstrated its commitment to progressive advocacy through the creation of its new foundation. The federations and Hadassah join long-standing and highly respected organizations such as The Jewish Fund for Justice, US/Israel Women to Women, The New Israel Fund and The Shefa Fund in articulating a commitment to directed funding for women and girls.

Leaders, both lay and professional, of these new funds share two common goals: to increase the dollars flowing to programs for women and girls and to empower Jewish women as donors and advocates for a more inclusive community that meets the needs of women and girls.

Federations have traditionally been consensus builders rather than change-makers; the leadership of the American Jewish federation movement has long been both the provenance of men and the center of response to community direct service crisis needs. Now, with the proliferation of women's funds, the federation movement is making a statement about its willingness to conduct business in a new way. That means change — in fact, a sea change, both inside our federations and out in the communities we are attempting to nurture and sustain.

The politics of change is both replete with opportunity and fraught with challenges. The opportunities are tremendous — to fund arenas that have heretofore been largely ignored or marginalized by the Jewish institutional community; to attract new donors and untapped expertise; to advance a talented pool of loyal federation women for whom there have been few avenues to power; to educate donors to set funding strategies and priorities; and to create a cadre of activists on behalf of women and girls. And the challenges are just as momentous — to establish and sustain activism in environments not conducive to progressivism; to gain and maintain visibility in organizations with competing and often conflicting internal agendas; to define and express articulately the needs of Jewish women and girls; to address gender in a respectful, constructive way; to train women to think of themselves as powerful leaders and advocates; to educate women donors to recognize the need for fundamental, systemic change and to find the methods and the monies to do so; and to develop and sustain this funding into the next generation.

Despite the challenges, Jewish women's foundations are creating a new sense of excitement among women across the spectrum of our institutions. If we believe that through philanthropy we can create a more equitable society, then pooled Jewish women's funds can be powerful agents for change. We are poised to close the gap, to leverage our dollars and our skills, not merely to attain short-term change, but to, in the words of Judith Plaskow, “redefine normative Judaism.” We are on the threshold of actualizing a potent resource — a flourishing Jewish women's funding movement that will proudly advance our cherished tradition of *tzedek* (justice) and *chesed* (lovingkindness) for all Jews, regardless of gender.

POOLED JEWISH WOMEN'S FUNDS AND FOUNDATIONS

American Jewish World Service Women's Empowerment Fund

Boston Jewish Community Women's Fund

The Hadassah Foundation

Jewish Women's Endowment Fund of the Greater Phoenix

Jewish Federation

Jewish Women's Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago

Jewish Women's Foundation of Metropolitan Detroit

Jewish Women's Foundation of New York, Inc.

The Lillian Fund at the Endowment Foundation of the Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford, Inc.

Minneapolis Jewish Federation Women's Foundation

Nefesh: An Endowment for Jewish Women at the Jewish Endowment Foundation of Western Massachusetts

New Israel Fund (can be earmarked for women's programs)

The Purim Fund at The Jewish Fund for Justice

The Shefa Fund (structure is being re-evaluated)

US/Israel Women to Women

Women's Endowment Foundation of the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle

Women of Vision: A Fund of the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia

Jewish Women's Foundation of Broward County (in formation)

Jewish Women's Foundation of Greater Miami (in formation)

Jewish Women's Foundation of Pittsburgh (in formation)

Allied Jewish Federation of Colorado (on the verge of being set up)

United Jewish Federation of San Diego County (on the verge of being set up)



Rosh Chodesh table cloth



PROGRAMS

MA'YAN PROGRAMS

To register for programs call Paulette Lipton at 212.580.0099 ext. 232
or email: paulette@mayan.org

Sunday, May 20, 2:00–7:15 pm

Pre-Shavuot Tikkun: Women and Time In Texts and In Our Lives

Join us for our third annual highly popular mini-marathon of study with engaging female scholars and rabbis from a variety of approaches and fields. Includes food, song, serious study and creative explorations of traditional and non-traditional texts. Come for one hour or give yourself the treat of a whole afternoon of learning!

Co-sponsored with the Drisha Institute for Women's Education
Held at Drisha, 131 West 86th Street. \$18 (\$10 for under 18 and over 65).

Monday, June 4, 9:00–10:30 am

Jewish and Feminist Text Study with the Ma'yan Staff

"When ten sit together and study Torah the *Shekhina* resides among them." (Pirkei Avot 3:7) Join us as we explore some of the foundational texts for our work as Jewish feminists. Held at Ma'yan. Free

Thursdays, May 24, 7:30–8:30 am, June 21, 6:30 pm

This Month Is For You

Rosh Chodesh, the beginning of the Hebrew month, is a special day for Jewish women. Join us for an early morning celebration of *Rosh Chodesh Sivan* in May and for an evening program for *Rosh Chodesh Tammuz* in June. Facilitated by Janice Rous and Susie Kessler. Held in private homes. Call for locations.

Monday, June 4, 7:00 pm

Jewish Women at the Top: How are we doing?

