

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

Newsletter no. 12, June 2013, Tamuz 5773



**Prof. Judy
Baumel-Schwartz**

Dear Friends,

I am happy to share with you a brief summary of our activities during this past academic year. During my second year as Director of the Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center for the Study of Women in Judaism the Center has been involved in a number of cooperative research ventures, has been a partner in national and international conferences, and has been instrumental in promoting academic research dealing with various aspects of women in Judaism. As a result of these ventures the Center has received a great deal of positive public exposure and its name has been publicized as being an institute that stands at the forefront of cutting edge scholarship dealing with women in Judaism. In addition we have continued the exciting challenge of seeking worthy scholars at various levels who are studying various aspects of women in Judaism and have enabled them through our translation, travel and research grants to continue and expand their important research.

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 good summer, a year of good health, fulfillment and Jewish growth,

Prof. Judy Baumel-Schwartz, Director

Research Grant Recipients:

Dr. Adam S. Ferziger



Dr. Adam S. Ferziger is senior lecturer and vice chairman of the Graduate Program in Contemporary Jewry at Bar-Ilan University. His research focuses on Jewish religious responses to secularization and assimilation in 19th century Central Europe, and 20th century North America and Israel. In 2011, Ferziger was the recipient of Bar-Ilan's "Outstanding Lecturer" award. Currently he is a visiting fellow of Wolfson College, University of Oxford, and co-leader of an international research group on Orthodoxy and theology at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies. Dr. Ferziger's received his award for research on female activists in American community outreach kollels.

My research aims to explore the growing role of women in haredi outreach enterprises, specifically the community kollel. Below is a brief description of the emergence of this novel religious educational institution and the focal position played by women, followed by a statement of my working hypothesis.

Rabbi Aharon Kotler (1891-1962) was the driving force in the renaissance of mid-twentieth century haredi Judaism in North America. Upon his arrival in New York in 1941, he proclaimed that “authentic” Judaism could only rebuild if a core population separated itself physically from society and its members concentrated on enriching their own Jewish knowledge and commitment. The key to achieving this goal was to establish yeshivas and, even more so, kollels – institutions where married men receive a regular stipend in return for dedicating themselves exclusively to Talmud study. Indeed his project was successful and today the Beth Medrash Govoha in Lakewood, New Jersey – which he started with a few students – enrolls over 5000 full-time kollel members.

During the 1970s, some of the larger kollels, most prominently Lakewood, sent groups of at least five couples to other metropolitan areas devoid of a significant presence of advanced Torah students.

The planting of these enclaves within a more heterogeneous environment constituted a declaration of sorts that new members were invited to join the fold. Yet at this juncture, it was aimed less at interfacing with the non-observant or non-Orthodox population, than at bringing Modern Orthodox Jews closer to a traditionalist Orthodox lifestyle. These institutions became known as “community kollels.”

The newest development can be traced to 1987, when a “community outreach kollel” was established in Atlanta, Georgia. Its members continued to dedicate three to four hours a day to their own Talmud studies. During the rest of the time they initiated a multi-faceted educational program aimed primarily at attracting unaffiliated Jews to Torah learning and religious involvement. Since 1987 numerous similar type frameworks have sprouted in Jewish communities throughout North America.

One of the notable innovations of the community kollels is the transformation of Haredi women into outreach activists. This stemmed from a realization that in order to interface successfully with the broader Jewish population, it was imperative for women to play central roles. The kollel women's activities are not limited exclusively to addressing female Jews. Indeed, they often work in direct partnerships with kollel males, and in many cases it is the women who pilot the initiatives. At the website of one such kollel, for example, the individual pictures and biographies of the female activists, most of them wives of fellows, appear on the same page as that of the male faculty. Both divisions are included under the title "our team."

Seen within the context of traditional haredi outlooks, such "egalitarianism" is a novelty which offers an alternative model of Jewish female leadership. The stewards of the kollel movement have demonstrated their awareness of the crucial influence of female involvement by creating year-long training programs that cultivate outreach skills among the kollel wives prior to embarking with their husbands on life outside the haredi milieu.

