



THE JWC NEW MOON

Sh'vat/Adar 5770
February 2010

Ultra-Orthodox & Netanyahu Government Step Up Persecution of Women of the Wall

by Laura Horowitz

The international women's prayer group Women of the Wall, has suffered a dramatic increase in the severity of government persecution in the last two months. It is not clear what has led to the recent events, but they have culminated in the arrest, fingerprinting and detaining of the group's leader, Anat Hoffman, on suspicion of violating a legal directive and of rebellion.

The current crisis began on Rosh Chodesh Tevet, when WoW member Nofrat Frenkel was arrested for wearing a tallit and carrying a sefer Torah during the group's regular service. Frenkel came to the regular prayer site with about 40 other women. It was her donning of a tallit and the fact that she held a Torah scroll in her arms rather than keeping it in her bag that seems to have provoked the extreme reaction that followed. According to YNetnews.com, "[i]nspectors of the Western Wall Heritage Foundation claimed that the act was a violation of the law and called a police officer who proceeded to arrest the woman and escort her to the police station for questioning. Western Wall Rabbi Shmuel Rabinovitz, on the other hand, claimed that the women had already prepared to read the scroll at the Western Wall site itself, thus breaking the law."

Hoffman, who is also the executive director of the Israel Religious Action Coalition, was detained following WoW's Rosh Chodesh Kislev minyan and interrogated about the activities of the women who pray with the group. The investigation is continuing. The Women of the Wall held its first minyan in December of 1988. Since that time, they have been harassed continuously. According to the New York Times, "[h]aving suffered verbal and physical abuse as they prayed, the Women of the Wall petitioned the Supreme Court to have their right to religious freedom recognized, on grounds

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that the Kotel does not belong to the Orthodox establishment alone. After a lengthy legal battle, the court ultimately ruled against the women in the interest of public order. Consequently, it is illegal for them to read aloud from the Torah or to wear prayer shawls openly by the wall. Instead, the authorities have allocated them a special area where they can conduct services in their own fashion, in an archaeological garden tucked around a corner, out of sight."

It appears that in the Tevet incident, Ms. Frenkel put on her tallit and removed the Torah from her bag before reaching the Robinson Arch, where WoW holds its actual

[cont'd on p. 4]

JWC Tzedakah Project 5770

The JWA's mission is to uncover, chronicle, and transmit to a broad public the rich history of American Jewish women. www.jwa.org.

February 4, 1838

Rebecca Gratz founds first Jewish Sunday School

Drawing upon an established network of Jewish women communal workers in Philadelphia, [Rebecca Gratz](#) presided over the establishment of the first Jewish Sunday School on February 4, 1838. Taking its cue from the Christian Sunday School movement, the Philadelphia Hebrew Sunday School Society offered a new and long-lived model of Jewish education. While Gratz prized the religious freedom available to Jews in the United States, she also believed that American Jews could best earn the respect of the Christian majority by being knowledgeable and observant. To that end, the Hebrew Sunday School offered weekly classes free of charge to both boys and girls from early childhood to the early teens.



Born into privilege in Philadelphia shortly after American independence, Rebecca Gratz was responsible for establishing and running a number of Jewish organizations in her native city, including the Female Hebrew Benevolent Society (1819) and the Hebrew Sunday School (1838). A strong believer in American religious freedom, she nonetheless felt that Jews had a responsibility to be knowledgeable about their own faith.

In addition to educating Philadelphia's Jewish youth, the Hebrew Sunday School provided Jewish women with an unprecedented role in the public education of Jewish children. Staffed by local women, the school offered its own teacher training program and selected its faculty from among its own female graduates. Gratz herself served as the School's superintendent for more than a quarter-century. Philadelphia's most prominent male Jewish leader, Isaac Leiser, publicized the program in his national Jewish periodical and compiled educational textbooks for use in its classes.

Gratz's school was a success almost from the beginning. Over time, it opened branches across Philadelphia; by the end of the nineteenth century, the Hebrew Sunday School had served over 4,000 students. Even more importantly, the Philadelphia school offered a model to women in other cities. Similar schools were soon created in New York; Augusta, Georgia; Savannah; Richmond; Charleston; Baltimore and elsewhere. All of these schools sought guidance from Gratz and her co-workers. Moreover, Sunday School education, as introduced in Philadelphia in

1838, has continued, to this day, to provide the basic structure of supplemental Jewish education in the United States.



Help the JWC support the Jewish Women's Archive:

Here is my check for \$ _____ for this year's JWC tzedakah project.

