

The Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center for the Study of Women in Judaism

Newsletter no. 11, July 2012, Tamuz 5772



**Prof. Judy
Baumel-Schwartz**

Dear Friends,

It is with pleasure that I introduce myself as the new Director of the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center for the Study of Women in Judaism. As a historian specializing in the history of Jewish women it is a unique privilege for me to direct an institute devoted to supporting the academic study of women in Judaism. At the same time it is an exciting challenge to seek out worthy scholars dealing with this topic in order to encourage them to continue and expand their important research. This is one of the main goals that we have set for the Center during the present academic year, along with a continuation of the important academic activity that the Center has been involved with throughout the years.

As always, we are indebted to Mrs. Fanya Gottesfeld Heller for her support and direction, and see her own experiences as a guiding light for young scholars wishing to explore and document various academic facets of the study of women in Judaism, both today and in the past.

This year our activities focused on three areas: Academic Conferences and Symposia, Research Grants for Bar Ilan University Ph.D. Graduates and Staff, and Prizes awarded to outstanding Graduate students at the university. These activities, along with plans for the next academic year, are featured in this year's newsletter. Please follow our website for further information.

Wishing you a Shana Tova, a year of good health, fulfillment and Jewish growth,

Prof. Judy Baumel-Schwartz, Director

Research Grant Recipients:

Dr. Rachel Levmore



Rachel Levmore, PhD, Talmud from Bar-Ilan University, is a rabbinical court advocate, coordinator of the Get-Refusal Prevention Project of the Council of Young Israel Rabbis and the Jewish Agency, and author of Minee Einayich Medima on prenuptial agreements for the prevention of get refusal. Dr. Levmore was awarded a research grant to continue her research project entitled: "Spare Your Eyes Tears: Prenuptial Agreements for the Prevention of Get-Refusal."

Since 1995 I have been intimately involved in the resolution of hundreds of agunah – victims of get-refusal – cases. As a professional Rabbinical Court Advocate in the field of Jewish divorce in Israel, together with experience freeing agunot around the world and as an author of prenuptial agreements for the prevention of agunot, it was natural for me to carry over the knowledge gained into the world of academia, so to enrich that knowledge. With a Master's thesis researching the first prenuptial agreements signed in Israel for the prevention of get-refusal and a Doctoral dissertation dealing with the change in halachic rulings issued by the Israeli Rabbinical courts in the most severe agunah cases– it is of great interest and natural for me to deepen my research into prenuptial agreements for the prevention of the agunah problem and their practical dissemination.

In the academic world there has been much interest of late in the "agunah" problem. Articles, conferences and even a moot court have been held in Law Schools and Talmud Departments in the USA and Israel—most prominently in Bar Ilan University. Examinations and studies have been made in research articles of the Rabbinical Courts the world-over, and their attempts to overcome the "modern-day agunah" problem—the victim of *get*-refusal.

The English-language research study herein is the first of its kind, uncovering actual prenuptial agreements for the prevention of *get*-refusal which were signed over several decades in Israel –as opposed to theoretical proposals for solutions. Systematic

investigation is continuing to lead to the discovery of individual personal prenuptial agreements for the prevention of get-refusal, signed before a legal authorizing authority in Israel—the earliest in 1984, until the present. Scientific methodology, including text analysis, interpretation of language and function, placement in context of historical background as well as societal influences, the reviewing of professional/rabbinic/scholarly literature together with a complete overview of the development of Jewish Divorce Law with citation and annotation of the primary sources throughout the ages (Biblical until the most recent response, Israeli Law and even Israeli Civil Court rulings), are all employed to extract the deepest and clearest understanding possible of the agunah problem on the one hand, with the need and the efficacy of prenuptial agreements to resolve it, on the other. Each of the prenuptial agreements is presented verbatim and undergoes rigorous analysis and interpretation—actually leading to the revealing of an evolutionary process.

In the expanded English language version of this study close attention is paid to the roots of the concept of prenuptial agreements for this purpose in the Diaspora. A chapter is dedicated to the process of its acceptance by the rabbinical establishment in the United States.