The working hypothesis of my research project is that: the rise of the female kollel activist is one illustration of the ways in which American

haredi Jewry's turn toward outreach vis-a-vis non-Orthodox Jews has led to significant social and religious adjustments. In this case, the blurring of previously strict gender boundaries. The new roles taken on by women kollel activists raise conflicts and engender complex hybrid identities that digress in notable ways from the accepted notions of this community.

Dr. Yoel Finkelman



*Dr. Yoel Finkelman is a lecturer in Jewish studies at Bar-Ilan University, and he teaches Talmud and Jewish thought in various venues in Jerusalem. His 2011 book, *Strictly Kosher Reading: Popular Literature and the Condition of Contemporary Orthodoxy*, uses popular print media as a lens into the cultural dynamics of the contemporary Haredi community in the United States. He has published academic and popular articles on Haredi Judaism, religious Zionism, and Jewish education. Yoel lives with his wife and five children in Beit Shemesh, Israel*

Contemporary Orthodox women find themselves caught in tensions between their socially assigned roles as mothers and wives in the domestic sphere and their equally socially assigned roles outside the home or in the workplace. How do they negotiate their relatively constricted roles within the religious sphere and, under some circumstances, their more robust roles outside of it? Questions about women's roles interact with related questions about men's roles, as Orthodox individuals and communities try to negotiate the tasks facing Orthodox communities, split rights and responsibilities between genders, define ideal social structures, and navigate the tensions between the ideal world they or their communities envision and the real world in which

they live. These negotiations are caught up in ideological debates and socio-economic and structural differences between various subgroups in contemporary Orthodoxy, such as more isolationist Haredim, moderate Haredim, mainstream religious Zionists, and Hardal (Zionist-Haredi) communities.

To get at a rich and nuanced understanding of a culture's gender images, one must find locations in which numerous voices discuss, compete, and interact with one another. One location to examine the multi-vocal discussions of gender in Orthodoxy is the new phenomenon of Orthodox women's magazines, produced by virtually every subgroup of Jewish Orthodoxy (with the exception of North American Modern Orthodoxy). Orthodox women's magazines bring together numerous stakeholders in conversation about women, men, the tradition, the family, education, authority, the consumer culture, material goods, wealth, youth, aging, femininity, masculinity, domesticity, deviance, education, observance, piety, etc. Despite heavy editorial oversight, hegemonic gender images compete in these magazines with subversive and transgressive gender images. Voices from the centers of power interact with voices from the margins.

These magazines give voice to conversations between Orthodox women, publishers, rabbinic leadership, female and male readers, the wider Orthodox community, and the general non-Orthodox community. They offer a prime opportunity for making sense of the internal Orthodox discourse about gender, in particular the vastly understudied topic of Orthodox masculinity.



Dr. Yoel Finkelman speaking



Dr. Adam Ferziger speaking

Translation Grant Recipients:

Dr. Nava Vasserman



Dr. Nava Vasserman is a graduate of the Program in Contemporary Jewry from Bar-Ilan University and 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 translation grant to translate her article on "The Wedding among Gerrer Hassidim".

A Gur Hasidic wedding is a rite of passage in which the couple's relationship is sharply transformed from a bare acquaintance to intimacy. The Gerrer bride and groom usually meet only once before their engagement and briefly again during their engagement ceremony. No further contact is made during the long months between the engagement and the wedding. Under those circumstances, the wedding ceremony is the event that institutes the relationship, both in the fulfillment of the formal and legalistic requirements and in the establishing of an emotional and mental bond between the husband and the wife.

My article examines the different stages of this unique wedding day from the bride's and the groom's perspective: the reception, the '*badeken*' covering of the bride's face with the veil, the wedding ceremony, the special '*Yihud*' 'secluded' room for the couple after the ceremony, the special '*Mitzvah tanz*' dance in which male family members dance with the bride. The article also touches the issue of the relationship between the bride and the groom that is formed at this time.