Mail your check to: JWC, P.O. Box 81924, Pittsburgh, PA 15217

JWC PROGRAM CALENDAR: 5770 (2009-10)

Theme: Reaching In, Reaching Out

EVENT	DATE	TIME	PLACE	TOPIC
Rosh Hodesh Adar	Sunday Feb 14	7:30 PM	LZC	Jewish Concepts of Love
Women's Shabbat	Saturday March 6	10:00 AM	LZC	with Rabbi Sharyn Henry
Rosh Hodesh Nisan	Monday March 15	7:30 PM	Beth Shalom	with Beth Shalom Sisterhood Passover Inspirations
Women's Pesach Seder	Thursday April 1	6:00 PM	LZC	--
Celebration of Iyar & Annual Meeting	Tuesday April 13	7:30 PM	LZC	Massage the Body / Massage the Soul
Celebration of Sivan and Shavuot	Monday May 17	7:30 PM	LZC	Pre-Shavuot Study with Tem- ple Sinai Rosh Hodesh Group
Rosh Hodesh Tammuz	Sunday June 13	7:30 PM	LZC	Jewish and Muslim Women
Rosh Hodesh Av	Monday July 12	Sent via e-mail	Your home	Do-It-For-Yourself
Rosh Hodesh Elul	Sunday August 8	11AM-1PM	Member's home	Potluck Family Brunch

In case you missed it: Tashlich 5770

On a gorgeous September afternoon, by a sparkling part of Nine Mile Run, in beautiful Frick Park, and surrounded by East Enders out enjoying the sunny Sunday, the JWC celebrated our annual opportunity to shed that which we no longer needed. Led by Malke Frank, attendees marked Tashlich by casting flowers or bread crumbs upon the waters of the brook and reflecting on our wishes to let go of some things and gather in others. It was a connecting and refreshing way to enter the new year of 5770.



[Women of the Wall, cont'd from p.1] prayer service. It was these acts, which are illegal, that led to her arrest. Some news articles have raised the question of whether WoW is deliberately engaging in civil disobedience in order to challenge the existing law.

The Western Wall Heritage Foundation was created the same year as the Women of the Wall (coincidentally, it would appear). According to its website, "[t]he Foundation's objective is to convey to all segments of the Jewish people the values inherent in the heritage of the Western Wall, to preserve and develop the Western Wall and its Tunnels, and to develop educational frameworks that make Jews everywhere feel closer to Jerusalem.



In fact, this organization, which is run by an ultra-Orthodox rabbi, works to maintain the status quo and make sure the Kotel site is run according to far right-wing standards. The website offers programs for bar mitzvahs and instructions on how to celebrate a bar mitzvah at the Kotel. But only tours of the site are offered for girls becoming bat mitzvah. Despite its unabashed bigotry, however, the Foundation's rabbi Rabinovitz is a government employee.

This sickening state of affairs must cease. The Women of the Wall attempt to go about their activities in peace and without provocation. The state of affairs brought about by the Israeli Supreme Court was grossly unfair and remains a disgrace to the idea and practice of Judaism. Women attempting to engage in prayer are verbally and physically assaulted month in and month out. Objects are thrown at them. Ultra-Orthodox men and women spit on them. They are called vile names, not the least of which is "Nazi". If Frenkel's acts were civil disobedience, one can question her timing, as it is clear that the Netanyahu administration intends to march Israel backwards and serve the interests of the far right in every area of Israeli life. But Israeli women have suffered discrimination for long enough. If they are ready to press their cause, we are ready to support them.

To quote the Western Wall Foundation site once again, "The Western Wall, to which Jews everywhere turn in prayer, belongs to us all. We are all links in the Jewish chain of generations that began here in Jerusalem, on Mount Moriah, the Temple Mount. The Western Wall Heritage Foundation seeks to make that connection come alive by reminding us all that we are linked to each other, to our heritage, and to our Jerusalem."

Amen, selah. May it come soon, and in our days.

NOTE: the Women of the Wall organization was the JWC tzedakah project in both 5760 (199-200) and 5764 (2003-04).
WoW websites:

<http://womenofthewall.blogspot.com/>

<http://womenofthewall.org.il/wordpress/home-2/>

To join the WoW Facebook group, go here:

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=55122699510>

Sources:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/22/world/middleeast/22jerusalem.html>

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3831223,00.html>

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3807090,00.html>

<http://english.thekotel.org/>

Member News



Mazal tov to member **Lois Rubin** whose article "Creativity in Later Life: The Poetry of Maxine Kumin and Linda Pastan" was published recently in the Journal of Aging, Humanities, and the Arts, Vol. 3, No. 4, Oct-Dec 2009.

Member **Barbara Shuman** writes, "My father, Gerald Kayten, passed away on the evening of January 23 at the age of 90. My sister and I were both blessed to be present at his dying which was very peaceful. In the days before his death we all had a chance to speak with him and to share memories, love and gratitude. *Baruch Dayan HaEmet*. We extend our condolences to Barbara and her family.