This study includes research of the ongoing *agunah* problem and the solution contained within prenuptial agreements for the prevention of *get*-refusal; the continuation and expansion of the Hebrew study originally published under the title *Minee Einyayich Medim'ah: Heskemei Kdam Nissuin L'meniat Seiruv Get*; publication of the English manuscript **Spare Your Eyes Tears: Prenuptial Agreements for the Prevention of Get-Refusal** (working title) by Dr. Rachel Levmore. Through this study, the fact will be recognized by the English speaking Jewish community the world-over, that a prenuptial agreement provides a tool to both spouses, as well as to the Rabbinical Court, which preempts the rising of the problematic situation of get-refusal.

Dr. Nava Vasserman



Nava Vasserman, PhD, Program in Contemporary Jewry from Bar-Ilan University, now teaches in that department. She is also a graduate of the rabbinical court advocate course for women, and teaches in a number of religious women's colleges.

Dr Vasserman was awarded a research grant to continue her research project entitled "Man, Woman and Couple among Gerrer Hassidim".

Between 2000 and 2008 I worked as a psychology lecturer at the Teacher's Enhancement Unit of the Gur seminary in Bnei-Brak. My close contact with the women of the Gur Hasidic movement exposed me to their way of life and their unique approach to marital relationships, of which I was previously unaware and which contradicted all that I knew about Judaism's approach to married life. My curiosity was piqued and therefore, when I had to choose a subject for my doctoral thesis, I decided to focus on how Gerrer Hassidim establish families and the special features of marital relationships among this group.

In my study I call the Gur Hasidim 'The sacred society' because of their commitment to sexual abstinence, which in their terminology is called 'holiness'. During my research I traced the establishment of this Hassidic movement in the Land of Israel from the 1920s onward, explaining the reasons and the means by which it transformed itself into a 'sacred society'. After that I discuss the movement's current social profile and the affect that the 'sacred' value had on the formation of separate and clearly defined communities of males and females. My study's central section describes and analyzes, in chronological order, the stages leading to the establishment of a marital relationship among Gerrer Hassidim: Preparation for married life, choosing a spouse, the period between the engagement and the marriage, the marriage and the conjugal relations it brings with it and the ways in which all those stages are driven by the overarching value of 'holiness'. The concluding chapter summarizes the contribution this work makes to the definition of the inner religious and social world of the Gerrer Hassidic male, female and couple; betters our understanding of the Gerrer Hassidic movement and provides a description of a different aspect of Israeli Haredi life.

My long association with Gerrer Hassidic women helped me delve into their lives, and more importantly, their hearts. Through this first hand knowledge I have come to learn how strict gender segregation may actually empower women and to realize that the rejection of gender equality does not totally diminish the women's social influence. This has brought me to the conclusion that the happiness of married women is not dependant on the type of marital relationship espoused by the couple and that it may flourish even in a marriage where the couple distance themselves from each other and practice sexual abstinence.

After I submitted my doctoral dissertation my teachers encouraged me to rework my results into book form. I decided to take on this challenge and broaden my original research framework by including a few new subjects that I have not discussed in the dissertation itself. The research grant offered me by the Fanya Gottesfeld-Heller Center for the Study of Women in Judaism will help me accomplish this task and I am very grateful for it.

Outstanding Graduate Students Prize Recipients:

Naama Teitelbaum



Naama Teitelbaum is a graduate student in the Martin Szuss Department for Land of Israel Studies and Archeology .She received her research prize for her study of "On the other side of the Mehitza: Women's participation in Synagogue Space and its significance for Religious Zionist Society in Israel".

My research is a part of a larger body of research exploring issues of gender in Religious Zionist society. My goal was to examine the phenomenon of religious women in the Orthodox synagogue space and to detail the characteristics of this involvement. The synagogue incorporates a ritualistic and community based structure and constitutes a central institution in Jewish communal life and acts as a fundamental structure in defining the identity of a religious Jew and a religious Jewish community. It is therefore little wonder that the feminist revolution touches upon this space. In addition to detailing the phenomenon of women's participation in synagogue space and analyzing some of its aspects, my research sheds a new light on this topic from a gendered perspective, adding to the growing body of research that deals with the gendered history of Religious-zionist society.

It appears that the feminist revolution influenced synagogue space in two main aspects: Creating women prayer groups and developing a model of an “equalistic community”: a community that incorporates women in the synagogue space itself. At the core of this research I examine four Israeli synagogues belonging to the second aspect of my research: The “Yedidya” community (formed in 1980); “Shira Hadasha” (formed in 2000); the “Darkey Noam” community (formed 2005); and “Hakhel – an equality based Minyan in Bakaa” (formed in 2006). My research focuses on Israeli synagogues where women's partnership is expressed within the synagogue space as part of the main prayer ritual and finds expression in an organized fashion.