These special wedding customs emphasize the differences between the Lithuanian Orthodox and the Gur sect, one of which emphasizes modesty between men and women, in dress and physical contact even between

spouses. This emphasis has gender implications demanding a lesser visible profile of women in the presence of men.

Yet, despite its strict restrictions regarding modesty, a Gerrer wedding allows a limited and focused breach of norms aimed at bringing the couple together and hastening the ripening of the marital bond. The public intimacy occurring between the bridegroom and the bride is in sharp contrast to the demands for modesty imposed upon Gerrer Hasidim both before and during the marriage. Covering the bride's face after observing her, the interlinking of arms after the wedding ceremony and most of all, the couples mutual dance, are a marked departure from the group's usual norms.

The fact that intimacy of such degree is experienced in front of all the community gives the couple the group's stamp of approval as does the with the bride. The ritualistic dances of the bride with the bridegroom and the relatives explain why this custom has persevered in the Gerrer Hasidic community, as well as in the larger Hassidic world, in spite of the dynamic changed which all marriage customs usually undergo and despite the fact that it has been abandoned in the Lithuanian Haredi groups.

Dr. Michal Shaul



Dr. Michal Shaul is a Lecturer in the Department of history and the director of 'Amital' Holocaust studies program at Herzog College in Gush Etzion. Her dissertation, Pe'er Tachat Efer: Hachevra Hacharedit BeIsrael Betzel Hashoah, 1945-1961 [“Holocaust Survivors and Holocaust Memory in the Haredi Community in Israel, 1945-1961”], won the Ben Halpern Prize for best dissertation (2010) and the book, based on this dissertation is forthcoming (Yad Ben-Zvi, 2013).

During the post-Holocaust period, many survivors hoped that starting a new family would both compensate for their lost families and also serve as a springboard for rebuilding their lives. Beyond filling biological-

emotional needs, for religious survivors the starting of a family also met a religious imperative: the obligations to create a family unit and to reproduce are among the first commandments in the Torah. On the social level, the founding of new families was essential to the demographic rehabilitation of religious society. It was also necessary for regeneration of the chain of tradition broken by the Holocaust and to prevent the concomitant drifting away of its sons and daughters. Thus, the need for demographic rehabilitation coincided with a social-ideological mission: the desire to bequeath the religious lifestyle to future generations. In addition, many religious rabbis and educators viewed family units as more resistant to drift to the non-religious world; marital ties could moreover provide enhanced supervision and stability. Thus, the formation of new families in the spirit of traditional Jewish society formed a first, significant chapter in the rehabilitation of religious society in general and in the rehabilitation of its Holocaust survivors in particular.

But a number of difficulties hampered fulfillment of this task. One factor inhered in the destruction of the former social fabric and institutions of the religious world: in the absence of the traditional parental, lineage-based matchmaking mechanisms, how were matches to be made between single persons, many of whom were orphans? Moreover, the leading criteria for matches in Eastern European religious society, namely, scholarship for men and family wealth for women, had little relevance in the early post-Holocaust years. After all, the war uprooted the mainly Eastern European young men from the *Yeshivot* where they had devoted themselves exclusively to Torah study; the women were mainly penniless orphans. Also affecting matchmaking patterns was a drastic reduction in the numbers of single men and women in religious society.

Halakhic issues as well impacted on religious society's attempt to rehabilitate the traditional religious family. Rabbinic authorities now faced an unprecedented number of tragic halakhic issues, including marriage for deserted wives (*agunot*), kohanim, and for sexually abused women. In my paper I make an initial attempt to address the questions of whether or not religious society assisted young people, mainly orphans, to find marital partners, and to organize weddings, housing, and childrearing guidance. I also explore the issue of whether those lucky enough not to have experienced the Holocaust married survivors; or, did the fact that these orphans had been detached from family life during the war years spark concerns that survivors would not have the knowledge to manage a "proper" religious home? Should we look on Matchmaking

patterns in religious society in the early post-Holocaust years as a Tradition or as a change?