Among the 50 American Jewish leaders singled out by *The Forward* because they are doing and saying things that are making a difference in the way American Jews view the world and themselves, were 17 women who have distinguished themselves in a variety of fields. Join several of these women as they discuss the challenges they have faced and which face other women trying to make a difference. Shifra Bronzick, change management consultant will moderate a panel including Tamara Cohen of Ma'yan; Rabbi Shira Stern, Director of the Joint Chaplaincy Program of Middlesex County, New Jersey; Belda Lindenbaum, President of the Board of Drisha; Hannah Rosenthal, head of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs and Blu Greenberg, JOFA President.

Co-sponsored by The JCC, Ma'yan and The Forward. \$7 JCC member/\$10 non-members.

AT THE JCC

Ma'yan is a program of the JCC in Manhattan, a dynamic and inclusive Jewish community center. To find out about JCC programs, visit the website <http://www.jccnyc.org> or call 212. 580. 0099 for a program guide.

The JCC offers a variety of support programs and groups, including: Bereavement, Divorce, Single Parents, Gay and Lesbian, Illness, Infertility, Adoption, Post-Partum, Interfaith.

For questions about any of these groups call Carol at 212. 580. 0299, ext. 205, or surf www.jccnyc.org.

The JCC's New Samuel Priest Rose Building at 76th and Amsterdam Doors Wide Open This Fall.

SUMMER LEARNING

CAJE (Conference on Alternatives in Jewish Education) August 5–9. Colorado State University. Hundreds of workshops, including 3 by Ma'yan. 212. 268. 4210 or CAJENY@CAJE.ORG.

Drisha Institute for Jewish Education. Three-week Institute: June 4–June 22; Five-week Institute: June 25–July 27; Summer High School Program: June 25–July 27. 212. 595. 0307 or inquiry@drisha.org.

Elat Chayyim: A Jewish Spiritual Retreat Center in the Catskill Mountains of NY. July 30–August 5. The Festival of Miriam. August 27–31; Jewish Women's Meditation Retreat. 800. 393. 2630, or info@elatchayyim.org or visit the website at www.elatchayyim.org.

Hebrew Union College — Jewish Institute of Religion. Through June 29. "Jewish Mothers: Strength, Wisdom and Compassion." A photography exhibition. Thursday, June 21, 7 pm. With Barbara Rose Haum "Lunar Performances: Creating an Architecture of Text in Time." One West 4th Street. 212. 674. 5300.

Kolech: The Religious Women's Forum. June 25–26. Jerusalem, Israel. For information email Kolech@zahav.net.il.

National Havurah Committee Summer Institute. August 13–19. Franklin Pierce College. Classes include "Consents and Coercions: Women as Moral Agents in Rabbinic Judaism" with Dawn Robinson Rose; "Gathering the Sparks: Politics and Spirituality" with Martha Ackelsberg; "Poetry as Prayer: Sensuality and Spirituality in the Voices of Jewish Women" with Marcia Falk. 215. 248. 1335 or institute@havurah.org.

Aleph Kallah. July 2–8. Dekalb, Illinois. Workshops include: "Dipping into Miriam's Well: Women, Ritual and the Spiritual Journey." 303. 554. 5913 or KallahAJR@aol.com.

Project Keshet. August 19–26. Help staff a leadership seminar for Jewish women in the Ukraine. 847. 332. 1994.

Kallah 2001. Union of American Hebrew Congregations. Franklin Pierce College, New Hampshire (June 27–July 1); UC Santa Cruz, California (July 18–22); UC Colorado Springs, Colorado (August 1–5). Faculty includes: Ellen Frankel, Merle Feld, Judith Baskin, Rachel Adler and Riv-Ellen Prell. 212. 650. 4087.

Ma'yan Staff

Eve Landau, Director

Barbara Dobkin, Chair

Tamara Cohen

Paulette Lipton

Susan Sapiro

Rabbi Rona Shapiro

Ruth Silverman

Debby Hirshman, Executive Director,
JCC in Manhattan

Photography

cover: Wedding Rings by Ruth Markus

p. 2 Silver Kippah with Bridal Veil by
Gloria Spitz

p. 3 Chuppah by Laura Lazar Siegel

p. 21, Wedding Rings by Stuart Golder
(photo: Ralph Gabriner)

All the above courtesy of Hebrew Union
College-Jewish Institute of Religion's
Exhibition "Living in the Moment:
Contemporary Artists Celebrate
Jewish Time"

p. 8 Dyanooosh Youseffi & Daniel Westreich

p. 9 Susan's *Shtar* by Jacqueline Savolainen

p. 10 ©Deborah Ugoretz

p. 14 Paulette Lipton

p. 16 Richard Lobell

pp. 26, 27 Beth Peters

p. 44 *Rosh Chadesh* Tablecloth by Barbara
Stoner from *Rosh Chadesh Guide* by
Rabbi Lenore Bohm. (WRJ, 1997)

Inside back cover Joan Roth

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organizations for the purpose of informing
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do not want your name and address given
out, please let us know.



design / parlour; nyc
212. 228. 9579
parlour@mindspring.com



The Jewish Women's Project
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