At a first stage I examine the creation of the Minyanim while emphasizing the gender-social initiatives, showing the theoretical and practical aspects of the female

partnership in the synagogue as represented by the synagogues' regulations; in the origin of Halachic authority; and in the patterns of Equal prayer.

My research concludes with the interaction between the creators of the Minyanim and the religious-zionists institutions, an interaction that helps form the women' participants personal and social identity. The study defines the paradox typifying these communities: on one hand they desire to create a new gender construct that challenges the traditional-Jewish world, on the other hand they have a strong desire to stay bound to the Orthodox-Jewish “Halachic” world. In view of this paradox each community constructed an equality based-religious model, according to their interpretation of the concept of “Orthodoxy”.

In certain cases it is impossible to balance these two aspirations and therefore the communities chose which values they retained and which they excluded.

Yael Dichovsky



Yael Dichovsky is a graduate student in the Israel and Golda Koschitzky Department of Jewish History. She received her research prize for her study of "The Gateshead Seminary for Women – Uniqueness in a Unique Community (1944-1988)".

As one who comes from the Ultra Orthodox society and one who is an ex-student of the 'Charedi' education in Israel and a graduate of Gateshead Seminary of Gateshead, I have attempted to investigate the re-establishment of the religious education for girls in Europe after the Holocaust. In my research I have been writing about Gateshead seminary since its establishment in 1944 until 1988, the year when Rabbi Avraham Dov Kohn, the first principal of the institute, passed away. The seminary in Gateshead whose formal name is the Jewish Teachers' Training College, opened its gates in 1944, during the Second World War. This institute was the first Jewish college for girls in England and the only one existing at that time. Girls from all over the world came to learn there throughout the years. The seminary is unique for its special educational path, based on Torah virtues and developed by separation from the world that surrounds it. The seminary reflects the community where it exists. The Jewish congregation in Gateshead lives in a world of its own. The staff of this institute

consists of rabbis who teach only Jewish subjects plus pedagogical studies. These subjects are crucial for teaching training.

My research begins with a survey of the Anglo-Jewry since the end of the nineteenth century until 1944, the year when the seminary was founded. In this survey there is a description of the two waves of emigration to England that shaped Anglo Jewry. There is a review of the growth of the Jewish population and its centers, its financial situation and the educational institutes. I also focus upon the religious changes that take place as a result of the assimilation in the English culture. This background is essential for understanding the unique character of the Jewish congregation in Gateshead in general, which is practically reflected in the seminary in particular.

In the second part of the research I deal with the establishment of the Seminary, its background, and its first year. I analyze the rabbinical personalities who initiated it and founded the institute. These rabbis had considerable effect upon the rebuilding of the Orthodox world after the Holocaust. As different types of girls from all over the world came to study there throughout the years I created a typology of the girls who studied there since the Seminary's establishment. Then I investigate the educational goals and their effects, the curriculum and the style of learning. I deal with the technical organization and the physical conditions in the seminary over the years and the increasing number of students in view of the Seminary's fame and reputation. In the next stage I explore the nature of the interaction between the community and the seminary, and the similarities and differences between education offered at the Gateshead seminary and that being taught at 'Beth Yaakov' seminaries in Israel.

At the end of my study I compare between the goals of Gateshead seminary and those of the Women's Colleges in USA and the impact of the Second World War upon these institutions. The picture which emerges from my research is one of a unique seminary at Gateshead that reflected the unique congregation where it is located.



Research Grant Recipients at the reception before the awards ceremony

Adi Sharabi



Adi Sharabi is a graduate student in the Bible Department. She received her research prize for her study of "Between Partners and Adversaries: The relationship between pairs of women in the Bible".

Much research has focused on female figures in the Hebrew Bible. In my research I examine the nature of the relationship between female figures who interact in the Bible. I will determine if their connection is one of utter cooperation or of rivalry or of some in-between phase. Some of the pairs of female figures on which I will focus engage in dialogue; others never converse, yet nonetheless display a relationship of engagement.