Dr. Nava Vasserman receiving prize envelope



Dr. Michal Shaul receiving prize envelope

Outstanding Graduate Students Prize Recipients:

Yisca Monnikendam-Givon



Yisca Monnikendam-Givon is a PhD candidate in the department of Management at Ben Gurion University of the Negev specializing in Micro-Entrepreneurship of Ultra-Orthodox women and writing her dissertation about The Role of Social Networks in Micro Businesses among Ultra Orthodox Women. She studied Social Community Work at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and later MSw degree in Management of Non for profit organizations. During this period she worked as a social community worker in different organizations. Today she teaches different courses at the Bsw program at Bar Ilan University and Co-Leads a research project about social enterprises with the Israeli social enterprise research center.

My research deals with Ultra-Orthodox Women who are small business owners. The businesses are varied: wigs, pastries, women's and children's clothes, art, graphic design, photography or accounting. My study seeks to identify and understand the factors in the women's environment that help her succeed in her business. It also investigates how operating a small business affects their families, their economic welfare their self-esteem and personal welfare.

To obtain the needed information we interviewed 90 ultra-orthodox women small business owners by means of a mixed quantitative – qualitative questionnaire, and nearly 90 secular women small business owners as a control group. The women were selected with help of an organization providing services to business-women.

Preliminary findings show that In comparison to secular women, many of the ultra-orthodox women have a very limited social network. They receive a great amount of help from their husbands and children in

organizing and the day to day running of the business. They do not utilize their friends to reach other clients or other businesses for cooperation. We also found that Ultra-Orthodox women owning businesses are coping with the dilemmas of combining motherhood with running a business, usually by choosing to limit the business to fulfill their roles as mothers. Nevertheless they don't relinquish the additional income or the need for self-fulfillment. Finally, the Ultra-Orthodox business women are somewhat open to non-traditional professions such as photography and theatre or open to using new business methods such as facebook, and a willingness to work with secular clients.

We hope that this research will help policy-makers to better utilize the resources invested in promoting Ultra-Orthodox women's small businesses, to help empower Ultra-Orthodox women and to strengthen family and community social and economic welfare.

Moriah Ben Hai



Moria Ben Hai is a doctoral student in the Department of Land of Israel studies and Archaeology in Bar Ilan University. Moria participates in Beit midrash program for outstanding doctoral students at the Midrasha for Women in Bar Ilan University. In addition, she teaches Judaism to youth in the Karev educational program.

First of all I would like to thank the Center of the Study of Women in Judaism for supporting me in the beginning of my academic path. This grant shows the importance of my research in the eyes of the Center and I cherish them for that.

The research focuses on the biography of Professor Alice Shalvi. Shalvi, winner of the Israel Prize for her activity in the fields of education and the advancement of women, was and still is one of the advocates for social-gender change in Israeli society. In my study I trace her unique identity, her leadership image and her breakthrough activity, in which her personal story serves as a reflection for analyzing the complex implementation of feminist ideas in Israeli society, secular and religious alike.

Shalvi, a professor of English Literature and mother of six children, immigrated to Israel in 1949 from London. Then she began lecturing in the English Department at the Hebrew University, where she also did her doctoral studies. Along with her work as a lecturer in English, Shalvi volunteered to manage 'Pelech' high school, where her daughter studied, after the directors retired. Shalvi served as director of the high school for fifteen years and led it to educational innovation. In 1984, after authoring the Namir Report examining the status of women and was herself a victim of gender discrimination, Shalvi and other women established the Women's Network in Israel. Aside from her work in the education and public arenas, Shalvi worked for the advancement of co-existence between Jews and Arabs through dialogue. After her retirement from the Women's Network, Shalvi became the head of the Schechter Institute. Today Shalvi lives in her Jerusalem home and is active in the New Israel Fund.