Condolences go out also to Jeff Herman, member **Pat Cluss'** husband, on the recent death of his father, Dr. Donald Herman, in Cleveland.



In case you missed it: Rosh Hodesh Kislev

by **Barbara Baumann**

Judith, Hanna, and Other Fabulous Females

The JWC celebrated RH Kislev on November 16, 2008, with the women of Congregation Beth Shalom. Around 20 women participated in this wonderful collaboration. While everyone enjoyed wine and cheese, Rabbi Donni Aaron lead an interesting and lively discussion about Judith, Hannah, another Hannah, *chag habanot*, and the yahrtzeits of several women we remember in Kislev. All of their stories have some traditional relationship to the story of Chanukah. We discussed why we should know and care about these women, their lives in relationship to ours, and how we view their acitons. It was a wonderful evening of text study, poetry, and thoughtful questions and answers. Rabbi Aaron suggested several good online sources of information that she had used and recommends: www.wujs.org.il and www.ritualwell.org.

We are fortunate that Donni will join us for our next joint rosh hodesh meeting on March 15th at Beth Shalom.

The newsletter is one of the few things we print on paper and send to you through the mail. If you would prefer to receive your newsletter via e-mail in PDF format, just let Mimi Reznik know at mimireznik@msn.com.

Tu B'Shvat Seder

By Pat Cluss

On a cold evening in late January, seventeen JWC members and friends came together once again to celebrate the New Year of the Trees. Some seder elements were longstanding JWC traditions: our tried-and-true quilted tablecloths, the lovely haggadah emphasizing the “wonderful female connection to the life-giving cycles of nature,” Julie Newman’s beautiful music, four questions, and four colors of wine from the white of winter, through the blush of spring, the rose red of summer and the vibrant ruby of autumn. Other elements were newer: five first-timers to a JWC event, including two new friends from a church in Clairton, and, of course, that symbol of female connection to all things wonderful—the chocolate fountain. Seder leader Debbey Altman-Diamant reminded us that the fruits and nuts we consumed at different parts of the seder returned us to our *shorashim* (roots) by connecting us with our ancestors who supped on just these foods gathered from their surroundings. Malke read an article from [The Jewish Daily Forward](#) that traced the history of the Tu b'Shvat seder from approximately 2000 years ago until now. And Debbey’s daughter, Lani, drawn to the seder by the promise of chocolate, enhanced our haggadah with this photo (center, below) reminding us of the link between women/femaleness and trees/nature. All agreed that the Tu b'Shvat seder is a meaningful event in the JWC calendar that we are pleased to continue.



In case you missed it: Rosh Hodesh Tevet & Hanukkah Celebration

by Malke Frank

On December 16, 2009, the Jewish Women's Center had a different and very enjoyable Rosh Hodesh Tevet and Hanukkah celebration with the residents of Riverview Towers. This facility, located on Browns Hill Road, is an independent-living apartment building for senior adults. Pat Cluss and Malke Frank organized the evening's program. We were received very warmly by the 50 people who came to the program. They enthusiastically participated in our Rosh Hodesh ritual, eager to remember and share their Yiddish/Hebrew names and the names of their parents and grandparents. Betty Steinfeld and her daughter, JWC board member Adi Rapport, led everyone in singing Hanukkah and other Hebrew/Yiddish songs. The program concluded with Hanukkah memories related by the residents with obvious fondness, tinged with sadness. Refreshments were provided by Riverview Towers. The members of the JWC who participated all agreed that this should be an annual program.





*Celebrate a special
woman-focused seder
with the Jewish Women's Center!*

Tuesday, April 1, 2010 at 6:00 p.m.



Labor Zionist Center, 6328 Forbes Ave.

To easily provide a light Seder meal and dessert, we
are asking each person to bring something.

Everyone Bat/Bar-Mitzvah age & older is welcome.

\$12 for non-members; Bring your kiddush cup



RSVP by March 25 to 412-421-2219 or jwcpqh@yahoo.com

Jewish Women's Center of Pittsburgh

P.O. Box 81924
Pittsburgh, PA 15217
Phone: 412 422-8044
Email: jwcpgh@yahoo.com

[We're on the web:
www.jwcpgh.org **]**

TO:



The JWC Mission:

The Jewish Women's Center is a community of women of all backgrounds that provides educational opportunities and spiritual experiences rooted in Jewish values and feminist ideals. The JWC is a supportive environment for broadening our knowledge and involvement in Jewish life. The programs and resources of the JWC create opportunities for Jewish women's learning, leadership, spiritual growth and ritual practice.