My goal is to understand the quality of each relationship partially in light of the women's relationships to the men in their life. Nevertheless, the main focus of this work is the relationship of each woman with her companion. In order to better understand the relationships, the dyads on which this work is based are presented in a spectrum spread between two poles. The determinant for placement on the spectrum is the degree of rivalry or cooperation that characterizes the relationship. The men's roles in the women's relationship will also be touched upon. In addition, the narrator's, men's and women's perspectives towards the women's relationships will be analyzed.

Relationships and the characters' points of view on them will be examined in light of: the discourse and rhetoric of the characters, literary strategies of representation, social or sociological perspectives, and psychological considerations. The feminist literature takes note of the abundance of female characters in the Bible but is critical of the typical lack of continuity in their stories. Thus my study first considers the women in the Bible who are presented in conjunction with one another, as direct and indirect interlocutors. My approach is primarily literary, but I make use of perspectives derived from sociology, law, ethics, and other social scientific disciplines. My study entails a fresh reading of the stories on which it is based. Close reading and rhetorical-literary analysis will yield a new understanding of the female

characters who collaborate, compromise or compete with each other. It is hoped that my study will contribute to a greater understanding of women's conduct in light of the context of their time, from social and moral perspectives.



Grant Recipients and Prize Winners with Center Director, Prof. Judy Baumel-Schwartz

Academic Conferences and Symposia:

On January 2, 2012 the Center sponsored an international symposium entitled "The Jewish Palaces of Time" together with the Leo Baeck Institute in Jerusalem. The well attended symposium was held in honor of the publication of Prof. Elisheva Carlebach's book: **Palaces of Time: The Jewish Calendar and Culture in Early Modern Europe**. Speakers included Prof. Katherine Kogman-Appel, Dr. Ya'akov Deutsch, Prof. Guy Miron, Dr. Sylvie Anne Goldberg and Prof. Elisheva Carlebach.

On February 1, 2012 the Center, together with the Artists Museum at Ein Harod and the Gershon and Yehudit Lieber Exhibition Center at Bar Ilan University, sponsored an international symposium entitled: **Matronita: Jewish Feminist Art**. The symposium was an outgrowth of the exhibit by the same name which was created by Dvora Liss and David Sperber at the Museum at Ein Harod. The Center also provided funds for the exhibit catalogue, including translating an article appearing in the catalogue

from Hebrew to English. Speakers included Dvora Liss, David Sperber, artists Helene Aylon and Zipi Mizrahi, director of "Studio Mishelach" ("Studio of your own").

Cooperation with other Centers both inside and outside Bar-Ilan University:

The *Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center* continued its tradition of cooperating activities with other centers and institutes both inside and outside the university. The Center is planning a joint conference next year together with the Institute for Religious Zionism at Bar Ilan University. Several meetings have been held between the Center's Director Prof. Judy Baumel-Schwartz and Prof. Ella Belfer, Director of the Institute for Religious Zionism, together with, a senior member of its board, Prof. Eliezer Don Yehiya, and the coordinators of the two institutes, Dr. Yishai Arnon and Yonatan Edrei. A large portion of the conference that will be held in December 2012 will deal with women within the religious Zionist movement and as part of the religious kibbutz movement in Israel.

The Center continues its cooperation with the Israel and Golda Koschitsky Jewish History Department at Bar Ilan University, with the Graduate Program in Contemporary Jewry, and with other university institutes and programs connected with the study of women in Judaism.

In addition the Center is planning to sponsor a conference in January 2013 together with Prof. Yosef Gorny and Prof. Eliezer Ben-Rafael of The Institute for Jewish Communication and the Institute for the Study of Zionism at Tel-Aviv University that will include two sessions dealing with research about women in Judaism today.

In addition to these two conferences we plan to continue the tradition of student prizes, research grants, publication and travel grants, and support for translation of scholarly articles dealing with women in Judaism from Hebrew to English.

Staff

Center coordinator, Orit Kandel, began her maternity leave in January 2012 and was replaced temporarily by Yonatan Edrei. In June 2012 Ms. Kandel announced that she would not return to her position in the near

future and therefore Mr. Edrei will be replacing her for the coming academic year as Center coordinator.

Updates on our conferences and programs will appear on our website:

We hope that you will be able to join us for all the activities that we will host this year. For further information about conferences and fellowship opportunities:

<http://www.hellercenterforjewishwomen.org/>