Since the 1970s many shifts have taken place in the status of women in Israel. These changes are, among others, a result of the second wave of the feminist revolution in the world and in Israel. Feminist ideas have penetrated into diverse social strata, including conservative and religious sectors. As a result of this, in 1984 the Women's Network was founded with Prof. Shalvi at its head. The Network set as its goal to advance the rights of Israeli women by means of legislation, raising public awareness, and acting in a variety of ways in order to achieve results. These ways of operating were different from those of the veteran women's organizations, for example Hadassah, Na'amat and WIZO. The openly feminist declaration of the Women's Network brought them to adopt a more feminist outlook. Among the Network's prominent accomplishments are the Law of Equality of Opportunity in the workplace and the support it gave to Alice Miller in getting her petition accepted by the High Court of Justice to include women in the IDF aviation course. To track the Network through its activities, its successes and its failures, is to show Shalvi's leadership, organization of women

and the uniqueness of the Network among other women's organizations and the changes that have taken place in the status of women in Israel.

Pelech Religious High School for Girls was established in 1963 in Jerusalem as an ultra-Orthodox but highly academic alternative to Beit Yaakov schools. It actually provided an answer for the national religious community which sought a rich modern Torah education for its daughters. Shortly after Shalvi's entry to the school, it was recognized as experimental due to its innovative learning programs and the implementation of democratic concepts in education. During Shalvi's administration, religious studies were intensified and the matriculation examination in Gemara (Talmud) was added. An additional innovative and groundbreaking area at Pelech is education for women's leadership and for social involvement. The results of innovative education for religious girls at Pelech can be seen in its graduates, who are involved in creating social changes for the advancement of women in religious and general society, and in its being a model for emulation by other high schools. Its story, its unique educational breakthroughs as well as the difficulties it encountered on this path, will shed light on the changes that have taken place in the education of the religious girl and in the status of women in recent decades in the national religious community and will deepen the question of the integration between Orthodoxy and feminism and the manifold ways of resolving it.

In summary, many research studies deal with the status of women in Israel, some of which even note the contribution of Shalvi to the matter. However, until now no comprehensive research has been done focusing on the biography of Shalvi and her contribution to Israeli feminism. This research will in future fill that lack, by tracing the unique personality of Shalvi, her attitudes, her life work, her choices and the conflicts she faced, through an analysis of her contribution to Israeli society.

Dorit Yosef



Dorit Yosef is a Ph.D. student in the Gender Studies Program at Bar-Ilan University. She is in the final stages of writing her dissertation about "Life stories and memories of women who left Germany and Central-Europe and immigrated to Erez-Israel before the Second World War".

In the 1930s (prior to the outbreak of the Second World War), as a result of the rise of the Nazi regime, about 60,000 Jews from German-speaking countries (Germany, Austria, Bohemia and Moravia) immigrated to the Eretz-Israel. This involved a sharp transition from a bourgeois, liberal, individualistic society with a conservative gender perception to an ideologically Zionist, collectivist, and socialist society with rhetoric of equality between the sexes. The repercussions of this immigration had deep significance for the life-stories of the immigrants.

My research deals with the experience and life-stories of women who were part of this wave of immigration, based on their writing, whether penned in retrospect, such as reminiscences and autobiographies, or recorded closer to the events, such as diaries and letters. The research is based on dozens of personal records written by these women, as well as on records written by men, for purposes of comparison.

The themes which constantly recur in the women's writing are those which they perceived as constituting the principal components of their lives – home and family, income, profession, adapting to cultural differences. The emphases, extents, and significances vary between writers, but a recurring pattern can be perceived among most of them, according to which (although not always consciously) their life-story had been structured around two main axes. The first was based on their core identity (as they had perceived it), whether it was based on their

traditional gender roles, such as being mothers, spouses and home makers, or on their professional identity. The second was based on their national- Zionist identity. The core identity enabled them to maintain continuity between past and present, whereas national identity constituted a supra-text and explanatory framework enabling them to accord significance to the events of their lives. Combined, These two axes enabled the writers to construct continuity, coherence and meaning to their life story.

Another main issue which is exposed through the women stories is gender structure and gender roles. Because of gender differences, men and women experienced the events of their lives in different ways. While the immigration experience (which is supposedly neutral, but essentially masculine) has found expression in several research studies, the female immigration experience of these years and from this origin, has hardly been studied at all.

Exposing the women's stories, examining them from their individual point of view, gives voice and identity to "regular" women, such as were the majority of the women immigrants of this period. At the same time it illuminates the experiences of a larger group of central-European women who immigrated to Erez-Israel.



Yisca Monnikendam-Givon Receiving her Prize Envelope



Dorit Yosef Receiving her Prize Envelope



Moriah Ben Hai Receiving her Prize Envelope



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

Academic Conferences and Symposia:

On December 19, 2012 the *Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center* sponsored a symposium entitled "Political Parties and Religious Movements: Past, Present and Future" together with the Institute for the Study of Religious Zionism, The Rabbi Moshe Haim Lau Chair for Leadership in Crisis, the Yehua Avner Chair for the Study of Religion and Politics and the Graduate Program in Contemporary Jewry at Bar Ilan University. The well attended symposium was held to mark the 90th anniversary of the Founding of the Hapoel Hamizrachi, the 100th anniversary of the Founding of Agudath Israel and the 110th anniversary of the founding of the Mizrachi. Speakers included Prof. Dov Schwartz, Prof. Menachem Klein, Prof. Menachem Friedman, Prof. Eliezer Don-Yehiye, Dr. Ya'akov Hadani, Dr. Yosef Fund, Dr. Mati Dumbrowsky, Emunah Chairwoman

Leora Minka, Dr. Yossi Avneri, Prof. Malka Schoeps, Dr. Nissim Leon, Prof. Yossi Katz, Rabbi Meir Porush, and Knesset Members Zeev Elkin, Zevulun Orlev, and Rabbi Moshe Gafni.

On January 7-9, 2013 the *Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center* financially supported and participated in the Seventh International Symposium of the Klal Yisrael project on the topic of "Reconsidering Israel-Diaspora Relations, at Tel Aviv University. The longstanding project was held under the auspices of Tel-Aviv University, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Ben-Gurion University together with la Fondation des Sciences de l'Homme (Paris), the Moses Mendelsohn Zentrum (Potsdam) the Institut d'Etudes juives Martin Buber (Bruxelles), Brandeis University, The Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism and Racism (TAU), The Kantor Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry (TAU), The Liwerant Center for the Study of Latin America, Spain, Portugal and their Jewish Communities (HUJI) and the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

The *Fanya Gottesfeld Heller Center* was instrumental in underwriting the sessions held on "Gender in the Jewish World". Center Director Prof. Judy Baumel-Schwartz delivered a paper at that session on "Orthodox Jewish Women as a Bridge between Israel and the Diaspora". The Klal Yisrael Project plans on publishing a book of papers delivered at the Conference and Prof. Baumel-Schwartz is preparing an article which will appear in that volume.

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 another 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 additional board members and the coordinators of the two institutes, Dr. Yishai Arnon and Yonatan Edrei. The conference, dealing with various aspects of women's participation in religious Zionist movements, is scheduled to be held in late 2013.

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 an international conference in early 2014 together with Prof. Zehavit Gross of the School of Education at Bar-Ilan University, on the topic of "Gender, Religion and Education in a Chaotic Postmodern World".

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 Yonatan Edrei continued his excellent work throughout the year, dealing with all the bureaucracy involved in dealing with various bodies both inside and outside the university. Mr. Edrei was instrumental in setting up the prize giving ceremony, photographing the winners and ensuring that the ceremony would receive publicity both inside and outside the university.

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/>